



# ERITREAN ORTHODOX TEWAHDO CHURCH DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA

Sunday School Curriculum  
for  
Grades 11 and 12

Compiled by the Educational Branch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church,  
Diocese of North America

Adopted from the Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Southern USA

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# PREFACE

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In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God Amen.

The Children's Sunday School Program within our churches provides an opportunity to fulfill the command of our Lord Jesus Christ: "... *One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could touch and bless them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. When Jesus saw what was happening, he was angry with his disciples. He said to them, 'Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.'* Then he took the children in his arms and placed his hands on their heads and blessed them" (Mark 10:13-16). It is a venue where they learn their Christian identity, enhance their Christian foundation, know their mother church, and acquire godly values through Biblical lessons. It allows children to learn on their level as many young children struggle to understand the word of God when it is taught during regular worship services. Children are divided into groups according to their age and educational grade levels so that they gain a better understanding of what is being taught. Hence, the Children's Sunday School Program is a part and parcel of the church's ministry with the objective of presenting the story of salvation, the christian moral values, the life of the church at the level of the young children, and engaging the kids in constructive conversations that could transform their lives forever.

In this endeavor, Sunday School servants are given the task of not only making the message comprehensible, attractive, and age appropriate for the younger children, but also to be a role model to the kids. Hence, a Christian upbringing is not just an educational curriculum to be taught, but rather it is a life that is acquired through exemplary actions and characteristics. Therefore, apart from the parents of the children, the role of teachers is second to none in achieving the objectives of Sunday School Program.

Besides, the role of textbooks developed under a well thought, planned and framed Sunday School curriculum is very crucial. However, considering the human expertise, the time and resources required to such tasks, it is more practical and efficient to begin the task by adapting the curricula and related resources of sister churches.

Previously, there were Children's Sunday School textbooks compiled by Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church, Diocese of North America, based on

the materials prepared by the Coptic Orthodox Church. Since early 2016, a work has been undergoing to further refine and revise the contents of these textbooks. Much effort was exerted to revise the contents by going through each lesson and making modifications, and at time lesson substitutions whenever necessary. Besides, rearrangement of lessons were done to reflect the Church seasons as well as the flow of the lessons. Apart from making grammatical and spelling revisions, the team strive to put all the lessons in a common structure format. So far, the work has covered Grade 11-12, Grade 9-10, and Grade 6-8, in their respective order. It is the understanding of the team that the work is still a draft and has a lot of things to be done. However, the team believes that it could be used by Sunday School teachers in preparing their lessons.

God willing, the team has every intention to continue the work. It has the following short and long term plans:

1. Promote the textbooks to be used in the Sunday Schools of our churches.
2. Collect feedback from Sunday School servants and keep refining the already started grades.
3. Extend the work to the remaining lower grades.
4. Encourage and facilitate sharing of experiences, lessons, activities, video clips, and other resources among the Sunday School servants.
5. Create a web page within the church website <https://www.tewahdo.org/> for Sunday School related resources.

As the Lord has said in Matthew 9:37-38, “... *The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field,*” the team disparately needs supporting hands to join in the work. Anyone who is interest to join the team in the work, please contact Aboy Keshi Tesfalem Beraki using the address: Fr. Tesfalem Beraki, 8849 Fair Oaks Crossing # 2074, Dallas, TX 75243. Email: [frtesfalem@gmail.com](mailto:frtesfalem@gmail.com).

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and always, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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# Part I

## Lessons for the Month of September

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## Week 1

# Getting the Benefits of the Holy Bible

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### Objectives:

- To know the effectiveness of the word of God.
- To learn how to read the Holy Bible.
- To learn how to apply the word of God in our life.

### References:

- 2 Timothy 3:15-17

### Memory Verse:

*How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.  
(Psalm 119:103)*

## Introduction

There is an essential difference between the word of man and the word of God. Man's word echoes in the air and disappears. We may not believe it as it does not have the power to do things although the words of kings and judges have the power of action. However, the word of God is one of the attributes of God and a personal hypostasis coming out of the Lord whose word has the power of action and does not go back without benefit. The word itself is composed of sayings and actions without separation. The word of God is living and active.

## Lesson Outline

- I. How did the word of God reach us: God sent us His word through the prophets inspired by the Holy Spirit. When men did not listen to the voice of prophecy and kept away from the word of God, He sent His Incarnate Word “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. The Bible is a precious message sent to us. The New Testament is the Life of Christ on Earth and His sayings come from the Mind of God Himself. The Old Testament composes the messages of the prophets whom the Lord spoke to through the Holy Spirit.
- II. Characteristics of the Word of God:
  - a. The Word of God is Light: God said, “Let there be light”. The word of God lightens darkness, gives light to the thoughts of the heart and provides the spiritual insight. Christ granted the Samaritan woman enlightenment and she recognized her darkness and sinful past. The Word of God is powerful enough to lighten our hearts as David said “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet . . .*” (Psalm 119:105).
  - b. The Word of God is Life: The word of God has its power in the material creation “My word is Spirit and Life”. God has created living beings from dust and nonexistence. Ezekiel the prophet saw a place full of bones and when he prophesied through the Word of God they became a great army. When Jesus called Lazarus, the soul went back to the body, which gave out a vicious smell. The Word has a great authority “*He who hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life*” (John 5:24).
  - c. The Word of God is Power: “Praise the Lord O angels who carry out the commands of God when you hear the voice of His Word”. Contemplate what happened on the Mount of Sinai when the Law was received. It was the powerful voice of the Lord . . . the voice of God with great glory shakes the wilderness and fills the heavens. “*So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it*” (Isaiah 55:11).
  - d. The Word of God is Food: “*Your words were found and I ate them and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart*” (Jeremiah 15:16). “*How sweet are Your words to my taste; sweeter than honey to my mouth*” (Psalm 119:103). The body lives on food

and the soul lives by every word that comes forth from the Mouth of God.

- e. The Word of God is a Weapon: The Word of God is powerful and effective; it is sharper than any sword that is double-edged. It comforts and reproaches. It rectifies and instructs. It drives away our enemies and judges us. It keeps us safe in time of trouble and saves us from stumbling blocks, which we bring to ourselves.

### III. How to read the Holy Bible?

- a. With the Spirit of Prayer: Contemplate how people stand when they read the Holy Bible in the church and when the priest starts to raise incense while praying so that we may hear, understand and work according to the Holy Gospel and the deacon asks us to pray from the Holy Gospel. Prayer should accompany reading the Bible. Hence, we should pray before, during and after reading the Gospel. We thank God for His promises and pray to Him to give us the words with understanding. We pray that He might lighten our insights and touch our hearts and clarify what we do not understand.
- b. With the Spirit of discipleship: Whatever the degree of your knowledge or culture may be, read the Bible as a young child who wants to know something about the Absolute Truth. Read it regularly. Use a regular educational method. Start with the simple explanatory series (The key to the Book) and then study the characters and heroes of the Book. Then read it a third time slowly, verse by verse. Resort to the method of studying by heart. Stay for a long time to enjoy it. We usually spend a long time to achieve the sciences of the world. Begin now and concentrate on the study of the Book of Heaven as the Lord told us “Heaven and earth will pass away but My words will not pass away”.
- c. With the Spirit of Obedience: You also see the priest put the Gospel over his head bowing his head to the voice of God as if he were ready to slaughter every dear and precious thing “And take every thought captive to obey Christ”. “That who hears the word and does not keep it deceives himself and these words will condemn him”.

## Conclusion

The word of God is the most important guide to our life to reach the unity with God on earth and eventually in heaven.

### Applications:

- With the help of your Servant or your father of confession or your parents, set a program for studying the Holy Bible this month and throughout the year.
- Pray so that God will help you to commit to it and write down your notes.
- Take one verse every day and write it down in your notebook. Repeat it during the day, recite it and apply it to your life.

### Exercises:

1. What is your most favorite verse in the Holy Bible?
2. Give two characteristics of the word of God.
3. List the three ways we should follow in reading the Holy Bible.
4. What does it mean to read the Holy Bible with the spirit of Obedience?

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## Week 2

# Introduction to the Old Testament

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### Objectives:

- To have a clear overview of the Old Testament.
- To know the theme and the importance of the Old Testament.

### References:

- The Bible - Old Testament

### Memory Verse:

*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God. (John 17:3)*

## Introduction

Eternal life is the gift of Jesus Christ to those who believe in Him “*He [the Son] should give eternal life to as many as You [the Father] have given Him*” (John 17:2). Also, it is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, which comes upon us when we apprehend the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ “*But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you*” (Luke 11:20). This life starts here on earth and continues forever in the life to come. In John 17:3, Jesus Christ confirms that eternal life is the knowledge of God through Him. *Knowledge* here does not mean the theoretical intellectual knowledge, but the spiritual knowledge based on experience, communion, living and tasting. Briefly, the means for this experience and communion are:

1. In the sacrament of communion, in which we experience eternal life by receiving the body of Christ that was broken (Acts 2:24), and His blood

that was shed: *“if any man eats of this bread, he shall live for ever”* (John 6:51).

2. In the mystery of the word - the word of God - the voice of God in the Holy Bible, which gives eternal life when it is heard *“the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”* (John 6:63), *“He that hears My word, and believes in Him who sent Me, has everlasting life”* (John 5:24). This second means is the subject of the present *Short Notes*.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Holy Bible contains 73 books written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit over a period of more than 15 centuries. These books are divided into two testaments:
  1. The Old Testament: Includes the history of creation, the fall and corruption of mankind, and the establishment of a covenant between God and man in preparation to save mankind from their corrupt state. The Old Testament covers the period from the creation till the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior and the King. The Old Testament consists of 46 books. These books are again divided into:
    - a. The first canonical books, which are 39 books, collected by Ezra the priest in one volume.
    - b. The second canonical books (Deuterocanonical or Apocryphal), which are seven in addition to the completion of the books of Daniel and Esther.
  2. The New Testament: The New Testament consists of 27 books.
- II. The Main Sections of the Old Testament
  1. The Five Books of Moses (from Genesis to Deuteronomy): Also called the Pentateuch, Torah or the covenant. They correspond to the four gospels in the New Testament. These books describe the beginning of human history dealing with God . . . the failure of the human race . . . until his arrival to the gates of the Promised Land. Whereas these books declare the need for a savior to free the human race from bondage, the gospels in the New Testament reveal this savior, who is the desire of all nations, and take us into the true Promised Land.

2. The Historic Books (from Joshua to Esther): These books present the chronicles of the work of God with His people from before the period of the kings (period of Joshua and the Judges) until the captivity in Babylon. The corresponding book in the New Testament (The book of the Acts of the Apostles, *Praxis*) presents Jesus Christ as the judge and king who does not request an earthly kingdom. It also presents His disciples declaring the only savior (Joshua vs. Jesus), and warning against sin that leads to devil's captivity.
3. Poetic, Edification or Wisdom Books (from Job to the Song of Solomon): They present practical teachings for living with God, teachings which help us throughout the present life. The corresponding books of the New Testament (the Epistles: the Pauline and Catholicon) present the Christian life with the Father in His Son through the Holy Spirit as a true foretaste of eternal life in heaven.
4. Prophetic Books (From Isaiah to Malachi): These books came in a spiritually dark period, calling people to repentance and preaching a glorious vision of the Messiah, Christ the Savior. The corresponding book in the New Testament, Revelation, encourages us to keep up our struggle expecting the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords.

### III. General Comments on the Old Testament

1. Jesus is the center of the two Testaments. He appears in the Old Testament behind the scenes and the events and in symbols and through holy men. For example: At the creation of man, God said, "*Let us make man in our image*" (Genesis 1:26). Isaac carries the wood (the cross) on his way to death as a burnt offering (redemption) but he returns alive (resurrection). Joseph saves the world from starvation and death (salvation) in the Old Testament. Moses and Joshua lead the Israelites from slavery to freedom. The Passover and sacrifices as a method to escape death and receive forgiveness.
2. The Holy Bible is one book, and the Holy Spirit has inspired the writing of the two Testaments. The New Testament complements the Old Testament and sees the men of the Old Testament as heroes of faith (Hebrews 11). They are the people that hoped for salvation and resurrection of the dead. In the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appear beside Jesus (Matthew 17:1-8).



3. The Law was the means to discover man's sin, and a helper for him to look ahead to the savior (Galatians 3:24). It successfully accomplished these purposes during the period of spiritual childhood of mankind until the coming of the "*fullness of time*" (Galatians 4:4) declaring Jesus Christ the Savior who gives new life and grants liberty, and proclaiming the age of the generous grace for every one who accepts.
4. The sons of Israel are the people whom God has entrusted with the seed of faith in order to prepare a field for the continuation of the work of God, i.e. the salvation of all people and the spread of the kingdom of heaven when His Son arrives in the "*fullness of time*".

## Conclusion

We leave you in the hands of the Holy Spirit that He might guide you to God's purpose in what you read, and guide your steps to its depth to gain the spiritual experience. The interaction with the word is a continuously renewed field, in which the heroes of faith become alive among us, and the past in flesh becomes the present in the Spirit, through Him.

### Applications:

- Start reading the Old Testament from the beginning and make note of things you do not understand to ask about their meaning in the next class. We hope that the book of Genesis will become the subject of the daily Bible study for all of us in the coming days until we meet again in the next *Short Notes*.

### Exercises:

1. What is the first verse in the Bible ?
2. What is the main theme in the Book of Genesis ?

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## Week 3

# Introduction to the New Testament

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### Objectives:

- To have an overview of the content of the new Testament.
- To learn the theme of the new Testament.

### References:

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### Memory Verse:

*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. (John 6:63)*

## Introduction

This is the era of grace that embraced mankind by the glorious advent of the Messiah and the salvation from corruption by redemption which gave us the privilege to become the children of God who have the blessed hope of eternal life at the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ at the end of time. The Bible has 1,189 chapters, thus it can be completed in less than three years if we read one chapter a day.

## Lesson Outline

The New Testament consists of 27 books: 4 Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) The Book of Acts (written by St. Luke) 14 Epistles written by St. Paul 7 Epistles written by St. James (1), St. Peter (2), St. John (3) and St. Jude (1) Revelation written by St. John

- I. The Gospel of St. Matthew: St. Matthew wrote this Gospel for the Jews in order to explain to them that the Lord Jesus is the expected Messiah, the son of David of whom numerous prophecies of the Old Testament were written. Therefore, this gospel has about 65 prophecies and focuses on the Lord as the king, the son of David.
- II. The Gospel of St. Mark: St. Mark wrote this gospel for the Romans. He emphasized that our Lord Jesus is a powerful minister. This would satisfy the powerful Romans. It has a simple and lively style and explains some of the Jews traditions.
- III. The Gospel of St. Luke: St. Luke wrote this gospel for the Greeks, the men of wisdom and philosophy, to show them that Jesus Christ is the Son of Man who will deliver man from all his problems and will open for him the gates to eternity.
- IV. The Gospel of St. John: St. John wrote this gospel in order to reply to the heresies that tried to refute the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He addressed the world as a whole.
- V. The Acts of the Apostles: St. Luke wrote this book to his friend, Theophilus, so as to continue his conversation with him. He told him about the life of the Lord in his gospel and then started to explain to him how the apostles preached the message to the world, exactly as Jesus Christ asked them to do and through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- VI. The Epistles: While the apostles were preaching, they faced a lot of questions, various problems and heresies that threatened the soundness of faith. Thus, they started to reply to these matters in the epistles directed to churches, people, or priests in order to explain to them the basics of Christian faith and to warn them of the hated heresies. St. Paul wrote to the Galatians in 49 A.D. in order to deal with their reversion to the Jewish law. In 53 A.D. he wrote to the Thessalonians in order to explain to the believers the meaning of expecting the Lord's Second Coming, as some had left their jobs, waiting for this event. In 58 A.D. he wrote to the Romans and Corinthians to explain to the believers the meaning of justification through active faith and to correct the numerous faults found in the Corinthians such as division and the abuse of spiritual gifts. He also wrote to the Hebrews to demonstrate to them the superiority of Christ than all the prophets, priests and angels. Subsequently, St. Paul wrote four epistles when

he was prisoner in Rome in the years 62-64 A.D. known as captivity Epistles? These are the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians and to Philemon. Each of these epistles had a wonderful pastoral message. For example:

The theme of the epistle to the Ephesians was building the body of Christ The theme of the epistle to the Philippians was to live in Christ The theme of the epistle to the Colossians was the preeminence of Christ The theme of the epistle to Philemon was Forgiveness from Slavery He went on writing according to the condition of the churches or the priests. He wrote, for example the first epistle to Timothy, which was a leadership manual for churches. Then he wrote the epistle to Titus, which was a conduct manual for the churches. Finally, he wrote the second epistle to Timothy, which was a farewell counsel as he felt that his martyrdom was near (67 A.D). James, Peter, John and Jude wrote the catholic or universal epistles to all the churches. They are 7 epistles, one was written by St. James, two by St. Peter, three by St. John and one by St. Jude.

VII. Revelation: This book was written by St. John the beloved while he was exiled on the island of Patmos by the Emperor Dumetian who, at seeing that throwing the saint in boiling oil had no effect on him, thought that by exiling him to Patmos he could stop his influence on his children in Asia Minor. The Lord, however, revealed Himself to St. John in order to encourage him and his children in their tribulation assuring them that victory was at hand and that He is coming undoubtedly. St. John wrote this book in a symbolic style. Thus the 27 books of the New Testament were completed by the end of the first century. However, they were scattered in different places and their collection into one book was done during the second century.

## Conclusion

Christians should deeply know the Bible because God is its primary author and hence it gets them closer to Him by hearing His commandments. The Bible's practical benefits for us may well be summarized under two headings: knowing and growing. The Bible proclaims the good news of the gospel that we might know God; it explains the will of God that all of us may grow spiritually before Him.

### Applications:

WEEK 3. INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

- Read one chapter of the New Testament every day.
- Read every paragraph carefully and if you do not understand anything bring it to the Sunday School teacher or the priest to explain it to you.
- Also try to look for books that explain the Bible.

**Exercises:**

1. Explore how Jesus was described in the Gospel of Mark
2. Explore how Jesus was described in the Gospel of John

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## Week 4

# Susanna and the Second Canonical Books

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### Objectives:

- To learn about the Second Canonical books.
- To learn the story of Susanna and the spiritual meanings behind it.

### References:

- Daniel chapter 13
- Internet site: <http://wesley.nnc.edu/noncanon/apocrypha.htm>

### Memory Verse:

*I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord. (Daniel 13: 23)*

## Introduction

The commonly used Bibles (Protestant versions) do not include some of the Old Testament books, which the Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, the Greek Orthodox, the church of Antioch and the Byzantine churches consider as part of the Old Testament. These books are usually called “Apocrypha” which means hidden. The Protestant believe that they do not have the same spiritual level as the rest of the Old Testament and since they were not included in the Old Testament version collected in the time of Ezra the priest in 534 B.C, they should not be part of the Bible. However, these books were written by the Jews in the exile after the time of Ezra and were included in the Septuagint translation of the Bible and many other early translations of the Bible, including the first Coptic translation. These books are:

1. Tobit - 14 chapters and should come after the book of Nehemiah.
2. Judith - 16 Chapters and should come after Tobit.
3. The remainder of the book of Esther - Chapters 10 to 16.
4. The Wisdom of Solomon - 19 chapter and should come after the Song of Songs.
5. Joshua the son of Sirach - 51 chapters and should come after the Wisdom of Solomon.
6. The Prophecy of Baruch - 6 chapters and should come after Lamentations.
7. The remainder of Daniel, which include the rest of chapter 3 and chapters 13 and 14.
8. The first Maccabees - 16 chapters and should come after Malachi.
9. The second Maccabees - 15 chapters and should come after the first Maccabees.

The Orthodox Church believes that these books are part of the Old Testament because many of their verses were repeated in the New Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself cited verses from some of them. Many of the early church fathers also used verses from these books in their writings, including St. Clement the Roman, St. Polycarp, St. Clement of Alexandria, St. Origen, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine, St. Gregory and many others. There are other Apocrypha books, which all the churches agreed on the fact that the Holy Spirit did not dictate them, e.g. the book of Bernaba.

## Lesson Outline

The story of Susanna is mentioned in Daniel chapter 13 and is read during the Apocalypse night. It is one of many stories read on this night to demonstrate deliverance from death to life by the power of God. These are considered prophecies of the salvation given to the humanity through Jesus Christ who changed our death into life and our punishment into salvation. The story of Susanna is as follows (Daniel 13):

*"1 There was a man living in Babylon whose name was Joachim. 2 He married the daughter of Hilkiyah, named Susanna, a very beautiful woman*

and one who feared the Lord. 3 Her parents were righteous, and had trained their daughter according to the Law of Moses. 4 Joakim was very rich, and had a fine garden adjoining his house; the Jews used to come to him because he was the most honored of them all. 5 That year two elders from the people were appointed as judges. Concerning them the Lord had said: "Wickedness came forth from Babylon, from elders who were judges, who were supposed to govern the people." 6 These men were frequently at Joachim's house, and all who had a case to be tried came to them there. 7 When the people left at noon, Susanna would go into her husband's garden to walk. 8 Every day the two elders used to see her, going in and walking about, and they began to lust for her. 9 They suppressed their consciences and turned away their eyes from looking to Heaven or remembering their duty to administer justice. 10 Both were overwhelmed with passion for her, but they did not tell each other of their distress, 11 for they were ashamed to disclose their lustful desire to seduce her. 12 Day after day they watched eagerly to see her. 13 One day they said to each other, "Let us go home, for it is time for lunch." So they both left and parted from each other. 14 But turning back, they met again; and when each pressed the other for the reason, they confessed their lust. Then together they arranged for a time when they could find her alone. 15 Once, while they were watching for an opportune day, she went in as before with only two maids, and wished to bathe in the garden, for it was a hot day. 16 No one was there except the two elders, who had hidden themselves and were watching her. 17 She said to her maids, "Bring me olive oil and ointments, and shut the garden doors so that I can bathe." 18 They did as she told them: they shut the doors of the garden and went out by the side doors to bring what they had been commanded; they did not see the elders, because they were hiding. 19 When the maids had gone out, the two elders got up and ran to her. 20 They said, "Look, the garden doors are shut, and no one can see us. We are burning with desire for you; so give your consent, and lie with us. 21 If you refuse, we will testify against you that a young man was with you, and this was why you sent your maids away." 22 Susanna groaned and said, "I am completely trapped. For if I do this, it will mean death for me; if I do not, I cannot escape your hands. 23 I choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord." 24 Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and the two elders shouted against her. 25 And one of them ran and opened the garden doors. 26 When the people in the house heard the shouting in the garden, they rushed in at the side door to see what had happened to her. 27 And when the elders told their story, the servants felt very much ashamed, for nothing like this had ever been said about Susanna. 28 The next day, when the people gathered at the house of her husband Joachim, the two elders came, full of



*their wicked plot to have Susanna put to death. In the presence of the people they said, 29 "Send for Susanna daughter of Hilkiah, the wife of Joachim." 30 So they sent for her. And she came with her parents, her children, and all her relatives. 31 Now Susanna was a woman of great refinement and beautiful in appearance. 32 As she was veiled, the scoundrels ordered her to be unveiled, so that they might feast their eyes on her beauty. 33 Those who were with her and all who saw her were weeping. 34 Then the two elders stood up before the people and laid their hands on her head. 35 Through her tears she looked up toward Heaven, for her heart trusted in the Lord. 36 The elders said, "While we were walking in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, shut the garden doors, and dismissed the maids. 37 Then a young man, who was hiding there, came to her and lay with her. 38 We were in a corner of the garden, and when we saw this wickedness we ran to them. 39 Although we saw them embracing, we could not hold the man, because he was stronger than we, and he opened the doors and got away. 40 We did, however, seize this woman and asked who the young man was, 41 but she would not tell us. These things we testify." Because they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them and condemned her to death. 42 Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, "O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; 43 you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!" 44 The Lord heard her cry. 45 Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the Holy Spirit of a young lad named Daniel, 46 and he shouted with a loud voice, "I want no part in shedding this woman's blood!" 47 All the people turned to him and asked, "What is this you are saying?" 48 Taking his stand among them he said, "Are you such fools, O Israelites, as to condemn a daughter of Israel without examination and without learning the facts? 49 Return to court, for these men have given false evidence against her. 50 So all the people hurried back. And the rest of the elders said to him, "Come, sit among us and inform us, for God has given you the standing of an elder." 51 Daniel said to them, "Separate them far from each other, and I will examine them." 52 When they were separated from each other, he summoned one of them and said to him, "You old relic of wicked days, your sins have now come home, which you have committed in the past, 53 pronouncing unjust judgments, condemning the innocent and acquitting the guilty, though the Lord said, "You shall not put an innocent and righteous person to death." 54 Now then, if you really saw this woman, tell me this: Under what tree did you see them being intimate with each other?" He answered, "Under a mastic tree." 55 And Daniel said, "Very well! This lie has cost you your head, for*

*the angel of God has received the sentence from God and will immediately cut The Greek words for [mastic tree] and [cut] are similar, thus forming an ironic wordplay you in two.” 56 Then, putting him to one side, he ordered them to bring the other. And he said to him, “You offspring of Canaan and not of Judah, beauty has beguiled you and lust has perverted your heart. 57 This is how you have been treating the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear; but a daughter of Judah would not tolerate your wickedness. 58 Now then, tell me: Under what tree did you catch them being intimate with each other?” He answered, “Under an evergreen oak.” 59 Daniel said to him, “Very well! This lie has cost you also your head, for the angel of God is waiting with his sword to split The Greek words for [evergreen oak] and [split] are similar, thus forming an ironic wordplay you in two, so as to destroy you both.” 60 Then the whole assembly raised a great shout and blessed God, who saves those who hope in Him. 61 And they took action against the two elders, because out of their own mouths Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness; they did to them as they had wickedly planned to do to their neighbor. 62 Acting in accordance with the Law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus innocent blood was spared that day. 63 Hilkiyah and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, and so did her husband Joachim and all her relatives, because she was found innocent of a shameful deed. 64 And from that day onward Daniel had a great reputation among the people.”*

The story of Susanna demonstrates the strength in her stand against sin regardless of the price, even if it was humiliation to herself, her husband and her family. She was about to lose her life but she felt safe in the hands of the Lord regardless of what man can do to her. She probably was singing with David the Psalmist when he said, *“let Your hand become my help for I have chosen your precepts. I long for Your salvation, O Lord and Your law is my delight. Let my soul live, and I shall praise you; and Your judgments help me”* (Psalm 119:173-175).

There is a great resemblance between the story of Susanna and Joseph against Potiphar’s wife temptations to sin with her (Genesis 39:7-23). They both refused to sin against God and initially had a hard punishment from humans but God delivered them and restored them to a higher rank or reputation.

It is also interesting how God used Daniel and guided him to save Susanna. In contrast, He used the dream of Pharos to save Joseph. It has never occurred to Joseph or Susanna that they will be saved is such Godly plans and arrangement for them. This shows how His thoughts can be above our understanding and expectations. As He said in Isaiah *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways; says the Lord: For as*

*the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isaiah 55:8-9). Therefore, we might as well surrender completely to His good will for those who keep His commandments.

## Conclusion

Standing against sin has a certain triumphant reward from God. We pray that God may give us the same strength and faith that He gave to Susanna to face all evil wars against her.

### Applications:

- Study other stories read in the Apocalypse night that demonstrate deliverance from death to life.
- Read stories of saints that demonstrate chastity in their lives.

### Exercises:

1. What did you learn from the story of Susanna?
2. What spiritual meanings behind can will learn from this lesson?
3. Do you think this story of Susanna demonstrates strength for this generation family?
4. Have you hear before about “The Second Canonical Books?”

**Part II**

**Lessons for the Month of  
October**

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## Week 1

# The Sermon on the Mount I

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### Objectives:

- To describe the contents of the Sermon on the Mount.
- To learn the virtues desired for Christians as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount.

### References:

- Matthew 5:1-16

### Memory Verse:

*Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which lead to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:14)*

## Introduction

Jesus Christ our king met His people on the mountain to give them His new law. In the Old Testament, Moses went up the mountain to get the law after fasting 40 days. Nobody approached the mountain but Moses. The mountain was smoking and the thick clouds and thunder surrounded it. Now, the Word of God Himself came to us and talked directly to us with simplicity.

## Lesson Outline

- I. Blessed are the poor in the spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven: This is the humbleness that teaches us that without God we are nothing. If pride is the basis of every fall, then humbleness is the way to the kingdom of Heaven. This is the best start to the blessings since *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”* (Psalm 111:10) and

*“Pride is the first Sin”* (Wisdom of Joshua 10:15). The poor in spirit is the person who fears God and confess his sins. He is never proud of his righteousness.

- II. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted: The humble person feels his sins and its weight, so the Holy Spirit leads him to the “Spiritual Mourn”. He also mourns for every sinful person. The normal mourning is for losing something or someone precious. A spiritual person does not consider any of these things as precious to him. *“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death”* (2 Corinthians 7:10).
- III. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth: The mourn on our sins leads us to meekness. Meekness does not mean weakness but means the power of the inner spirit that does not get disturbed by the timely things. Our Lord said: *“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”*(Matthew 11:29). The reward is inheriting the earth, which can be interpreted literally. A meek person does not get only spiritual reward but also an earthly reward. It can be interpreted as the land of life *“I cried out to You, O Lord: I said: You [are] my refuge, My portion in the land of the living”* (Psalm 142:5).
- IV. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled: A meek person will always wish to quench his spiritual thirst by Christ Himself, proclaiming *“As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God”* (Psalm 42:1). The Holy Spirit takes us through this hunger and thirst to unite with Christ so we are a filled only by Him *“As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.”* The Jewish people were not only hungry or thirsty in the desert waiting for the manna but it was a matter of life and death to them. Also our hunger to our Lord Jesus Christ should be on the same level, *“I am the bread which came down from heaven”* (John 6:41), *“For with You is the fountain of life”* (Psalm 36:9).
- V. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy: When we are filled with Jesus Christ, we start to become like Him, *“Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful”* (Luke 9:36). Mercy is not only by giving to the poor but in every aspect of our life. We should feel others’ pain and share it with them. *“Who does not have*

mercy does not deserve the mercy of God” (St. Keprianos). If you saw a poor man then, even if he does not look like Jesus Christ, He is the one accepting your act of mercy, *“Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me”* (Matthew 25:36).

- VI. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God: God works in the merciful person’s heart so that he can see God. His inner eye sees what cannot be seen. The pure in heart are those who gained every virtue and do not carry any evil inside them, *“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14). We can only see the divinity with our hearts, *“My heart said to You: Your face, Lord, I will seek”* (Psalm 27:8).
- VII. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God: Making peace is not an outside act but it is the nature of the sons of God. Through the inner peace, they shine on everyone. Peacemakers control their lusts inside them.
- VIII. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven: When we become the sons of God through uniting with Him in baptism, we do God’s work, which is peace. The Devil starts prosecution against us. We have to accept prosecution for righteousness’ sake as the apostles accepted prosecution with happiness, *“So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name”* (Acts 5:41).
- IX. You are the salt of the earth: Salt is a cheap element but is indispensable. Same with the Christian person, he is humble giving his life for everyone. Food is not good without salt, like the world with a good Christian person. The salt is dissolved in the food, like the Christian giving all his life for others. Salt alone has no effect, only when it is mixed with food it gives the taste. The Christian also gives taste to the world when he is in the world.
- X. You are the light of the world: When we offer our life, God makes us shine as light to the world, *“that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”* (Philippians 2:15). The basket that hides the lamp is our sin and the lust of the flesh.

XI. That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven:  
We do not do well for others but to please God and glorify His name.

## Conclusion

The Sermon on the Mount requires fifteen minutes to read but its brevity has not diminished its profound influence on the world. The Sermon on the Mount presents new standards and laws for God's people.

### Applications:

- Try to adopt one of the virtues blessed by the Lord to practice for your life, e.g. you can try to be a peacemaker and not get involved in fights or arguments.
- Read this Sermon on the Mount many times this week and memorize some parts of it as much as you can.

### Exercises:

1. Read Romans 12:18-21 and discuss how we can be peacemakers in people around us.
2. What does Jesus mean when he said "... they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"?
3. Read John 15:18-21 and 2 Timothy 3:12, and then discuss why do Christians get persecuted for righteousness.



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## Week 2

# The Sermon on the Mount II

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### Objectives:

- To learn the new laws of the New Testament era, the grace era.

### References:

- Matthew 5:17, 6:-, 7:-.

### Memory Verse:

*But I say to you, do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool. (Matthew 5:34-35)*

## Introduction

Here, we continue the contemplation of our Lord Jesus' meeting with His people on the mountain to give them His new law. We will understand some of the strong commandments like, *"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill"* (Matthew 5:17) where our Lord showed them a new dimension of the law. He also introduced a new spiritual law for the sons of God, *"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds [the] [righteousness] of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:20).

## Lesson Outline

The name Esther is taken from the Persian name meaning a "star". Her story fits between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra, between the first return by Zerubbabel and the second return led by Ezra to Palestine. It provides the only biblical portrait of the vast majority of Jews who refused to return and chose to remain in Persia. God's protective hand on behalf of His

people is evident throughout the book of Esther. The clearly emerging message is that God uses ordinary men and women to accomplish His gracious purposes. Although God disciplines His people, He never abandons them.

I. Killing: The Old Testament commandments tell us not to kill, but the New Testament asks for even higher spiritual level with higher new standards *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny”* (Matthew 5: 21-26). These verses teach us that anger with our brother has different levels:

1. Raca is a Hebrew word which means disrespect. This is a worse level of showing anger of one person to his brother. This angry person deserves the council, which is a higher court.
2. A higher level of expressing anger is saying a fool. We should control our anger in the first step, if we cannot totally prevent it.
3. *“But no man can tame the tongue”* (James 3:8). Man can tame beasts, but it is difficult to tame his tongue. God can only do this for us. This verse demonstrates how hard it is to control the tongue. It may be easier to control our temper earlier in the ladder of anger.
4. When anger is expressed in words, it is a sin that deserves the judgment on judgment day and it can cause us to lose our brothers on earth because of materialistic things, even if they seem important.

II. Adultery: Sin is a three-step process: desire, enjoying and fulfilling. The Law had forbidden the fulfilling of the sin and our Lord Jesus Christ wanted to uproot this sin by preventing the first step, *“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust*

*for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell”* (Matthew 5: 27-30). In these verses, plucking the eye means not seeing the beloved person or the desirable object.

- III. Swearing: The world will recognize us by our language. Swearing is a sin that many of us slip into it and some people do it many time a day. Again it takes prayer and lots of self-control to prevent the tongue from slipping into the sin of swearing “*Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one”* (Matthew 5:33-37).
- IV. Returning Evil with Good: This is the highest level of Christian perfection “*You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away”* (Matthew 5:38-42). What does the right cheek mean? Usually a strike is on the left cheek unless the person is left-handed. So, you are the one who would humbly turn your cheek in an effort to stop the angry striking person. That is why Christianity is called the second mile religion. The believer would give more than required to win others to Christ.
- V. The Narrow Gate: God commanded us to enter by the narrow gate; “*for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it”* (Matthew 7:13-14). The wide gate is the lust of the world and the narrow gate is opened by spiritual fighting like fasting, praying. We do not have to search for the wide gate; it is available for everyone.

However, few can find the narrow gate. Even when they find it, they may not enter. The end is different in both cases.

VI. Building on the Rock: Our Lord Jesus Christ told us, *“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall”* (Matthew 7: 24-27). Who is the rock except our Lord? If we build our souls on Jesus Christ, then we are not afraid from any rain, which is the devil that tries to demolish the house. We need to hide in Jesus.

VII. Summary of the 10 major sections of the Sermon on the Mount

1. The beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)
2. The lessons of salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16)
3. True righteousness (Matthew 5:17-48)
4. Practice without hypocrisy (Matthew 6:19-34)
5. The Christian’s concern (Matthew 6:19-34)
6. Warning against Judgment (Matthew 7:7-12)
7. Invitation to prayer (Matthew 7:7-12)
8. The two ways (Matthew 7:13-14)
9. A tree and its fruit (Matthew 7:15-20)
10. The importance of deeds (Matthew 7:21-29)

## Conclusion

The central theme of the sermon is summarized in Matthew 5:48 *“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect”*. The word ‘perfect’ does not refer to sinless or moral perfection. It indicates completeness, wholeness, maturity being all that God wants a person to be.

**Applications:**

- Think of a situation that provoke you to be angry recently. How did you respond? Was it in line with what you learned in this lesson? If not, think of ways you can improve your response.
- Do you swear in conversations? Think of reasons why do people need to swear in conversations. Think of ways you can avoid the need for you to swear.

**Exercises:**

1. Make a comparison between the Ten Commandments in the old Testament (Exodus 20) and the sermon on the Mount.
2. Why is Christianity called “the second mile religion”?
3. Why do many people choose the gate that leads to destruction?
4. Why is a person who hears the words of Jesus and do them liken to a person who built his house on a rock?

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## Week 3

# Faith and Patience

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### Objectives:

- God will solve our problems. Fulfill our needs. Have faith in Him, and wait PATIENTLY for His solutions.

### References:

- Mark 9: 2-8, Luke 9: 30-32

### Memory Verse:

*By your patience, possess your souls. (Luke 21:19)*

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11: 1)*

## Introduction

- “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11: 1).
- “*My brothers, count it all joy when you fall in various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience*” (James 1:2-3).
- “*But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness*” (1 Peter 1:5-6).
- “*So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took for himself a post shed with which to scrap himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die.’ But he said to her,*

*‘you speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:7-10).*

- *“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord - that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11). “But we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulations produce perseverance” (Romans 5:3).*
- *“Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. Do not fret because of him who prospers in His way. Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Wait on the Lord and keep His way. And He shall exalt you to inherit the land. When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it” (Psalm 37:7,34).*

Faith without patience produces people who start off good, but burnout over time. Patience without faith produces people that constantly suffer and have no power to change their situation. . But combining these two will enable us to inherit the promises.

## Lesson Outline

- How do you feel while waiting in long lines (Amusement Parks, fast food restaurants, banks . . .)?
- Describe the emotions of people during traffic jams?
- How do you handle these situations?
- What is the definition of faith? What is the relation between faith and patience?
- Can you give some examples from the Bible of people that have endured for a long time with faith and patience?
  - a. Joseph: hatred; false accusation from employer; separation from
  - b. Job: financial ruin; death in family; sickness; problems with wife and friends.
    - Can you relate your life to these problems?

- Why do you think God waits, sometimes it seems for us too long, before He solves our problems?
- a. To test our faith . . . .
  - b. Our problems which, if we endure patiently, and He eventually solves, is glorifying to Him
  - c. This, in turn, earns us glory in His kingdom . . . .
  - d. He knows the right time that is best for solving our problems.

I. What is Faith: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (Hebrews 11: 1).”* There is a fundamental difference between hope and faith. Hope is ‘open-ended,’ meaning that it is not tied to anything. You can hope to be successful in life, hope to be healed of a sickness, hope to be promoted, and so on; but this is no more than wishful thinking. Lots of people hope and wish for things. Faith adds substance to this hope. Faith must be tied to God’s Word. When we tie God’s Word to what we hope for, then we have confidence that He will do what He said He would do. The Bible tells us that God does not change His mind (Num 23:19) and that He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). So when we substantiate our hope with the Word of God, we can have confidence that He will bring it to pass. It does require faith to believe in a God that you cannot see and to furthermore believe that this invisible God will make a difference in your visible world. It means that you can think about being victorious and successful in life and hope that you will somehow achieve it, but when your dreams and desires are rooted in the Word of God, you can operate in faith. Faith gives substance and confidence to your thoughts and produces Godly images of His expected outcome. Without faith we often lose.

II. Why is Faith Important? *“It’s impossible to please God apart from faith. And why? Because anyone who wants to approach God must believe both that he exists and that he cares enough to respond to those who seek him.(Heb 11:6) ”*

Faith is woven into everything that we do in the Kingdom of God. It has been said, and I agree, that faith is the currency of the Kingdom. So what’s the big deal about faith? We all want to live a life that is pleasing to God. We all want the favor of God upon our lives. We all want God to respond to our prayers. This text teaches us that it is literally impossible to please God without faith. If it is impossible to



please God without faith, then we should want to know more about it, to ensure that we are pleasing to God. Let's take a look at some of the things that the Bible says we do, as believers, through faith. The Bible teaches us that we:

- a. Are saved through the vehicle of faith (Eph 2:8, 9).
- b. Are to live by faith (Ro 1:17, Gal 2:20, Gal 3:11, Heb 10:38).
- c. To be even clearer, we are instructed to live by "our" faith (Hab 2:4).
- d. To walk by faith and not by our senses (2 Cor 5:7).
- e. To fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12).
- f. Are taught that the prayer of faith can heal the sick (James 5:15).

It means that nothing is done in the Kingdom of God without faith. God requires faith. Faith moves Him. The absence of faith disappoints Him and opens a door for the operation of fear. Faith, however, cancels fear. So open yourself up in this series and prepare to receive instruction on how to develop faith and patience in your life, so that you too can inherit the promises of God (Heb 6:12).

- III. How is Faith Developed? “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Rom 10:17).*” Remember that faith is a confident assurance that God will do what He said He would do. You cannot apply faith in what God said He would do, if you do not know what He said. Faith, then, is tied to the Word of God. The more you investigate the scriptures on any given subject, the more promises you will be able to stand on in that area. The more promises you are able to stand on, the more faith you are able to exercise. You can then see how faith is developed through the Word.

It means that our faith is developed through studying and applying the Word of God. Once you know what God's promises are, then you can believe – by faith – that He will bring them to pass in your life. Without knowing what He promised, the best you can do is hope or wish. Hoping or wishing for kindness is OK, but developing our faith through the Word is better!

- IV. What is Patience? “*For you need endurance so that, having done the will of God, you may receive the promise. (Heb 10:36).*” Patience is more than simply waiting on something to happen, but rather remaining the same while you wait, no matter what the circumstances may

be. You can see how this ability, coupled with faith, is very important. You must know what to do in the space between “I believe, in Jesus’ name. Amen;” and “there it is!” This is what I call the space between the promise and the performance. The enemy will make every attempt to get you to lose heart during that space. He will tell you that God is not going to do it, that He did not hear your prayer, that you need to lower your expectations, and etc. This ability to remain the same (patience) will enable you to combat the thoughts of fear, doubt, and unbelief; and make it possible for you to remain in faith.

- V. Why is Patience Important? *“By your endurance you will win your souls”* (Luke 21:19). *“The ability to remain the same”* Luke 21: 10-18. Patience is critical in the life of the believer. I have stated that faith is the currency of the Kingdom and how nothing happens in God without faith. This is true, but patience gives us the ability to remain the same while we are waiting on the manifestation of our faith. Remember that fear cancels faith and faith cancels fear. Without patience, without the ability to remain the same, most people will cancel out their faith with fear, doubt, and unbelief; before they ever see the manifestation of it.
- VI. What does Patience produce? *“Let endurance have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”*(James 1:4). Well, the issue is not whether you know how to suffer, or whether you know how to endure pain; the issue is whether or not you can be trusted to remain faithful for the long run. Does God know that you have the ability to remain the same, no matter what the devil may attack you with? That is the key issue. If you search the scriptures to find people that God used mightily you will see a common denominator in all of their lives – they were people that were proven faithful.
- a. Abraham proved himself faithful when he was willing to offer God his only son.
  - b. Noah proved himself faithful when he continued to seek God, even though he was surrounded by a world of heathens.
  - c. David proved himself faithful while he was a shepherd boy and protected his sheep from a lion and a bear.
  - d. Elisha proved himself faithful to serve Elijah for many years, before he received his anointing. And the list could go on. Jesus explains it well in the parable of talents in Matthew 25. He gave talents to three men. Two of them were faithful. To the two that were

faithful, to the ones that passed the test, He said, “Wonderful! You are a good and faithful servant. I left you in charge of only a little, but now I will put you in charge of much more. Come and share in my happiness” (Mat 25:21, 23 CEV).

It means that you have to resolve in your heart that you will allow patience to run its full course in your life; that you will continue to operate in faith, no matter what may happen; and that you will not allow what you see to change what you believe God for. If you remain the same (patience), you will prove yourself faithful. Once you prove yourself faithful over the level that you are operating in today, God will elevate you to the next level!

VII. Faith and Patience *“That you won’t be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherited the promises. (Heb 6:12).”*

It means that God has given us many examples in His Word of people that have obtained the promises of God through faith and patience. God does not want us to recreate the wheel. If it worked for them it will work for us! Operate in faith and patience and your too will obtain the promises of God. You will see God manifest Himself in your life like never before. Simply have faith and keep that faith until you “see” what the Word “says” you can have!

- a. Jesus is the leader and source of our faith: Jesus is why we came to God. He is why we first believed. It is through His blood that we are saved. He initiated our faith walk.
- b. Jesus is also the Finisher of our faith: Jesus ensures that we have every opportunity to develop and become fully mature. Remember, James taught us that the testing of our faith develops patience (1:3) and that when patience is fully developed in our lives, we become complete, mature, and lacking nothing (1:4). For Jesus to ensure that we mature, He must give us opportunities for our faith to be tested.
- c. Jesus is also our example: He knew where He was headed. He knew that He had to endure the death of the cross. He struggled with that reality in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:42), but He decided that His purpose was greater than His predicament. He knew that His calling was greater than His crisis. He decided to put up with anything he had to put up with to fulfill His purpose and because of it, He is back in heaven, established in His rightful position of authority.

## Conclusion

Faith and patience are always rewarded with victory on earth or eternally because He said, *“behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his works”* (Revelation 22:12). So our faith must be developed to produce patience and our patience must be developed if we are to fulfill our purpose. Knowing where you are going is one thing, but having the determination to “stay the course,” no matter what may come your way is something else altogether. Remember that Jesus is our example. He stayed His course, finished His race, and fulfilled His purpose. Our goal now is to do the same!

### Applications:

- Give examples from our lives for people who endured problems for a long time and prevailed by their faith that gave them perseverance.
- It is not the will of God that we become spiritual sluggards. We are to live for Christ all the days of our lives.
- We should be imitators of faith
- We should be initiators of patience
- We must be confident that we can also obtain the promises of God through faith and patience

### Exercises:

1. How do you feel about the prayers which you are still waiting to be answered according the faith and patience you should have?
2. Can you give some examples from the Bible of people that have endured for a long time with faith and patience?

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## Week 4

# Christianity and Violence

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### Objectives:

- To teach students to live a Christian life marked by meekness and devoid of cowardice, subjugation or humiliation.

### References:

- The life of Jesus Christ.
- The life of St. Paul.
- The life of John the Baptist.
- Bible verses which clarify the absence of contradiction between meekness and strictness or firmness. We need to train our children to abstain from practicing violence in their lives and to face its different forms with meekness that befits the children of saints.
- The following are only some of the situations that might be raised during discussions: Matthew 12:18-20; 26:51-53; Luke 9:54-56.

### Memory Verse:

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)*

## Introduction

Psychological studies underline the tendency of violence in most youth, especially in males. This is compatible with the surging instincts in their bodies, and the ambitions filling their beings, as well as their ultimate requirements and the tendency to seek to fulfill them at whatever cost. However, Christian youth pose an opinion about violence drawn from the attitude of Jesus Christ Himself where He rejects violence in all its aspects.

## Lesson Outline

### I. The Teachings of Jesus Concerning Violence:

- Our Lord rejected violence for He said, *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”* (Matthew 5:5). He also preached and said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God”* (Matthew 5:9).
- Again, He said, *“Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also”* (Matthew 5:39). To His apostles, He said, *“I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves, therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves”* (Matthew 10:16).
- St. John Chrysostom comments upon this saying, “you can be a savage wolf and unwilling to be meek as sheep, but you cannot be of Christ’s fold because He is the shepherd of sheep and not of wolves.”
- Jesus rejects violence in His life: When He was interrogated by the religious leader of the Jews, the latter asked Him about His disciples and His teachings. Jesus courageously answered that He taught in public. At that point, one of the soldiers hit Jesus, according to the gospel of St. John, and said to Him *“Do You answer the high priest like that? Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?’”* (John 18:22-23). It is important to stop for a while and meditate on the words of Jesus. Jesus did not turn the other cheek to the soldier who hit Him, neither did He reveal any sign of humiliation, subjugation, or depression in his reaction. However, He did put an end to the man’s aggression by using a tone characterized by meekness and manliness, as well as being awesome and sublime. This underlines that meekness of a Christian is not due to cowardice but rather to forgiveness arising from spiritual ability and power. These characteristics enable a Christian to overcome his own weakness and physical nature. When the Lord was crucified, He faced the worst form of hatred with ultimate love as He called aloud, on the Cross and prayed on behalf of His murderers.

### II. The Church at the Time of the Apostles is a Practical Model of Meekness: The first Christians followed the model set by their Teacher (Matthew 11:29). Consequently, they did not revolt against their persecutors. In fact, they achieved the biggest spiritual revolution by

offering a testimony of blood without any hatred. For example, Saint Barbara prayed for the governor and her father who commanded that she be made to suffer. Philemon and Apollonius also prayed for the governor, Arianos of Ansana. Upon their martyrdom, the latter took dust from their graves and rubbed his ailing eyes and they were instantly healed. Thus he was transformed from a cruel persecutor to a great martyr.

### III. Why Does Christianity Reject Violence?

- Violence rejects love since it considers a person like an object that should be destroyed rather than someone who should be respected.
- Violence is weakness because it fears others, while meekness is strength, and love is power and perfection.
- Violence disregards man's humanity, while Christianity strengthens it and opposes contempt for others.
- Violence involves pride since it involves exaggerated self-confidence, while the meek tolerates discussion and listens to others.

IV. Does Society Reject Violence? Yes, civilized societies reject violent actions and consider those who react with hostile attacks as savage. Consequently, society judges and condemns both the aggressor and the violent defender.

### V. Christian Meekness Implies True Power:

- Because by facing violence with meekness, we allow love to enter the heart of the violent through our own living testimony of true love.
- Christian meekness is not due to wavering, for it does not oppose security, firmness or steadfastness in standing for the truth. Strictness is required to shake our hardened consciences.
- Jesus was firm without bearing any hatred in many instances (check Matthew 17:17; John 3:13-16).
- Meekness does not mean making compromises or bargaining with evil or making peace with the wicked, because it arises from love and truth.

- Dear youth, let all your energy, keenness, jealousy and ambition be blessed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. May the only violence you experience be the violence of love and testimony to the truth.

## Conclusion

Our lord Jesus Christ taught us not only to love our friends, but also love our enemies. Our lord Jesus Christ is the best model to a Christian. He didn't retaliate against those who were unjustly beating and accusing him before his crucifixion. He was so patient and silent to the surprise of everyone. Christianity is a religion of love, not a religion of violence and retaliation. Thus, we should follow the perfect examples of love and patience set forth by our lord and saviour Jesus Christ.

### Applications:

- Train yourself to practice meekness in your family life as well as at school and in national service.
- Train yourself to praise meekness and to prefer it to cruelty and violence.

### Exercises:

1. How do you explain meekness, explain using practical examples if applicable?
2. There are some people who think meekness as a weakness. How would you answer to them?
3. As Christians, how should we respond to an altercation? What does it mean to 'give the other cheek' as described in Matthew 5:39?
4. What did you learn from today's lesson?



## **Part III**

# **Lessons for the Month of November**

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## Week 1

# Isaiah the Prophet

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### Objectives:

- To have an overview about the book of Isaiah.
- To learn lessons from the book of Isaiah.

### References:

- The Book of Isaiah.

### Memory Verse:

*All flesh shall know, that I, the Lord, am your Savior, and your Redeemer.  
(Isaiah 49:26)*

## Introduction

Isaiah is the first of the 4 great prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. He belonged to the family of the kings. He was contemporary with four kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He lived in their palaces for about half a century. He shared in ruling the kingdom as those kings had confidence in him. He called for comprehensive reform when he recognized the afflictions that people suffered especially the poor classes who suffered from social injustice. In the days of Isaiah, the North Kingdom (Israel) fell into the hands of the king of Babylon and its people were captured and sent into exile . . . and there they spent a difficult time and they expressed their sufferings in this sad hymn: *“By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion . . . On the willows there we hung up our lyres . . . for there our captors required of us songs, and our tormentors, mirth. How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”* (Psalm 137).

The book of Isaiah contains 66 chapters and is the second most quoted book after psalms, in the New Testament (about 50 quotations). The four

evangelists quoted Isaiah in referring to John the Baptist 40:3 *“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God”*.

Jesus, Himself, read part of Isaiah 61:1-2 that said, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed”* (Luke 4:18).

Isaiah began his prophecy in 733 BC and continued for 50-60 years. The evil king Manasseh, who followed Hezekiah, had him sawed into two. His book has several themes. The most prominent is the portrayal of God as king over all creation and His eternal commitment to the descendents of King David.

## Lesson Outline

- I. Isaiah’s dramatic call to be a prophet occurs in a vision where he saw God sitting grandly on a throne, and the angels called “Seraphs” serve Him and proclaim the essence of God’s character *“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory”* (Isaiah 6:3).
- II. A large section of Isaiah’s book contains cracks against foreign nations: The first of the nations marked for condemnations is Babylon and Isaiah foresaw its fall to the Persians in the 6th century. The Assyrians were singled out for a condemnation in Isaiah 14:25. Moab, Israel’s neighbor to the east of the Dead Sea, was next on the list of wicked Nations in Isaiah 15:1. The oracle against Egypt in chapter 19 depicts the Lord in majestic term. The seafaring nation Phoenicia, with its capital Tyre, was told of its dread fate in chapter 23.
- III. Condemnation of sin: The first chapter condemned the sins of Israel *“Israel’s hands are full of blood”* (Isaiah 1:2,15). God commends Israel *“Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow”* (Isaiah 1:16-17). Satan’s sin and fall was described in Isaiah 14:12-15 *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations. For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to*

*the lowest depths of the Pit*". Chapters 34 and 35 describe God as the divine judge and is calling all people to listen to God *"For the indignation of the Lord is against all nations, and His fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter"* Isaiah 34:2.

IV. The coming of the Savior: The birth of Jesus is prophesied in Isaiah 7:14 *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel"*. Also, Isaiah 9:6 *"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace"*. Jesus is a descendent of King David *"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots"* (Isaiah 11:1). Jesus' character *"Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles"* (Isaiah 42:1). Isaiah 52:13 and 53:12 provides a sobering sense of the price that must be paid for redemption. The divine servant *"Shall be exalted and extolled and be very high"* but only after surviving affliction and oppression *"He was wounded for our transgression; He was bruised for our iniquities"* (Isaiah 53:5). Acts 8:32 echoed the language of Isaiah 53:7 to describe Jesus' suffering and death. Jesus as Savior *"The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined"* (Isaiah 9:2). Compare with Matthew 4:16 *"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned"*.

V. Return to God: God expects us to be righteous, repent our sins and worship Him *"Thus says the Lord: Keep justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed"* Isaiah 56:1. God promises that those who are faithful *"Shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint"* (Isaiah 40:31) and *"Fear not for I am with you"* (Isaiah 41:10). God offers the promise of a joyous future for the righteous. For them, God will create a *"new heaven and a new earth"* (Isaiah 65:17) in which all human infirmities will disappear and there will be continual rejoicing. The divine plan will achieve full realization when *"From new moon to another, and from Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before God"*

(Isaiah 66:23).

The following are the three images with which Prophet Isaiah expressed what he saw through prophecies about Messiah:

1. The Messiah as the Incarnate God: Isaiah prophesied the conception of the Messiah of a Virgin and the birth of Christ, and considered this fact the top of all prophecies as we see in Isaiah (Isaiah 7:10-16). Ahaz requested the Lord to rescue him from the Syrians and the Lord told him to seek a sign of being rescued. However, Ahaz did not ask for a sign and kept silent. Here the prophecy of the Messiah was uttered and it was the glory of all the signs and miracles. This sign and prophecy was repeated once more in chapter nine and it emphasized that He is the true light that shines over the whole world (Read Isaiah 9:1-7).
2. The Messiah as the Redeemer and Sufferer: The true Son of God is coming to redeem the world. Isaiah saw Him as a person sent by God taking the image of a servant enduring many sufferings, pains and grave (Isaiah 53). Isaiah saw Him bearing the men's grieves "*He has borne our grieves and carried our sorrows*" (Isaiah 53:4). Then he saw Him wounded on the cross, "*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed*" (Isaiah 53:5). He saw Him as a lamb that bears all our sins "*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth*" (Isaiah 53:7). Although He did not sin, yet He was numbered with transgressors and was sentenced to death in place of sinners: "*And they made His grave with the wicked- but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth . . . Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors*" (Isaiah 53:9-12).

The greatness of this personality is shown in the redemptive work, as through His passions He saved men out of love and redemption. He turned sufferings into a fellowship of love and sacrifice for the others. His passions formed the way for achieving triumph and victory to achieve the blessed goals people hoped for . . . Our Orthodox church recites the prophecies of Isaiah about the passions of the Savior in her Pascha prayers of the Holy Week showing how these prophecies were fulfilled in Christ's life and passions in the Holy Week.

3. The Messiah as the Spiritual King: He saw Christ, the Son of David as a strong wise king ruling over the peoples of the world: *“There shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord”* (Isaiah 11:1). A kingdom where justice prevails: *“But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked”* (Isaiah 11:4). A kingdom where peace prevails: *“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them”* (Isaiah 11:6). He saw security and peace fill all the hearts: *“The nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper’s den”* (Isaiah 11:8). The knowledge of God fills the hearts with holiness so the bad and corrupt things of society will disappear *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea”* (Isaiah 11:9). All these prophecies were fulfilled in the spiritual kingdom of Christ, which He established on earth and in the hearts of the believers:
- a. King: *“You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth”* (John 18:37).
  - b. A spiritual kingdom not worldly kingdom: *“My kingdom is not of this world”* (John 18:36).
  - c. A kingdom of peace, security and eternal joy *“for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 14:17).
  - d. A chosen and holy nation: *“you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people”* (1 Peter 2:9).

## Conclusion

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah reflect concrete historical events from the eighth century BC. The last chapters depict a future in which God will fashion an entirely new heaven and earth. Thus, a spanning time period from the eighth century BC to the unrealized future, Isaiah’s vision ad-

dresses the morbid fears of judgment and fervent hopes for consolation of countless generations past, present and yet to come.

**Applications:**

- Open the Holy Bible and read Isaiah chapter 53. You will find that it is full of prophecies of the passions of our Lord Christ. Thank God for these passions, which bring life to us.
- Choose few verses from the book of Isaiah and meditate on them and show your meditation to the teacher next Sunday.
- Try to search for some of God's characters from the book of Isaiah and support them with verses from the book.

**Exercises:**

1. What is the most prominent theme of the book of Isaiah?
2. Mention one prophecy of Isaiah about the Messiah.
3. What are the three images with which Prophet Isaiah expressed what he saw through prophecies about Messiah?

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## Week 2

# Jeremiah the Prophet

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### Objectives:

- To learn about the personality of Jeremiah the prophet.

### References:

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### Memory Verse:

*For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.  
(Jeremiah 31:34)*

## Introduction

Let us imagine something. Let's say when you are praying, God would speak to you and asks you to go to specific people in school who drink, party, commit adultery, or take drugs. God wants you to preach to them and tell them that if they do not repent, then they would be destroyed. What would you say? How would you feel and what are some of the issues that would be going through your mind about this request? Well, this exact thing happened before with Jeremiah the prophet. Let's read Jeremiah 1:4-10, 19 and see how Jeremiah the prophet responded.

Jeremiah was set aside before birth to take a message to the nations, urging a change of heart and turning to the one true God. His message still applies.

## Lesson Outline

When God called Jeremiah the prophet for service, Jeremiah was initially scared because the people he had to face were very wicked, and they were a lot higher in status than he was. However, God comforted Jeremiah



by telling him not to worry, and that God will help him speak. From the first scene between God and Jeremiah we can summarize some basic characteristics of Jeremiah the prophet:

1. Humility: when he told the Lord that he “*can not speak, for he is a youth*” (Jeremiah 1:6).
2. Full of spirituality God has chosen Jeremiah the prophet when he was about 13 years old! That by itself says a lot about how much God valued Jeremiah the prophet.
3. Obedient: When Jeremiah expressed his concerns to the Lord, and the Lord comforted him, he trusted and obeyed the Lord. Thus, witnessing to the evil and wicked people of Israel at the time.

Some interesting facts about Jeremiah the prophet and his relationship with God include:

1. God chose Jeremiah the prophet before he was born. This is shown in the fifth verse of the first chapter when God said, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.” In order for him to serve and set a good example before the wicked, he had to be sanctified and blessed by the Lord as mentioned in Jeremiah 1:5, “Before you were born I sanctified you.” Finally God has ordained him or appointed him to the service when He said, “And I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”
2. What an honor to be so special to the Lord. We all have the same status in front of God, it’s just a matter of our willingness to serve Him and be good witness before the others, showing them the true meaning of Christianity.
3. Even though Jeremiah the prophet was very strong when he went to preach about God and tell people to return from their evil ways, at times of persecutions and hardships, he would always plead with God for help and encouragement. The other amazing feature in his service is that although the people he was preaching were evil, he still cared for them and prayed for them. We see that in Chapter 9, verse 1 when Jeremiah says, “Oh, that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” Here Jeremiah the prophet expresses his sorrow for his people.

4. Jeremiah was never able to make the wicked people return. He worked very hard telling them to repent, but unfortunately these wicked people started plotting to kill him. He was able to escape the death several times, but he was finally killed by and for his people. He was killed by his people, and he was killed for them because he continued to care for them by carrying God's message to them but they did not care. Similarly the Jews, who claimed to know the God of Israel all their lives, killed Christ, and Christ was killed for them because He wanted to save them and grant them eternal life.
5. Here is a question for further reflection: What other characteristics of Jeremiah the prophet could we compare to Christ's characteristics and life?

We learn many virtues from Jeremiah the prophet, one of which is the relationship with God. Jeremiah always had intimate conversations with the Lord, and we pray that we would improve the quality of our talks with God. Also, Jeremiah the prophet trusted in the Lord in the hardest times when people were seeking to kill him. We wonder, if we were in his situation, if we would've done the same thing?

## Conclusion

Prophets of God often performed a dual role. One was to warn a wicked nation of God's judgments while powerfully calling on them to repent and turn from their sins. And the other was to build up and encourage the faithful of that time as well as us today to remain steadfast in living godly lives and to stay close to God in order to weather the increase in wickedness.

We see that Jeremiah the prophet was a courageous yet a humble man. He started his service when he was a very young man, i.e. 13 years old. This tells us that it's never too early to start serving the Lord. We should always have the sense of responsibility toward serving the Lord and others. Also we should learn from Jeremiah that even though we might find road blocks, we need to keep on going and asking God for His support.

- Applications:**
- Never be afraid or ashamed from what God likes you to say or do, we should always know that God would be on our side to support us.
  - Get more familiar with the Bible so we would be more qualified to carry the divine message to others.

**Exercises:**

1. What was Jeremiah's purpose of his calling?
2. What do you learn from Jeremiah's life?
3. What does God want you to do at this time?

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## Week 3

# Ezekiel the Prophet of Renewal and Unity

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### Objectives:

- To learn about the new life in the prophecy of Ezekiel.
- To understand the fundamentals of a christian life journey.

### References:

- John 3:16, 2 Corinthians 5:17, John 17:20-23

### Memory Verse:

*The name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE.  
(Ezekiel 48:35)*

## Introduction

Ezekiel is a priest and a prophet, ministered during the darkest days of Judah's history: The seventy years period of Babylonian captivity. He was carried to Babylon before the final assault on Jerusalem and used prophecies, parables, signs and symbols to dramatize God's message to His exiled people.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Defeat of Jerusalem Before the Babylonians: In about 597 BC the Babylonians came under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar and besieged Jerusalem. Jerusalem's king, Jehoiakim, surrendered and the Babylonians looted the city and took with them Jehoiakim and all the strong men as captives and sent them into exile in Babylon

as the Scriptures say: *“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon”* (Jeremiah 24:1).

- II. Ezekiel the Prophet In those days there was a great prophet whose name was Ezekiel. He prophesied of the Exile before it took place but the people did not listen to him and were not wise in what they did. Ezekiel was taken captive to Babylon and there he prophesied about what would happen in the future. The people went to him and asked about the time of salvation and rescue from that affliction and Ezekiel prophesied saying: *“The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me: Son of man, can these bones live? So I answered: O Lord God, You know. Again He said to me: Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, ‘O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.’ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them. Also He said to me: Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, ‘Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.’ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army”* (Ezekiel 37:1-10). This prophecy had a direct meaning (which was near) and a spiritual meaning. The direct meaning indicates the historical events, which took place fifty years after this prophecy when Cyrus King of Persia gave an order that the Jews would return to Jerusalem from exile and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4). But the remote spiritual meaning is what Ezekiel prophesied about the work of the Holy Spirit and the New Life which is given to men: *“Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ”* (Ephesians 2:5).

### III. The Work of the Holy Spirit

- a. The Gift of the New Life: We can imagine human beings before Christ. They were sentenced to death because of sins. That was the wide valley which was full of the bones of the dead then Christ the Hope of Gentiles, came and His light shone on those sitting in the valley of darkness and shadows of death and the voice says, “O you who are still asleep, get up rise from the dead and Christ will send light for you”. The soul that believes will pass from death to life and will rise with Christ and take, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the new life . . . and on the day of Pentecost, there was a sound which came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind and the Holy Spirit rested on the early church and all the people were filled with Spiritual power . . . gifts and miracles according to what the Holy Spirit gave them and the new man who rose with Christ began to live his new life with the Holy Spirit: *“We were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life”* (Romans 6:4). In this way the rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit saved us (Titus 3:5). The life of the disciples was completely transformed after they received the holy spirit during Pentecost. If we take Peter, for example, he betrayed Jesus three times before the rooster crows twice (John 18:13-27). After receiving the holy spirit, however, he courageously stood up and preached to the Jews from all over the world (Acts 2:14-40). Thus, the holy spirit transforms our lives from death to new life, as the prophesy of Ezekiel tells us.
- b. The Source of Unity: Ezekiel prophesied of the Unity of the church in which the Spirit of the Lord works, “Come from the four winds O breath and breathe upon these slain that they may live”. The breathing of the Spirit from the four parts of the world indicates the one church in the whole world which is led and guided by the Spirit of the Lord in the holy unity of all believers as the Lord Jesus desires so that all believers may become one (John 17:21), a new heart and right spirit. St. Augustine said contemplating this saying, *“Come with all your sins and with all your faults, come with your heart, with your spiritual desires and in secret take off the works of darkness, take off the sins of humanity . . . the moment you do this the Spirit renews your senses which have been corrupted by iniquities and sins. In this way our souls will be holy temples for God and the Spirit of God abides in us . . . Ezekiel the Prophet wrote: Thus says the Lord. . . Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and*

*you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them”* (Ezekiel 36:25-27). The unity of the church is very important God. Our lord Jesus Christ prayed for the unity of the church before his death saying “. . . *I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity.*” John 17:20-23. And the life of the first church was a testimony of this prayer as they were living together in unity and love. The source of all this wonderful unity is the holy spirit as prophesized by Ezekiel.

## Conclusion

The Lord appeared to Ezekiel in a heavenly vision so he fell upon his face and the Lord said to him, “*Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak to you*” (Ezekiel 2:1). This encouraged Ezekiel and the Lord gave him a message to call the captured to repent and ordered him to deliver that message. This lesson also teaches us on how God honors his promises. “*It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law.*” Luke 16:17. Thus, we can trust God, because he keeps his prophesies and promises.

### Applications:

- Do a Bible search for the characters that saw a vision?
- Unity of the church is very important to God. God tells us to love each other and live in unity. It is our responsibility to love each other, and preserve the unity of the Church.

### Exercises:

1. Find verses from the New Testament that was actually prophesied in the book of Ezekiel.
2. Do you appreciate the new life you received through our lord Jesus Christ? Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come! “*Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come!*” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

3. Whenever we are tempted to do something against our consciousness, we hear a voice inside us telling us not to do it. Have you ever had such an experience? That is the holy spirit guiding us.
4. Exercise the habit of listening to the advice of God. God advises us through different means such as His word ( Titus 3:16), through other people ( 2 Samuel 12), through a voice in our heart (John 14:26), through vision like in the case of Jeremiah. God could also talk/teach to us through our problems (eg Joseph).



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## Week 4

# Daniel the Prophet of the Messiah

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### Objectives:

- To Know the Character of the Coming Christ in the Book of Daniel.

### References:

- Matthew 24 for more reference about events preceding the second coming of our lord Jesus Christ.

### Memory Verse:

*Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2)*

## Introduction

We see in King David a model indicating a greater king, i.e. the Messiah. He rules over all the world and his kingdom is endless according to the promises given from God and the prophecies uttered in the psalms. After him came prophet Isaiah and through the spirit of prophecy he revealed the personality of the coming Christ and His kingdom, which He would establish. But it was a spiritual kingdom not of this world. Here we meet with Daniel to whom Heaven revealed many secrets through visions and he saw the great events in the life of the Son of man and he prophesied of His coming and the kingdom of saints as he saw it in his vision.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Son of Man in Daniel's Vision: Daniel saw a dream: *"I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other. The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings. I watched till its wings were plucked off; and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it. And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was raised up on one side, and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: 'Arise, devour much flesh!' After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words. I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed"* (Daniel 7:4-14).
  
- II. The Saints and the Kingdom Here Daniel began to understand the interpretation of this vision. One of those standing began to explain:

*“Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. . . The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces. The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time. But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it forever. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Daniel 7:17-27).*

This explanation clarifies the vision to us and gives us its spiritual meaning as follows: The Son of man who Daniel saw is Jesus Christ who took to himself the title of the “Son of man”. This means that Daniel prophesied of His coming down from heaven, His incarnation and becoming man for us, the people and for our salvation. Daniel here reveals the symbols of the Holy Trinity the One God so we see: The Father (the Ancient of Days), the Son (the Son of man) and the Holy Spirit (a river of fire running and coming out from the Father). The saints whom Daniel saw in his vision are the Christians who believed in the Incarnate God and accepted Him and He gave them dominion to become children of God and made them children of the kingdom of God. Those saints are from the kingdom of Christ, which begins and is established here on earth. This kingdom is the struggling church which includes a society whose life is characterized by holiness as they made Christ their king; the king of their life and their hearts. They obey the commandments of God and their holy hearts glorify Him. This kingdom extends to heaven which represents the triumphant church represented in the heavenly glories where the righteous inherit the kingdom prepared for them before the establishment of the world and they will attain the crowns of righteousness. Daniel revealed the fight between the world and the children of God and how the world prevails and succeeds for a limited time (the fourth kingdom refers to the Roman Empire which was in existence when Christ came and how the Romans fought the believers and persecuted them severely). But the King of kings won victory. He went out conquering and to conquer

and to give His people triumph and victory. In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).

- III. Seventy Weeks! Gabriel the angel appeared to Daniel and said to him *“I have come to tell you because the Lord loves you... After seventy weeks (70 x 7 which means in the fullness of time ... as 7 is a complete number) Christ the Holy of Holies will appear and He shall make a strong covenant with many ... and He shall cause sacrifice and offering to cease”* (Daniel 9:20-27).

## Conclusion

Let us be cautious of those who interpret the prophecies of Daniel in a way that may make people believe that Christ will come on a certain day or that Israel in her present political circumstances is the outcome of ancient prophecies ... as Christ will come on a day unknown to.

**Applications:** Choose from the Second group what responds to the first group and completes the meaning:

- First Group The Son of man whom Daniel saw is .....
- The four beasts stand for .....
- The beast, which fights the children, is .....
- The horn, which spoke great things against God stand for .....
- The saints of the Most High to whom the kingdom is given are .....

### Exercises:

1. How did Daniel inform us of the Messiah?
2. Do all Christians have to be saints? How?
3. Why is Christ given the title of “Son of man”?
4. Study the following verse: Daniel 7:13,14
5. *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all”* (Psalm 34:19). Explain this in the light of what you studied in the Book of Daniel.

## Part IV

# Lessons for the Month of December

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## Week 1

# Discovering God's Will

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### Objectives:

- To appreciate the importance of seeking God's will before every decision that we make.
- To know how to make decisions according to God's will.

### References:

- John 6:28

### Memory Verse:

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2Timothy 1:7)*

## Introduction

Everyday we face multiple decisions that challenge us in various aspects of our lives. Some decisions are big and some are small, but we always have to live with the consequences. Many Christians make their plans and decisions like atheists, without reference to the Lord. They verbally profess to be Christians, but their lives are no different from those who deny God's existence. But the Lord calls us to forsake practical atheism and puts feet to our verbal profession of faith.

So how do you know what to do? Our contemporary world provides us a dizzying abundance of choices and opportunities in our personal, family and public lives. Which option should we choose? Sometimes the choices for the Lord stand out starkly and we at least are aware of what we are supposed to do. But even when we know what we are supposed to do, our will to honor God often seems disabled. How do we follow through in obedience with the right choices? In our contemporary world, the choices

for the Lord are not always clear. In our family, in our vocation, and in our community several tough options often confront us, and maybe none of them seem terribly clear. How does the Christian sift through shades of gray?

## Lesson Outline

- I. God's will has two aspects: One aspect is the revealed will of God and the other is the hidden will of God. What is the difference?
  - The revealed will of God is the Word of God, the Holy Bible.
  - The hidden will of God is His plan for each one of us that is not immediately evident on the pages of the scripture.

Many Christians agonize as they try to ascertain the hidden will of God for their lives, but the key is first obeying the revealed will. It is truly amazing how much God's hidden will becomes apparent to us when we are faithful to follow Him in the things He has already revealed. Our Lord Jesus said: *"you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things"* (Matthew 25:20). So, what is God's revealed will for your life and my life?

First, God's will is that you and I be saved. The only way to be in the middle of the Lord's will for our lives is to be saved and be reconciled to God through Christ. His highest hope for you and I is to be in a loving relationship with Him every moment of every day.

Second, God's will for us is to obey His commandments and love Him with all of our heart, mind and strength. The Holy Bible tells us that it is God's will that we should avoid sexual immorality, and that we pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 5:17-18). Also God's will for all of us is to be spirit-filled (Ephesians 5:18). This means that we are to surrender our will to the Lord and let the Holy Spirit direct and empower us. God's will for us is to obey scriptural commands.

But what about the situations where God does not specifically give a command? If you are unsure ask yourself these questions:

- a. Will God be glorified if I choose this option?
- b. Will people connected to this decision be strengthened in their faith or at least see a clear example of Godliness?

- c. Would Our Lord Jesus do that?
- d. Does this help me grow closer to the Lord?
- e. Would I like this done to me or said about me?

II. Two important activities that help in making God's desires your desires: Prayer and Godly advice. Prayer is one way the Holy Spirit works (John 16:13). Godly counsel is important in seeking to discover God's hidden will. Ask your father of confession a Sunday School Servant, or a trusted friend in church. The Holy Bible tells us that the church (all believers) is the body of Christ, and the Lord often works His blessings in our lives through other parts of the body. However, be careful whom you ask. Make sure you know that the individuals that you solicit advice from are trustworthy, mature, loving and true Christians. Seeking Godly counsel does not mean that you do exactly what they tell you but it does mean that you give serious consideration and weight to their advice.

III. Waiting and Fearing God's Will Waiting is a difficult but important part of seeking God's will. Many of us have been conditioned by society to expect results right away. We are impatient in waiting for the Lord's direction on important decisions in our lives. However, God tells us to wait upon Him: *"Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!"* (Psalm 27:14). He is very concerned about our character, not just our clarity in decision-making. Often we find that the very process of waiting illuminates selfish, demanding areas of our hearts, which God can purify and cure.

Also some people express anxiety about God's will that it may not be according to their will and that will make them miserable. Fearing to submit to God's will shows that we don't know the goodness of God and His love for us. The Lord knows us perfectly. He knows our physical, mental and emotional make-up and needs. He knows our hopes, dreams, and fears. He knows all the good and bad in us and He loves us utterly the whole time. God's desire is for our best. In fact, He wants what is best for us more than we do! *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"* (Matthew 7:11).



## Conclusion

When you pray, “Lord, I am yielding my will to yours. I relinquish my own selfish plans and accept whatever you have for me,” the Lord becomes exalted because He can bring more blessing and joy in your life more now than ever before. The one place in the universe where your fears must flee forever is in the center of our loving God’s will. It doesn’t get any better than this.

### Applications:

- Search the Bible for the acceptable prayers in the Old and New Testament and look for the way they were worded.
- Identify Bible personalities that submitted completely to God’s will and contemplate on the outcomes in their lives.

### Exercises:

1. From this lesson what is God’s revealed will for your life and your family?
2. What do you understand from St. Paul message when he was saying: *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”* (Philippians 4:8)
3. What does It mean when the Bible says this *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:3)
4. Do you agree with this *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

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## Week 2

# The Goal of Life

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### Objectives:

- To show that our Life is not for us but for others.

### References:

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### Memory Verse:

*But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you.  
(Luke 12:31)*

## Introduction

If I ask some of you about the thing that pleases each one of you, one of you will say: I feel very happy when my father buys me a new shirt. Another will say: I feel happy when I play with my friends. A third one will say: I feel happy when I watch television. A fourth one will say: I feel very happy when I have money with which I can do what I want. Another one may say: I feel happy with all these together but I also feel happy when I see my brother or my friend happy too. I feel happy when they put on a new shirt or when they enjoy the pleasure of playing with their friends or others. In general, all what pleases them pleases me. Which group do you belong to? Are you of that selfish type who cares only for himself and concentrates on what pleases him personally or are you of that type who is happy when others are happy? But, what binds me with the others so that I may be happy for their happiness and sad for their sadness?

## Lesson Outline

- I. The fellowship of brotherhood:

1. Members of one body: We have to know that we are all members of one body; if one member suffers all the other members of the body suffer. For example, if your leg is wounded, can the body do without this wounded leg and say to it “you can suffer far away from me”? On the contrary, the whole body suffers when the leg suffers. Because we are members of one body and the head is the Lord Jesus Christ, we share one another in joys and sorrows (An example: The Church of the apostles).
2. Cooperation and Integration: In soccer matches, the team cannot do without the goal keeper, nor can it do without the forward players or the defenders. All play and each one has his own important place and no one can do without the other. The same is with us; each one of us has a gift and a task to do. We need one another; the thread of love gathers our hearts and combines us together. Can a miller do without the farmer who plants wheat for him or can a baker do without the miller who grinds the wheat for him or can you do without all those people? We are all in need of one another. We integrate one another. No one is self-sufficient. So we must cooperate and integrate.

## II. Phases of practical fellowship:

1. Love and Service: Each time you can do a work of love, do it to please the heart of your brethren. If a blind man wants to cross the street help him cross the street with love. When you hear that a colleague is ill, visit him and so on.
2. Pray for one another: One of the best phases of fellowship is to raise our prayers for one another especially when one of us is in trouble or ill, sad, worried or is traveling. We have to pray for them and plead the Lord to support them (Example: The Church prayed for Peter when he was in prison).
3. The blessing of the Lord’s brothers: To be an active member in the body of the Lord, you can do good work in secret to the poor and the needy that are the Lord’s brothers. If your circumstances are better than those of any of them, it is your duty to help them, in the spirit of love and sacrifice. Give them as much as you can: money, visits, service but in secret (Example: Barnabas sold a field he owned, brought the money and handed it over to the apostles).
4. Endurance: The person in whom Christ dwells and who is considered a member in the body of Christ endures the weakness of

others. He does not reproach them or blame them as he knows that his weaknesses and sins are more in number than those of others. Endure your brethren in their anger, endure your colleagues when they sin and pray for them, endure your friends and do not blame them when they do not share your joys or sorrows: you do not know their circumstances. Accept, with love, the instructions of the elders whether they are your parents, your brothers or your Servants.

## Conclusion

Christianity is the religion of the second mile, which reaches out to others. It is the religion of the living sacrifices, where we sacrifice our comfort, material and time for the sake of others. It takes the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who sacrificed Himself for our sake.

### Applications:

- Try to achieve these trends in Sunday School classes and write about points of success and points of failure in achieving this exercise.
- Try to practice these exercises in your church and in your family to achieve your goal in life.
- Think out, you and your class, how you can give food to the hungry, find a shelter for the stranger, and visit the sick people.
- Contemplate the parable of the rich and fool . . . and make a comparison between saints such as St. Paul who sold everything for their love of King Christ and the greedy people of this life. What is your situation? Who would like to be your role model?

### Exercises:

1. Read the First Epistle of St. Paul the apostle to the Corinthians and quote the verses which contain these words: members, body and member.
2. Why can't money, food, or all material matters be considered sufficient to be the goal of life?
3. What is the true meaning of "riches" to God?
4. What are the characteristics that enable you to be an heir to the Kingdom of heaven? And what are the obligations?

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## Week 3

# Youth and Identifying a Goal

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### Objectives:

- To realize that our spiritual goal in life is to be children of God.
- To witness to God wherever we go and whatever we do.

### References:

- 1 Timothy 4:12, 2 Chronicles 15:7, Psalms 37:4-5, Psalms 127:1, Proverbs 3:6, Proverbs 16:3

### Memory Verse:

*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. (Mark 16:15)*

## Introduction

Many people live to achieve temporary earthly goals that perish. They devote all their time and thoughts in achieving such goals even though, they get covered by rust or worms such as money or commerce, knowledge or lust or other lowly desires such as passionate indulgence. However, such people are rarely satisfied or gratified. After a while, they realize they have wasted their lives to achieve these goals. They wish that life would go back in time to give them another chance to choose a different goal. Unfortunately, time would be up, the door closed and the bridegroom already inside. They will find themselves thrown outside the door and deprived of the heavenly bridegroom.

The danger such people take by living without having goals is that they are swept by the different trends surrounding them. They go because they see others doing so, and they stop as they see others stop. They do not wish to see for themselves and often wonder why they are living, or why God has created them. Because they live without a purpose, they are like a ship that sails without having any destination.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Importance Of Identifying A Goal: There should be a goal and it should be identified. It should also have a defined strategy. Jesus Christ came to define your goal for you. He then holds your hand and leads you towards it. He scolds every wind, and calms every wave, so that your boat proceeds peacefully to the port, blessed by His presence inside it.
  
- II. Clarity of the Goal: By this, we mean that a person should know exactly what he is going to do, where he is going, and how much time he will spend on his journey. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, in planning for the salvation of mankind, had a goal set before Him. St. Paul the apostle expresses this when he speaks about Christ saying, *“who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 2:2). Thus the Lord came to achieve the goal He had set. He struggled to achieve it and it was motivated by His love, an inexplicable love, to save the world.
  
- III. Identifying the Goal: When Jesus handed down His mission to His disciples He made them responsible for the whole world; they had to teach all His ways. He therefore offered Himself totally to them, thereby ensuring the realization of His goal.
  - *“Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 28:19).
  - *“And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the world”* (Acts 1:8).
  - *“Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”* (Matthew 28:20).
  - *“I am with you always, even to the end of ages”* (Matthew 28:20).
  - From the above three verses, the overall goal, its depth and its sublimity that transcends power and time, becomes clear. These last three commandments that the Lord delivered to His disciples reveal that the mission is very lengthy. In fact, it would entail all ages for its fulfillment.

As for our responsibility towards this lengthy divine mission, we should observe its comprehensiveness, which seems impossible, unless it is put

within the framework of the divine Will and the assistance of Jesus Christ. However, comprehensiveness in its full sense is hard to achieve. Nevertheless, we could serve and mark our mission by this feature when we do not discriminate among people or areas, flesh or blood, friendship or profit, moods, comfort, beliefs, or nationality. Such a multiple population, served so completely, elevates the value of the goal. It makes it a task greater than could be confined to one man, one group, or one people. Therefore, we are required to present the Lord Jesus Christ to the entire world exactly as He has presented Himself to it.

The task of the Christian could be clarified in the following three goals. He hopes to achieve them through his contacts with the world, supported by Christ Himself as well as the Holy Bible:

- First Goal: Promoting the relationship between people and God to achieve its true spiritual level.
- Second Goal: Promoting man's relationship with himself so that he becomes concerned with the salvation of his soul above all other considerations whatever those may be.
- Third Goal: Promoting the relationship between man and his fellowmen in order to raise it to its original divine status, and give it priority over all other considerations.

IV. Consolidating the Goal: When a Christian succeeds in achieving his goal in society, on the basis of the above three specifications, he will find that this does not guarantee steadfastness. To ensure the strength and development of a human soul, or any group within the limits of the defined goal, a transformation must take place whereby the affected become effective. In other words, there is the need to become continually and actively alive. For every person living with Jesus Christ is required to be actively alive within the body of God. This necessitates unity with the Church and close adherence to it.

Consequently, any work undertaken by a Christian and which does not end with leading people to join the Church or end in their perseverance in prayer so that they, too, would carry the mission one of these days, would come short of achieving the goal. This is so because life with Jesus Christ is inconceivable if a person is isolated from the rest of those who live with Him. All this is a preparation work for the greater task undertaken by a person to get spiritually unified with all people in the whole world to love them on the basis of, and

through, Christ's love for everyone. That is how the responsibility of a Christian transcends the circle of Church service and moves into the circle that comprises work for the benefit of all mankind. It involves responsibility for providing the needs of all nations and peoples who are suffering or are deprived. That is the goal of Christ's mission as well as that of the Bible. It is the way that Christ has designated as the perfect picture of the Christian person. This is how man was at the beginning - in the image of God and likewise upon the Cross, the picture of Christ, Himself, crucified for the salvation of the whole world.

We are all invited to attain this picture. We can achieve it whether through our small services or larger ones within the Church. It is a possible task when the heart is prepared to receive and love every person it meets; becoming like Christ's heart and actually taking on His power to change and convert the hearts of men. In other words, as much as the task is comprehensive, it becomes a prerogative to open up one's heart. Moreover, to consolidate the goal as well as ensure its promotion, we need to exert a great effort.

## Conclusion

This lesson revealed to us an important aspect and a deep concept of the Christian life; in that it is not mere mental doctrines, nor controversial philosophies, but is rather a life and a spirit by which the youth lives, as well as the student; each within his own responsibility and work.

Paul told Timothy, a younger man in the faith, "*Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*" (1 Tim. 4:12). God specifically commands us, as young people, to be leaders—to lead by example. We are to understand God's instructions to us and let the world watch us grow in our spiritual walk with the Lord. Finally, never give up. When we fail the Lord in various areas of our lives, get back on track through repentance prayer and Bible study and keep purposing to please Him in everything you do. Keep striving to be an example "of the disciples." God earnestly desires to help us, walk with us and strengthen us in every area of our lives. All we need to do is to obey Him and yield ourselves to Him and to His will. Difficult times will come—loneliness, anxiety, peer pressure and discouragement will look us straight into the eyes at times. But God is always faithful to us. Purpose to remain faithful to Him.



**Applications:**

- This lesson revealed to us an important aspect and a deep concept of the Christian life; in that it is not mere mental doctrines, nor controversial philosophies, but is rather a life and a spirit by which the youth lives, as well as the student; each within his own responsibility and work.
- Paul told Timothy, a younger man in the faith, ;"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). God specifically commands us, as young people, to be leaders—to lead by example. We are to understand God's instructions to us and let the world watch us grow in our spiritual walk with the Lord.
- Finally, never give up. When we fail the Lord in various areas of our lives, get back on track through repentance prayer and Bible study and keep purposing to please Him in everything you do. Keep striving to be an example "of the disciples." God earnestly desires to help us, walk with us and strengthen us in every area of our lives. All we need to do is to obey Him and yield ourselves to Him and to His will. Difficult times will come—loneliness, anxiety, peer pressure and discouragement will look us straight into the eyes at times. But God is always faithful to us. Purpose to remain faithful to Him.

**Exercises:**

1. What is the importance of Identifying a Goal and clarity of our Goal?
2. What do you think we learn from the life of Timothy? And what made him to be strong in the eyes of the Lord?

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## Week 4

# Christianity is a Practical Life

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### Objectives:

- To describe the practice of alms giving at the individual and group levels.

### References:

- 1 John 3:11-18; James 1:27, 2:14-16

### Memory Verse:

*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:18)*

## Introduction

James the apostle says: “*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit*” (James 2:14-16). In his first Epistle St. John says, “*But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth*” (1 John 3:17-18). Lord Jesus Himself not only gave us commandments about mercy, love and kindness but He also gave us His Body. He gave “Himself” to us as a model to follow His steps. He came down from heaven to become man like us in everything except sin only. He lived as a poor man and worked as a carpenter in Joseph’s house. He visited the poor in their homes. He also entered the houses of sinners and tax collectors. He shared the household of Lazarus with His heart and tears, and He shared in the wedding at Cana of Galilee with His love and rejoicing. In this way, He gave us a model for practical participation.

## Lesson Outline

- I. Typical Life Examples: The following are examples of problems many people are going through. We should do something to help those people:
  1. The Orphan: A little boy who lost one of his parents or both of them and he had nobody to support him. He lost the kindness of the mother and the parents' care so he became needy, vagrant and deviant.
  2. The Widow: A woman whose husband died so she and her children are without means of support and her responsibility towards her children and her duty to bring them up make her unable to work to support her children.
  3. Unemployment: A young man who is able to work but he does not find a job to help him support himself and his family. He may have a profession or experience but he does not have the money needed for a simple project.
  4. Poverty: A worker whose resources are very few and whose wage is very low and limited and the demands of life are pressing, had to borrow money and the creditors ask for their money back. He dwells in an unsuitable house and his children suffer from malnutrition because of lack of food. He was forced to find work for his children at an early age, so he deprived them of being sent to school.
  5. Addiction: A family supporter who spends a large portion of his limited income on drinking wine, smoking or tea or any other things and what remains does not suffice the necessities of life. His health is dangerously affected and the family atmosphere and home happiness are corrupted.
  
- II. Some Domains in which we can serve the Lord Christ:
  1. Visiting orphanages and charity institutions to study their spiritual needs and material needs, and showing them spiritual and cultural films, making Agapi (love) parties there, and giving children some religious and scientific books.
  2. Visiting the widows and the disabled and giving them help and care, caring for old people and the aged ones who have nobody to support them and sending them to institutions.

3. Visiting a family that suffers a severe shock or that is in grief and sorrow, and sitting with those in grief to soften their suffering by reading them texts from the Holy bible.
4. Visiting those in prison after getting permission and offering the prisoners some pamphlets and spiritual guidance, and encouraging them to repent and endure affliction if they are not guilty.
5. Giving help to the poor and the unemployed by possibly setting up small projects to support themselves.
6. Finding a dwelling place for sojourners and looking for some sort of make agreements with social and national institutions to make an integrated plan for offering services.
7. Visiting patients in hospitals and comforting them by showing the feelings of love and raising prayers for them.

### III. Examples of things offered in the previous domains:

1. Materials: money, food, sweets, presents clothes, covering.
2. Cultural: Holy books, religious and cultural books, magazines pictures.
3. Abstracts: Visits, reconciliation, sharing occasions.
4. Spiritual: prayers, gospel, religious pictures, public masses, visits and individual work.

### IV. Instructions in Social Service

1. Respect the poor man's feelings and dignity. Do not hurt him by any word but at the same time be on your guard so that you may not be a prey for swindlers. Therefore, a social worker should study each case.
2. Concentrate on prayers and reading the Bible during your visits.
3. Draw the poor people's attention to the Lord Jesus, as He is the source of every good gift and do not tie them to yourself.
4. Try to find a suitable job for each unemployed man for alms may drive people to laziness.

V. A Problem and its Solution: We do not have enough money to meet the needs of the poor and our pocket money is limited. This problem faced the disciples when the Lord Jesus asked them to give food to the multitude and they said to Him. "We do not have enough food". We

have to believe that He who blessed the little and filled five thousand people with five loaves can bless our little money and our gifts and the more we pray and show zeal the more the Lord gives us. Then comes the story of the poor widow who dropped two coins in the treasury chest out of her want and the Lord praised her saying: *“Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had”* (Luke 21:1-4). This emphasizes that the limited potentialities did not hinder the woman to excel over the rich when she gave out of her want. The spirit and the way of almsgiving are more important than its amount. So we have to offer the little that we have and we have to ask loving people to participate in the projects we make for the poor.

## Conclusion

As Christians we show our faith through our acts. We are sensitive to the needs and pains of others. We show them love and mercy as the Lord loves us and is always merciful to us.

### Applications:

- Think of a person in need and practice of some of the above mentioned domains of service.
- Together with you class and Sunday School teacher, plan to visit people in need and help in their suffering by showing love.

### Exercises:

1. How does God want us love each other?
2. List three group of people who are suffering among the society.
3. List ways Christians can assist the people you mentioned in (1).

**Part V**

**Lessons for the Month of  
January**

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## Week 1

# The Coming of the Savior Jesus Christ

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### Objectives:

- To contemplate the Nativity of the King of Glory and the Prince of Peace.
- To know the fulfillment of the prophecy made in the old testament about coming of Jesus Christ
- To understand Salvation attained by coming of Jesus Christ
- To know the sacrifice that Jesus made for us

### References:

- Luke 1:26-38
- John 3:16

### Memory Verse:

*Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.  
(Luke 2:10)*

## Introduction

Since Adam fell and was driven out of the Garden of Eden, the Lord promised Adam that the seed of the woman would smite the head of the serpent and man waited for a long time and expected that the Lord would fulfill His promise through the Law and the prophets. In the Old Testament there are many clear references indicating the Coming of the Messiah and

that the Promises of God must be fulfilled . . . as what happens before dawn appears . . . rays of light gather and light shines suddenly and darkness is no more . . . . Jesus came to give himself as a sacrifice for all peoples so that we could escape our failure and reconnect with God

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Prophecy: Isaiah prophesied that Christ would come when he said, *“For to us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”* (Isaiah 9:6) The same prophet says, *“Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”* (Isaiah 7:14). Jeremiah emphasizes the promise when he says, *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people”* (Jeremiah 31:31-33). The Old Testament paved the way for the New Testament, which is a spiritual testament. In it the Lord dwells in man and we become God’s people.
  
- II. The Day, which the Lord has made: Let us rejoice and be glad in it . . . . In the first two chapters of his Gospel St. Luke explained how man was joyfully waiting for the day when Christ comes according to God’s promise. When Virgin Mary visited Elizabeth, she sang hymns of praise and said, *“My soul magnifies the Lord. And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; for behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped*



*His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever” (Luke 1:46-55).*

When Zechariah the Priest opened his mouth, he said, *“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant” (Luke 1:68-72).*

When Simon the elder was in the temple, he took the child Jesus in his arms and gave thanks to God and said, *“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word: For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people” (Luke 2:29-31).* There was also a very old prophetess, a widow named Anna. She never left the temple day and night she worshiped God. That very same hour she arrived and gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free (Luke 2:38) . . . Christ, through His Incarnation and His coming to us as man brought back our nature and our first order to us. The greatness of what the Lord did by His coming to us, His Incarnation and His Nativity can be shown through the hymn, which the angels sang the moment the Lord Jesus was born *“Glory be to God in the highest and on earth peace . . . good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).*

- III. Glory be to God in the Highest: Through Nativity man could share the angels in glorifying God. All heavenly and earthly creatures gathered to bow to Jesus and glorify Him . . . This is what the church says in her prayers: “We worship You, O Christ with Your Good Father and the Holy Spirit for You have come and saved us”.
  - a. And on earth peace: In the prophecy of Isaiah, the Lord Jesus was called “the prince of peace” and the peace He sent on earth is the spiritual peace, which helps man to overcome sin as sin drives peace away. He gave us His peace by saying, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, I give unto you”. The Lord reconciled the heavenly creatures with the earthly ones and reconciled the soul with the flesh. In this way the church has become the kingdom of true peace on earth.
  - b. Good will toward men: True happiness and good will result from the strong relationship between God and man and it gives man true

joy, which is the work of the Holy Spirit in the believers. That is why the church in her prayers says, "Fill our hearts with joy and gladness. Fill our hearts with rejoice and grace that we may develop every good deed and should be satisfied with the bare necessity".

## Conclusion

Let us sing praise with St. Mary when she said: "*For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation*" (Luke 1:49-50).

### Applications:

- Read the good news that the angel brought to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14) and paint the scene.
- Make a Nativity cavern showing the Nativity events. Invite your friends and explain these events to them and sing together the Nativity hymns.
- The following prayer should be recited daily this week: "O Lord, who were born in poverty for me. Grant me that I will devote all my life for you. You who saved me through your Incarnation grant me that I give you myself and my whole life. You who gave me your peace let me be a messenger of peace among all the people".
- As we are in a testament where the ruler is not law but grace of God; we shall make use of the power gained through grace to rule over sin and live for Christ.(Romans 6:13-14)

### Exercises:

1. What made God to send His only son to become a man and sacrifice Himself to avenge our sin?
2. How do you remember the coming of Christ?
3. Meditate that Jesus Christ came to earth in order to save us

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## Week 2

# My Need for Jesus Christ

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### Objectives:

- There is no life without Jesus Christ.

### References:

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### Memory Verse:

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)*

## Introduction

Within man there is a need that is endless and unsuitable. All philosophical and psychological studies have identified that need. Moreover, the daily observation of man's life has proved its existence. For example, man may seek knowledge and he may attain various scientific degrees, however, he is still unsatisfied and demands more.

Another may seek the truth, and the truth is God, so he struggles in his search. However, he does not reach the other bank for the simple reason that he is limited. At the same time, there is within him an infinite hunger that can be satisfied by God only. This need will not be satisfied except in the world to come, when man shakes off the finiteness of his flesh and short sightedness and puts on another nature granted by God. Then the words of the apostle will be fulfilled: "*For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face*" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Similarly, man may struggle in his search for money. He may obtain a lot of it. However, he continues his relentless pursuit. This is because money is limited and no matter how plentiful it is, money can never satisfy that infinite hunger within man. The same theory applies to earthly pleasures. Man may strive and seek them, he may greedily indulge in them every day, yet he is never satisfied.

Actually, these pleasures are like salty water, which does not quench thirst, but rather inflames it. This reveals the truth of the saying, "man's heart is a triangle, and even if we put inside it the whole globe, the angles will still be empty". For there is nothing that can satisfy the triangle of man's heart other than the unity in One God. A philosopher known as Baggy said, "Man is a deep well of desires, and a well can never be filled. No matter how much water is poured into it, it will never be filled". Now, let us ask ourselves: what are my real needs? How can I satisfy them?

## Lesson Outline

Man's deepest needs can be grouped into two categories:

- a. Psychological needs: Such as the need for love, success and security.
- b. Spiritual needs: Such as forgiveness, inner peace and immortality

However the good part about being a Christian is God can supply all you need, when you acknowledge your need for Jesus Christ. So let's see some of the needs and how God fulfills them.

- I. The need for Life: If you are reading this you are alive, and may think that Jesus Christ has nothing to do with it. However, the life you have now was given to you, and it is destined to end. The life that comes through Jesus Christ has no end. If you enjoy life and want it to continue then you need Jesus Christ. There is no life without Him. Eternal life is through Him (Rom 6:23).
- II. The Need for Love: This is a real need present in man's inner depths. Without love, man lives within his shell, isolated from the flow of human life. He is wrapped within himself and deprived of communal life. However, human love is limited, and is often diverted. In fact, it is a love that likes to take before it gives. Consequently, it is not satisfying and soon becomes transformed into hatred. On the other hand, if we obtain infinite spiritual love that proceeds from the heart of God, we will be satisfied. Moreover, we will offer it to others without any hindrance, reservation, or diversion. It will take the form of a holy, generous, and communal quality that is self-sacrificial.
- III. The Need for Success: The definition of success varies from one person to another. However, real success is to "*prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers*" (3 John 2). This important form

of success is a gift of God only. It protects the soul from harm and grants it true peace. This is what truly makes man successful in all the walks of life, and not only in one limited sphere as that of money or knowledge.

- IV. The Need for Security: Man may live in a fortified fortress but still experience fear from people or the unknown future. Our children, however, experience real security for they are supported by God's promise "Fear not, for I am with you". Thus they are saved from the torment of fear. Moreover, they speak out of perfect love that casts out fear (1 John 4:18).
- V. The Need for Forgiveness: "*For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). For Jesus Christ alone is the redeemer and "*through His blood, the forgiveness of sins*" (Ephesians 1:7). He is the only offering that can adequately cover our sins. This gift cannot be granted by anyone else other than Jesus Christ. Man obtains it through repentance, baptism, and Holy Communion.
- VI. The Need for Immortality: It is impossible for man to be satisfied by the world or by time for he will always transcend these and aspire to an encompassing immortality and happy eternity with God. Such eternal life is confined in the person of Jesus Christ for "*this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have Sent*" (John 17:3).
- VII. The Need for Strength: Some people are stronger than others, but there always seems to be someone or some thing more powerful in this life to overwhelm you. Only some of us have great physical strength. Yet, what of the inner strength needed to make right choices, to live each day, and to resist the evil. How does one go on? Jesus Christ provides this strength when all things are done through him (Phil 4:11-13).
- VIII. The Need for Peace: Peace is allusive in this world where we toil to provide what we need, and there are constantly others who are trying to take what we have. We can have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1). We can also have the peace of God work in us through the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 4:7). Peace is something every man desires, and yet few have consistently without Christ.

IX. The Need for Grace: We would not have of any of these things if it were not for God's grace giving them to us freely. All is fulfilled by the grace of God. A just man would uphold the principle of giving people what they deserve, but what if you deserve nothing or worse? What is your net worth then? What of the times you fail, sin, or break the law? No one truly wants what they deserve, they want more. If you are a sinner, you need more. Grace is necessary for you to continue, and the grace of God to you is in the providence of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Man's deepest needs can be grouped into two categories. Psychological needs: Such as the need for love, success, strength, and security, and Spiritual needs: Such as forgiveness, grace, inner peace and immortality. Jesus Christ can only fulfill all these needs.

Shepherd of our souls, we are lost without You. Help us to rejoice in Your presence that we do not think of straying. Thank You for Your love that find us and holds us unto You.

### Applications:

- Train yourself to read Bible and pray regularly.
- Train yourself to love, start with your fellow brothers and extend that to include the love of enemies.
- Train yourself to go into retreat so that your soul is at peace and can meet Jesus Christ even for one hour on a weekly basis.
- Go regularly to confession to obtain absolution and forgiveness and to solve your problems.
- 'Turn your soul to God and you will find peace' St. Abba Moussa.

### Exercises:

1. Tell your friend what you got through Jesus Christ

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## Week 3

# Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding

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### Objectives:

- To understand the concept and meaning of salvation in the Orthodox Church.
- To understand the importance of working towards salvation.

### References:

- “Salvation in the Orthodox Understanding” By His Holiness Pope Shenouda

### Memory Verse:

*By works, faith is made perfect. (James 2:22)*

## Introduction

Many Christians believe that salvation can happen in an instant and last a lifetime. Yet, in the Orthodox Church, salvation is a long continuous process.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The danger of using a single verse: Wrong practice can lead to incorrect understanding of Biblical truths. Consider the following examples:
  - a. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31). Some take this verse to mean that salvation comes through faith alone. This verse was said to an

unbeliever, so he needs to believe in Christ first as a beginning of a life of salvation. Sometimes the Bible mentions a first step:

- Simeon the Elder said: *“my eyes have seen Your salvation”* (Luke 2:31).
  - Christ said, *“Today salvation has come to this house”* (Luke 19:9). How could salvation come to the entire household through the faith of the jailer? If we continue the passage, we see that he and his family were baptized. So we learn that we have to put together a number of verses in order to understand “salvation” correctly.
- b. Once a young man came to Christ and asked Him what he should do to have Eternal life (Matt 19:17). Christ did not mention faith or grace in his response. Christ said he needed to keep the commandments. Should we then say that keeping the commandments is sufficient without faith, baptism, and the sacraments? Christ here made His comments in order to reach this person’s weakness.
- c. *“Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God”* (Romans 5:1). Again this verse alone indicates that justification is through faith alone. We should include other verses, such as, *“For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified”* (Rom 2:13). Also, *“You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only”* (James 2:24).

II. There is no salvation except through the blood of Christ alone:

- a. Faith in the redeeming work of Christ is essential for salvation. Those who do good works apart from faith in Christ will not be saved.
- b. Why can there be no salvation but only through the blood of Christ? Since God is unlimited, any sin committed against Him is also unlimited. So sin cannot be forgiven except by an unlimited propitiation. Therefore the only solution for man is for God to take flesh and die on man’s behalf.
- c. Conditions of salvation through the blood of Christ: Faith, Baptism, Church sacraments and Good works.

III. The importance of working for salvation:

- a. Evil works lead to perdition: Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:5-6, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.



- b. Judgment will be according to works: Psalm 62:12, Ecclesiastics 12:14, Matthew 16:27, John 5:28-29, Matthew 12:37.
- c. Works are required of faith: Luke 3:8, James 2:14, Matthew 21:43.
- d. Works are evidence of the existence of faith: James 2:18.
- e. Works are evidence of being born of God: 1 John 2:29.
- f. Works make faith perfect: James 2:22.

IV. Striving:

- a. A person cannot be saved through his own efforts. *“Without Me you can do nothing”* (John 15:5). Grace is necessary for salvation, but it cannot solely save us unless we respond to it.
- b. The communion of the Holy Spirit. It is a fellowship where both we and the Holy Spirit work together. The Holy Spirit alone could save us, but He does not work against our will.
- c. The necessity of striving. *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. . . . You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin”* (Hebrews 12:1-4). *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all”* (2 Timothy 4:7-8 ).
- d. The spiritual war. *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world who have loved His appearing”* (1 Peter 5:8-9).

V. Confidence and trust concerning the Kingdom of God:

- a. Two questions: To what extent may one have hope in God’s mercy? Can a believer trust that he will attain the Kingdom?
- b. Unlimited trust in God. We have hope in God’s mercy. Hope is one of the three great virtues mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:13.
- c. We should not trust our own will. A person may err easily. A person is mistaken to think that he has done away with sin and is now renewed and sanctified. We trust in Christ’s blood, but admit

our tendency to sin: *“I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3). *“Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Corinthians 10:12).

- d. Are you saved or not? We answer saying, “We were saved from the original sin in baptism, but final salvation shall be attained when we put off the flesh”. The Church does not celebrate the birthdays of the saints or the day that they were accepted in the Church. It celebrates the godly completion of the journey of their lives on earth.
- e. Let your answers be from the faith of the Church: *“Lean not on your own understanding”* (Proverbs 3:5). Church teaches us in our prayers: “If the righteous is hardly saved, where shall I a sinner appears? Behold I am about to stand before the Just Judge, terrified and trembling because of my many sins. For a life spent in pleasures deserves condemnation. So repent, O my soul, so long as you dwell on this earth . . .” These prayers teach us not to rely on any guarantee, but to struggle with humility for salvation.

#### VI. Is it possible that a believer should perish?

- a. First example: *“Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, and if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off ”* (Romans 11:20-22 ). *“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit . . . if anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned”* (John 15:2-6).
- b. Second example: Hebrews 10:26-31.
- c. Those who deny the faith: 2 Peter 2:20-21.
- d. The saints can be overcome: *“And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation”* (Revelations 13:7).
- e. The perdition of Demas: Colossians 4:14, Philemon 1:24, 2 Timothy 4:10.

## Conclusion

Both faith and works are essential for a continuing process of salvation.

### Applications:

- Do a search regarding the understanding of salvation in the Protestant and Catholic faith?

### Exercises:

1. Thank God for He has provided us with a way of salvation.
2. Think about which of your current behavior could hinder from living on the way of salvation.
3. Discuss with your friends at school about salvation by the blood of Jesus Christ.

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## Week 4

# Commitment in Spiritual Life

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### Objectives:

- Commitment (seriousness) in Spiritual Life.

### References:

- Book of Job
- The four Gospels

### Memory Verse:

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: For Your sake we are killed all day long. (Romans 8:35-36)*

## Introduction

We all strive to be saints during this life but many times we fall short to achieving our goal and we feel like we are dragged back to where we started. We then wonder how these people that the Church mentions in the Synaxarium became the saints they are. These saints lived in the same evil world we live in, they were tempted with the same temptations that we are tempted with, and some of them even lived a worse life than us all. So why are these people saints and we are not? The answer to the question is very simple. Maybe these people lived a part of their life in darkness and evil, as with St. Moses the black, but at one point they made a commitment to God and did not turn back away from it. They became committed and serious about their spiritual life no matter what risks, dangers, or losses they had to endure as a result to their steadfast stand to such a decision.

## Lesson Outline

Most of us live in a state of a coma. We work in the morning, watch TV in the evening, eat when hungry, and sleep when tired. We don't have any set standards or spiritual goals in our lives. We then go to confession and say that we feel like sinners and do not know what to do. First and foremost we need to sit with ourselves and know whether we are serious about Jesus Christ or not, whether we are willing to do what it takes for us to be His or not, or are we so weak that after hearing His calling and seeing his open loving arms, we decide to *"be sad at the Word, and go away grieving"* (Mark 10:22) as did the rich man. Most of us are always looking for things to do to earn the heavenly kingdom. It would be our dream come true if our father of confession would give us a list of 1,2,3's to do that will guarantee us heaven. Unfortunately God is not like that. God does not work with lists or requirements. We cannot just give Him what is His', and then we're free to do whatever we want. The commandment is very clear, *"you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength"* (Mark 12:30). A full and complete life commitment to worship God and to follow Him to the ends of the earth is our key to abide in Him. No space for the world or any of its desires should be present after Jesus comes in.

When we meditate on the lives of the saints of our Church, we always see four characteristic features in their spiritual life. These four aspects or characteristics should be the cornerstone and the blue print of our own spiritual lives.

- I. Clarity of goal: First point to a successful serious spiritual life is a clear goal; eyes wide open on the road; a mission; a plan. Sadly however, we sometimes even forget the reason why we come to Church. Who can boldly say, "I come to Church to meet with Jesus?" Who of us is actually coming to Church to ask for a favor from God, to meet with friends, to just satisfy his parents, or to not even feel guilt for not going to Church on Sundays, and who among us is actually coming to Church to have a personal chat with Jesus? Since we do not have a clear goal, we are lost and confused. We do not know which college to go to, what field to major in, whom to marry what job to accept ... etc.

Our Church fathers did not have that confusion in their lives. They had a clear goal. Even when their neck was under the sword, their goal was still clear, Jesus Christ. No one could shake their faith; their goal was clear. Their clear goal was "my life does not matter, my life

does not make a difference, that is how much I do not care if I live or die as long as I live with Jesus Christ, that is how much clear I see the way.” Their vision was so clear that the Church decided to name those who died for Jesus Christ Martyrs, which means, “to see”. Martyrdom means the “vision” or the “revelation”.

In Church manuscripts there is a story about an emperor that was persecuting Christians. One day he was torturing an 87-year-old man by the name of Polycarp. The emperor felt so sad for that old man and for what he was going through that he told him, “Have mercy on your age and deny Jesus Christ so that I may grant you mercy”. With all faith and with all clarity of goal the old man Polycarp told him, “87 years I lived with Jesus Christ and he never betrayed me, how can I betray him now?” St. Polycarp is indeed a deserving saint in our Church, may we all ask for his prayers and supplications to the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf that He may grant us clarity of goal. Let us all have a clear and an apparent Jesus. Let us not put Him on a balance and see what we need to give up to have Him and then weigh it out. How can one weigh an absolute such as our Lord Jesus Christ with relative things of this world? And if Jesus is our absolute, then there is no other absolute out there, for there can only be one right absolute *“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. The world is passing away, and its lust. But the one doing the will of God abides forever”* (1 John 2:15-17).

- II. Determination: Second point to a successful serious spiritual life is persistence. We can find good example in Daniel 3:1-30. *“At the time of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, he builds a giant golden statue and sets it up on a plain near Babylon. His reverence for Daniel’s God apparently evaporating, Nebuchadnezzar gathers together all the officials and VIPs from throughout the Babylonian Empire and its different nations and languages. He invites them to come to the statue’s dedication ceremony. When everyone is assembled, they are ordered to bow down and worship the golden statue when the music strikes up—or else they’ll be thrown into a fiery furnace. Apparently, everyone bows down and does as their told. Well . . . almost everyone. Some Babylonians attack Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for being disobedient and failing to honor the statue. Nebuchadnezzar flips out—which is mainly what he does—and orders the Jewish trio to be brought in. He asks them if what their accusers say is true. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego immediately admit to not worshipping the statue. They say that their God is powerful enough to save them from the fiery fur-*

*nace. If they can survive, it'll prove that their God is, indeed, pretty powerful. Snarling with rage, Nebuchadnezzar arranges for them to get tossed into the furnace. He orders the furnace to be extra toasty, warming it up to seven times its normal temperature. Nebuchadnezzar's henchmen prepare to toss the fully clothed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace, but the cronies get burned to death in the process of chucking the trio into the furnace. Nebuchadnezzar is shocked to see that there appear to be more than three people in the fire. There's a fourth person present, who looks like "a son of the gods." And he's walking, alive with the other three."*

One can imagine all the thoughts that went through St. Anthony's head when he decided to go live in the desert. The devil definitely had tried to discourage him telling him how cold and hot the desert will be, how full of snakes and wild beasts it will be, and how lonely it will be. But because of St. Anthony's determination on living with Jesus Christ, Christianity all around the world now enjoys the heavenly aspect of Monasticism.

A few years ago when Russia was a communist Country, Christianity was outlawed. Priests, clergy, and any testifying Christians were arrested and locked up in concentration camps. They were tortured to extremes to deny Christ but just like St. Polycarp, they all had a clear goal and were determined in their commitment to follow Jesus Christ, no matter the circumstances.

One day, one of the priests in the prison saved his one and only meal of the day, a piece of bread, to use it as the bread of offering for he longed for a liturgy and communion. He gathered all the clergy and they all decided to pray a liturgy but did not know where is a worthy place in such a dirty prison cell to use as an altar to officiate the sacrament. With some simple meditation they remembered that an altar is a place where Jesus Christ is sacrificed so with all unity they went towards the most tortured prisoner among them, the one lying in the corner covered with wounds and blood who could not move out of pain who has not denied Christ despite of all the tortures he experienced, and decided that his body is a worthy altar to sacrifice Jesus on. They placed the bread on him and started praying the liturgy.

Why couldn't they just deny Jesus Christ and go back home to their families and to a normal painless life? It's not that they don't know what fire is nor had special power. But to them, that life they would have earned if they had denied Jesus Christ would have been more

horrible and painful than the life of starvation and torture they could experience in prison.

During early Christianity, when Airiness became a governor over one of the Christian Roman villages he made a declaration that when he comes into the city the next day he will kill all people inside the Church thus starting an era of Christian persecution. He decided that he will spare the villagers who will not go to Church for he will assume that they have denied Jesus Christ and decided to worship the emperor. The next day came and Airiness marched into the city with his army as he declared, and to his surprise all the streets and the houses were deserted but for one crippled old lady with a cane in the middle of the street. He rode his horse towards her and he commended her on her decision to obey him and to deny Jesus Christ so as to live. The old crippled lady with all disappointment said, "I am but an old crippled lady and everybody was in a hurry to go to Church and the Church is crowded and no one had the time to carry me in, but I am a Christian" . . . . It is said that on that day blood flowed in the roads and the streets of the village for it was a great massacre and a mass slaughter. When people from neighboring cities heard what happened, they all came down to the village to be martyred too. Why didn't these simple villagers just deny Jesus Christ, even just publicly in order to live, to raise their children and to pass down their lands? The answer is that they couldn't. They saw the goal so clearly and they had determination that can move mountains.

We all might make decisions to follow Jesus Christ but we are not determined about it when it comes down to it at the first temptation we face, we start compromising and making excuses and then we finally let it slide. We have to be strict and serious when it comes to Jesus Christ. When we start fasting, let us fast all the way. No compromising or making deals or even cutting corners. When we decide to pray everyday, let us actually pray everyday, no matter how tired or busy we are "*But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No' 'No'. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one*" (Matthew 5:37). All these saints that we read their stories and we try to be exemplified by their lives, "*they did not love their soul even until death*" (Revelation 12:11) and that is why they earned the heavenly kingdom.

- III. Exertion and struggle: The third point to a successful serious spiritual life is putting effort in it and exerting oneself to keep it burning with holy fire. One might think that the martyrs had it easy. All they



needed to do is to confess their faith and in just a matter of minutes they were killed and put out of their misery and behold, they are in heaven. The truth is that martyrdom is such a powerful representation of faith that only the strong in Christ can undergo it.

During the era of persecution, a monk went to his spiritual father requesting that he would be dismissed so that he can go to the nearest city to the governor confessing his faith so as to be martyred. His spiritual father prohibited him from going and instructed him that if he prays 10 minutes twice a day, let him extend his prayers to two hours in the morning, and four hours at night. The monk, disappointed by what he had heard, decided to go get martyred despite of his spiritual father's warning.

After a few minutes of torturing, the monk denied Jesus Christ and knelt down offering incense to the idols. Going back to the desert ashamed, the monk walked in on his spiritual father and told him what happened and asked for his forgiveness. He also asked him why he couldn't get martyred. His spiritual father, with a fatherly look, told him that he failed because he was lazy in his spiritual life inside his cell. The spiritual father also told him, "He, who cannot offer sweat in his room, cannot offer his blood in the arena of persecution". Let us always remember that feeling Jesus Christ should be translated to something alive that we do. In other words, spiritual life is a living translation to love and feelings for God.

We are always complaining about how long the mass is and how boring praying is. We are not prepared to offer our lives for martyrdom unless we offer our personal comfort to Jesus Christ in our spiritual life in our homes. No one said that one would not get tired if he/she stands during liturgy. Let us get tired standing during liturgy; let us stand in all fear and respect while Jesus Christ Himself is being sacrificed in front of our eyes on the altar; let us exert ourselves physically and mentally to show God how much we love Him. St. Paula of Tamoh was a 100 years old monk in the desert. One day he was doing his prostration (matanias) and suddenly Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him, "Enough struggle and strive my beloved Paula". St. Paula raised his tears filled eyes and said, "God, I haven't had thorns in my head or nails in my limbs, or a spear in my side. What did I offer to you of my body that is worthy enough for me to stop striving?" If Jesus Christ appears to us, what is He going to say? Is He going to tell us it is enough exerting ourselves, or is He going to say enough laziness, compromise, slumber and enough hammering more nails in

His hands? Let us always remember that God is never pleased with anything you offer from yourself but He is pleased with anything you offer of yourself. God may not be pleased if you offer him money that you can live without, but He will be pleased with just two mites like the widow who offered Him, for those two mites were out of her need. God is more pleased with the smell of sweat than the smell of incense. St. MarIsaac says, “Blessed is he whose cheeks were burned with tears of strive” .

In Church manuscripts there is a story about a circus man who asked God what he could do to live more for Him? God spoke to him and told him to go to the desert and join the monastery. God also spoke to the abbot of the monastery and instructed him to ordain that young man a monk immediately with no reservations or testing. The circus man was ordained as a monk even though he knew not how to read, how to pray, or even how to praise God. The rest of the monks got annoyed with him and asked the abbot of the monastery to kick that monk out of the monastery for he did not know how to do anything and so he was not worthy to be a monk. The abbot, seeing that the request was unanimous, instructed all the monks to go with him to tell the monk the decision. When the monks entered the Church, the abbot asked them to stand aside in a dark area so as not to disturb the monk when he comes in to pray his one final prayer, and after prayer they can go tell him the decision. The monk walked in the Church with a sack in his hand and knelt in front of the altar. He then took off his clothes and opened the sack getting out a circus custom and put it on. He also brought out of the sack three colorful balls that he twirled in the air while jumping around and shaking his hat that had bells at the end of it. The monk kept twirling the balls in the air and ringing the bells that he started sweating. Suddenly St. Mary came out of her icon and with her hands, she wiped off the monk’s sweat. Shocked by such a scene, all the monks flooded the monk and asked him to forgive them for what they were about to do to him. He, looking amazed at all what is happening told them that throughout his life he knew nothing but a circus trick that he performed to people. That circus trick, which was all that he had, he decided to offer it to God in front of his altar everyday.

No matter how simple or how few are the things we can do, let us offer them to Jesus Christ. He is capable of transforming such small talents to numerous powerful gifts that are able to show God’s glory to men. But let us offer all that we have to Jesus Christ not saving anything

to the evil world we live in.

- IV. Particularity: The fourth and final point to have a successful serious spiritual life is particularity. We must be very particular in everything. We must be particular in our free time, in our senses, in our thoughts, and in our friends or else our crown will be stolen and there will be no more days to make up for lost time.

We say that we are too busy and have no time for all that spiritual stuff. We say that there is no way we can stay up all night praying, or stand up in mass for 4 hours, or even fast all day without eating anything. But unfortunately, we all do these things already but not for Jesus Christ. We stay up all night talking to friends and having slumber parties. We play basketball for hours, not just standing up, but even running and sweating. We stay up late at night talking on the phone or thinking about something not eager to eat. But how many times do we offer a fasting, not eager for it to end?

We are capable of doing all those things but unfortunately not for Jesus Christ. We live seriously in everything but not in spiritual life.

## Conclusion

Seriousness in spiritual life leads to commitment and commitment leads to success. Indecisiveness in spiritual life leads to leniency, and leniency will definitely lead to failure, no matter how small the degree of compromise in spiritual life is. With failure, condemnation and anger from the Almighty are accompanied. *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth”* (Revelation 3:15-16).

The Church fathers have always meditated on such a concept and always warned about the smallest glitches in our spiritual lives that are more than capable to destroy the whole structure. A huge ship is bound to sink if it has a hole in its bottom. The smallest hole will still take such a ship down. Struggling against every sin in our lives, big or small, will fortify us against defeat and will be the stepping stone towards God’s grace. Beware of *“the little foxes that spoil the vines”* (Song of Songs 2:15).

Let us all today, actually now at this moment, stand up in prayer and raise our hearts and make a commitment to God and say to Him that no matter how strong the world rages against us, we are His? and we will never forsake Him for He never forsook us. Let us tell Him that we now have a clear goal, which is He. Let us tell Him we will persist till death in our

spiritual life. Let us tell Him that we will exert our hearts, our souls and our bodies to show Him how much we love him. Let us tell Him that we will be particular in everything we do from now on. If the enemy overcomes us, let us pray to Him that He sends power from above to come and save us in a miraculous way. Through the intercession of St. Mary, and the prayers of St. Polycarp, St. Anthony, and all the martyrs that gave up their lives for Him throughout time allover the world, may God grant us a spiritual life from above. May He be the sole owner of our lives and our eternity. Amen.

**Applications:**

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**Exercises:**

- 1.

## Part VI

# Lessons for the Month of February

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## Week 1

# Prophet Jonah and Salvation

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### Objectives:

- God makes use of everything and all things for the salvation of man.

### References:

- The book of Jonah

### Memory Verse:

*I long for Your salvation, O Lord and Your law is my delight. (Psalm 119:174)*

## Introduction

A long time elapsed during which men kept away from God and people committed so many sins that they forgot themselves and forgot God their Lord but God did not forget them at all. He was always near them because He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. It was not possible for God to come closer to men in a direct way as men invented gods for themselves and their idea about God was deformed so the Lord sent prophets to the children of Israel whom He had chosen to send to the other nations to let them know His holy name. He did not choose them out of prejudice, far be it from God, but He chose them because they were the seed of Abraham who believed in Him and blessed His name. God expected many good things of this people but sorry to say even those people who tasted many tidings worshipped the idols and the people and their prophets needed the Savior. However, when man's sufferings increased and people kept away from God, He insisted on saving them. His love for them remained strong and the Lord's hand was always ready to save them.

## Lesson Outline

- I. God saves Jonah: This prophet was characterized by fanaticism, stubbornness and faith heartedness. Like all other people he fled from the Lord when he heard His voice. This reminds us of the verse; *“I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself”* (Genesis 3:10). As a prophet of the Jews, he was supposed to be better than others in obeying the commandments of God but if this is the case of the head what will be the case of the other members. Jonah thought that there would be peace for him in Tarshish or at the bottom of the ship although he knew that the Lord fills every place and although he read David’s psalm: *“Where can I go from Your Spirit?”* (Psalm 139:7).
- II. How the Lord Saved Jonah? The Lord made use of:
  1. Discomfort: the rough sea, the destruction of the gourd (God insisted on fulfilling the message).
  2. Tenderness: God was merciful to Jonah when He saved his life and taught him through practical educational examples (such as: the gourd -helping him to complete his mission and finally reproaching him gently).
  3. The solid nature: The lesson was for Jonah in:
    - a. Obedience: The storm obeyed the Lord and carried out His purpose and the whale as a ship to carry Jonah to the appointed place and the worm is ordered to devour the tree.
    - b. Ability and Power of God: God is able to do everything and all things obey Him but man is free to obey or disobey.
- III. God saves the sailors: The Gentile sailors were better than the prophet who escaped:
  1. They prayed to their gods.
  2. They prayed with the spirit of fellowship.
  3. They believed that the calamity was because of the sin of one of them.
  4. They asked Jonah to pray to his God so they were not fanatic.
  5. They had a sensitive conscience. They only made sure that Jonah deserved death but they refused to carry out the sentence even after drawing lots.

6. They prayed for forgiveness before they threw him into the sea: "Lay not on us innocent blood".
7. In this way justice and mercy filled their hearts.
8. They believed in the miraculous power of God.

IV. God saves Nineveh: At last the Lord found the man who would go to Nineveh. He was kind to them as a father who loves His children. The Lord could have punished and frightened them but He was also ready to turn from His anger. Jonah refused to go to those evil people but the Lord accepted their repentance. The Lord was patient with them. Although they were pagans and sinners, the Lord did not abandon them. The Lord does not abandon His children no matter how sinful they are. Theirs was true repentance. They were afraid and cried to the Lord and believed in what Jonah said. The anointed king covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. All the people fasted and humiliated themselves, even animals. The Lord accepts true repentance and the contrite and submissive hearts.

V. Jonah is a symbol of Christ: God sent Jonah to the people of Nineveh so that they might repent and be saved. In the same way the Lord, out of love, chose to be incarnated and become man to die for the world then rise from the dead to grant salvation to those who believe in Him. Throwing Jonah into the sea saved all the sailors of the ship from certain death. In the same way the death of Christ on the cross caused the Salvation of those who believed in Him and saved them from eternal death. Jonah remained inside the belly of the whale three days and three nights then he went out and was alive. In the same way, Christ was buried three days and three nights in the tomb then He rose up from the dead. He was alive and granted us the eternal life. In Jonah's prayer we find a clear expression of his success in the test of death and rebirth: "*Out of the belly of Sheol I cried . . . I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet You did bring up my life from the Pit . . . O Lord my God*" (Jonah 2:2-6). Compare this to the death of the Lord Christ and His resurrection as He says to His disciples: "*The Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles . . . and after three days He will rise*" (Mark 10:33-34).



## Conclusion

God has prepared the humanity with many prophets before Him. He also gave different signs and prophecies for the awaited salvation of the world. Those who were attentive and responsive to the fulfillment of the prophecies (Jesus Christ) were saved.

### Applications:

- What is your opinion of casting lots in our life? (The Spirit abides in us and we do not seek any sign from outside).
- *“The Lord has chastened me severely; But He has not given me over to death”* (Psalm 118:18). Apply this verse to the story of Jonah.
- Resist despair so that you may proceed and correct your way of life.
- Pray the Lord to receive our life and correct it as he likes.
- Quick obedience that results from the heart to all that the Lord commands us to do having confidence that he is the Loving Father who desires the Salvation of the souls of men.

### Exercises:

1. Mention some situations in the life of the holy men of God with whom God used severe punishments so that they might be saved?
2. Mention some situations in which the Lord was merciful and patient with men?
3. Did the Gentile sailors were better than the prophet (Jonah) who escaped? How?
4. We learned that the people of Ninevah’s practiced true repentance. Was this considered true because they dressed and acted out the right way (which may have been a custom/culture of their society), or was it the fact that they genuinely meant it when they repented from their hearts?
5. Did the Lord accept true repentance Nineveh? How about ours?
6. How did you understand Jonah as a symbol of Christ?

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## Week 2

# Sin and Its Consequences

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### Objectives:

- To study the meaning of the commandment.
- To learn why the commandment was broken (disobeyed).
- To discover the consequences of the disobeying the commandment.

### References:

- Genesis 3.

### Memory Verse:

*But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'. (Genesis 3:3)*

## Introduction

In this way the Lord showed man His love and waited for his answer and man had to answer willingly: Love for love or to refuse the Divine love.

## Lesson Outline

- I. Man was Created and was Associated with the Lord: When man walked with the Lord he was associated with the life and enjoyed the joy of heaven. If he confined himself to his ego, he would separate it from the mystery of life and enclose himself in the prison of nothingness and death.
- II. The Meaning of Commandment:

- As the commandment was given to Adam, it was a covenant between God and man. If man walks with God, He will keep the source of his origin.
- It is a domain of showing man's love for God.
- It is a proof and evidence of the freedom of man and his freedom in choosing the attitude.

### III. How Did Man Sin?

- Adam wanted to deify himself and to live with a power of his own independent of God and depending on the material world and that caused his fall.
- The tree of knowledge of good and evil - knowledge here means testing and not the mental knowledge alone, as Adam was able by his mind to distinguish between evil and good.
- The serpent, a creature, stands for evil. This means that evil is not everlasting as it has a beginning and it will have an end and the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent.
- The devil had a role in the temptation as he envied man after the devil separated from the life in heaven.
- The sin entered by arousing suspicion in the heart of man towards God and His love for man.

### IV. The Consequences of Sin:

- Became anxious of God's presence: as he separated himself from the Divine love.
- He left the Lord and depended on other creatures - he hid himself among the trees.
- Death and separation from God. As a result of the sin, physical and spiritual death came us. God was leaving in the presence of the lord happily without fear. After sinning, they were thrown out of the garden of Eden. Sin and its consequences were inherited by all his offspring. *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* (Romans 3:23).

### V. The Destruction of Man:

- His unity with himself collapsed (His mind became dark - the instincts ruled over the will - the desire of the flesh).

- His unity with others collapsed (selfishness - spite - envy - hatred).
- His unity with the universe collapsed (earthquakes - disasters - wild animals - microbes).

## Conclusion

Every sin in its essence is disobedience to the will of God. It means that he refuses to be associated with Him as a son. The image of God has not been completely lost from man as he has kept in himself a mind and a will and tendency to do good - with the existence of contrast with evil things. The return of man to God is the realization of his loneliness and his reconciliation with himself, with people and with the universe.

### Applications:

- The servant discusses with his students the importance of the work of grace and the spirit in bringing man back to his first image.
- Ask the students what are the reasons that make us fall into sin.
- Remember, we reap whatever we sow. *“The For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23)

### Exercises:

1. What is sin?
2. Read the following verses in groups and try to identify the consequences of Sin:
  - a. *“Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good things from you.”* (Jeremiah 5:25)
  - b. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”* (Romans 3:23)
  - c. *“Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.”* (Isaiah 59:1-2)
3. Can believers do to keep themselves from sinning (Psalms 119:9)?

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## Week 3

# The Effect of the Softly Spoken Words

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### Objectives:

- To demonstrate the benefits of the softly spoken word.
- To learn from the example of our Lord and His wisdom of speech.

### References:

- Matthew 12:36; Psalms 141:3, 19:14; Proverbs 15:1-2, 4, 23, 18:21, 20:19; Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 3:8; James 3:5-10; 2 Samuel 11:12-17
- The Tongue - A sermon by Pope Shenouda III

### Memory Verse:

*The heart of the righteous studies how to answer. (Proverbs 15:28)*

## Introduction

The ultimate goal of any Christian is to resemble our Lord Jesus Christ in everything. We try to change ourselves gradually to reflect His image in our lives. When Jesus Christ was among people, He was obedient and helpful to His parents. He also fulfilled all the characters of Sonship to God “*He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoking flax He will not quench*” (Isaiah 42:1-3; Matthew 12:18-21). Thus, He was gentle and kind to the weak and the sinner. He encouraged the broken heart and strengthened the weary. Even in the critical discussions and testing by the pharisees and the priests, He was firm and strong, yet He never insulted or used unsuitable words. For example when He was slapped by one of the officers of the high

priest, Jesus said: *“If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me”* (John 18:23).

## Lesson Outline

The virtue of the softly spoken word and controlling the tongue is an important virtue for every Christian. King David talked about it and said: *“Lord who may abide in Your tabernacle? . . . He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take reproach against his friend”* (Psalm 15:3). Also, St James said about the tongue *“If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man able also to bridle the whole body”* (James 3:2-12).

- I. What is the value of controlling my words? Words can lead us to evil and sin or it can lead us to blessings and spiritual growth. For example lying is a sin and praising God is a blessing and they are both expressed by words. Remember a word from Herod the king to Herodias’ daughter lead to the death of St. John the Baptist (Mark 6:22-23). Through our words we can make friends or enemies, love or hate, peace or war. We can bring the non-believers to the faith through our words. A message becomes stronger when it is delivered through gentle and kind words, as in the example of the Lord’s words to the Samaritan woman.
- II. How can I acquire the virtue of the softly spoken words?
  - a. Pray: Pray that God may help you to be as gentle as He was. Ask the Holy Spirit to work and speak on your tongue.
  - b. Think Before You Speak: The wise and righteous thinks before he talks, because he would like to present his thoughts and ideas in the best manner. On the other hand, the foolish and impulsive person talks without thinking because he does not care about the consequences of what he says. In proverbs King Solomon said: *“The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness”* (Proverbs15:2).
  - c. Choose the Words Carefully: You may have great ideas but if you use bad words to present them, they would seem to be bad ideas. Therefore, ask yourself: am I choosing the correct words or am I just talking. The words of a Christian are the guide to others to their Christianity. People would know that we are Christian by our

words. St. John Chrysostom was described of having a mouth of gold because of the words of blessing he offered during his sermons. A true Christian is able to direct the conversation to be constructive and comforting (Proverb 9:11).

- d. Put Yourself in Place of the Listener: You can build bridges or destroy them through your words with others. If you place yourself in the listener place you may be able to judge if your words bring comfort and knowledge to others or if they bring hurt and anger, *“Soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”* (Proverb 15:1). Also, the Lord commanded us to do unto others what we would like done to us (Matthew 7:12).
- e. Remember That Your Words Indicate What is in Your Heart: The words that come from your mouth indicate what is in your heart *“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”* (Matthew 12:33-37). So, let the Holy Spirit work in your heart to purify it and thus purify your words. By no means, can you speak good words if the heart is not clean (Luke 6:45).
- f. Our senses play a crucial role in allowing us to sense and understand our environment. The things we allow to our senses through media such as TV, novels, movies, internet, songs, games have a huge influence on our behavior and speech. The bible warns us to *“Pay attention to what you hear”*(Mark 4:24). In addition, the people we hangout with such as our friends and peers can influence our speech (1 Corinthians 15:33). Thus, since we have control over the things we allow to enter through our senses, it is important not to allow the evil of the world into us. Remember, the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the hearth.

## Conclusion

Experience the effects and the blessings of the softly spoken words in your life. Take the example of Job who blessed the Lord even in his hardship and Solomon the king whose words of wisdom brought the queen of Sheba from thousands miles afar to listen to him (1 Kings 10:1-7).

- Applications:**
- Avoid bad words, swearing dirty jokes and lying.
  - Avoid unproductive conversations and gossiping.
  - Think of how we should react if others call us names *“bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you”*(Luke 6:28).

**Exercises:**

1. Why does the bible warn us much about the words we speak? (Ans: *“But I tell you that men will give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken”*(Matthew 12:36).)
2. Tell us about a situation when you spoke something to someone that you ended up regretting later?
3. Tell us about a situation when someone offended you with his/her words and how did you feel?



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## Week 4

# Fellowship among Believers

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### Objectives:

- To learn that the integration and unification of the whole body is achieved by the fellowship among members.

### References:

- Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37
- Romans 12
- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4:1-16; 25-32

### Memory Verse:

*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)*

## Introduction

Read 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Discuss with your students what the text is about (Fellowship among believers and ties with members, which form one body; that is the Church).

## Lesson Outline

- I. Communion With Believers Is The Participation In Our Lord Jesus Christ: Draw a parallel between our relationship with our Lord Jesus and that of the vine with its branches. Jesus is the origin of the vine, and each true believer is a live branch fixed in the origin and drawing

from Him, the elixir of life. As long as the believer is steadfastly rooted in the vine, he will consequently gain fellowship with the other branches, fruit, and leaves.

## II. The Early Church Experienced Communal Life: Analysis: Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-37.

- The disciples regularly joined together in one spirit for prayer and supplication. The women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers were also there (Acts 1:14). They all joined as one soul, one existence, and one heart (Acts 2:1,46; Acts 4:32)
- Communal worship and communal doctrines (Acts 2:42,46,47).
- Witnesses joined in faith (Acts 4:32).
- Witnesses gathered around the holy offering of the Eucharist (Acts 2:42).
- The Agape (sharing a meal) table (Acts 2:46).
- Spontaneous sharing of money and possessions (Acts 4:32.34-3) *“they had all things in common”* (Acts 4:32).

## III. Characteristics of The Fellowship Among Believers “Canonization”

- Its basis and main role is to achieve steadfastness and unity in God.
  - A communion achieved through faith and belief.
- a. *“One Lord, one faith, one baptism”* (Ephesians 4:5).
  - b. myverseOne God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Ephesians 4:6).
  - c. The wisdom of the Church in reciting the Creed of Faith in a loud voice is to inculcate the basis of our faith. It ensures the isolation of heretics and contrivers, and their banishment from the Church (1 Thessalonians 3:10; 2 John 1:10,11).

## IV. Fellowship Demonstrated In Holiness and Chastity:

- It is a communion among saints living in purity and rejecting the way of the world and its uncleanness. They seek to live according to the way of the Lord (Hebrews 12:12-16).
- The Church used to eliminate its ties with the wicked, the immoral, and the adulterers (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

V. Fellowship Achieved Through Worship and Rejoicing:

- The Church has its communal prayers, such as those of the Holy Mass and its communal praises, such as the Psalms, the Psalmody, and the prayers of the Coptic month of Kiahk.
- The Church also observes general fasting periods in which everybody participates to create an atmosphere of ritual, of worship, and of purity. This allows the Church to rise above physical bonds and all the earthly lusts they involve.
- The whole Church joins in the offering of the Eucharist announcing that we may be one body and one spirit and ‘that we may have a share and an inheritance with all the Saints’ (Divine Liturgy).

VI. Fellowship Based On Love and Sympathy:

- Divine Love in the Church gathers everyone in reciprocal love. Each one places his brother before himself in the place of honor, as it is stated in the Bible (1 Corinthians 12:25, 26).
- Fellowship of love in the Church is beyond slander and seeks to promote the exchange of sympathy to limitless giving (Acts 3:15; 1 John 3:17-18).
- Therefore the first Church lived in the spirit of sharing (Acts 4:34; Romans 12:9-13).

VII. Fellowship Achieved Through Integration and Cooperation:

- St. Paul, the apostle, speaks in Romans 16 and Corinthians 12 about the integration in the one Body of Christ, made up of various members. In spite of the diversity of their functions all members work together, harmoniously, for the well being of the body (1 Corinthians 12:14-25).
- In the same way, there are multiple talents just as there are multiple members (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).
- Moreover, the tasks and services are numerous and each of us should stand in the appropriate post assigned to him/her by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 4:10).

VIII. Our Spiritual Life Originated and Formed Through the Life of Fellowship in the Church: The Church servant discusses with his students the extent of which they respond to the life of fellowship with believers, through which communal prayers gain greater efficacy and strength.

The wonderful power of communal worship and its support to the spiritual life of each person; the efficacy of communion of the Holy Mysteries, the general fasts, the sermons and the spiritual (retreat) days, the fellowship of the Saintly fathers as they sustain our struggle by praying and interceding on our behalf, communal life of the Church and how it enriches, discovers, and guides our talents so that they may be used for the glory of God and the expansion of His Holy Kingdom.

IX. Sayings of the Father:

- If you have been born in Christianity, then everyone else born in Christ is your brother. Consequently, if you love yourself more than your brother, this does not arise from Christ (a spiritual elder).
- The younger member adds brightness to the elder, as the simple eyelid is the beauty of the eye. Therefore a person, who resists his younger brother, resists himself. Moreover, harm does not fall upon the person resisted, but rather it reverts to and harms the initiator, in a greater degree than that caused to his brother (St. John Chrysostom).

## Conclusion

Fellowship among believers is very crucial to their spiritual growth. The Lord gave us this promise, “[For where two or three gather together in My name, there am I with them.](Matthew 18:20). Thus, we should utilize properly the fellowships in the church in order to grow spiritually.

**Applications:**

- Discover some of your talents and use them for the benefit of the Church.
- Spend a vigil of prayer in Church.
- Join in providing the needs of the saints (brothers in God).
  - a. Offer clothes, covers, or food.
  - b. Contribute to the education of needy colleagues.
  - c. Visit an orphanage and donate some gifts.
- Pray for the weak, the stumbling, and the fallen.

**Exercises:**

1. What does it mean fellowship with believers is the participation in our Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Compare this “our Spiritual Life Originated and formed through the Life of Fellowship in the Church” with “*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.*” (Psalms 122:1). Do you feel happy to come to church? Why or why not?

## **Part VII**

# **Lessons for the Month of March**

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# Week 1

## Repentance

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### Objectives:

- To learn the importance of repentance in our spiritual journey.
- To point out the practical steps of true repentance.
- To underline the importance of confessing to a Priest.

### References:

- Psalm 51:1-19; Mathew 18:18; John 20:22-23; James 5:16

### Memory Verse:

*Against You, You only have I sinned and done this evil in Your sight.  
(Psalm 51:4)*

## Introduction

When the Lord Jesus desired to show the love of God for the sinner, He gave the parable of the Prodigal Son who deserted his father's house and went to a far country. There he spent his money foolishly and led a life of corruption and extravagance. At last he became needy and he repented and decided to return to his father's house. He at once rose and went to his father who was waiting for him stretching out his hands to receive him. He kissed him and gave him the best garment and slaughtered the fat calf for him. All these things show us how God's love is great enough to receive any sinner who repents and go back to God.

## Lesson Outline

- I. What are the sins that we should confess? “*Sin is lawlessness. Sin is the transgression of the law*” (1 John 3:4). It is written that the wage of sin is death. Sin may be in the form of action, saying or thinking. The more man matures spiritually, the more he discovers his wrongdoings. At the beginning of the road he discovers the apparent sins such as insulting people, calling them names, swearing, stealing and telling lies. However, when he matures, he discovers selfishness, stinginess, self-love, grudge, hatred, etc (John 3:14-20). We must examine ourselves well before confession to discover our sins, as this is one of the signs of our spiritual progress. The real death is when we think that we are saints and are not in need of the Savior or when we are desperate of the mercies of God.
- II. How to repent?
  1. The first step in the way of repentance is to test yourself. Sit by yourself and think of the things you did in the same way the Prodigal son did so that you may know your sins and the points of weakness. In this regard, St. John Chrysostom says, “Test yourself. If you remember your sin God will not remember it and if you forget it, God will not forget it”.
  2. The second step is to repent what you have done. The prodigal son repented leaving his father’s house and his heart was broken. We cannot repent unless our hearts become sorry for what we did. We should be confident of God’s love and be sure that He will accept us. We should never fall into despair.
  3. The third step is to adopt an attitude against sin. Repentance does not mean that I should confess what I did only but it includes a positive move towards the Father. What would have been the benefit if the Prodigal son had sat in his place without doing anything? He rose, walked and went to his father’s house. In the same way, we have to rise and pray and seek God’s help to grant us the power so that we may not sin again. We should give signs of repentance to the Lord as when we say “sorry” to those whom we offend or as we get rid of a bad picture in our library . . . and so on.
  4. The fourth step is going to confession. This is a necessary step as he who sins, sins against the Lord and against the church which is His Body. We should bear in mind that each believer is a member of that Body. That is why our teacher St. James tells us “*Confess*



*your sins to one another*" (James 5:16). In the past, believers used to confess their sins in public in the church but the church saw that it was better for the believers to confess in secret to the priest.

III. A Test to examine Yourself. Ask yourself the following questions and answer them honestly:

1. Pride: Are you proud of yourself or of your deeds? Do you despise others? Do you condemn others and judge them?
2. Selfishness: Do you harden your heart and show no mercy to your brothers? Do you prefer yourself to your brothers in choosing the best things? Do you refuse to help others and serve them with pleasure?
3. Grudge: Do you feel sorry when others succeed? Do you feel happy when evil befalls one of your relatives? Do you think of taking revenge when anyone offends you?
4. Hatred: Do you refuse to forgive others and reconcile with them? Do you say bad words about others? Do you put the seeds of hatred between friends?
5. Laziness: Do you do your homework and studies honestly? Do you neglect prayers or spiritual exercises? Do you eat much or sleep for a long time?
6. Disobedience: Do you refuse to respect or obey your parents? Do you lie to them or cause sadness to them? Do you refuse to eat with them?
7. Dishonesty: Do you cheat in exams? Do you evade paying the price to the shop assistant or to the conductor? Do you take others belongings in secret?

IV. Is it necessary to confess to the Priest? Yes, we must confess our sins to our Priest. The Priest should be our spiritual father of confession because he receives his authority from God who forgives our sins. He receives this authority through the Sacrament of the Holy Orders. The Lord said to His disciples, *"Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"* (Mathew 18:18). After His resurrection He confirmed that sacrament when He breathed in their faces saying: *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained"* (John 20:22-23). Someone may say that "I am ashamed of confessing my sins to the priest. What shall I do?"

If you are not ashamed of yourself when you sinned before God, you have to be ashamed before the priest during confession. It is of a great benefit to recognize the lowliness of sin. This painful feeling should motivate you to go back to God and avoid sin. Remember that you do not confess your sins to man but to God (read Psalm 51, Luke 15:18-19 or 1 John 1:28,2:3). Another may say that “the priest makes me ashamed of myself when I repeatedly make confession of the same sin.” It is beneficial for the soul to feel ashamed and fear the guide, so that the soul in this case tends to fear God only?????????????. Pride may lead man to refuse to confess his sins to the Priest.

V. The Prayer of Repentance: O righteous Lord . . . I know my weakness and the silliness of my mind but I give myself to your grace to save me. With complete trust and confidence I leave myself between your hands to keep me safe till the Day of Judgment. Bless me and grant me Your grace till Your Son comes. Glory and Honor be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit forever and ever Amen.

## Conclusion

There is no joy in heaven and on earth greater than the joy of the Father to see His children come to Him with a true repentance. On the other hand, there is no comfort greater than the comfort of the sinners when they rid off themselves from the burdens of sin. Do not deprive yourself from this comfort and do not deprive your Father from this joy.

### Applications:

- Examine yourself and be prepared for repentance and then go to confession in the church.
- Encourage your colleagues to go to confession and to repent, and then receive the Holy Communion.
- Study the life history of the saints who repented to follow their example.

### Exercises:

1. What is sin?
2. To what extent is sin dangerous?

WEEK 1. REPENTANCE

3. What are the steps of true repentance?
4. Why should we confess to our priest?

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## Week 2

# Confession

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### Objectives:

- To elucidate the role of the mystery of Confession as a complete cure for the pains of man and its connection with repentance.
- To describe the benefits of confession before a priest.

### References:

- The book of Jonah (Jonah's prayer).
- John 1:9, James 5:16, Proverbs 28:13, Acts 19:18; Psalms 51:1-5, James 4:17, 2 Peter 3:9

### Memory Verse:

*For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. (Romans 10:10)*

## Introduction

Confessing the Sin is an Ancient Divine Plan.

1. God asked Adam our father: "Where are you? Have you eaten of the tree?" That was the Divine Plan to bring man to confession and through confession he could have been forgiven.
2. The Law of Moses states that the unfaithful should confess his sin (Deuteronomy 5:1-6; Numbers 5:6).
3. Even David the Prophet and King when he sinned he had to confess his sin before Nathan the priest (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalms 51).
4. In the days of John the Baptist many people came to him to be baptized in the Jordan and they confessed their sins (Matthew 3:5).

5. In the New Testament, the Lord Christ designed the mystery of confession and gave it to His disciples (Matthew 3:6, 18:17,18; John 20:22-24).

## Lesson Outline

- I. To whom do you confess? Is it enough for a sinner to confess his sins directly to the Lord? Why did the Lord command us to confess before the priests? Here we count the blessings of confession and its beneficial effects on the self, body and the soul:
  - a. Confession before the priest cures the problems of repression (Job 22:18-20).
  - b. The human nature drives man to complain to others.
  - c. The psychiatrists, the psychological clinic and modern psychiatry are a little point of a confession session. However, it doesn't give absolution of sin or listening to the word of God that proceeds from the mouth of the father of confession.
  - d. Self-peace resulting from confession is reflected upon the health of the body.
  - e. Confession of sin by the priestly authority (Absolution) has many relieving effects on both the body and soul.
  - f. The person who confesses acquires the habit of accuracy and self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:31).
  - g. The person who confesses feels that his confessor is wise and kind father who shares with him, his feelings and pains (2 Corinthians 11:29).
  - h. In confession, we benefit from the blessed instructions given by the experienced father of confession. The elders' advice is good. Remember the advices given by the elder and young men to Rehoboam the king, son of Solomon. Not listening to the elders' advice destroyed the whole kingdom.
  - i. In confession, we share with the priest our thoughts that reveal the tricks and snares of the devil, and bring to light the weakness and defects of the self that may not be easily noticed by the person as he may be afflicted by the sin of pride, he may be in a state of despair or self-degradation.

## II. How to Practice Confession Correctly?

- a. Examine yourself before you go to confession. This should be according to the commandments, which call us to be holy, and without blemish before the Lord and the People.
- b. Cast the self before the Lord with contrition and feeling of remissness, as Isaiah did when he saw the Glory of the Lord.
- c. Confess to our father the priest with reverence and tears. Confess your sin in detail . . . the time taken in doing it, how often you did it, and your feelings while doing it.
- d. The person who confesses must listen carefully to his father of confession and carry out his advice with great obedience and persistence.
- e. It is good to remind your students that personal confession, where we can ask God for forgiveness in our prayers, is also important. Due to the shortage of priests in the US, we might not get an opportunity to confess our sins to a priest or father whenever we want to. If a priest is not immediately available, we should keep confessing our sins to God everyday in our prayers. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”*(1 John 1:9).

### III. What are hindrance to Confession?

- a. Shyness: When we offer true confession with a spirit of shyness, we taste the bitterness of sin and we do not go back to it. If shyness turns to stubbornness and refraining from confession before the priest, then it is a hidden pride (Sirach 4:26).
- b. Fear that the secret may become known: We all should have trust in the priest who has been accustomed to listening to hundreds of confessions and who cannot reveal any secret.
- c. Some do not benefit from the father of confession’s guidance: When people choose their father of confession, they must be sure that he is an experienced, wise, patient and spiritually advanced. Note: The problem sometimes does not lie in the father of confession but it often lies in the person who confesses, as he does not obey the advice of the priest with earnestness and perseverance. You can change your father of confession when necessary but first take his permission to do so.
- d. Making U-turn in our life after a confession: After confessing our sins, the next step is to abandon our old ways and live a life of

righteousness. For example, if one was stealing, that person should stop stealing again, and start working hard to support his/her life and help the poor. A person who goes back to repeating his old sins after confession is metaphorically described as ‘A dog who returns to its vomit,’ and, ‘A sow that is washed returns to her wallowing in the mud.’ (2 Peter 2:22).

## Conclusion

There are multiple spiritual benefits to confession in the life of the youth. We must be aware of the blessing and grace of confession as through it man can wipe out all the dust of sin and remove its effects and then the Divine Icon appears. Confession is like a monitor of our spiritual growth and though it we can find the right path to salvation.

**Applications:** • Read some of the booklets about how to practice the mystery of confession among the students before they go to confession.

- Prayer meetings should be held for those who have repented and those who have not repented yet.
- Encourage your students to practice confession regularly.
- Encourage your students to develop the habit of reading Psalms 51 everyday.

### Exercises:

1. What did you learn from today’s lesson? Find bible verses in which Jesus told/asked people to confess and repent.
2. What is the difference between confession and repentance? (Ans: Repentance involves commitment not to return to the confessed sin. Confession is agreeing with God that what we did is wrong with sorrow and remorse.)
3. How often should we confess our sins? How do you confess your sins?
4. What are the advantages of confessing our sins to our confession father/priest?

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## Week 3

# Fast and Pray as Christ Did

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### Objectives:

- Sound spiritual practice of the acceptable fasting.

### References:

- 1 Corinthians 7:5, Matthew 6, Matthew 4:2

### Memory Verse:

*Give yourselves to fasting and prayer. (1 Corinthians 7:5)*

## Introduction

What does fasting mean? Fasting is abstaining from food for a period of time followed by eating vegetarian food. It is not a commandment for weakening the body but exercising and controlling the body to refresh the soul and test it to grow in grace and in the knowledge of God.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Position of Fasting in the Spiritual Life: Fasting has an important position in the spiritual life and there are many examples in the Old Testament of the men of God who fasted and did great works. Moses fasted forty days before he spoke to God. Daniel was fasting when the Angel Gabriel appeared to him. Nehemiah fasted when he heard of the sad news about Jerusalem. David was a man of fasting. He said, "I afflicted myself with fasting". Isaiah spoke about fasting (Isaiah 58:3-12) and king Jehoshaphat called all the people to fast (2 Chronicles 20:3). In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Himself fasted till He felt hungry. The Lord spoke about fasting in His Sermon on the Mountain (Matthew 6:16-18). He also spoke about the importance of fasting when



He said about the Devil *“This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting”* (Mark 9:29). In Book of Acts we read about fasting in the church of the apostles (Acts 13:3,4) and (1 Corinthians 7:5). The church fathers also wrote about fasting in their writings and rules, which reached us. The history of the Orthodox Church bears witness to the fact that the believers respected public fasting that have been established since the times of the early church such as Lent, and fasting on Wednesday and Friday.

II. How the Lord Christ Fasted and Prayed? After Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights and afterwards He was hungry and the devil came and tempted Him three times but the Lord quoted verses from the Scriptures to answer him with. He gave us a practical example of how man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Mathew 4:2-11). The Lord’s fasting was accompanied by prayer and spiritual struggle. In the same way we fast and pray with Him and through Him. May our fasting and prayer be acceptable before the Lord. Fasting is a wonderful rite in the church that goes side by side with receiving the Holy Communion. For example, fasting always precedes every communion. So the church connects our worship of fasting and prayers and unites them with the Divine Sacrifice of the Lord, which is His Body and His Blood so that it may be acceptable before Him and without blame.

III. How to Fast Correctly?

a. Fasting and Spiritual Growth: Fasting is an exercise to humiliate the desires of the flesh and not an exercise to weaken the body itself. In our physical nature there is a bad tendency which we inherited from Adam and Eve and St. Paul expressed it by saying; *“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other; so that you cannot do the things that you would”* (Galatians 5; 17). In another place he says: *“O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death”* (Romans 7:24). St. Isaac the Syrian says: *“Every struggle against sin and its lusts must begin with fasting especially when the struggle is because of an internal sin”*. Resisting the desires of the flesh does not mean that we should weaken the body and moderation in fasting is necessary so that physical and spiritual health may not be affected. Abstaining from food should

go side by side with internal spiritual growth. This means that physical fasting is connected with the godliness of the heart, the soul's fasting and the purity of the flesh. In this, one of the saints said, "If we are fasting only in the sense of abstaining from food while we are still bound to sin and iniquities, submission of the body will not benefit us so long as the most precious part of us is defiled. So as the outer man fasts, the inner man must also be controlled and be kept away from harmful food as acceptable fasting should be genuine, without evil, insincerity, grudge, hatred or defilement of body and soul".

- b. Inseparableness of fasting and prayer: The saints likened fasting to a stronghold and prayer to a weapon with which man fights inside the stronghold ... St. Augustine said, "In the Temple built by Solomon, there were two altars, on the outer altar, burnt offerings are offered and on the inside altar the incense offerings were offered. The same is true with the temple of Spirit which is man where there must be two altars; the inside one which is the heart where he offers the incense of prayers and their aroma and an outer altar where the body is offered as an offering through fasting and types of abstemiousness and devoutness".
- c. Inseparableness of fasting and contemplation: *"The fast that I choose ... Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house? When you see the naked, to cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?"* (Isaiah 58:6,7). It is necessary for spiritual life to feed on contemplations during fasting. The church sets fasting on important occasions so we must connect fasting with contemplation and remember the occasions of fasting. During the holy Lent we remember our Lord, the Holy righteous Lord when he fasted. On Wednesday we remember the plans of the chief priests to kill him. Ask yourself then "Do I betray him and how much shall I receive to betray him?" Remember that you betray him when you sin. So during each fasting raise your heart to God in the spirit of contemplation to attain spiritual power during fasting. You can get benefit also through reading the Holy Bible and the spiritual books with the spirit of discipleship, prayer and obedience of the commandments.
- d. Inseparableness of fasting and almsgiving: Fasting is usually accompanied by works of love and mercy, so in his hunger, the fasting man shares the poor and the needy and spends what he has saved of the expenses of his food and other things on his needy brethren

... Isaiah emphasizes this fact by saying: “Is not this who are kind to the poor ...”.

- IV. Discussion: A young man may face a problem, i.e. the family sometimes does not allow him to fast as they believe this would keep him healthy and the suggested cure is the following:
- a. He must test himself as his life may not be straight and his behavior may be a stumbling block in the eyes of the family.
  - b. He must discuss the matter with his father of confession and follow his advice concerning the period he appoints for fasting and if there are any health reasons a doctor should be consulted.
  - c. He should discuss the matter with his family and explain the importance of fasting and the importance of obeying the commandments of Christ and the church order.
  - d. He should seek the priest’s advice when necessary and the priest will help him to convince the family to allow him to fast. He could also pray so that the Lord may soften their hearts and allow him to fast.

## Conclusion

Fasting is essential for us to develop self-control and to grow spiritually. Jesus Christ Himself fasted and we should follow his example.

### Applications:

- Practice fasting with reverence, prayer, contemplating and reading the Holy Bible. It is also important to share whatever you have (money, food, cloth...etc)with the poor.

### Exercises:

1. What important is fasting in the Orthodox Church?
2. Have you ever fasted all the seven fastings of the Orthodox Church? What are the seven fasts in the orthodox church?
3. Do you know the names of the seven Fasting periods of the church? If a young man who does not fast asks you “Why do you fast?” What will you say to him?

4. Of what benefit is fasting for your private inner and outer life?
5. What are the conditions of the acceptable fasting before God?
6. Why do the church and the Holy Bible emphasize the inseparableness of fasting and prayer?
7. Can we tell/show off to other people that we are fasting? (Matthew 6:17-19).
8. Pin point to personal things that may hinder you from participating in fasting and praying. How can you overcome these challenges?

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## Week 4

# The Eucharist

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### Objectives:

- To go into the depths of the Eucharist Sacrament to meet the Lord Jesus and understand His work of Salvation through sacrifice of His love.

### References:

- John 6:25-59, 1 Corinthians 11:28

### Memory Verse:

*Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them and said, Take eat, this is My body. (Mark 14:22)*

## Introduction

What is the Sacrament of the Eucharist!

- It is the mystery of being united with God through the enlightenment of knowledge and reaching eternity.
- It is the mystery of worship and consecration through which the soul knows the Holy Trinity and loves Him, accepts Him and responds to His work.
- It is the mystery of thanksgiving through which we obtain the grace of Christ's life.

## Lesson Outline

- I. Eucharist and Relationship with Passover, Salvation and Church:

- The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the continuation of Christ work of sacrifice as He is present in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is an extension to the Cross work of salvation.
- The Eucharist Sacrament is the Sacrament of the New Testament and in it the covenant between God and man is achieved as the Sacrifice of Christ is the faithful witness (Revelation 1:5). Also, He grants us heavenly relationship through it, a heavenly meal that grants us eternal life.
- The Eucharist is a symbol of real Pascha as Christ was offered as the lamb of God (Corinthians 5:7). The mystery of the Pascha has been achieved in the Body of the Lord that He gave us in His body and His Blood so that we may enjoy eternity. So the sacrament of the Eucharist allows us to enter the kingdom of God to meet Him face to face forever.
- The Eucharist is the church sacrifice, which Christ offers with all love and obedience to God. The church goes into the altar (the Golgotha) and soars up to the highest heaven and does not know what to offer except Christ.
- Through the Eucharist we become members of Christ's Body, filled in Christ and known to the Father on the altar through His beloved Son.

## II. The Eucharist and the Word of God

- The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the flesh of the Word of God that fulfils the voice of God.
- The sanctification of the sacrament of the Eucharist and receiving the Holy Communion bring us into the depths of the Holy Bible to realize that the Word of God is the presence of the living God with all His power as a Creator, Judge and Savior.
- The Holy Bible is the main source of sanctioning the Sacrament of Eucharist as we read during Liturgy prayers the Pauline Epistle, the Catholic Epistle, a reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Psalms and the Holy Gospel.
- The Liturgical Eucharistic text is taken from the Holy Bible (1 Corinthians 2:9).

## III. The Eucharist Symbols in the Old Testament:

- The Passover (Pascha).

- The heavenly Manna.
- The offering of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:17-19).
- The wisdom meal (Proverbs 9:1).
- The Messiah's meal (Isaiah 55:1-3).
- The wedding meal (Songs of Songs).
- The prophecy of Malachi (Malachi 1:11).
- The Division of the Eucharist Liturgy
- The Eucharist Liturgy is a journey to heaven - during which we enjoy the company of our Lord Jesus through our unity with Him by.
- The Hymn: This is a preparation for this journey and through it we enter the life of praising God the Creator.
- The bread and wine Prayer (the Lamb): this is the beginning of the journey and in it we offer all our life to Christ.
- Readings: These are the guides of the journey. Without them we cannot follow the road or achieve the goal. They give the believers a chance to listen to the voice of God through:
  - a. His apostles (the Pauline epistle and the Catholic epistle).
  - b. The works of His apostles (Acts of the apostles, Praxis).
  - c. The Acts of the church (Synaxarium).
  - d. The Acts of His Son (the Gospel).
  - e. Through the Ministers (the Sermon).
- The Intercession: Throughout this journey the church prays for her safety and peace (the intercession for peace), the safety of her ministers (the intercession for the fathers), for the Lord to bless the Congregations (intercession for the congregations) so that she may complete, achieve and fulfill her message without fear.
- Reconciliation Prayer: Before the Invocation of the Holy Spirit: The church announces reconciliation between God and the people in Christ (the apostolic embrace of Peace).
- The coming of the Holy Spirit (Anaphora): It is the moment of going into heaven and being united with God through receiving His Holy Body and Blood.

## Conclusion

The Lord, with His great compassion toward man kind, has arranged for a continuation of His salvation to man kind through the sacrament of the Eucharist. This is the sacrament to continue the unity between man and the loving God. It would be very difficult for any wise person not to participate in it.

### Applications:

- Clarify the concepts and meaning of the Sacrament of the Eucharist to the students so that the spiritual benefit of the sacrament may be achieved.
- A special Mass is to be said for the students and the teachers to explain the divisions of the Liturgy.
- All the students are to receive the Holy Communion in this Mass as one fellowship to renew the spirit of membership and understanding the basic relationship with the Lord.
- Encourage the students to receive communion regularly.
- Tell your students that they need to pray and repent before taking the holy communion.

### Exercises:

1. Why do we take the Holy Communion? (John 6:53-54)
2. What should a believer do before taking the Holy Communion? (1 Corinthians 11:28).



## Part VIII

### Lessons for the Month of April

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## Week 1

# Holy Liturgy I

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### Objectives:

- To explain the steps of the Holy Liturgy and how to benefit from attending it.

### References:

- Matthew 26: 17-30
- The Book of Liturgy of Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church

### Memory Verse:

*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me and I in him.  
(John 6:56)*

## Introduction

The Holy Liturgy is the most sacred part of our worship to God since our Lord Jesus Christ is present physically on the altar by his body and blood. Every move in the Holy Liturgy has a deep spiritual meaning as explained below.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Church Rites: The word (serate Qdasie) meaning order or arrangement. It means the order of service in church and the different prayers that are chanted in her.
- II. God Takes Care of Rites : God accepted Abel sacrifice and not Cain because He had already taught them that it should be an animal sacrifice and because of His knowledge of the purity of their hearts.

In the tent of meeting, God has shown Moses how the tent should look like and how different parts of service are carried out with great detail. Anybody changing this order would be severely punished. For example, Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron offered profane fire before the Lord, fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (Leviticus 10).

III. How the Church Rites Started and How It Reached Us: Jesus Christ Himself laid the foundation for the church rites when He instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist in the upper room. The apostles delivered to the churches what they learnt from our Lord. This in turn was given to the next generations. All parts of the Holy Liturgy are from the Bible, e.g., the Great, the Mighty God, whose name is the Lord of hosts (Jeremiah 32:18). Finally having a defined way of praying the Liturgy is an element of stability and order in church.

IV. Parts of the Liturgy: Prayers for Sunday morning

1. Prime payer.
2. Morning praises.
3. Morning raising of incense .
4. The Holy liturgy (Catechumen and Believers).

V. Components of the Divine Liturgy:

Steps Jesus performed in the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-30)	Steps of the Divine Liturgy
The disciples prepared the upper room	The raising of incense
Jesus washed the disciples feet	Repentance, confession and absolution
Took Bread	Choose Lamb
Gave thanks	Thanksgiving Prayer
Blessed it	The blessing
Broke it	Fraction
Gave it to His Disciples	Communion
Sang hymns (Matthew 26:30)	Hymns for communion

VI. The Raising Of Incense: Using the incense in praying is a heavenly angelic act *“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne”* (Rev 8:3). The priest enters the sanctuary and put

five hands on incense. This is a symbol of the offerings of Abel, Noah, Melchizedek, Aaron and Zechariah.

## Conclusion

Everything in the liturgy has a meaning and it becomes more enjoyable when we understand those meanings. We feel as if we are living many of the events of the life of Jesus Christ on earth. The liturgy finally left us from earth to heaven.

### Applications:

- Pay attention in church to the prayers and moves of the priest. You may use a liturgy book to help you out. It is also important to frequently attend Qdasie (holy liturgy).
- If there is anything that you do not understand during the liturgy, ask the priest or your Sunday school teacher for an explanation.

### Exercises:

1. What is the main purpose of the Holy Liturgy?
2. Why do we take the holy communion?
3. It is important that we remember and witness the death and tribulation of our lord Jesus Christ every time we take the holy communion or when we attend the holy liturgy.

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## Week 2

# Holy Liturgy II

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### Objectives:

- To learn the sequence and the meaning of the liturgy.
- To appreciate the beauty of the Holy liturgy.

### References:

- The Book of Liturgy of Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church.
- Matthew 6, 1 Corinthians 11:27

### Memory Verse:

*I am the bread of life. (John 6:35)*

## Introduction

Examine parts of the Liturgy and analogy with the Last Supper. Refer to the previous lesson.

## Lesson Outline

### I. The Burial:

1. The priest places the bread on the paten: He pours wine into the chalice, emptying out completely the cruet. He pours water into the empty wine cruet and from it he adds to the wine in the chalice a little water (around a third). This is a symbol that blood and water came from Jesus' side when he was on the cross.

2. The prayer of thanksgiving: The priest covers the oblation with a handkerchief and he covers likewise the chalice with another handkerchief. This is a symbol of the clean linen cloth that our Lord Jesus was wrapped in the tomb. He covers both with the Prospherine together with the deacon facing him. This is a symbol of the big rock that was rolled over Jesus Christ's tomb. Also the priest and deacon on either side of the altar are a symbol of the two angels seen by Mary Magdalene in the tomb, one on the head's side and the other on the legs' side (John 20:12). Then, the priest places a handkerchief above the Prospherine. This is a symbol of the seal on the rock.

II. The Absolution of the Servants: This is the absolution given to everyone in church to be able to complete this service and partake from the Holy Communion. If two priests are attending the liturgy, one is called the serving priest (choosing the lamb, saying the fraction and administering the body of Christ), and the other is a participating priest. The participating priest always says the absolution even if he is younger or newer than the other one is. The bishop always says the absolution himself.

III. The Readings The Pauline: From the 14 epistles written by St Paul The catholic: From the epistle of the other disciples: St. James (1), St. Peter (2), St. John (3), St. Jude (1). The Acts: from the Book of Acts (Praxis). During the reading of the Pauline, the priest goes around the altar and the whole church representing the preaching of St. Paul to the whole world. During the reading of acts, the priest turns around the altar and the deacons? chorus only remembering that the Lord asked His disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they receive power from above. The Psalm: Some verses from the Book of Psalms. The Gospel: This is the center of all readings. It speaks about the occasion of the day according to the Sundays, Lent, and Pentecost days have separate readings. The sermon: This explains what is read in the Gospel.

IV. The Creed: Two main things we need to do before approaching the sacrifice, faith and love. Faith we prove by saying the creed and love by the holy kiss.

V. The Prayer of Reconciliation: This narrates the story of salvation. The deacon stands on the other side of the altar and the priest takes

the handkerchief on the Prospherine and holds it up. This is a symbol of the separation between God and man before our Lord Jesus was incarnated. At the end, the Prospherine is removed (symbol of resurrection).

- VI. Anaphora from the 14 Anaphora's one be conduct for the day The Blessings: The priest asks the Holy Spirit to come and bless the bread and wine to change them to the body and blood of Jesus Christ.
- VII. The Seven Prayers: After the bread and wine change to the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, we start asking Him for all our requests. We pray for the safety of the church, the Pope and bishops, the priests, God's mercy, our place (water of the rivers, the plants or the air of heaven) and the oblations.
- VIII. The Congregation of the Saints: We remember all the saints asking for their prayers on our behalf and take them as an example.
- IX. The Fraction
- X. The Absolution: Another absolution here before approaching the sacrifice.
- XI. The Confession: The priest and the deacon confess their faith.
- XII. Taking Communion: During communion the congregation chants psalm 150 and appropriate hymns praising God and thanking Him for His gifts.
- XIII. After the Liturgy: Each one should take care not to take anything out of his mouth or get injured. Meditate on the gift and blessing received for the rest of the day.
- XIV. How to Benefit from the Holy Liturgy:
  - a. Prepare for the liturgy: Attend vespers the previous night. Come clean to church, outside and inside. Outside, by washing and wearing tidy clothes. From inside by having a pure heart through peace with everyone together with repentance and confession. It is important to examine our self and repent our sins prior to taking the holy communion. "So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. " (1 Corinthians 11:27-28:1 Corinthians 11:27-28)

- b. Come early to church: Coming to church too late may prevent you from taking communion. Coming early allows the enjoying of the readings, hymns and deep prayers in the liturgy. The longer time spent in church will calm down the soul and ease the concentration in the liturgy.
- c. Participating in the Liturgy responses: The congregation is one of main three persons needed for a liturgy: a priest, deacons and the congregation. The responses are meant for the congregation not only the deacons.
- d. Concentrate in the prayers and responses: We should pray with the mind not the lips only. Using a Liturgy book may help in this situation.
- e. Take communion: Every one should be prepared by repentance and confession and participate in the communion.

## Conclusion

“The time that we spend in church during the Holy Liturgy is a moment of heaven on earth. This glory surrounding us may be hidden from our eyes at that time. This is only because we are human but many are deserved to see this glory. They witnessed and it is true” (The life of orthodox prayer).

### Applications:

- Try to apply all the methods mentioned above to benefit from the Liturgy.
- Pay attention in church and use a liturgy book to follow up.

### Exercises:

1. What is the purpose of the holy communion?
2. Mention steps that MUST be taken before participating in the Holy Communion?
3. How should we prepare before taking the holy communion (1 Corinthians 11:27,2)?
4. Why do we take the holy communion (John 6:53-54)?
5. How should we behave after taking the holy communion?



6. What are the right and wrong ways to behave after the holy communion?  
Why?

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## Week 3

# Resurrection

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### Objectives:

- To understand the effect of resurrection on the life of the Lord, the life of the church and on our life.

### References:

- Luke 20:35-36; Acts 26:23; 1 Peter 1:3;

### Memory Verse:

*I am the life and the resurrection, he who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. (John 11:25)*

## Introduction

The days of resurrection are days of happiness and joy so the church sings the resurrection hymns that are characterized by their pleasant and joyful tunes for fifty days during which she forbids any sad tunes even in her prayer for those who die. She also forbids fasting and kneeling in worship during these days. May the gratification of resurrection be for the benefit of the soul not for the benefit of the body. May we be filled with joy so that we may test the power and brightness of resurrection.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Power of Resurrection: The devil won all the rounds before the Resurrection. He could make the authorities sentence Jesus to death as a sinner and evildoer. The Lord neither objected nor protested. The devil could direct all sorts of disgrace such as striking His body with whips and striking Him and spitting on His face, nailing His hands and stabbing Him with the spear . . . . Christ received all these sorts of

afflictions on the cross and the devil thought that the Lord was weak and that he could conquer Christ. The disciples hid in the upper room. They were filled with horror and awe, as they were afraid of the Jews ... while the sincere women and the Maries together with John and Peter went to the tomb all night long till dawn to offer the spices to the body of Christ in great sorrow. Sorrow and despair filled the hearts of some disciples. The two disciples of Emmaus were speaking with the Lord while He was walking with them after His resurrection without knowing Him. "... *Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death, and crucified Him .... It is now the third day since this happened*" (Luke 24: 19-21). But the truth of resurrection turned sorrow into joy and despair into boldness and courage and fear into courage and preaching .... This is the power of resurrection, which filled the church with Joy, and comfort .... The Lord Jesus rose with His own power .... He rose and the stone was still at the door of the tomb .... He rose and His wounds were as they were and His side was open .... He rose declaring: "O death where is your sting? O Hades where is your victory?" He rose at the time He appointed and left the shroud and the napkin lying in their place.

- II. The Joys of Resurrection: The church sings hymns that clearly express the joys of resurrection ... she sings: "All the heavenly hosts ... all heavenly and earthly ranks and orders ... all angels and people sing happily as our Lord Jesus Christ, the True Lamb has risen from the dead". Your heart will be filled with joy when you see the deacons decorate the Resurrection Icon while singing: "O all heavenly ranks and orders sing to our Lord with hymns of praise and rejoice with us today as we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Christ .... The Lord rose as if He had been asleep or affected by wine and granted us the eternal grace and freed us from severe bondage".

- III. The secret of this great joy:

He bruised the head of the Serpent.

He broke the sting of death.

He opened the door of Paradise.

Resurrection had a great effect on the church of the apostles. The Writer of the Book of the Acts (St. Luke) says: "And with great power the apostle gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord

Jesus and great grace was upon them all”. St. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, considers the resurrection as the basis of Preaching and without resurrection the preaching would be futile. He says: *“And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins”* (1 Corinthians 15:14-17).

IV. Resurrection in our own life: When St. John saw the Lord in a vision on the island called Patmos, he fell at His feet as dead. The Lord laid his right hand upon him saying, *“Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death”* (Revelation 1:17-18). The Lord Jesus; then, is Living in heaven and is living in the hearts of the believers. Through the Holy Spirit, He fills their hearts with the power of His resurrection. In this, St. Paul the apostle says, *“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death”* (Philippians 3:10). As the Resurrection was latent and present in the life of the Lord Jesus, it is also a test that takes place in the hearts of believers with which they attain the power, the glory and the joys of resurrection. Whenever our hearts are filled with the Divine love and strong will to carry out the commandment, the spirit of resurrection fills us and the ugly sin disappears. Whenever we overcome our grudge, lusts and bad tendencies, the Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead fills us and raises us with Him and delivers us from evil. Through the Holy Spirit, we attain the power to rise up from the spiritual death, *“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you”* (Romans 8: 11).

## Conclusion

If we have been raised with Christ, let us seek what is above where Christ is sitting on the right hand of the Majesty on High. If we have truly been raised with Christ let us search for the lost sheep to attract them as that who rose from the dead said to Peter, “Do you love me? . . . attend my

sheep” After His resurrection, the Lord used to say and still says to our hearts, “That who loves Me should feed my lambs”.

**Applications:**

- Read what is written in the Gospels about Resurrection in the last one or two chapters of each Gospel.
- Recite the cheering hymns of the Resurrection and take part with the deacons in the Resurrection Icon Procession.
- Send presents to the orphans and those who mourn especially on Easter.
- Pray and contemplate the prayer for the sharing of Holy Communion prayed by the priest while breaking the Holy Body. Study some parts of it and recite these parts.
- Examine yourself to find out any sin and pray so that the Lord may help you to keep away from it and test the power of resurrection from the tomb of the sin.

**Exercises:**

1. Why is the Resurrection of the Lord Christ considered one of the miracles?
2. What is the difference between the resurrection of Christ and that of Lazarus?
3. What was the effect of resurrection on the church of the apostles?
4. How has resurrection given the church joy and happiness?
5. How can we know that we have tested resurrection in our life?

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## Week 4

# Building the Heavenly Kingdom

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### Objectives:

- To learn the dimensions of the Heavenly Kingdom.
- Our role in building the Heavenly Kingdom.

### References:

- Matthew 3, 10; Revelation 21

### Memory Verse:

*As you go, preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand. (Matthew 10:7)*

## Introduction

Since the sin of Adam, man had been cast out of God's sight in paradise to live in the realm of Satan. The authorities of darkness and death overruled every man, until our Lord conquered death by His death and became King on the wood of the cross (Psalm 95). He also said, "*I am going to prepare a place for you (in the kingdom of heaven)*" (John 14:2). The preparation for the heavenly kingdom was the focus of the preaching of St. John the Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ and the disciples. Since we always pray and say "thy kingdom come", where are we now in the process of preparing for the heavenly kingdom?

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Kingdom In Our Hearts: The heavenly kingdom starts in the hearts of those who enthrone the Lord as king over their hearts. The Lord said, *“give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my way”* (Proverbs 23:26). However, He is a unique king. You are not forced into his kingdom, and He does not force Himself over your heart. He actually reigns through love.
- II. The Kingdom On Earth: The heavenly kingdom is also felt among the people who show good will and love to each other (John 15:12). In heaven, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and by doing this same thing to each other on earth we start the heavenly kingdom on earth (Revelation 21:4).
- III. Our Role In Building The Heavenly Kingdom: To build the heavenly kingdom we have to know what is the kingdom built of? In revelation chapter 21, a description of the New Jerusalem: *“Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God”* (Revelation 21:3). Then, the building blocks of the kingdom are the people of God. So, How many blocks did you put to build the kingdom? How many did we bring to God and His kingdom? Or do you care only about entering first and everybody else should take care of his own salvation?

Building the kingdom need lots of hard work and perseverance to bring more and more people to the kingdom. It needs great sacrifices, like sacrificing your own comfort to comfort others. We may need to sacrifice our leisure time to win infinite time with the Lord in heaven for you and for others. It also may need financial scarifies to help others in times of need. The more sacrifice we give the more blocks we place in building the heavenly kingdom.

There are many great examples of builders of the heavenly kingdom who entered and brought with them hundreds or even thousands of men and women. St. Peter, with one sermon on the day of Pentecost, converted 3000 men into Christianity. St. Paul, through his trips spread the Word and brought thousands or even millions into the kingdom. Another great example is St. Anthony who started monasticism and showed many of his followers a new way of building a close relationship and dedication to God. St. Demiana brought 40 virgins with her to the kingdom when they were martyred for the

name of Christ. St. Rifka brought her children with her when they were slaughtered on her lap for Christianity. So, how many are you bringing to the kingdom with you?

Building the kingdom may take many forms. A wife may care to bring her family and children to the kingdom with her. A Sunday school servant works hard to bring his students to the kingdom with him. A preacher would preach the Word to every soul that does not know Christ. Every one of us has a chance somehow, somewhere to bring more people with him to the kingdom of God.

However, we have to be careful that others may enter and we remain outside. The Lord gave an example of those who said we performed miracle in Your Name but He said to them: *“I do not know you”* (Matthew 25: 12). So, be watchful also for your own salvation. The sight of a chicken who walks with all her chicks walking behind her brings the question again how many are walking behind you into the kingdom of heaven? Are you like a magnet that attracts tens of pins to it or you make people repel from you?

## Conclusion

Every one of us has to help in building the heavenly kingdom by bringing more people with him into the kingdom of God.

We pray that we be counted with the five wise virgins who were watchful, filled their lamps and were ready for the arrival of the bridegroom and entered his wedding. We pray that the fire of His Spirit would take away the laziness of the five foolish virgins away from us.

### Applications:

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### Exercises:

- 1.



## Part IX

### Lessons for the Month of May

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## Week 1

# Witnessing to the Lord in Today's World

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### Objectives:

- To help our youth become more proud of following Jesus Christ
- To identify some ways by which they can witness to Jesus Christ in today's world.

### References:

- Luke 10:1-20.

### Memory Verse:

*Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. (Luke 10:3)*

## Introduction

Can you imagine if one day while you're praying to God, He sends an angel and asks you to go to school the next day and tell everyone at school that they are on the wrong track, that God is warning them to repent, and that if they do not return to God, He will destroy them? Really, how would you respond? Would you feel worthy of this task? Would you feel capable of this task? Well, I know that this might be difficult to believe considering your age, but you know it has actually happened. God asked Jeremiah the prophet as a teenager to witness to the Israelites when they were sinful and went after other gods (Jeremiah Chapter 1). Jeremiah the prophet felt incapable, but God told him that He will put the words in his mouth as he serves. So could the same thing happen to us? Are we expected to witness in the world? These questions will hopefully be answered through this lesson.

## Lesson Outline

First it is important for us to establish the normal conditions under which service is expected to occur. Christ Himself said to the seventy apostles that He appointed, *“Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves”* (Luke 10:3). It is apparent through this verse that God is aware of the world's corruption and that His servants will face lots of problems. Now why do we use the word servants here even though we are talking to teenagers who are being served? Because God said that we are the light of the world. He did not differentiate the levels. We as true Christians are by default the light of the world. We actually carry the light of Jesus Christ to the world. It is the duty of every Christian to confess the name of Jesus Christ to everyone. We even repeat at least every Sunday, “Amen, Amen, Amen, Your death, O Lord we proclaim.” Have we ever stopped and thought about what that really means? Do we really proclaim and confess Christ's death and resurrection? Now that we know that tribulation and hardship come from service and witnessing, it is important for us to know the tools by which we can witness.

1. In Luke 10:2, Christ asks the seventy to pray to the Lord for the sake of service; therefore, prayers are essential for the success of witnessing or carrying the good news to others. Have you ever known a good non-Christian friend, and you were too disappointed that they are not Christians? Well, pray to God and ask Him to lead you in your witnessing. Ask God to help you find the way by which you can introduce your friend to Jesus Christ.
2. The second essential tool for witnessing is humbleness. It is important for us to introduce Christ to others with meekness. We need to start out teaching others about Christ's love rather than condemning them. It is a shame that some of the people whom we meet at the malls and roads claim to be witnesses by stopping people while shouting and telling them that if they do not believe in Christ they would go to hell. St. Paul said, *“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one”* (Colossians 4:6).
3. The third important tool in service is the Gospel. St. Paul said, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another . . .”* (Colossians 3:16). Also St. Peter said, *“always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear”* (1 Peter 3:13). This is

an excellent verse because it explains the importance of knowledge and meekness.

There are few true believers in Jesus Christ in this world and this fact naturally makes us feel odd enough. However, We always have to remember that we are not just governed by natural instincts but by the blood of Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

We need to understand that the least we could do as an appreciation to God's blessings in our lives is to introduce others to Him. We as Christians are expected to attract others to Christ. Even if we do not have the personality to talk about it, our actions and behaviors should attract others. Do we display the true Christian behavior? When people see our actions, do they form a good or a bad impression about Christianity? Being a true Christian is a serious responsibility; we have to watch our actions and make serving God our focus in life.

### Applications:

- Some of the ways we can build our knowledge include attending as many Sunday School classes, youth meetings and bible studies as we can.
- Also a close relationship with your father of confession can help guide you into becoming a more active servant to God.
- If you have extra few months and resources, you might consider serving with the missionary group around the world. That would build self-confidence in terms of witnessing to others about Christ.
- Pray to God to give you courage and wisdom to speak his word boldly.

### Exercises:

1. What does he mean when Paul was saying "*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ*" (Rome 1:16) how about you are you ashamed to share the Gospel with the people?
2. What does He mean when Jesus Christ was saying "*Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*" (Mark 8:38)?

WEEK 1. WITNESSING TO THE LORD IN TODAY'S WORLD

3. What does He mean when Jesus Christ was saying *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matthew 16:26)
4. Describe what our lord Jesus Christ's love mean to you personally? How much do you love Jesus in your life? How do you prove your love to him? *“[If you love Me, you will keep My commandments](John 14:15).*

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## Week 2

# The Church after the Apostolic Era

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### Objectives:

- To learn the heroism of the fathers who carried faith down to us.

### References:

- Matthew 10:32-39; Luke 12:8-9; John 15:18-16:4.

### Memory Verse:

*So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily. (Acts 16:5)*

## Introduction

The day of Pentecost was a shining day in the history of humanity. A stormy wind shook Jerusalem and tongues came down on the disciples and the Holy Spirit outpoured over them and filled them with all knowledge. Emboldened by the Holy Spirit, they went out of their upper room to the world carrying the message of Christ . . . a message of love and redemption. Years go by and the disciples work hard and the Christians and the churches grow in number. The first century came to its end and all the apostles departed from this world after they had changed the whole world. Before them the world was completely filled with paganism. There were groups of Jews, some were in Palestine and the others were scattered here and there. But now, delightful lights began to shine the lights of the church of Christ, which began to lighten darkness.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Happy Church: The Christians were pleased with the new religion. They shared everything among them. Nobody was poor or needy. They sold their property and divided the price among all according to each one's need. Every day they gather for prayer, singing hymns and listening to the preaching and to the Gospel that the apostle had left them. They used to eat together. On Sunday, they gather to attend prayers of the Holy Mass and receive the Holy Communion. People around them desired to imitate them so the Christians allowed them to attend their meetings and taught them the rules of religion and the Lord brought those who were saved to the church every day.
  
- II. Persecutions: The spread of Christianity was not easy. Many enemies tried to hinder its progress and growth. They fought it by all means but it won victory over them. In spite of persecutions, the Christians were an example of loyalty and sincerity even to their persecutors and their life was a good model for all people to follow. Many non-Christians believed in Christ when they saw their deeds and they glorified their Father who is in heaven. Through love, sacrifice and martyrdom, Christianity became victorious and the more persecution and torment increased, the more they kept close to Christ. They did not fear death but they sought it and desired it everywhere. They were martyred in Egypt, in Syria, in Rome and their martyrdom astonished the people around them and made them ask themselves "Why do they hold fast to their God?" Many believed because the Christians held fast to their Christ in spite of the cruelty and tormenting they suffered.
  - a. Ignatius (35-108 AD): Ignatius, Peter's disciple, was the Bishop of Antioch. He cared for his people with power and courage so the people gave him the name of "Theo-Forus" i.e. "that who carries the Lord". The king urged him to worship the idols. He tempted him with money and glory and threatened that he would torment him and put him to death but all his attempts were in vain and at last he sent him to Rome to be thrown to the fierce animals to devour him. Ignatius was not frightened. All his people wept for him but he encouraged them all and in his epistle to the Romans he says: "At last my brothers I attained what I desired . . . to die for Christ to declare myself a Christian and deserve the glorious name given to me but my fear is that you, through your love for me might try to save me from death and deprive me of the martyrdom for Christ".

- b. Clement: Clement knew Christ in Rome through St. Paul and he was ordained Bishop of the city. Because of his activity to spread Christianity, the Emperor sent him into exile in a far away country. There he met two thousand Christians in exile like him because of their Christian faith and they were tormented with hard work. He encouraged them and helped them in their work and reminded them of the heavenly joy that awaits them. Those banished people endured hardships joyfully and their life changed. Many non-Christian people believed in Christ because of Bishop Clement's works.
- c. Polycarp (69-156 AD): In Izmir in Asia Minor, the governor arrested Polycarp, John's disciple. When he saw his white beard and bent back, he showed sympathy for him and advised him to deny Christ. But, Polycarp said to the governor, "Since my childhood, I have been serving Christ for 86 years and during that long time he gave me every love and kindness so how can I reject him?" The governor threatened that he would send him to wild beasts. The saint said, "Let these beasts come to me. I am not afraid of them". The governor said, "If you despise the beasts I will throw you into a burning fire" and the saint said, "Your majesty, you threaten me to send me to a fire that burns a little then dies away but you do not know the fire of the eternal judgment that the Lord has prepared for non-believers". Then the saint said, "Why are you slow, your Majesty? Do what you want quickly". The governor ordered that Polycarp would be burnt alive. When the soldiers wanted to tie him up, he said to them, "there is no need for that. God who gave me power to endure the insult, gives me power to stand amid fire". He lifted up his eyes to heaven and prayed: "O Lord, I bless you because you have chosen me to be one of your martyrs who die for bearing witness to your name. I have glorified You in my life and I am now glorifying You in my death". The saint attained the crown of martyrdom and the Christians gathered his bones and kept them in their church in Izmir.

Ignatius, Clement and Polycarp were martyred and gave us the best example of holding fast to Christ. Their life and death were the seeds of faith in the church.



## Conclusion

Those are the word of these saints who loved the Lord from all their heart and were ready to endure all kinds of suffering for His seek: “I desire martyrdom to declare myself Christian not only in words but also in action” (St. Ignatius). “Since my childhood I have been serving Christ and He never harmed me but He showed me every mercy and kindness, how can I leave Him?” (Polycarp)

### Applications:

- As you are one of the children of those martyrs, what are the troubles and sacrifices, which you are ready to endure for the growth and spread of the church?
- What types of service can you perform to achieve this purpose?

### Exercises:

1. List two ideas that describe the life of the Christians during the Apostles' time.
2. On a map, write the names of Ignatius, Clement and Polycarp beside the cities to which they were Bishops.
3. Give the names of the Apostles who mentor Ignatius, Clement and Polycarp.
4. Do a research to find out How these apostles died?

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## Week 3

# The Ecumenical Councils

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### Objectives:

- To learn about the three great councils and the work of the church.

### References:

- Church Ecumenical councils [http://www.suscopts.org/servantsprep/pdf/HIS/HIS102\\_councils.pdf](http://www.suscopts.org/servantsprep/pdf/HIS/HIS102_councils.pdf).

### Memory Verse:

*Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. (1 Peter 3:15)*

## Introduction

- a. Administration System in the Church: The church anywhere is always in charge of her priests and deacons. If there is a simple dogmatic question, people usually ask the priest of the church. The deacons could help in financial and administration matters. This is like the system followed in organizing any group. For example, a principal runs the school assisted by a vice-principal and a board that meets regularly to discuss the school's needs. A society also has a board and a chief. In the church we have deacons and priests headed by bishops and his holiness the Patriarch. The Holy Council (Holy Synod) is the highest authority in the church and it is its members who decide and it is they who have the final word in the domains of the church creed and faith, in ordaining bishops and their assistants and in setting the general policy of the church.
- b. The Holy Council (Holy Synod): It is the highest authority that looks into the affairs of the church, manages its activities and solves its problems. If there is a problem in more than one country and is too difficult

to be solved as the case was in the early Christian period, there is a need to hold a council in which the different churches of these countries are to be represented. As the early church had one dogma and one faith, Ecumenical councils were held. The main direct reason for holding these councils was the appearance of strange religious views or what we call heresies.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The First Council and the Choice of Matthias: “The Council” is a living expression . . . on the part of the church to keep the spirit of understanding and love. The Lord Christ left the apostles as a group of believers who love one another, are tied to one mind and one heart. They expressed their opinions and took their decisions with unity in mind, heart and spirit so they gave a model to the church, a model of unity and love. In the apostolic age, the eleven apostles held a meeting under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and they all prayed so that God might choose Judas’ successor as Judas betrayed the Lord. They drew lots and the one chosen was Matthias who was added to the group of eleven apostles (Acts 1:15-26).
  
- II. The Conference in Jerusalem: We also read about the first council in Jerusalem in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15:1-20). Here we find the great apostles holding a meeting to discuss the problem that aroused a lot of discussion those days. The problem was: It is necessary for a believer to go through the Jewish stage first then to Christianity or can his faith in Christ take him directly from paganism to Christianity? They discussed this problem, then one of them proposed a suggestion and a certain decision and they all agreed then they wrote it and sent it to all the churches.
  - Mention some names of the apostles who attended that meeting?
  - Who was the head of the council?
  - What were the decisions?
  - Was this the apostles’ own point of view, or was it God’s desire? Prove this.

The faithful Christians must do the same if they misunderstand a religious topic and the church clarifies it for them. In this case they must obey and be happy to learn, not to be stubborn and resist.

There appeared in the church people who understood dogmatic matters wrongly. Those persons appeared at different times in the fourth and fifth centuries when Christianity was declared a formal religion of the State, i.e. the Roman Empire. Let us discuss some examples in the following sections.

- III. The Council of Nicene (325 AD): Arius was a priest in Alexandria. He came from Libya. He could not understand the Holy Trinity and how God is One in Three Hypostases. He thought that God the Redeemer was not God. He said that the Son (Jesus Christ) was of a less degree than the Father. The Egyptian church tried to convince him but he did not obey the church so the church excommunicated him. He complained to Emperor Constantine who summoned a conference in Nicene in Asia Minor. 318 Bishops from different parts of the world came to attend the conference. It was a blessed model of the unity of the church. Theological discussions ran between Arius and the church. The great defender of faith was Deacon Athanasius who accompanied Pope Alexander who was the Pope of that time. Arius enjoyed a strong character. In Alexandria and other places he wrote hymns that contained his corrupt belief and tried to indoctrinate his belief into the minds of many people. In the conference, he played with words but the council reached decisions and opinions were listened to and votes were taken for each decision. “Truly we believe in one God . . . creator of heaven and earth, and all things, seen and the unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Only begotten Son of the Father . . . true God out of true God; Begotten not created . . .”. What was the conviction of the council?

The council excommunicated Arius and the bishops signed approving the decision. They glorified God who gathered them as brothers and the Holy Spirit who guided them to take this decision.

- IV. The Council of Constantinople (381 AD): The church settled the question of the Son but Macedonia’s Patriarch of Constantinople said that the Holy Spirit was created or made (not God), so the Second Ecumenical Council met in Constantinople and was attended by 15 bishops. The principles were discussed and decisions were taken and thus the last part of the Orthodox creed was written: Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the life giver. we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen.
- V. The Council of Ephesus (431 AD): The questions rose never ended. Before the fourth century people used to ask and they still ask ques-

tions. Blessed are those who obey and never cause troubles to the church, but the devil never keeps still. Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, said that God was not born of Mary the Virgin but she gave birth to a man then God abode in him. These words are against the Holy Bible. We shall give three verses to prove this fact. For example: *“And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”* (John 1:14). *“Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh”* (1 Timothy 3:16). *“For you have found favor with God . . . therefore also the Holy One which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God”* (Luke 1:30-35). So the council of Ephesus was held and 200 bishops attended it and the leader was St. Cyril the Pope of Alexandria. After the discussion they came to the following definite decisions: *“We exalt you O Mother of the True Light . . .”* They ended with this text: *“We preach and evangelize the Holy Trinity. One Godhead . . . we worship Him and glorify Him”*. So the decisions of the Council of Nicene summarized the most important topics studied by the Ecumenical Councils.

- What are the three Ecumenical Councils?
- Why was each of them held?
- What were the names of the people involved in the heresy?
- What were the decisions of each council?

## Conclusion

The Orthodox Church was strong and defended the faith actively in all the councils. The heroes of the church St. Athanasius, St. Cyril and Pope Alexander were the defenders of the faith. We should be proud of the role that our church had in these councils. We should also appreciate that our church gives people found with heresy a fair hearing and a chance to repent before excommunicating them. We also learn that we shouldn't stubbornly rely on our intelligence and understanding about matters of the church like these heretic people. As a member of the Orthodox Tewahdo church, it is important that you properly know your church doctrine in order to give answers to those who ask you. *“[”Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.](1 Peter 3:15)*

### Applications:

- Read the holy creed and try to memorize it by heart. Ask your priest or Sunday school teacher if you have questions about it.

- Study the dates, topics raised, and names of all the ecumenical councils along with the names of the main pain parties involved.
- Read the holy creed and try to relate the statements with the ecumenical councils.

**Exercises:**

1. Write what you know about Athanasius the Apostolic, Arius the heretic, and Cyril the great?
2. What are the ecumenical councils accepted by our church and what was the main reason for holding each one of them?
3. Why is it important for the church to protect its believers from heresy?
4. Write a list of the heretic teaching and try to match them with the statements in the Orthodox Creed that refute these fallacies: Write the items opposite each other?

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## Week 4

# The Orthodox Creed on One God

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### Objectives:

- To explain the Orthodox Creed One God.
- To understand the attributes of God and the work of the Father.

### References:

- The Bible, Colosians 1:16-17, Matthew 3:16-17, Genesis 1:31

### Memory Verse:

*The Lord our God is One. (Deuteronomy 6:4)*

## Introduction

The soldier who marches at the head of an army of fighters carries the flag and raises it to fix it at the highest spot. He may be wounded; he may die and become a martyr. In case this happens, another soldier succeeds in raising the flag and declaring victory. Similarly, our faith came to us through the saints' struggle and the martyrs' blood.

The main part of the Orthodox Creed was set by the Council of Nicene in AD 325. There were 318 Bishops who attended that Council and Pope Alexanderos, together with St. Athanasius the Apostolic (who was a deacon at the time), represented the Coptic Church. The Council was held to discuss the Arian heresy. Arius claimed that Christ was not the Everlasting Son of God, but that He was created as any other man. Pope Alexanderos did his best to bring Arius back to the correct faith but Arius would not be convinced. Emperor Constantine attended the first meeting of the Council. St. Athanasius defended the Godhead of Christ and succeeded in having the

Council's agreement to issue a creed to excommunicate Arius and dismiss him. Then he put the Orthodox Creed till the beginning of- "Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit".

In AD 381, the Second Ecumenical Council, the Council of Constantinople was held because Macedonius denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit, so the Council added the Second part of the Orthodox Creed. So the Orthodox Creed was set by two Councils; the Council of Nicene in AD 325 and the Council of Constantinople in AD 381.

## Lesson Outline

### I. One God:

- a. God is one and has no partner: We do not believe in three gods but we say: In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God. If there were two gods, who would be greater and who came before the other? If they were equal, each one would possess half the kingdom! How can a limited being be a god? God is one Essence. The statement "The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" does not mean that they are three gods but they are three hypostases: One Essence and the Essence of God is Love.
- b. An example:
  - Man is mind, body and soul; still one person not three persons.
  - The sun is disc, ray and heat; still one sun.
- c. Other evidence that God is one: There are countless number of clear verses that prove that God is One. These are some of the Scripture verses:
  - *"The Lord our God is One"* (Deuteronomy 6:4).
  - *"There is none holy like the Lord. There is none besides thee"* (1 Samuel 2:2).
  - *"For who is God but the Lord"* (2 Samuel 22:32).
  - *"I am the First and I am the Last, besides Me there is no god"* (Isaiah 44:6).
  - *"For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (He is God), who formed the earth and made it. I am the Lord, and there is no other"* (Isaiah 45:18).
  - *"There is none good but one, that is God"* (Mathew 19:17).
  - *"Hear O Israel our God is one Lord"* (Mark 12:29).



- *“It is One God”* (Romans 3:30).
  - *“There is none other God but one... But to us there is but One God”* (1 Corinthians 3:20).
  - *“God is One”* (Galatians 3:20).
  - *“Thou believe that there is one God”* (James 2:19).
- d. God reveals Himself: The Lord spoke to Adam and gave him a commandment. Adam heard the Lord’s voice walking in the garden. The Lord spoke to Noah, saved him and rescued his family from certain death. He revealed Himself to Abraham, tested him and blessed him . . . . It is He who gave Moses the Ten Commandments at Mount of Sinai. The mountain was burning with fire and smoke. The Divine voice was heard when Christ was baptized in the Jordan and said, *“This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased”* (Mathew 3:17).

## II. The Attributes of the Father:

- a. His Existence is a must: The Existence of God is a necessary obligation for understanding the universe. *“For in Him we live, and move and have our being”* (Acts 17:28).
- b. He has no end: He is not confined in a certain place, and He has no end. He is boundless. *“Thou art the same and thy years have no end”* (Psalm 102:27).
- c. He is a Simple Spirit. He has no flesh. He in Himself is a Spirit *“God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24).
- d. God does not change: *“Man changes but God does not change.”* The Lord says, *“For I the Lord do not change”* (Malachi 3:6). “[”
- e. God is everlasting and eternal: He has no beginning and has no end. The Lord says, *“I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending”* (Revelations 1:8).
- f. God exists everywhere: He is present everywhere. No place can confine Him. God knows everything *“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do”* (Hebrews 4:13). “[”Jesus looked at them and said, “[”With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.] (Matthew 19:26).
- g. God is Almighty: *“Whatever the Lord pleases He does in heaven and on earth in the seas and all deeps”* (Psalm 135:6).

### III. The Work of the Father:

- a. Fatherhood and choice: Fatherhood is one of the attributes of God the Father. He is the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Father of humanity and that is why we call Him God the Father. He created us and He cares for us. Sparrows are without number but one of them does not fall on earth without the will of God who art in Heaven. He also cares for plants . . . . He clothes them in a way that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. But God cares more for man.
- b. Why does God let his children suffer? God created man on the sixth day after He had provided him with all his needs. He also gave him a perfect, accurate, good-looking and beautiful body. He gave him an eternal soul, mind, intelligence, Sufferings in our life are due to our sensitive advanced nature. Our feeling of pain distinguishes us from inanimate things. Sufferings make us escape to a better life. Some sufferings are the outcome of our behavioral mistakes and others are due to God's purpose, which we do not know (The man who was born blind John 9:1-12). “[”For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, “[”declares the LORD.] ] (Isaiah 55:8).
- c. Choice: Because God is a Father, He chooses His beloved. This choice is according to man's heart's preparedness and response to the Divine Will. He chose us to be His children and this was a special call to us, as we believed in Him. The scripture says:
  - Pre-destination: *“For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that he might be the first born among many brethren”* (Romans 8:29).
  - The Call: *“And those whom He predestined, He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified”* (Romans 8:30).
  - Our choices: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love”* (Ephesians 1:3-4).

### IV. The Almighty God:

- a. The Lord controls the universe: The sun rises in its appointed time. Stars do not sleep. Planets do not collide. There are laws,

which control the universe. These Laws are so accurately set by the Lord that scientists find it difficult to discover their details. *“How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”* (Romans 11:33).

- b. God is our supporter: He opens and no one shuts. He shuts and no one opens. The Lord also protects our life from dangers, lusts and deviations. *“The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your hand. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; He will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore”* (Psalm 121:5-8).

V. He Created the Heaven and the Earth: There is the wonderful nature which we see and enjoy its beauty and when we see a lovely thing we utter the name of God. The existence of a thing indicates that someone has made it and if that thing is perfect, we say that its maker has a great ability and skill. There are also the invisible creatures, which we cannot see such as atoms and electrons, which run through wires, but we feel their effects. There are also the remote stars and the tiny microbes. The greatness and majesty of God are beyond our thoughts. There are also the spiritual invisible creatures such as angels, archangels, cherubim and seraphim who are without number. Then thousand times ten thousand and thousands and thousands praising God but we do not see them. Those creatures (angels) help us. Man is a tiny drop in a big ocean but the Lord cares for him as if that entire big universe had been made for man. Isaiah 40:15

## Conclusion

The holy creed describes our church’s doctrine. It testifies the believe of the church in God the father, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit. As the flags of a country represents its nationals, the holy creed represents our faith. Thus, it is important to study, understand, and reflect on it.

### Applications:

- Encourage your students to reflect these attributes of God every time they pray.
- Encourage your students to memorize the Orthodox creed and quiz them on that.

**Exercises:**

1. During which two ecumenical councils was did holy creed evolved? [Nicene and Constantinople]
2. Speak about the attributes of God?
3. Define the works of God the Father?

## Part X

### Lessons for the Month of June

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## Week 1

# The Orthodox Creed on the Godhead of the Son

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### Objectives:

- To understand the Godhead of Christ and His works.

### References:

- The Bible, John 1:1-18, John 3:16, Matthew 3: 13-17, Genesis 1, Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 64:8, Psalm 139:14

### Memory Verse:

*Of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:33)*

## Introduction

### Lesson Outline

- I. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages: There is a difference between sonship among people and the Sonship of Christ to God. The human father is older than his son and each one of them is separated from the other but Christ is Co-substantial with the Father everlasting and of the Same Essence. He said about himself, "I and the Father are One" (John 10:30). The human language does not contain any words that can indicate the conformity and unity except "the Father and the Son", that is why Christ is the "Son" but there is a big difference: "He is the only Begotten Son of the Father before all ages" (John 3:16). There is another simile that can be used, i.e. the coming forth of the light out of a lamp is generated but not through flesh.

- II. Light Of Light; True God Of True God: He is of the same nature and essence of the Father. God is Love and we knew love through His Son “[”This is how God’s love was revealed among us: God sent His one and only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him] (1 John 4:9). There is no difference in Essence.
- III. Begotten Not Created: As water flows out of a spring and runs through a canal but the water is one, the same is true of the Son begotten of the Father before all ages. This was the basis for the heresy of Arius that led to the council of Nicene. He claimed that ‘Jesus is created, not begotten.’ This is completely wrong and we believe that our lord Jesus Christ is ‘Begotten Not Created.’
- IV. In One Essence With The Father: The Scripture says: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made”* (John 1:1-3). Here we see that God the Son was in existence before creation and is the creator of all creatures that exist (Colossians 1:16-17).
- V. Incarnation: We know that the Son is co-substantial with God. He is everlasting and not made but He took flesh of Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. So Christ has two births, the first is everlasting and of the heavenly Father, and the second is of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary. He has not come of a man through the natural way of birth like us and this proves His Godhead (Luke 1:34-35).
- VI. He Was Crucified For Us Of Whose Kingdom Shall Have No End: Now comes the role of redemption, which we confess that it was fulfilled for our salvation. “[”He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. “[”By His stripes you are healed]] (1 Peter 2:24). We also confess the Second coming for judgment and kingdom. The angel says to the Virgin: *“Of His kingdom there will be no end”* (Luke 1:33).

The following Schedule shows, Christ’s Tasks in brief:

## Conclusion

God the son is the only Begotten son of God. We believe he is begotten, not created. He existed before created and was the word by which the entire creatures were created. We believe he had two births, the first is everlasting

Time	Place	Task
Before all ages	With God	Divine Sonship
The beginning of life (5000 years before Christ)	In heaven	He took part with
starting the new AD era	In the Virgin's womb	He was incarnate
Forty days after Resurrection	From earth to heaven	Going up to the
Unknown	From heaven to earth	The Second Com

and of the heavenly Father, and the second is of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary for our salvation. “[/”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).

### Applications:

- Encourage your students to study and recite the holy creed.
- Encourage your students to appreciate the act of love God showed us when he gave his only son to die on our behalf (John 3:16). Would you give the only thing you have to someone who is your enemy?
- Quote the verses that prove this and you can make a wall chart. Invite a priest or a minister who has a deep knowledge of theology and let the students ask questions about the difficulties they face in understanding the Godhead of Christ. Evidence should be given from Logic, reason, the Gospel and from different references.

### Exercises:

1. When we say in the church that we believe in One God, the Almighty God. Does this mean that He controls our tendencies, emotions and instincts?
2. When we confess that He created heaven and earth, do we offer worship to Him in awe feeling that our life is of Him and to Him?
3. When we confess that Christ is light out of light and True God out of True God, do we ourselves live in light and walk in truth, as we are the children of God who is light of light and truth of truth?
4. When we confess that the Lord Jesus came from heaven and incarnated for our salvation and suffered to redeem us, aren't we ashamed of ourselves when we ignore and neglect such salvation?



WEEK 1. THE ORTHODOX CREED ON THE GODHEAD OF THE SON

5. When we recite the Orthodox Creed, do we have real and practical faith in what we say?
6. The students are to be divided into 3 groups:
  - a. The first group proves the Godhead of Christ in His nativity.
  - b. The Second group proves the Godhead of Christ in His miraculous deeds and teachings.
  - c. The third group proves the Godhead of Christ in His crucifixion and His resurrection.

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## Week 2

# The Orthodox Creed on the Godhead of the Holy Spirit

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### Objectives:

- To understand the Godhead of the Holy Spirit.
- To learn about the unity of church and her tasks.

### References:

- Genesis 1:1-3, Genesis 1:26, Acts 5:1-11, 2 Peter 1:20-21, Acts 2:1-12, John 16:8

### Memory Verse:

*Because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:21)*

## Introduction

### Lesson Outline

- I. Truly we believe in the Holy Spirit: This past was put by the Council of Constantinople, which was held to refute the heresy of Macedonius who denied the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. He said that the Holy Spirit is one of the creatures and hence the church excommunicated him. We believe in the Holy Spirit and call Him “The Giver of Life.” When Ananias and Sapphira lied to St. Peter. St. Peter said, “*Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? You have not lied to men but to God*” (Acts 5:3-4). This verse clearly shows the divinity of the Holy Spirit.

II. The Divine tasks of the Holy Spirit:

- He is called the Spirit of Life or God the Giver of Life. *“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters”* (Genesis 1:2).
- He is the creator; He was not made; *“The Spirit of God has made me”* (Job 33:4). *“By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made and all their host by the breath of His mouth”* (Psalm 33:6).
- Through the Inspiration of the Scripture and prophecy: Who was spoken of by the prophets. *“Because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”* (2 Peter 1:21).
- It is He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and it is He that raises us up from any sin and purges us. *“If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you”* (Romans 8:11).
- He makes of us a new creation - created in the image of Christ. The Lord breathed in the face of His disciples as He breathed a breath of life in the dust. If the image of Adam was corrupted, the Holy Spirit gave us a new nature through baptism so that we may be in the image of God once more.
- Coming forth: As a ray of light comes from the sun, and as water flows out of a spring to pour into a lake, the same is true of the Holy Spirit who comes forth from the Father and dwells in the Son. The Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love that comes forth from the Father to the Son. In the Jordan River the Father said, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” “And behold the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on Christ.” As the water in the well, or in the canal or in a lake is the same water that we drink, the same is true of the Holy Spirit that is consubstantial with the Father and the Son.

III. One Church: All believers had one heart and one Spirit. The unity of the church is what Christ desires. In His final prayer of intercession He said, *“that they may all be one, even as You Father, art in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me”* (John 17:21).

- IV. Universal Church: She gathers all believers of every nation, language and tribe. She gathers all the orders of priesthood of bishops, priests, deacons and also the laity. She gathers men, women and children in one unity, which is the unity of the universal mission.
- V. Apostolic Church: As she is *“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone”* (Ephesians 2:20). The Life of her members is an apostolic life based on abstinence and Evangelic poverty. It is impossible to recognize and confess the priesthood of anyone if the hands of legal heads are not set on him.
- VI. A Holy Church: She is holy because Christ is her head. It is holy because it is his holy body (1 Corinthians 12:27). The spring of holiness is the Holy Spirit working in her. The life history of her members is pure and holy (the story of Ananias and Sapphira proves that the church rejects every corrupted and bad member).
- VII. We Confess One Baptism For The Remission Of Sins: Christ said to Nicodemus, *“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, One cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* (John 3:5) *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 28:19). Baptism is not repeated because it is like the death, burial and resurrection of Christ which happened only once: *“You were buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead”* (Colossians 2:12)
- VIII. We Look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the Age to Come. Amen. We believe that our souls are eternal and will not die. When the body dies, the soul goes up to Paradise or goes down to the Hades. On the Day of Judgment the Lord will come in awe and glory and will reward every one according to his deeds. The evildoers will be sent to Hell where they suffer eternal torment and the righteous are sent to the kingdom of Heavens and the glorified eternal life. Our bodies will be glorified and they will take the image of the body of the raised Son of God, to enter the kingdom as blood and flesh cannot inherit the kingdom. Let us live on the hope of resurrection waiting for the coming of the Lord. Amen.

## Conclusion

It is important to note the divinity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was coexisting with both God the Father and God the Son during creation. The Holy Spirit was at work when Jesus was born the virgin Mary. Also during the baptism of Jesus Christ and during the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The unity of the church is important to God, and thus, we have the responsibility to love each other in unity, just as God loved us unconditionally.

### Applications:

- Make a wall magazine about the attributes of the church (One - Holy - Universal - Apostolic).
- encourage your students to study and memorize the holy creed.
- Having a clear understanding about the divinity of God the Father, God the son, and the Holy Spirit is important to understand the difference among different Churches. For example, Jehovah Witnesses don't believe in the divinity of Christ (God the Son). Thus, knowing and understanding the holy creed allows us to defend the true teachings of our Church.

### Exercises:

1. Why is the holy creed so important?
2. Does believing in the divinity of God the Father, God the son, and God the Holy Spirit mean we believe in three Gods? (No. We believe in Trinity, but one God. That's why we say, 'In the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit one God amen' when we pray.)
3. How can we keep the unity of our Church? (Knowing it's right teachings such as the Holy Creed and living in Love).

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## Week 3

# The Council of Chalcedon

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### Objectives:

- To be acquainted with the reasons behind the Schism of the church.

### References:

- Church Ecumenical councils [http://www.suscopts.org/servantsprep/pdf/HIS/HIS102\\_councils.pdf](http://www.suscopts.org/servantsprep/pdf/HIS/HIS102_councils.pdf).

### Memory Verse:

*You may charge some that they teach no other doctrine. (1Tim 1:3)*

## Introduction

Eutyches was an archimandrite of a monastery at Constantinople. He defended the Orthodox faith against the heresy of Nestorus but his great zeal for the sound faith led him to a new heresy. He believed that Christ's body was not like ours but it was an ethereal body. Many people followed him in his belief, so a small council was held in the city of Constantinople under the leadership of its Bishop, Flabianus and the council decided to excommunicate Eutyches because he said that the Manhood of Christ was totally lost in his Divine Nature as a drop of vinegar is lost in the waters of an ocean. The heresy of Eutyches caused a great split in the church so King Theodosius decided to hold a new council in the city of Ephesus. He invited all the churches to attend that council and he also invited Pope Dioscorus to exercise supreme authority over it as president. Twenty Egyptian bishops attended with Pope Dioscorus.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Second Council of Ephesus (449 AD): The Bishops of Alexandria, Jerusalem and Antioch and all the churches came to Ephesus but the Pope of Rome sent two delegates with a message “Leon’s Tome”. Pope Dioscorus presided the council according to the king’s desire. The Pope began the meeting by reading the king’s decree of holding the council then he asked someone to read the message sent by the Pope of Rome but one of the bishops suggested that Eutyches should stand before the council so that his beliefs might be examined and all agreed. So Pope Dioscorus summoned Eutyches to appear before the council.
- II. Eutyches Declares Orthodox Statement: Eutyches appeared before the council and said that he repented his wrong belief and that he confessed the belief of the church so the council declared him innocent and rehabilitated him.
- III. The Roman Pope Protests: There was no chance for them to read the message sent by the Roman Pope to the council and that was a new heresy about the Lord Christ, so the Pope’s delegates went back to Rome and told the Pope that his message was not read and the Pope was annoyed. The Roman Pope asked the king to hold another council in Rome to re-examine Eutyches’ beliefs but King Theodosius did not agree to hold that council saying that the Second Council of Ephesus declared the true faith and there was no need for holding another council.
- IV. The goal is achieved King Theodosius died and his sister Pulcheria and her husband Marcian reigned Rome. Pulcheria hated Dioscorus because he used to reproach her because of her sins as she was a nun but she married. Pope Leo seized the chance and asked the queen to hold another council. At last there was an agreement to hold a council in Chalcedon.
- V. The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD): It is clear that the council of Chalcedon was not held to discuss a dogmatic creed but it was held for personal reasons. The queen desired to take revenge of Pope Dioscorus because he used to reproach her for her sins and Pope Leon wanted to declare himself as the head of all the churches of the world including the church of Alexandria as he saw that the Popes of Alexandria preside the Ecumenical Councils and some of the excommunicated

bishops wanted to be rehabilitated. In this way all the parties were against Pope Dioscorus and they tried to prove that he did not follow the Orthodox faith and that he followed the heresy of Eutyches. Because that was out of their power, they asked for the meeting to be postponed for five days. Then they held a meeting and ordered the soldiers to keep him within the confines of his house and prevent him from going out so that he might not attend the council. Then they excommunicated Pope Dioscorus and deposed him.

VI. Schism inside the Church: The council of Chalcedon had a very bad effect on the church in the whole world. The church split into two: The Eastern churches included the church of Alexandria and the church of Antioch and the western churches included the church of Rome and the church of Constantinople. It was love that gathered and united the hearts of the fathers in the first three councils of Nicene, Constantinople and Ephesus so those councils succeeded and the church became more powerful through them but when the spirit of jealousy and dispute appeared in the council of Chalcedon, the church divided into groups.

## Conclusion

Our church, which is one of the non-Chalcedonian churches, believes in “Miaphysis” which means the unity of the two natures of Christ (the Divine and the Human Natures) into one nature of the incarnate God. The two natures never separated and never changed each other.

### Applications:

- *“For where envy and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work”* (James 3:16). Show how this verse came true in the Council of Chalcedon.
- *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me”* (John 17:20-21). We see here how important unity of the church (gathering of Christians) was to our lord Jesus Christ. How do you think this verse relate to the split of the Church in the council of Chalcedon?



WEEK 3. THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON

- Raise many prayers so that the church may be reunited and all become one according to the desire of the Lord Jesus and the heavenly Fathers that we may be one in Him as He and the Father are one.

**Exercises:**

1. Write a list (a diagram) showing: The councils you know and their dates, the names of the famous fathers of each council, and the heresies they discussed.
2. Why was St. Dioscorus condemned in the Council of Chalcedon?
3. Do you think the split of the church after the council of Chalcedon weakened or strengthened the church?
4. Why is the council of Chalcedon not accepted by our church? Do you think the motives of the council were religious or political?
5. Our Church is called Orthodox tewahdo, what is the basis for that and what significance does it have? [Refer to the concept of "Miaphysis"].

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## Week 4

# Friendship

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### Objectives:

- Proper behavior in society: Distinguishes between your friends and when you choose the good one.
- Don't involve yourself in relationships that may lead to destruction.

### References:

- Friendship of Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:1-22).
- Friendship of David and Nathan (1 Samuel 18).
- 1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 12:26, 13:20, 17:17, 18:24, 22:24-25, 27:17; Job 2:11; Luke 6:31; John 15:12-15; Judges 16.

### Memory Verse:

*He who loves purity of heart and has grace on his lips, the king will be his friend. (Proverbs 22:11)*

## Introduction

Cisceron said "Tell me about your friends, I tell you about personality." Man is unconsciously affected by his friends.

## Lesson Outline

- I. Who is my friend? The concept of "friendship" varies according to the type of people and their aims. To the people of the world, "Friendship" means that I choose a friend who has approximately the same attitudes I have, is of nearly the same age, social rank, and behaves similarly.

But to the Spiritual man: My friend is the person whose aim is salvation and for this end the two friends encourage and support each other. Although David and Jonathan were different in education and social rank, they accompanied each other on the way of salvation.

## II. Two types of friendship:

- a. The good friend: Joshua son of Sirach says, “The good friend is more precious than any other living thing in the world and his goodness is matchless”. He is a treasure and a supporter in times of psychological, social and financial crises. He is a model and a mirror for his friend. A friend usually encourages his friend to develop spiritually and academically.
- b. The bad friend: Paul the apostle says, “*Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits*” (1 Corinthians 15:33). The bad friend may cause his friend to indulge in bad habits such as smoking, drinking, going to places of immoral entertainment, gambling and sometime committing crimes as St. Augustine’s friends once did.

## III. How to choose your friends

- You have to like them and be on good terms with them taking David and Jonathan as example “The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul”.
- Their behavior should be characterized by the spirit of holiness in talks, meetings, and short excursions and in play.
- They should be characterized by Christian attributes such as honesty “*The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice*” (Psalm 37:30) “*For my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips*” (Proverbs 8:7).
- They should be characterized by self-control (eye - tongue - thought).
- They should be of sound judgment and good reputation. They should not be gesturing or reckless.
- They should sincerely love God and people. David lamented for Jonathan saying, “*Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women*” (2 Samuel 1:26).
- They should be assiduous in their work and studies.
- They should have the same attributes.

- There should be conformity between you in age, in academics, and in social and spiritual level.

IV. The Ideal Friend: Lord Jesus is the best friend “The Lord is at hand”, “The Lord is near”, “We love him because He first loved us”, “Let’s follow His example”.

V. How to Preserve Friendship

- Friendship should be free from opportunism and selfishness so that it may be long lasting. It should be based on sacrifice and self-sacrifice.
- There should be mutual respect, serious and frank talk without reproach or violence with gentle treatment aiming at all spiritual benefits.
- Friendship should be created upon Christ and it should aim at salvation and spiritual growth.
- Forgive your friends when they sin against you, “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?”
- Defend your friends in their absence and reveal them. Don’t give ear to slander. Contemplate how St. Peter spoke about St. Paul (2 Peter 3:5).
- Give earnest advice to your friends and guide them to what is right. Contemplate the talk between Christ and the workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20).
- Do not impose your ideas on them and criticize them, only constructively.
- Refrain from harmful jesting.
- Sympathize with them in all circumstances “*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*” (Romans 12:15).

## Conclusion

Our friends have a tremendous influence in our life. Thus, we should choose our friends wisely. “[”Do not be deceived: “Bad company corrupts good character.”](1 Corinthians 15:33). Friendship should also be based on love and trust just like the friendship of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1-5). Moreover, if we truly love our friends, we shouldn’t sit idly when they are making bad choices.( James 5:9-20).

**Applications:** • Take part in the spiritual fellowship through prayers, receiving Holy Communion, spiritual reading, and attending bible studies.

- Find group of people who share the same Christian values and interests as you and make them your friends.
- Reflect on where and with whom you are spending majority of your time.

**Exercises:**

1. Can you think of other examples of good/bad friendships from the bible? What do you learn from them?
2. How do you know whether or not you are involved in a bad friendship? How can we get out of bad friendship?
3. Why is important for us to find good friends?
4. Does it mean we need to completely cut off other people whom we don't share the same faith with? How should we handle our relationship with such people? (Ans: Remember, we have a responsibility to lead others to know God with our life and speech. *"consider this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover over a multitude of sins"*(James 5:20)).

## Part XI

### Lessons for the Month of July

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## Week 1

# The Calling of St. Paul

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### Objectives:

- To learn the pleasant encounter of the Lord in our life and the possibility of change.

### References:

- Acts 9:1-31, 22:1-21

### Memory Verse:

*You did not choose Me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit. (John 15:16)*

## Introduction

St Paul was converted from a persecutor of the church to a preacher and a great teacher in the Church. All of this through a meeting with the Lord who was able to change him completely.

## Lesson Outline

- I. Saul the Persecutor of the Church (Acts 9:1-31): A Pharisee young man appeared in Jerusalem. His name was Saul and he was a disciple of Gamaliel the teacher of the Law. He was a great fanatic to Judaism. He heard the Story of Jesus of Nazareth and the appearance of Christianity from the Jews. He was greatly annoyed and began to persecute the believers severely as he believed that in doing so he served God and his religion. He used to destroy and loot the Christian churches. When the Jews planned to stone St. Stephen the pious deacon, Saul attended the process of stoning and heard him when he said: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit". He also saw his angelic face when he

knelt down and cried out in a loud voice “Lord, do not remember this sin against them” and Saul approved of his murder (Acts 7:4-60). The Book of the Acts of the Apostles says that this fierce lion used to break into the churches and houses and draw men and women and take them to prison. The church endured Saul’s persecutions patiently and the Book of Acts says that those who were scattered because of persecution went about preaching the Word of God. In every house where a murder took place because of this fanatic man’s persecutions, many prayers were raised for him. Nobody thought of hurting him because the Lord says to the believers; “Look, I am sending you forth as lambs among wolves”. The lamb is devoured by the wolf but a lamb cannot devour, otherwise it will turn into a wolf. God never fails the prayers of His children. This moaning and those cries which rose continually from the catacombs “O Lord, remember Saul” got a wonderful response from the Lord of the church.

- II. A Meeting and a Change: Saul caused Jerusalem’s flock to scatter. His fanaticism led him to take letters from the chief priest to Damascus and to the synagogue of Damascus so that if he should find any of these followers of Christ, he would be able to arrest them, both men and women and bring them back to Jerusalem. He was armed with all the weapons of power, he had the power of the High Priest and strong men and soldiers, he had his zeal and fanaticism which were beyond description, all this was against a humble meek flock that cannot resist because their Lord prevented them from carrying a sword and demanded that they should learn lowliness from Him and leave vengeance to the Lord as He already told them “Vengeance is Mine”. On his way to Damascus, jealousy and fanaticism filled his heart. As Saul was coming near the city of Damascus, suddenly a light from the sky flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you Lord,” he asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (The goads is a piece of iron used for pricking a beast to urge it to run). Saul was frightened and confused. He said, “What shall I do, Lord?” The Lord said to him: “Rise, go your way into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything it is appointed for you to do”. The men who were traveling with Saul had stopped, not saying a word; they heard the voice but could not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground and opened his eyes, but could not see a thing. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. For three days he was not able to see and during



that time he did not eat or drink anything.

My Lord and my God, your power is filled with love ... the wolf which devours Your flock you call it by its name and show him your love.

My Lord and my God, Your power is filled with might ... the lion before whom no one could stand collapsed before your glory and fell to the ground humiliated and asking You humbly "O Lord, What do you want me to do?"

My Lord and my God ... Your power is filled with glory the fiery sharp eyes that devoured the meek lambs, when they met you, they could see nothing ... their fanaticism was no more ... You brought them back through meekness to enlightenment to see the Divine light.

My Lord and my God, How great you are and how majestic. Saul the fierce man becomes Paul, the apostle of struggle and the chosen vessel and the great pillar of the church.

My Lord and my God ... turn me as you turned him, meet me and call me as you called him, O Lord.

III. In the House of Ananias: There was in Damascus a certain disciple named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision; "Ananias". He said, "Here I am, Lord". The Lord said to him; "Rise, go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look up a man called Saul, from Tarsus. For, look, he is praying, and in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands upon him that he might recover sight". But Ananias answered; "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how many injurious things he did to your holy ones in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to put in bonds all those caning upon your name". The Lord said to him: "Be on your way, because this man is a chosen vessel to me to bear My name in the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel. For I shall show him plainly how many things he must suffer for My name". So, Ananias went off and entered into the house, and he laid his hands upon him and said, "Saul, brother, the Lord Jesus that appeared to you on the road over which you were coming, has sent me forth in order that you may recover sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit".

IV. The Persecutor becomes a Preacher: And immediately there fell from his eyes what looked like scales, and he recovered sight and he rose and

was baptized and he took nourishment and gained strength. He got to be for some days with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately in the synagogues he began to preach Jesus, that this One is the Son of God. But all those hearing him gave way to astonishment and would say: "Is this not the man that ravaged those in Jerusalem who call upon this name, and that had come here for that very purpose, that he might lead them bound to the chief priests?" But Saul became Paul and he kept on acquiring strength and was confounding the Jews that dwelt in Damascus as he proved logically that this is the Christ.

- V. The Persecutions that the Apostle of the Nations Suffered: As the Lord Jesus Christ suffered in bearing witness to the Heavenly Father, each member bearing witness to the Lord Jesus has to suffer also. Every witness should be persecuted . . . persecuted by the world, the devil, and men and by the corrupt ancient man that lies in his nature. Thus the life of every faithful witness is composed of persecution forming a sad symphony outside him but inside him it is pleasant and enjoyable as St. Paul said: *"For though tribulation is momentary and light, it works out for us a glory which is of more and more surpassing weight and is everlasting"* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

VI. Sources of Paul's Troubles:

- The Jews: They were shocked when they saw Saul change into Paul the preaching apostle so they resisted him severely in every synagogue and in every city. They flogged him five times, struck him many times and they stoned him once and at this time he was about to die.
- The false brothers: Those are the Jews who became Christians but kept the Spirit of Judaism in their heart and tried to introduce Jewish beliefs in the Christian faith to dye it with the Jewish life. Those, Paul called "the false brothers". They used to go to every church he established and arouse tribulations and spread rumors so Paul suffered a lot because of their behavior.
- The Pagan Priests: Those caused the people to rebel against Paul because they felt that Paul's preaching caused the loss of their resources and income. This happened in the city of Ephesus as an example. Besides, he faced many other troubles in his travels especially the thorn in the flesh and in this he entreated the Lord that it might depart from him but the Lord said to him, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

## VII. Paul the Apostle Explained Some of the Troubles He Faced:

- a. Lots of Tribulations (2 Corinthians 11:23-33): He was obliged to refer to them to confirm his evangelism before the stubborn who resisted him and who wanted to corrupt the service in the church of the Ephesians. With far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings; I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been shipwrecked, a night and a day I have been adrift at sea. On frequent journeys; In labor and toil, in sleepless nights often; In dangers from highwaymen, in dangers from my own race, in dangers from the nations; In hunger and thirst . . . in abstinence from food many times . . . in cold and nakedness; The anxiety for all the congregations;
- b. Always faithful to the Lord: Concerning the message appointed to him and for the souls he loved, listen to him when he says: *“Who is stumbled and I am not incensed?”* (2 Corinthians 11:29). *“When being reviled we bless, when being persecuted we bear up, when being defamed, we entreat”* (1 Corinthians 4:12,13). *“Nevertheless, I do not make my soul of any account as dear to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry which I received of the Lord Jesus, to bear thorough witness to the good news of the undeserved kindness of God”* (Acts 20:24). *“Who will separate us from the Love of the Christ. Will tribulation or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or sword?”* (Romans 8:35).
- c. Why does God permit such persecutions to afflict his servants? In answer to this question St. Theodorus says: To protect us from falling in negligence and laziness and to make us always on our alert, on our guard and with open eyes. To look all the time to God pleading His mercy and help. So that we may not be proud but think humbly of ourselves. So that we may show that we are sticking to the glory of God, His love and faith till the end. So that continuous distress may give us the power to attain greater crowns. So that God may be glorified and the devil may be ashamed through our endless patience. So that we may show our faithfulness to God in spite of all tribulations.

## Conclusion

How can I be one of the Lord Jesus' disciples? Christ who directed His call to Saul is still directing it to each one of us. And the Lord who met him is

on the way ready to meet with us on the way of our life and call us all to be His disciples . . . He expects us to respond to Him and answer His call.

**Applications:**

- Meditate on the following two verses:
  - a. *“This man is a chosen vessel to me to bear My name to the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel. For I shall show him plainly how many things he must suffer for My name”* (Acts 9:15-16).
  - b. *“Lord, what will You have me to do?”* (Acts 9:6).
- Spend time in prayer and reading the Bible to be able to meet with the Lord and talk to Him.

**Exercises:**

1. Read Philippians 3:4-6 and describe how devoted Jew was Paul before his conversion to Christianity?
2. What were the sources of troubles of Paul?
3. What are the sources of troubles of Christians in our time?
4. List five troubles Paul faces as Christian.
5. List three reasons why God permit persecution to afflict His servants?

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## Week 2

# Success in the Christian Concept

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### Objectives:

- To learn that spiritual success should be our main goal in life.
- To understand that any worldly success is granted from God.

### References:

- The story of Joseph in Genesis 39: 1-6, 19-23, 41:37-43

### Memory Verse:

*The Lord was with Joseph and he was a successful man. (Genesis 39:2)*

## Introduction

The youth period is the peak of human ambition and dreams of a prosperous future. The youth would usually have dreams of being very successful in different forms and aspects of life. Some of them may desire to be very rich, others may want to be very famous or they may have very high academic ambitions of being always the top of the class and having a PhD in the shortest time possible . . . etc. The servant may start the lesson by giving every student a chance to express what would he/she like to do for his/her career.

## Lesson Outline

- I. Spiritual Versus Earthly Success: The story of Joseph is a great example in the Bible that demonstrates the spiritually successful man whom whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper. Joseph was at the

top of his spiritual success when he resisted the temptation of his master's wife. However, his reward at that time was to be put in prison. If you think about it, a prisoner would probably not fit the earthly understanding of success. However, that was a great success for Joseph in the eyes of the Lord. Joseph was actually being tested in different hardships and tribulations:

- His brothers were envious of him so they threw him in a well.
- He was taken to a foreign land where he was sold as a slave.
- He was tempted by his master's wife.
- He was thrown into prison.
- The chief butler forgot him after interpreting his dream of restoring his position again in pharaoh's palace (Genesis 40:21-22).
- In all these hardships, Joseph held strong to his faith and his purity although he was young and alone in a foreign land.

II. The Reward Of Spiritual Success: Joseph did not ask the Lord for earthly success or seek any high ranks or position in Pharaoh's palace. All what he probably looked for is to be safe in Egypt until he can return back to his father's house. Yet, because he clinged to the Lord during the harsh testing of his spiritual strength, God blessed him with many blessing that he became the second man in Egypt after Pharaoh (Genesis 41:39-43) and he ruled over all the Egyptians. This support what our Lord Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount "*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33). Job is another good example of a spiritually successful man through the severe testing by Satan and he was finally rewarded a multiple times on earth. Does this mean that every earthly success is the reward of spiritual success and every spiritual success results in earthly success? The answer is NO. There are many successful men whom do not even know God or believe in Him. Their success is pure earthly success, which may or may not lead them to eternal life. On the other hand, there are many spiritually successful characters who lead a miserable life e.g. the parable of the rich and Lazarus; Lazarus suffered on earth yet he was in the Bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in heaven while the rich man was tortured in hell. Other examples are Anba Rewiss and Anba Paul ... etc.

III. The Secret Of Joseph's Success: Since Joseph was such a successful man and probably all of us would like to be like him, then we must

ask what was the secret of Joseph's success? The secret is that God was with him. This is actually repeated multiple times in the story of Joseph (Genesis 39:2,3,21,23 and 41:16,38) to emphasize and confirm the fact that the sole reason for Joseph's success was the presence of God with Joseph and the spirit of God in Joseph. Joseph also in return always felt the presence of God with him; therefore he refused to sin with his master's wife.

- IV. Easier said: So we must obey God and seek to do His will in order to succeed. But there is a common saying that rings true in this case. The saying is, "It is easier said than done." We know we should be looking to our Creator for guidance; we should look to Him for standards to live by. He created us and His inspired words are our "user manual" that we must live by. We know this, but we sometimes find it difficult to live by. The apostle Paul experienced this same frustration in his life. He had a strong desire to obey only God. However, he shared with us in the book of Romans that he, too, sometimes did things according to our society's standards—according to Satan's standards. When Paul slipped up, he, too, felt like a failure. We can find his lament recorded in the Bible for our benefit. Paul said, "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice" (Romans 7:19). He continued by describing how he felt like a failure. He said, "*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" (Romans 7:24). We all can relate to Paul's feelings of failure. For we, too, walk down this path from time to time. But Paul did not throw up his hands in defeat. He purposely asked the question, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" so that he could accurately answer it for us. "*I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*" (Romans 7:25). Paul recognized the absolute necessity to look to God our Father and Jesus Christ for direction in our life - based upon God's truth. Satan has done such a thorough job of deceiving all of mankind (Revelation 12:9) that many have lost sight of God's truth.

## Conclusion

The Christian youth should seek first spiritual success with no compromise for the sake of earthly success or worldly achievement. They should place their career and life in the hand of the Lord who will grant them success according to His will.

**Applications:**     • Start with a prayer or Bible reading before studying everyday.

- Meditate on what God tells you (not what our society tells you).
- Turn away from the traditions of men. Turn instead to the holy commandments of God.
- Develop the habit of giving the tithes at an early age even from part-time.

**Exercises:**

1. Mention two people from bible who had lead a successful life.
2. What do you think you should do to have a successful life like Joseph?
3. Do you think you are a successful person?



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## Week 3

# Christian Understanding of Success

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### Objectives:

- To understand the meaning of success in Christianity.

### References:

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### Memory Verse:

*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prosper. (3 John 1:2)*

## Introduction

Success is a wish that every normal person seeks in fulfilling a certain target.

- Some find success in obtaining high grades that will enable them to enroll in a certain university or college.
- Some find success in getting a highly paid job.
- Some find success in marrying someone who is attractive and wealthy.
- Some find success in becoming famous and rich and obtaining the praise of people.
- Some find success is in having internal happiness and peace.

If you ask many people of their idea of success, you will get different answers according to the personal feelings and views of the individual. What is your understanding of success? It would be beneficial if you write it down specifically.

## Lesson Outline

I. What is the understanding of success for the worldly people? For the worldly people, success is limited and does not involve the depth that would ensure the internal peace. Moreover, you will find that those who are successful according to the worldly standards are in ruins internally.

- We heard in the news that a famous American actress is being blackmailed regarding her son's life because of her expensive jewels. She is always frightened and in constant misery because of these jewels. Did fame and possessions guarantee her success?
- We heard in the news about a famous rich man who chose to commit suicide rather than live unhappily. Is this success?
- If we went back with our memories across history, we find Ahab the vicious king unhappy and "unable to sleep", "*So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him*" 1 Kings 21:4.

How could it be that there is no happiness or internal peace with wealth, possessions and high grades. Is this success? Definitely not. The obvious reason is that if the person is made only of body then his success would be linked to these materialistic aspects. But being created from both body and spirit according to God's image, these materials cannot guarantee his success. St. Augustine says "Lord, You created us in your liking, so we have no peace except with you." The Psalmist says, "No peace for the villains" and he says, "The villain escapes and there is no one chasing him." Therefore, success of the worldly people is phony and limited and does not ensure this person's place, happiness and eternal life. It seems successful from the exterior but in fact it is loss and failure.

II. What is the understanding of success for the Children of God? St. John the Evangelist says, "*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers*" (3 John 1:2). Accordingly, success for the children of God is not limited to one aspect but it is an ultimate success, "prosperity and health."

The ultimate success in the lives of the children of God includes the following:

- a. Success in the spiritual life: This ensures the internal peace. It appears in the love of others and the pure heart that loves God and hates sin.
- b. Success in studies and work: The Christian student is successful in his or her studies and the person who works succeeds in his or her job and is honest and admired by his colleagues.
- c. Success in physical health: Apart from the maladies that God permits in order to test our faith and spiritual growth, the successful Christian is also physically healthy. He eats wisely, keeps his body fit and gets rid of the bad habits that cause harm like smoking and drinking.
- d. Success in psychological health: The successful Christian is flexible in dealing with others, not stubborn but calm. Therefore, who is the successful Christian? One who is balanced with correct personality, spiritually, physically, emotionally and practically successful. Is this possible? Yes. *“Therefore you shall be perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect”* (Matthew 5:48). The perfection mentioned here is comparative because the absolute perfection is in God only. *“The things which are impossible with men are possible with God”* (Luke 18:27).

III. Is there an example for this personality? If we searched through history we find many people who followed the way of God and were successful. A good example is Joseph who was a successful servant in the house of Potiphar. You can read his story in detail in the book of Genesis chapters 37 and 39 to 45. The deepest sentence said about Joseph was *“The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man”* (Genesis 39:2). Also, *“His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord made all he did to prosper in his hand”* (Genesis 39:3).

If the secret behind Joseph’s success is that the Lord was with him, then this is the secret for the success of any person.

IV. What does God give the person who follows Him to enable him of such success?

- a. He gives him the faith in Him which will take away all fear. *“Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid”* (Mark 6:50). The Lord was with Joseph so he did not fear the well nor his brothers’ hatred nor the job as a slave nor the power of his mistress. He was not afraid to fall in sin, nor face the criminals in prison, nor failure when he

was responsible for the state. When a person has the faith in the presence of God with him, this is a valuable treasure. *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31). The faith in God is the confidence that God is with me personally *“They shall call His name Emmanuel which is translated, God with us”* (Matthew 1:23).

- b. He gives us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, *“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”* (1 Corinthians 3:16). When the Holy Spirit dwells in us, He works by giving us the beautiful fruits of making my soul heavenly. *“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and selfcontrol”* (Galatians 6:22-23). These fruits have worked in Joseph’s heart so he was loving towards his enemies, his brothers, his fellow servants and his fellow prisoners. Joseph loved everybody and was a successful person. He was honest and diligent in his work without waiting for a reward. He loved purity and in the midst of the temptation he said *“How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”* (Genesis 39:9). *“Flee also youthful lusts”* (2 Timothy 2:22). Purity and chastity are a success and a triumph. No matter how successful a person is in all his deeds in front of others, if he is conquered by his desires he will feel beaten and unsuccessful. *“He who rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city”* (Proverbs 16:32). Joseph was successful in his purity.
- c. He gives us the blessing of son-ship by sending His only Son to the world. He blessed our nature in the Incarnation of His Son through the Virgin Mary and through the Holy Spirit. He was like us in everything except sin. This is the blessing of the New Testament which was fulfilled by the coming of the Son, the Logos. *“In this the love of God was manifested towards us, that God has sent His only begotten son into the world that we might live through Him”* (1 John 4:9). *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God”* (1 John 3:1).

## Conclusion

I discovered God’s love for me and this became a great power in my life, in fact, it is the source of my success because if God *“He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”* (Romans 8:32).

### WEEK 3. CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF SUCCESS

In this lesson we learned that:

- A true Christian is a successful individual in all aspects of life. Not only jobs or money or materialistic things, but a true Christian is successful here on earth as well as in having a place in heaven.
- Success comes from faith in the Salvation that was offered by the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### **Applications:**

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#### **Exercises:**

- 1.

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## Week 4

# Christian Means of Achieving Success

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### Objectives:

- To learn how to achieve success in Christian way.

### References:

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### Memory Verse:

*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)*

## Introduction

The blessing of Our Lord Jesus Christ in my life appears through 3 actions:

1. His redemption on the Cross: *“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God”* (1 Peter 3:18). *“The Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world”* (1 John 4:14).
2. His Salvation: He gave us true peace *“therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1). *“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10). He ensured my salvation, *“nor is there salvation in any other”* (Acts 4:12). *“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7).
3. He granted me to stand before God the Father not guilty, through His sacrificial intercession: *“If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation*

*for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world*" (1 John 2:1).

For example, after Saul's meeting with Our Lord Jesus Christ and believing in Him, he changed from an unsuccessful person, filled with envy, co-operating with the murder of Steven, to a successful person leading a fulfilled life and his heart was full of peace even inside jail where St. Paul rejoiced at the salvation of Christ. "*Who will separate us from the love of Christ?*" (Romans 8:35). And he said, "*As having nothing, and yet possessing all things*" (2 Corinthians 6:10). What do you think when you see someone like St. Paul saying that we possess all things; isn't this complete sufficiency and true success? God was with St. Paul in prison, that was enough to make him succeed.

## Lesson Outline

How can I be a successful Christian?

- I. The necessity to abide in Christ to ensure the true success "*He who abides in Me, and I in him bears much fruits*" (John 15:1). There are 4 means to ensure my unity with Christ the Saviour:
  - a. The Sacraments of the Church:
    - Baptism = Regeneration
    - Unction with the Holy Chrism = Acceptance of the fruits of the Holy Spirit
    - Repentance and Confession = Renewal
    - Holy Communion = Unity with Christ
  - b. Prayer: "*Men always ought to pray and not lose heart*" (Luke 18:1). There are different types of prayers and a Christian needs them all:
    - Prayer with the Agpeya
    - Arrow Prayers, which are short and comes directly from the heart reaching the heavens
    - Prayer in Church
    - Family Prayers
    - Personal free prayers
  - c. The Bible: Read the Bible daily to come closer to Jesus Christ and to learn how to deal in life through its teachings. "*Your words are a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*" (Psalms 119:105).

Your readings in the Bible should be slow, respectful and attentive. *“This Book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous and then you will have good success”* (Joshua 1:8).

d. Serving:

- Serving in the family.
- Serving in school by being a good example to others *“That they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16).
- Serving in Church and in social activities.

II. The need for work and spiritual perseverance. *“You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin”* (Hebrew 12:4).

- a. Serious positive work and studying diligently: God made work sacred by working Himself and He is always working. When He sent His only son to the world, He was going around doing good and he said, *“My Father has been working until now, and I have been working”* (John 5:17). And He said too, *“I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day”* (John 9:4). The Lord called His Disciples to follow Him from the midst of their jobs, like Peter and John when they left the fishing boats and followed Him.
- b. Resist the devil: *“Resist the devil and he will flee from you”* (James 4:7). We have to resist the devil and not surrender. *“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Peter 5:8). We are able, with the power of God, to conquer the devil, because then God would not have asked us to resist him nor would He allow him to fight us.
- c. Control the five senses: Sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. These five senses are entrances to the soul and the human sensation. If we put them under control, with the help of God, then the temptation of the world would not reach the soul. *“Each one of us is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death”* (James 1:14-15).
- d. Never lose hope: *“Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (Galatians 6:9).
- e. Fix your goals and press towards them forcefully: Make your goals clear and press towards them with force. Like the prodigal son



who fixed his goal clearly by returning to his father. He said, *“I will arise and go to my father”* (Luke 15:18). A young man has to choose his friends carefully because he could lose drive towards his goal if his friends do not have it.

- f. Meet failure with a spirit of courage: *“Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works”* (Revelation 2:5).
- g. Have a positive outlook to life: *“I do not count myself to have apprehended but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press towards the goal”* (Philippians 3:13-14).

## Conclusion

Finally, dear brother, I submit to you what was written by my beloved late Father Bishoy Kamel in this respect:

- Success is not in ranks but in the presence of God with you.
- Your faith that God is with you grants you peace and takes away fear.
- Your love to others is the measure of your success.
- Your honesty in your studies and work is a sacred order for your success.
- Your social relationships should be according to the Biblical teachings.
- Purity in your youth is the certificate of your success.
- Service is in the nature of the successful person and is the cause of that success.
- The church pleads for you with St. John, *“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers”* (John 3:2).

**Applications:** If you want to achieve all success here on earth as well as eternal life, make a promise to yourself now to the “3 S program”:

- Have a Spiritual Father. Regularly listen to and obey his directions.
- Follow a Spiritual Program. Regularly keep it and give it priority.

- Be in a Spiritual Surrounding. Spiritual friends, attend church regularly, visit monasteries and holy places.

**Exercises:**

1. What do you think about yourself from this lesson, are you good example in your house, school and church?
2. What do you think when you see someone like St. Paul saying that we possess all things; isn't this complete sufficiency and true success? Do we have today in the church like him in this generation?
3. What do you think we need should to work and spiritual perseverance in our daily life?
4. What is it use having a Spiritual Father, Spiritual Program and a Spiritual Surrounding in our daily life?

## Part XII

# Lessons for the Month of August

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## Week 1

# The Transfiguration

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### Objectives:

- To learn about the events and the nature of the transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- To know what kinds of bodies we will have when we depart from this world.

### References:

- Mark 9: 2-8, Luke 9: 30-32, John 11:25-26, Luke 20:35-36, Romans 6:8, John 5:24-25

### Memory Verse:

*“[” In the resurrection....they will be like the angels in heaven] (Matthew 22:30)*

## Introduction

The Transfiguration, which is one of the Lord's feasts, and the Church celebrates it on the 13th of the Coptic month Nehase, which is the 19th of August. The story of the Transfiguration is mentioned in the Holy Gospels of Mark and Luke (Mark 9: 2-8, Luke 9: 30-32).

As for His divinity, it is evident that in a moment He was transfigured to this illuminating bright-full aspect, whose brightness was magnificent ...and about which it was said: *“His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them”* (Mark 6:2). The Lord willed to show to His disciples that He had put on this human body, simply out of His humility, and His self-abnegation.

## Lesson Outline

- I. Graduation in the Transfiguration: Transfiguration is defined as a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful or spiritual state. The Lord Christ took steps in the revelation of His nature, even toward His saintly apostles. This Transfiguration on the mount of Tabor was the simplest image of His Transfiguration, in spite of its magnificence and its glory, in its light and in the testimony of the Father from the cloud. Another kind of the Lord's transfiguration was in His resurrection and His ascension. That glorious Resurrection in which He rose with a glorious body and was able to come out of the tomb while it was closed, and was able to enter to the apostles while the doors were closed (John 20:19), in a calm way that would not terrify them. His ascension to heaven with a body that is over the level of the earth's gravitation is like His transfiguration, "*He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight ... while they looked steadfastly toward heaven*" (Acts 1: 9-10). Our teacher the apostle saint Mark says about that: "*So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God*" (Mark 16:19). This transfiguration in the resurrection and the ascension, happened in a manner, which amazed them and made them feel His divinity, but it did not terrify them. The last transfiguration will be in His second coming when "*the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints*" (Jude 14), "*when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's and of the holy angels*" (Luke 9:26), He "*will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works*" (Matthew 16:27), "*When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats*" (Matthew 25: 31-32).
- II. With Moses and Elijah: Moses and Elijah in their transfiguration symbolized the whole human nature. In the same way the Lord gave us His Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, as a symbol of the transfiguration which the Lord will grant to all human beings in eternity.
  - a. Elijah represents the virgins (of either sex), and Moses represents the married. Rather Moses married more than once. He married Zipporah the daughter of the priest of Midian (Exodus 2: 19-22). He also married an Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12:1), who was a symbol of the acceptance of the Gentiles. All this is a symbol,

because the transfiguration will equally be the destiny of the virgins and the married.

- b. Moses represented those who were dead. And Elijah represented the living who have not yet died. That would symbolize, in the second coming of Christ, the dead who will rise, and the living who will be lifted up to the clouds, as saint Paul said in (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).
- c. Elijah represents those who have lived a life of ascetism in the mountains, as he was himself on the mountain of Carmel; and Moses represents those who have lived in the world with their families in a social life.
- d. One of them represents the life of monks, and the other represents the ministry and the guidance of crowds. One of them is in the style of Miriam, and the other is in the style of Martha, with the difference in measuring . . . all of these two kinds will be transfigured with the Lord.
- e. Moses represents meekness and Elijah represents the fiery jealousy. The one represents forgiveness, and the other represents punishment . . . (Numbers 12:3, 2 Kings 1:10,12).

As if Christ our Lord says: “I shall assemble all of them to Me in the transfiguration”. Him who was married, and him who was a virgin; him who lived the life of meditation, and him who lived the life of service; him who was meek and calm, and him who was firm and strong; him who lived on the mountain, and him who lived in the city. The important thing is that they live a life of righteousness “*who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body*” (Philippians 3:21). What is it then that will happen to that human body in the resurrection? The apostle says: “*So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power . . . It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body*” (1 Corinthians 15: 42-44). “*And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man*” (1 Corinthians 15:49). “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality”. Death will then be transformed into victory, and we shall say: “*O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*” (1 Corinthians 15: 52-55). Then human beings will be “*like angels of God in heaven*” (Matthew 22:30),

as the Lord has said. Our glorified body in the resurrection, will be a body that does not hunger nor thirst, nor get tired nor become ill, nor will die nor will be corrupted; but rather will be elevated upward in the transfiguration of the human nature. How will be the new nature of our bodies that will become spiritual heavenly bodies? Will they move as the angels who pass on from heaven to earth in the twinkle of an eye? Will they possess the spiritual perception instead of the ordinary vision?

III. Other Kinds Of Transfiguration: We mentioned before that the human nature obtains a kind of transfiguration in the general resurrection, when it will be clothed with spiritual heavenly incorruptible bodies, and human beings will become like the angels of God in heaven. But there are some kinds of transfiguration which happen here in life on earth such as:

- a. The transfiguration of thinking: Sometimes thinking is lucid and bright, bringing out extremely ravishing thoughts. That happens to a poet whose imagination and thinking becomes radiant in writing a poem of verse; or to a writer who composes a story or a novel while he is at the top of his creative capacity, in a state of transfiguration, in the depth of intelligence, and the depth of imagination.
- b. Transfiguration in the fields of many arts and gifts: It happens to an artist, or a designer, or a sculptor, or a musician, or a poet, or a novelist. Any one of these gifted people presents a marvelous masterpiece whose author is then described as being in a state of transfiguration in his feelings and senses and thinking, during the production of his artistic work. All these cases may be for a moment, during the production and the fabrication, and may be representing a case of perpetual transfiguration of gifts, and may appear even in infancy. Yes, undoubtedly, gifts are transfigurations that God grants to man. Because gifts are extraordinary capabilities that God gives, they are of many kinds, which the apostle St. Paul mentioned, in his first epistle to the Corinthians saying: *“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same*

*Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12: 7-11).*

- c. Transfiguration as of the great works of grace in man: As the apostle St. Paul said: *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain , yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).* Extraordinary capabilities and gifts are transfigured in man as a result of the work of grace. His image is granted a form that amazes those who see him as a result of transfiguration. It was said about St. Stephan in the story of his martyrdom, that during his trial before the congregation of the Jews: *“All who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15).* Sometimes it happens during certain dreams that we see a person whom we know, in a wonderful image or in a shining form, although we did not see him like that in his earthly life. But he appears to us during the dream in a state of transfiguration.

## Conclusion

Jesus’ transfiguration was the first fruits of the transfiguration of our human nature. *“Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).* The story of transfiguration is a story of hope. It shows us that our life doesn’t end here on earth. Death is just a transformation from the weak body to a strong body, from a corrupt to incorrupt body, from a mortal to eternal body. *“[”For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection](Romans 6:5).* Since our life on this earth is just a brief transition point to a better eternal life, we should always prioritize/glorify God in our life on earth. *“[”But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you] (Matthew 6:33).*

### Applications:

- Transfiguration of our lord shows us that we will resurrect from the dead during the second coming of our lord. Thus, give thanks to God about this amazing transfiguration. Also start desiring what is in heaven, not just what is on earth. *“[”Therefore, since you have been raised with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things](Colosians 3:1-2).*



- Gifts of the Holy Spirit are also transfigurations. Ask God to bless you with his gifts to be able to serve his people in the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

**Exercises:**

1. Compare between re-incarnation and the appearance of Moses and Elijah with the Lord during the Transfiguration. What do Moses and Elijah symbolize?
2. What is the importance of the transfiguration of our lord Jesus Christ? Why is it an important to us?
3. During resurrection, are we going to rise with the same body that we carry now or with something different (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 1 Corinthians 15:52-55)?
4. Write about what our glorious bodies will be able to do that we cannot do with our present earthly bodies.

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## Week 2

# The Book of Esther

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### Objectives:

- To study the book of Esther and know its theme and content.
- To learn from the courage of Esther.
- To learn that God always protects His people.

### References:

- The book of Esther

### Memory Verse:

*Fast for me; neither eat or drink for three days, night and day. (Esther 4:16)*

## Introduction

God's hand and deliverance to His people is evident throughout the book of Esther, though His name is not mentioned once. This is actually the theme of the book of Esther. The author of this book is not known. The book consists of 10 chapters describing a conspiracy plotted against the Jews in Persia during the reign of king Ahasuerus and how God saved them from it through the courage of the beautiful Esther and the wisdom of her cousin Mordecai.

## Lesson Outline

The name Esther is taken from the Persian name meaning a "star". Her story fits between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra, between the first return by Zerubbabel and the second return led by Ezra to Palestine. It provides

the only biblical portrait of the vast majority of Jews who refused to return and chose to remain in Persia. God's protective hand on behalf of His people is evident throughout the book of Esther. The clearly emerging message is that God uses ordinary men and women to accomplish His gracious purposes. Although God disciplines His people, He never abandons them.

- I. **The Threat to the Jews** The story begins in Ahasuerus's winter palace at Susa. The king provides a lavish banquet and display of royal glory for the people of Susa, and proudly seeks to make Queen Vashti's beauty a part of the program. When she refused to appear, the king was counseled to depose her and seek another queen, because it is feared that other women will become insolent if Vashti goes unpunished. Esther later finds favor in the eyes of Ahasuerus and wins the royal "Beauty Pageant". At her cousin's Mordecai's instructions, she does not reveal that she is Jewish. With her help, Mordecai was able to warn the king of an assassination plot, and his deed was recorded in the palace record. Meanwhile, Haman became captain of the princes, but Mordecai refused to bow for him. When he learned that Mordecai was a Jew he plotted to eliminate all the Jews as his hatred grew. Through bribery and lies he convinced Ahasuerus to issue an edict to slain all the Jews in the Empire. The decree created a state of confusion, and Mordecai asked Esther to appeal to the king to spare the Jews. At the peril of her life, Esther decided to see the king and reveal her nationality to him in desperate attempt to dissuade him. Mordecai convinced her that she has been called to her high position for this purpose. Esther asked all the Jews to fast for three days.
  
- II. **The Triumph of the Jews** After fasting, Esther appeared before the king and wisely invited him to a banquet along with Haman. At the banquet she requested that they attend a second banquet, as she seeks the right moment to deliver her request. Haman was flattered but later enraged when he saw Mordecai. He took his wife's suggestion to build a large gallows for Mordecai. That night Ahasuerus decided to treat his insomnia by reading the palace records. Reading about Mordecai's deed, he wanted him to be honored. Haman, mistakenly thinking the king wanted to honor him, told the king how the honor should be bestowed, only to find that the reward was for Mordecai. At Esther's second banquet, Ahasuerus offered her as much as half of his kingdom for the third time. She then made her plea for her people and accused Haman of his treachery. The infuriated king had Haman hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai. Persian law sealed with the King's

ring cannot be revoked, but at Esther's request the king issued a new decree to all the provinces that the Jews may assemble and defend themselves on the day when their enemies attack them. This decree changed the outcome intended by the first order and produced great joy. Mordecai was also elevated and put over the house of Haman. When the fateful day of the two decrees arrived, the Jews defeated their enemies in their cities throughout the Persian provinces, but did not take the plunder. The next day became a day of celebration and an annual Jewish feast called "the feast of the Purim". The word is driven from the Assyrian word *Puru*, meaning lot referring to the lots that were cast by Haman to determine the day for the annihilation of the Jews. The narrative closed with the advancement of Mordecai to a position second only to the king.

III. Emphasizing the Role of God in the Book of Esther: The God of Israel is the sovereign controller of history, and His providential care can be seen throughout this book. He raised a Jewish girl out of the obscurity to become the queen of the most powerful empire in the world. He ensured that Mordecai's loyal deed is recorded in the palace records. He guided Esther's admission to the king's court. He superintended the timing of Esther's two feasts. He was involved in Ahasuerus's insomnia and the cure he used for it. He saw that Haman's gallows will be utilized in an unexpected way. He gave Esther great favor in the sight of the king and He brought about the new decree and the eventual victory of the Jews.

## Conclusion

God can use any of us to help other through salvation; we only have to be ready for it and courageous to do it. As he used Esther and Mordecai for the salvation of His people, He can use any of us for the service and help of others. God is the Pantocrator who arranges every event in our lives for the final salvation of the human race; we just have to surrender to His perfect plan.

### Applications:

- Find other occasions when people fasted three days.
- Find other occasions where God protected the Israelites.

### Exercises:

WEEK 2. THE BOOK OF ESTHER

1. Pray that God protect your family

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## Week 3

# Some Virtues in the Life of the Virgin

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### Objectives:

- The Virgin as a model for the humanity.

### References:

- Luke 1, Mathew 2:13-23, John 14:15, 2 John 1:6, Luke 11:28, Psalms 1:2, Psalms 119:9, Luke 1:46-55

### Memory Verse:

*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be according to your word.  
(Luke 1:38) (Genesis 39:2)*

## Introduction

The Father looked down from heaven and he did not find any one like St. Mary. He sent His only begotten Son who came and incorporated from her. There is no doubt that the grace of God kept the Virgin as an example of perfect human being and a unique model of humanity. She found favor with the Lord, the Father chose her and the Holy Spirit came upon her and the Son became man and took flesh through her. With her humbleness, the Virgin responded without hindering the delivering grace of God.

## Lesson Outline

- I. The Virgin and the Life of Grace: The continuous sincere prayers of the Virgin to God in the temple and her contemplations on the kingly law made of her a chosen vessel for the Holy Spirit the source of perfection

and all gifts. Being without any blemish and her complete response to the gift of grace made her bear the fruits of the Spirit in perfect love and deep rejoice and perpetual peace in lowliness, meekness and chastity. Her fullness made her a second heaven and a dwelling place of the Living God and a Paradise for the word. The Virgin's life as a model reproaches us because we do not have the Spirit in us and because we neglect having Christ within our hearts although He gave us His body and His blood so that He may abide in us and we in Him. Each soul then must possess Christ inside her heart, mind and whole being and be occupied with that fullness all her life and in this way the soul will become a chaste virgin to Christ like St. Mary the mother of God.

- II. The Virgin and the life of Obedience: She was indeed the servant of the Lord. She obeyed the good news of the angel and subdued herself to the wonderful will of God who will be born in a manger. She escaped to Egypt in very severe circumstances and endured the life of poverty in Nazareth without murmur or complaint and in complete submission to the Lord she agreed that her only begotten Son would leave her to devote Himself to the message He brought from the Father to us. Her obedience was with understanding. She understood the purpose of God even if that Divine purpose was beyond human understanding. It was obedience out of love as it was the obedience of the children not that of slaves. It was the obedience that gains her power from the burning obedience of love that lives in the heart as the Son obeyed the Father and gave Himself for the Salvation of the world. It was the obedience within the frame of truth, as the Christian's obedience is not for a certain man. It is obedience of the truth only. For this reason the Virgin obeyed her Son not because He was Her Son but because He Himself was the Truth and the Life. The Lord Jesus honored His mother not because she was His mother but because she knew His will and obeyed the Truth in Him. The fathers used to refer to the obedience of the virgin as a model contrasting that of Eve. The first woman was tempted by disobedience in the Garden of Eden but the Second Eve (Mary) opened the way for us to go to the Tree of life.
- III. The Virgin and the Life of Devotion: The word "devoted" means "separated for a certain task" and the virgin was devoted to the Lord God from birth and she was a Nazarite to God. The Divine words were directed to her: "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed". As the Tent of Meeting was devoted to

the Lord, with all what was inside it and nobody could enter it but the Levites, the case also was true with the Virgin who was devoted to God and no one entered her or went out of her except the Son of God, the Word, the Second Hypostasis. Mary lived her childhood with God in the Temple and she lived a life of virginity and that is why she asked the angel Gabriel when he told her the good news of the birth of Christ, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" Thus she lived a virgin after giving birth to Christ; for this reason we call her the virgin of perpetual virginity. The church rejects the ideas of those who say that Mary married to Joseph after Jesus' birth. Jesus' brothers who were mentioned in the Gospel are the sons of Claupea and Mary (St. Mary's sister. She was given the same name "Mary" after St. Mary left to the temple). He who contemplates Ezekiel's prophecies knows how the virgin lived as a virgin all her life (Ezekiel 44:1,2). She is a model of true devotion. She was devoted in her body, in her virginity, in her mind, in her feelings and in her soul. She was an acceptable offering of life before the Lord.

IV. The Virgin and the Life of Contemplation: Contemplation is devoting man's mind and heart for the Love of God, keeping away from the worldly concerns, to unite with God so that the mind does not find pleasure in anything except in prayer and seeing God. The life of contemplation is a glorious connection with God through internal prayers and understanding of the scriptures. The Virgin was a blessed model so she *"kept all these things, pondering them in her heart"* (Luke 2:19). She was conscious of the Gospel's prophecies with the Spirit of inspiration. In her hymn, she held fast to the Lord's promises to Abraham. She remembered His mercy to His faithful ones through all generations, and His support to Israel. She quoted Hannah's hymn (the mother of Samuel). So the Virgin kept the spirit of the scriptures and the text too. The tradition tells us how she remembered all the events of the New Testament in silence and pondering as a holy vessel of the events of the church history of which she was eyewitness. The history and life of the virgin will remain a wonderful, splendid, calm model for contemplation and deep understanding that will call us always to understand the word of God.

V. The Virgin and the Life of Suffering: The Virgin was adorned with pain and virtue. She was exposed to psychological pains when Joseph suspected her . . . she found no place where she could give birth to her Son. She spent two years or more in Egypt without shelter exposing



herself to the dangers of robbers. She suffered from (bodily) physical pains and her heart suffered a lot under the cross when she knew that the disciples escaped and suspected Him and that one of them betrayed Him. The Jews at that time were able to crucify her only Son. She suffered a lot at the time of burial and at the garden when the stone was put to block the tomb. This is what Simon the elder prophesied: “A sword will pierce through your own soul also”. The physical pains were unbearable. The state of poverty when she was in Nazareth made her work to help the aged Joseph ... the pains of the journey to Upper Egypt, giving birth to her son in an unsuitable place, etc. What is the Virgin's attitude towards all this? She called all generations to magnify her. These pains were an offering of love and thanksgiving and an exercise of wonderful patience.

- VI. The Virgin and the Life of Purity: Her purity and virginity were not only in the flesh but that was also true in her soul and spiritual life. It was the purity of thought, life, heart and conscience. The Virgin is a model for anyone who wants to live the life of perfection in everything. She helps every young man and woman who suffers from the wars of the devil. She is their intercessor in their struggle. She is a model of holiness on earth. To honor and magnify the Virgin in our life, we must imitate her in her life and be inspired by her virtues. We must obey her Son so that we may be shining tapers before her icon.

## Conclusion

St. Mary is the example and the pride of all human races. Through her the incarnation was completed and manifested. We magnify her for her special place at the right hand of the Father and for her place in our hearts. She also feels for us and intercedes for our sake in front of her Son day and night. We need to follow her examples of humility, obedience, resilience, and purity.

**Applications:** Follow the example of the life of the Virgin in the following situations:

- Serve others in obedience, joy and love.
- Subdue yourself to the will of God in your life in time of disease and temptation and endure that thankfully.

- Put the picture of St. Mary the Virgin in your room and keep the picture as a model of purity. Remember her when you admire the physical beauty and ask her to intercede for you to God in times of troubles.
- Read and meditate on St. Mary's prayer found in Luke 1:46-55.

**Exercises:**

1. Make a wall magazine and write about the virtues of the Virgin. What qualities do you observe in the life of St. Mary?
2. What do you learn from the life of devotion seen in the life of St. Mary? Do you obey God in your life? When Angel St. Gabriel came to tell her the good news, she whole heartedly accepted this saying "*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be according to your word*"(Luke 1:38).
3. What do we learn from the life of contemplation of St. Mary? "*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart*"(Luke 2:19). In her prayers, she mentioned numerous events in the Old Testament. Do you pay attention when you hear/read the bible? How can memorizing/contemplating on the word of God help you become a stronger Christian? "*How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word*"(Psalms 119:9).

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## Week 4

# St. John the Baptist

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### Objectives:

- Concentrating on the Divine nature of Christ and Christ's work as a Savior.
- To learn St. John the Baptist mysterious life and God's work

### References:

- Luke 1 and 2

### Memory Verse:

*Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight. (Luke 3:4)*

## Introduction

St. John was only 6 months older than the Lord Jesus Christ. St Elizabeth was very old when she became pregnant with St. John but it was a miraculous conception. The angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariahs the priest and told him about the conception of Elizabeth his wife. When Zechariahs questioned the angel, he was silent until Elizabeth gave birth for their son. When Zechariahs was asked what would he call the child, he wrote "John". Then, he was able to speak again (Luke 1 and 2).

John the Baptist was a fascinating man. He ate locusts and honey in the desert. Crowds came to him, but he constantly told them that he was nothing—that the coming Messiah was everything. In the end, his life was cut short because he criticized a king for sinning. John the Baptist was an unusual character for sure. But incredibly, Jesus Christ called him the greatest of men (Matthew 11:11).

## Lesson Outline

- I. The voice of one crying in the Wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord. The Heavenly Father's plan was to prepare the way for the coming of Christ by sending John the Baptist who prepared the way before the heavenly procession. It was said about the great prophet that he would be great before the Lord, he would drink no wine nor strong drink, he would be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb, he would turn many to the Lord, he would turn the hearts of the children to the Father, he would go before Him in the spirit of Elijah and his power . . . and that he would make ready for the Lord a people prepared. His father Zechariah predicted and said, "*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare His way, to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins*" (Luke 1:76-77).
- II. The Preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-20): John preached in the Wilderness saying: "Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand". Isaiah said about him, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight". John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. To the multitude who came to be baptized by him he said, "*Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.'* For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:7-10). Many sinners came to him . . . he drew their attention to their sins and made them repent. He taught them how to confess and correct their life. Tax collectors came and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" and he said to them "Collect no more than is appointed you". Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" and he said to them, "*Rob no one by force or by false accusation, and be content with your wages*" (Luke 3:14). John reproached sinners and struggled against evil in every situation and on every occasion. He reproached Herod the tetrarch because of Herodia his brother's wife (when Herod wanted to marry her) and because of all the evil deeds that Herod used to do.
- III. Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan (Luke 3:21-23): When Jesus was thirty years old, He came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by

St. John. When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form as a dove and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased". He needed no baptism by John but He was baptized because He emptied Himself and became Son of man who planned the way of Salvation for all human beings.

- IV. Christ's fasting and His temptation (Luke 4:1-13): The Spirit led Jesus for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days and when they were ended, he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread" and Jesus answered him, "It is written: Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God". And the devil took Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to Him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be yours". And Jesus answered him, "It is written: You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve". And he took Him to Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written: He will give His angels charge of You, to guard You and on their hands they will bear You up, lest you strike Your foot against a stone". And Jesus answered him, "It is said: You shall not tempt the Lord your God". And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.
- V. The temptation is the model of struggle against evil (Discussion): In the first temptation: The devil tempted Jesus by the desire for food when He became hungry. The devil may tempt us by the desires of the flesh (As greediness, pride, hatred and anger). The situation needs struggle for chastity, prayer commitment to the words of God with which man lives . . . Explain how this can be achieved. The second temptation was the temptation of richness, pride of life and corrupt luxury . . . In it man is enslaved to another god when he tries to attain the greatest benefit through the shortest way and by wrong means such as worshipping the devil. The third temptation was the temptation of the ego and it was an attempt to separate the will from obedience to the heavenly Father . . . The devil wanted to shake the belief in the truth of God's words and promises and in this way lead to rebellion

and disobedience. The means of testing God's promises is through obeying His commandments and not through tempting Him. Discuss St. Paul's commandment to Timothy his disciple and apply it to your life, *"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses"* (1 Timothy 6:9-12).

VI. How did the Lord begin His mission then? He sent St. John to prepare people's minds for repentance . . . and to inform them of another baptism that is different from the baptism with water. It is the baptism with water and spirit . . . a fiery baptism that purifies, washes and sanctifies. He made it the beginning of the spiritual way and the beginning of the Christian mission. Through fasting forty days and forty nights, through struggle and prayer, He in the flesh - resisted evil and won victory with spiritual armor (prayer, fasting and the word of God). With Him we begin our mission with baptism, true repentance and struggle against sin.

## Conclusion

St. John the Baptist was the last of the prophets who prepared the way for the Lord's coming. He was great in the sight of the Lord and was led by the Holy Spirit. He helped many people to repent and he baptized many with water in preparation for the real baptism by water and spirit after the Lord's coming.

**Applications:**     • Make use of prayers and the word of God all the time, add to them fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays. These are weapons to be used against the devil.

- Stick to them and pray to God to strengthen you through them.
- Study aspects of greatness in the character of John the Baptist.
- How can you make both ends meet: our need for food of the flesh and our need for spiritual food?

- As St John the Baptist unashamedly shared the good news of Jesus Christ; we shall too be filled with faith and eagerness to share the good news with others.

**Exercises:**

1.

**Part XIII**  
**Filler Lessons**



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# Week 1

## Christian Self-Esteem

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### Objectives:

- To have a Christian self-esteem and use it in our society.

### References:

- The Holy Bible

### Memory Verse:

*Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)*

## Introduction

We have a built-in worth as humans, and that self-esteem is how we feel about our self-concept. Self-esteem means that we are to have respect and regard for ourselves, and to recognize our potential. But, what are some factors that will help us attain a good self-image?

## Lesson Outline

- I. We must have a sense of Aim. This aim comes from a proper understanding of God and His Word. Our understanding of God enables us to understand who we are and why we are here on this earth. St. Paul, the apostle wrote of his aim: *“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him”* (Philippians 3:8).
- II. We must have a sense of Belonging. The sense of belonging is essential to our well being as people. Our belonging to a family, friends or school

club gives us the self-confidence that we belong and are accepted in our environment. St. Paul the apostle had a sense of belonging to God through Jesus Christ, *“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20).

- III. We must have a sense of Competence. By that, we all must feel significant! Our competence grows as we think better of ourselves, which in turn changes our outlook on life. Solomon wrote: *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he”* (Proverbs 23:7). Therefore, have full confidence that you can do a lot if you awaken your dormant mental faculties and put your mind attuned to God. Always remember the verse *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”* (Philippians 4:13).
- IV. We must have a sense of Worth. By this we mean a good self-worth. Christ has given us the greatest feeling of self-worth when He gave Himself up for me and you to give us our sense of worth. If He did not feel that you and I are worth this great sacrifice and this honored blood, He would not have done it *“you were bought at a price, do not become slaves of men”* (1 Corinthians 7:23). However, a person with low self-esteem and inferiority complex is bound and has imprisoned himself in a steel cage with the idea that he/she cannot escape.
- V. We must have sense of Security. Lack of security creates fear and worries. Both insecurity and fear can destroy self-esteem. King David says, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me”* (Psalm 23:4).
- VI. We must have a sense of Freedom. Freedom from sin is a source for high self-esteem. In contrast, sin lowers the self-esteem and may be followed by guilt feelings and hopelessness. This was clear in the case of Judas who betrayed Christ and then surrendered to hopelessness and suicide. Adam and eve also felt ashamed when they sinned that they hid themselves from God. Also, freedom from worshiping men is important. Fear of others’ opinion is the greatest threat that man has created for his self-esteem. By trying to impress others you are gradually giving the key to your self-esteem to others. St. Paul clearly says: *“Do not become slaves of men”* (1 Corinthians 7:23).

VII. Sanctify the present for a Better Future. Accepting self-responsibility for your life and realizing that your thoughts, words and actions are the mould for your future can bring about a major change in your attitude towards yourself and life. You need not be slave in the hands of destiny. By exercising high self-esteem, positive thinking and making actual physical efforts with firm determination and will power against various obstacles; you can defeat the idea of destiny. Further, if you surrender yourself to God you will have divine help that is available to you at every step *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20). In other words, learn from the past; not live in it! Again, listen to the Bible: *“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:13-14).

## Conclusion

God has created us and supported us with all the sources of a high self-esteem. A low self-esteem would be due to the works of the devil who always tries to put us down and separate us from the power, the glory and the might of the Lord. Remember that how we think and feel about ourselves will determine how we get along with others and ourselves in this world.

### Applications:

- Always remember that we are the sons and daughters of the King. We are created in the image of God. And even when we sinned, we were bought with a price. These facts should elevate our self-esteem.
- If you feel down or your self-esteem is low, remember you have a friend who is Jesus, “Talk to Him” and he will take your burden away. You can also confess to your priest, talk to your parents, and Sunday School teachers.

### Exercises:

1. What is self-esteem?
2. List two factors that help us acquire good self-esteem.
3. List two characteristics of a person with good self-esteem.

4. List two characteristics of a person with low self-esteem.
5. How would you help the person with the low self-esteem to have good self-esteem?

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## Week 2

# Liberty with Responsibility

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### Objectives:

- To learn that the Lord gave us liberty and Liberty is to shoulder responsibility.

### References:

- 1 Corinthians 8:9; 1 Peter 2:16; Galatians 5:13.

### Memory Verse:

*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. (1 Corinthians 10:23)*

## Introduction

Once I met a person who was smoking heavily. When circumstances were favorable for us to speak together I began to talk to him about the harmful effects of smoking as it is harmful to health and has a bad effect on spiritual life. I was astonished at his reply. He said, "I am fully convinced that what you say is right but this is my life which I own and it is my right to do what I like with it. I never interfere in the life of others and this is enough". Here I wanted to explain to him the meaning of the phrase "One's life is one's own possession and one is free to do what one likes with it". I gave him an example by saying, "Imagine that your father has bought you a new cassette recorder and gave it to you saying that it is for you and would be yours". How would your feelings be like if he found that you broke and damaged the set? Would you say that the set was yours and nobody had any right to interfere in your affairs or freedom in doing what you like with the set? Suppose that your father accepted that way of thinking, could he trust you with any other thing or would he give you any other new present?

Of course not as he knows well that you are not responsible enough to keep his presents to you safely.

Are you like that person in that you feel that you own your life and no one has any right to interfere in it?

## Lesson Outline

- I. My life is not my own possession; it is a trust: As you know, you are the image of God and you were created out of the breath of His mouth and He gave you the breath of life with which you live. Not only this, but when you deformed this holy image, He descended from heaven and died for you and bought your precious soul and redeemed you with His precious blood. So your life is not yours but it is your redeemer's who redeemed you with His blood. You may say, "But my life is still mine and Christ has not taken it yet but He leaves it to me to do with it what I like", but I tell you that He left it to you as a trust so He asks you to keep it in good condition. If a friend of yours gave you a sum of money and asked you to keep it with you till he came back from a trip, could you spend that money? Of course not as it is not yours even if it was in your possession. In the same way, your life is not yours even if you live it.
  
- II. I do not live alone: As you know, you are not alone but you are a member of the body of the Lord Jesus and that there are other members in that body; you need them and they need you as each one integrates the other. In the same way, you cannot separate your life from the life of others. For example you cannot play football in the street at anytime without taking into consideration the cars which run in the street and the people passing the street and also the street dwellers as some of them may be sick, some are students who are studying their lessons and others are in need of rest. Another example is a person who smokes in a closed place. We say to him, "If you possess your health and your life and it is your right to do whatever you like with your life and health, this does not mean that you possess the health and life of others that are dangerously affected by the smoke of your cigarettes. Then how can I understand a man who says that he is free to do what he likes with his life? Truly you have that right, but you do what you like with your life for your happiness, joy and perpetual pleasure and this will not be achieved unless you have a goal,

which in achieving it you will be happy. So you are free to do what you like in your life but take the following points into consideration:

- a. Know your own interest and define your goal: Do not be deceived by any bright goal that may destroy your happiness. For example, it is necessary for you to study hard and get high marks in your exams. Do not say, “But I am free and I do not want to study”. Such a person does not understand the true meaning of freedom then. You should also know that your peace of mind, your happiness and joy are in your fellowship with Jesus Christ. Do not say: “but I am free in my decision whether to connect my life with Christ or not; it is I who should decide”. This is not right. You have to know where your happiness and peace lie and search for them”.
- b. Know the true means that will help you achieve your goal: For example you know that your success in mathematics depends on solving as many problems as possible. You are mistaken if you think that you can succeed without solving many problems and say “I am free. It is true that I know my goal, which is success but the means by which I can achieve that goal should be of my own choice, I am free to choose the means”. So you have to know your goal well and the means by which you can achieve that goal thus you can guarantee that you will live your life that trust which the Lord entrusted you with honesty and faithfulness. You should thank the Lord who redeemed your life with His precious blood. You must take into consideration the others who share this life with you.

Joshua the Son of Nun is one of the greatest heroes in history as a leader. His courage was notable when he was young, when Moses sent him to explore the land of Canaan. He was not afraid of the enemy but he said that the Israelites would conquer them as the Lord was with them. He led the people and crossed the Jordan and won victory over Jericho when the walls of the city fell. At last he entered the Land of Canaan and achieved victory. He distributed the land and gave each tribe the part appointed to them by the Lord.

At the end of his life, he stood before the people and said, “The Lord God, your God, fought for you. Whenever I remember the day when we crossed the Red Sea, the day we won victory over the Amalekites and our journey in the Mount of Sinai, when the Lord sent us food from heaven and water from the rock. With all faithfulness and zeal . . . tell me, do you intend to worship Him with faith or not? You have freedom of choice in that matter”. Here Joshua stood up and raised

his eyes to heaven and said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord". And the people shouted, "How do you say that our leader Joshua? We shall never leave the Lord. Is it possible for us to leave Him after all those good deeds of His? No. He kept us safe in all roads where we walked. We also serve God because He is our God". But Joshua again said, "Perhaps this will be difficult for you. You know that God is Holy and Jealous. He demands that your life be pure . . . and your behavior be straight before his eyes. You may not be able to do so". The people said with a great shout, "No . . . No . . . We will serve the Lord". Joshua said, "Beware, do not forget the Lord or what He did for you". All the people said, "Amen". Joshua said, "If you do that the blessing will rest upon you and your enemies will be unable to harm you". The people said, "Amen". Joshua said, "If you leave the Lord to serve idols, the Lord will severely punish you". The People said, "Amen". Joshua said: "Jehovah is great and there is no god like Him among the gods of the people of Canaan; those gods demand nothing but offerings". The people replied, "We worship God with faithfulness and truth with all our hearts". Joshua said, "You are your own witnesses to the fact that you have chosen to serve the Lord. You have chosen Him with your own free will so you have become responsible before God for that choice, is not that so?" They said, "We are witnesses, we shall worship God only and obey all His commands . . . Joshua made a covenant for the people that day and wrote this in the book of Law and set up a stone to be a witness against them. They were loyal to the covenant all the days of Joshua.

- III. Who are the people of God? They are those who believe in God and have great faith in Him. The Jews were the people of God in the past and all the other nations were pagans but now the people of God are those who believe in God the Redeemer. Whenever you read the words "The Children of Israel" in the Bible, take it with the meaning of "The Church" now where it is written *"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them, He gave the right to become children of God, even to those believe in His name"* (John 1:11,12)

## Conclusion

Lord forgives us for the time when we chose to regard many things as most important in our life. Help us to fear and love You and be inclined to You



above all things in the name of Christ. Amen.

**Applications:** Read Genesis Chapter 12 and answer the following questions:

- Did Abraham know his true interest when he obeyed the Lord's call for him to leave his land and tribe?
- What was the true goal for which Abraham went out of his land?
- What was the promise that Abraham received from the Lord that made him leave his country?
- Do you see, in Abraham's obedience to the Lord, the true means that would enable him to reach his goal and achieve it?
- Do you see in the Lord's appearance to Abraham, a sign that the means he used to reach his goal was correct?
- What did Joshua want the Israelites to do?
- What was the model he set before the people?
- What should your first choice be as a Christian?
- In His teachings, Jesus gave us freedom and did not force us to do anything. Example: Matthew 16:20.
- He made a new covenant with us to stand firm in His love. Example: Luke 22:20.
- In the story of Jonah the prophet we notice clearly the clarity of the will of God compared with man's thoughts and conscience. We also notice that God allows man to have freedom of choice so that he can disobey the will of God and this results in dangerous consequences but God, out of His love to us, sets hindrances in the way of our wrong will so that we may enjoy the blessings of obeying His will with our full freedom.
- Each freedom has its own responsibility. In each of the following verses, identify the freedom and responsibility: John 6:53; 1 Corinthians 10:23; Galatians 5:13.
- Discuss the useful and the harmful effects of these opinions:
  - My life is my own possession.

- I am free to do what I like.
- Which of the following behaviors is expedient and which is not?
  - Going late to attend the weekly holy Mass.
  - Staying up late watching television, seeing films of violence and sex.
  - When someone insults me I do not answer him.
  - Giving excuses saying that there is no time for the Morning Prayer.
  - Obeying parents willingly.
  - Being stubborn or insisting on one's opinion. Raise a hearty prayer to the Lord. Promise the Lord that you will do something in your life and remember your promise to God "*Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord and teach me Your ordinances*" (Psalm 119:108).

**Exercises:**

1. Explain liberty from biblical perspective.
2. Explain responsibility from biblical view .
3. Mention three persons from the bible who balanced their liberty with responsibility.
4. Mention three persons from the bible who failed to balance their liberty with responsibility .
5. What consequences will happen to our life and others life if we start to abuse our liberty with out responsibility?

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## Week 3

# Choosing Friends

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### Objectives:

- To learn that a bad company corrupts good manners.
- To show the necessity of bearing witness to Christ in social life.

### References:

- 1 Samuel 18:1-4 and 23:15-18

### Memory Verse:

*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity. (Proverbs 17:17)*

## Introduction

- Who is a friend and what are the characteristics of a good friend?
- A friend differs from a colleague.
- A colleague is merely a companion at work or in the scientific domain.
- A true friend is that whom you trust and love in purity, sincerity and internal relief.

## Lesson Outline

- I. How Important is Friendship to Man? Man was created as a social being in need of another person whom he trusts. Friendship is a domain for achieving true Christian love that is devoid of Unitarianism, personal interests, selfishness and misunderstanding. It is a domain for cooperation in school life, social life and overcoming the problems of everyday life (e.g. David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18-23).

- II. The Christian Behavior of Friends What you want him to do to you, do it to him. Do not concentrate on your personal benefits and interests as this attitude is against Christian love. Show respect to him and do not speak about weaknesses but endure them as God endures our weaknesses. Share with him his happy occasions and his sufferings and sorrows (Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep). Do not say your confessions to him as confessions should be said to the father of confession only. But general topics are liable to discussions, dialogues and frankness.
- III. Whom Should I Choose as a Friend? - Those with whom you feel spiritual, psychological, social and mental comfort or relief. Those who are NOT indifferent or whose character is bad whose mouths are full of repulsive words, sexual jokes and impure words. - The family must give agreement to that friendship so that your friendship with them should be within the frame of the family friendship so that all your movements would be in light not in darkness.
- IV. How to Win Others? - Show care to them. - Smile when you see them. - Be a good listener and give people a chance to talk about themselves. - Show respect and appreciation to others. - Talk in things that interest others.
- V. Good friends give good counsel. Proverbs 11:14 *“Without wise leadership, a nation is in trouble; but with good counselors there is safety.”* Proverbs 27:9 *“Ointments and perfume encourage the heart; in a similar way, a friend’s advice is sweet to the soul.”* Proverbs 24:6 *“For through wise counsel you will wage your war, and victory lies in an abundance of advisors.”*
- VI. Good friends tell you what you need to hear rather than trying to flatter you. Proverbs 28:23 *“Whoever rebukes a man will later on find more favor than someone who flatters with his words.”* Proverbs 27:5 *“Open criticism is better than hidden love.”* Proverbs 27:6 *“You can trust what your friend says, even when it hurts. But your enemies want to hurt you, even when they act nice.”* 1 Thessalonians 5:11 *“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.”*

## Conclusion

You can win others to Christ by showing them the same love and care as Jesus Christ our Lord showed to you.

### Applications:

- Examine if your friends are good friends and will strengthen your spiritual growth or not.
- Show love and care to your friends.

### Exercises:

1. Develop a good relationship with righteous people around you.

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# Week 4

## Dating

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### Objectives:

- To clarify the meaning of dating.
- To know how to mix with the opposite sex in a Christian manner suitable for the sons and daughters of God.
- To demonstrate the correct timing and form of dating.

### References:

- Genesis 39:1-12 and Genesis 29:9:30

### Memory Verse:

*Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)*

## Introduction

The period of adolescence and teenage is a critical period in the lives of young youth. Many physical and hormonal changes are taking place during this period. One of the important characteristics of this period is seeking attention and attraction from the opposite sex. This becomes the center and the focus of the young youth self steam. This may push some of the youth beyond the acceptable limits to get this acceptance and attraction from the opposite sex. Dating can be used in the wrong time and beyond the acceptable Christian limits to attain attraction and relationships with the opposite sex. Some teenagers use dating just to be part of the crowd and to follow the stream of the surrounding society. It is usually easier to follow the stream than to stand against it, especially at a young age. Dating can also be practiced mentally only, when the young adult spends hours a day dreaming with all kinds of sexual thoughts even when he is physically alone.

## Lesson Outline

I. Dating in the Non-Christian Concept: It is an outing or a meeting between two persons from the opposite sex and frequently leads to physical intimacy or even pre-marital sex. Dating is usually for the sake of having fun in a very temporary relationship driven by peer pressure. Teenagers think that this is the way to prove their maturity especially when they are in a transition from childhood to adulthood. There is no projected goal or sense of responsibility toward the opposite sex in such a relationship. It also indicates the egocentricity of these relationships since the person cares only for his physical, social and ego satisfaction without caring for the consequences of such relationship on the opposite sex. An example of such relationship was the behavior of Potiphar's wife toward Joseph, which ended by placing him in prison (Genesis 39:7-20). Definitely, this kind of relationship is devoid of the true Christian love, which resembles the love of our Lord Jesus Christ to us. The love that gives and sacrifices without asking for what is for itself (John 15:13).

II. Consequences of these Relationships:

- Pre-occupation with the physical aspect of the opposite sex.
- Degrading the image of the opposite sex when he/she becomes an object rather than a person created in God's image (Genesis 1:26).
- Daydreaming and decreased concentration during studying and school leading to poor performance and results.
- Pre-occupation with own physical appearance and dress in unsuitable clothing to emphasize the body features.
- Inappropriate behavior in the presence of the opposite sex to attract attention and to gain acceptance from peers.

The most important and the most serious consequence is neglecting and ignoring the adolescent spiritual and inner growth.

III. Daydreaming, Sexual Thoughts and Mental Dating: Many of our youth may restrain themselves or are restrained by their families from actual physical dating but allow their thoughts to wonder freely in all kinds of sexual thoughts and dreams (Proverbs 6:25). Our Lord has placed the sexual immorality in the same level of physical adultery when he said "*Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already*

*committed adultery with her in his heart*" (Matthew 5:28). In contrast the devil will always try to convince us that it is not bad to have sexual desires and thoughts as long as we are not practicing them.

- IV. Means of Spiritual Fights Against Non-Christian Dating and Sexual thoughts: Fill your soul with the love of God and make Him your best friend. Choose your friends carefully and surround your self with believers (Proverbs 13:20). Give equal care to your spiritual growth as you give to your body. Spiritual growth is achieved through prayers, church meetings and Bible reading. Discover the energies in your adolescence that can be directed towards the service in the church and others. Guard your senses including your eyes, ears, smell and touch against temptation (Proverbs 4:23-27). Flee from unspiritual environment and surroundings (Proverbs 7:24-25). Never think that you are strong and will not be affected by bad company or bad surroundings. Always stay in the group and avoid one to one interactions at an early stage. Resist and expose sexual thoughts in confession so the devil would know that your mind is not his hiding place. Never give-up or lose hope in purity if you sin by thought or deed.
  
- V. Dating in the Christian Concept: Dating in the Christian concept is demonstrated in some pre-marital love stories that were mentioned in the Bible. The story of Jacob who was directed by his father Isaac to go and choose a wife from the House of his uncle Laban (Genesis 28:1-2). Jacob obeyed his father and mother and went to his Uncle's land to find a wife. There, Jacob met Rachel his cousin and he loved her and worked 7 years to marry her (Genesis 29:18-20). During the 7 years Jacob has never been intimate with Rachel, since Jacob said to Laban "*give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her*" (Genesis 29:21).
  
- VI. The Characteristics and Consequences of the Christian Dating: Its goal is a serious relationship towards Christian love and marriage (Ephesians 5:30-33) Brings two souls, minds, and feelings closer to each other and to God. Physical intimacy is completely prevented in the pre-marital dating period. Usually blessed by the family and under the guidance of the father of confession.



## Conclusion

Discover the real maturity and growth when you say NO to non-Christian dating, “*My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent*” (Proverbs 1:10).

### Applications:

- Reach out to your Bible and read a chapter or few psalms whenever you are tempted with a sexual thought.
- Have company with pure Christians.

### Exercises:

1. List two characteristics of a non-Christian dating.
2. List two consequences of a non-Christian dating.
3. What is mental dating? Is it wrong to have mental dating with the opposite sex?
4. List two ways we can guard ourselves from a non-Christian dating.
5. List two characteristics and consequences of a Christian dating.

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## Week 5

# Alms Giving

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### Objectives:

- To develop the tendency of alms giving without limit or fanaticism.
- To learn the blessings of alms giving.

### References:

- Matthew 25:31-46

### Memory Verse:

*In as much as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. (Matthew 25:40)*

## Introduction

A Jewish teacher stood up to put Christ to the test and asked Him: “Who is my neighbor?” During conversation, Jesus spoke about love for the neighbor (You shall love your neighbor as yourself). The Teacher asked Him, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. Likewise, a Levite when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying: Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back. Which of these three, do you think proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said. ‘The one who showed mercy to him’. And Jesus said to him: Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:29-37).

## Lesson Outline

- I. Christianity Knows No Fanaticism: Christianity knows no fanaticism as she follows the example of the Good Samaritan in her attitude towards humanity. Anyone who needs my love, mercy and kindness is my brother regardless of race, language, religion or social class. The Lord Jesus considers the poor His brothers and He did not distinguish between a poor man and another. He did not limit His mercy to any race, religion or language. There are many examples which prove this stated fact in the life of the Lord Jesus. It is He who met the Samaritan woman and talked to her about His wonderful salvation. It is He who praised the faith of the woman of Canaan and healed her son. St. Paul the apostle says, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Galatians 3:28).
  
- II. How to Give to the Poor:
  - a. Give as brother and sister: We should give them as brothers and sisters for alms giving is not showing sympathy to people but it is the Christian love that motivates a man to give alms and compels the brother to open his heart to the poor: *“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”* (1 John 3:17) As true Christians, we have to share the suffering brother’s feelings, his sorrows and his joys and suffer with him as members of one body, i.e. Christ’s body. Our teacher St. Paul says: *“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body”* (Hebrews 13:3).
  - b. Give with love and generosity: Give him with love and generosity as alms giving devoid of inner love is rejected. The Pharisees offering was not acceptable before the Lord. When Ananias and Sapphira gave a part of the price of the field to the apostles and kept a part for themselves, St. Peter the apostle refused to accept their offering. But that who first offers his heart pleases God as the woman who offered two lepta (small coins). She offered her whole heart to God. Also, we see the woman who offered the Lord an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment as a sign of love. St. Paul the apostle says; *“If I give away all I have . . . but have not love, I gain nothing”* (1 Corinthians 13:3), and the Lord Himself says: *“I want mercy, and not sacrifice”* (Matthew 9:13).

- c. Give the poor in secret: The Lord in His sermon on the mountain says: *“Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and Your Father who sees in secret will reward you”* (Mathew 6:2-4). John Chrysostom says; “If you reveal your alms, the devil steals them from you as the Pharisee did”.

### III. The blessings of alms giving:

- a. Alms giving makes us like God in His mercy: St. John Chrysostom says “Alms are valuable and have power as they can loose the bonds, lighten the darkness, quenches the raging fire of Hell and its effectiveness qualifies alms givers to be like God in His mercy and the Lord says, ‘Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful’”.
- b. Alms deliver us from judgment: *“In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity”* (Proverbs 16:6). This does not mean that alms giving in itself is able to atone for sin; otherwise there will be no need for redemption. Alms reveal a heart filled with love for Christ, a heart that loves the needy and those who suffer. How beautiful the prophet Isaiah’s saying is: *“Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. ‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool”*” (Isaiah 1:17,18). That who does not show mercy does not deserve mercy.
- c. We attain the heavenly treasure: The Lord of glory says: *“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”* (Matthew 19:21). The believer who gives to the poor will have great glory in heaven and the immortal things not mortal things. As we give alms to the poor among us, Christ receive our alms and keep them for us as heavenly treasure.

## Conclusion

Alms giving is a great virtue for those who acquire it. It is also a great blessing. God considers it as caring for His brothers and sisters, since He considers the poor and his family.

**Applications:**

- Collect gifts for the poor in your class and distribute the alms gathered by visiting poor families and charity institutions that are concerned especially with the disabled regardless of any religion or belief.

**Exercises:**

1. Give evidence to show that Christianity knows no fanaticism in alms giving.
2. Who is the poor indeed? What are the types of poverty in the life of men? What is the Christian's duty towards these types?
3. What is the Christian manner in alms giving? What characterized the true Christian in giving alms?
4. What aspects corrupt the Christian's alms giving to the poor? How can we avoid them?

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## Week 6

# Psychological Health

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### Objectives:

- To learn that Christianity fulfills deeply the various psychological needs.

### References:

- 1 John 4:7-21, 5:1-3; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.

### Memory Verse:

*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18)*

## Introduction

Psychological health implies the complete harmony and integration among psychological functions leading to a positive feeling of happiness. The meaning of harmony is the absence of inner conflict within a person and the presence of principles governing his life (religious, social, moral). These principles provide a way out of the conflicts. Being unable to resolve these conflicts properly leads to tension, anxiety, and loss of self-confidence. Christianity gives sufficient and fulfilling remuneration to the personality (2 Corinthians 12:9). This is true as the grace of Christ compensates for all deficiencies in man (Luke 3:5). Man possesses extraordinary power through Christ and through the salvation and redemption that has been granted to him in the New Testament.

## Lesson Outline

It is possible to enumerate psychological needs as being:

- I. The Need for Security: Christianity fills the souls with security and safety to an extent that is beyond the mind's conception. This is due to the peace God grants to the soul thus shielding it from the penetration of anxieties or pain. Such peace filled the heart of St. Peter when he was in prison.
- II. The Need for Love and Tenderness:
- A child can never have enough of his parents' love for him . . . he loves himself and grows selfish and unable to love others.
  - Spiritual life fulfills the need for love: for God is love. And when God dwells in the heart. He fills it with love for others who would spontaneously love him in return.
  - Love is the mother of all virtues.
- III. The Need for Appreciation: A person grows with the need for others to appreciate him. A child deprived of being appreciated grows with weak self-confidence. He dreads new situations, and expects failure in any task he sets out to do. For the children of God the need for appreciation is fulfilled on the divine level. It does not matter if that need is or is not satisfied socially. The true Christian finds that the most honorable thing is to be considered the child of God and the heir of His kingdom. The Christian, consequently, disregards external appearance be it of position, status or authority. Although these are useful and could be exploited by God's help, yet they do not fulfill the need of the soul for appreciation, since the Holy Spirit already inhabits it and satisfies all its needs.
- IV. The Need for Freedom: Freedom is an important psychological need that plays an essential role in the edification of a wholesome personality. There is the condition, however, that such freedom should be within a correct framework. God created man as a free being in His image. Hence, Youth, who call for freedom, express an internal yearning implanted by God Himself within each person. Christ also clarified that there is an inner freedom that He spoke about in John 8:31-36. The Lord explained that when man fell, he enslaved himself to many inward and outward matters such as:
- Sin: By committing sin, one is enslaved to it "*Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin*" (John 8:34). St. Paul explains how God liberated us from sin (Romans 5 and 6).

- Fear: (Hebrews 2:14,15; Romans 8:15-17) In these passages St. Paul explains how the Lord liberated us from fear. Also St. John says, *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment”* (1 John 4:18).
- The Law: We were bound by the Law but now we have been set free from it (Romans 7).

V. External Matters that Bind Us: External matters that bind us involve our surrender to Satan, the world, people, and different thoughts. A spiritually oriented person experiences in his life, in sublime ways, how the Lord has liberated us from such influences. We also observe this in the lives of the saints. St. Augustine explains this mystery in his words: “I have come to live above the world when I no longer fear things, or lust for anything.” Thus freedom is not an opportunity for the flesh (Galatians 5:3), but man is the one who controls himself (Hebrews 12:4). Moreover, the obedience of the law in one’s spiritual life does not bind a person’s freedom. Being generally religious does not confine one’s liberty. On the contrary, such matters assist the enjoyment of a liberty that is mature and free of weaknesses.

## Conclusion

We, human beings, are a special creatures of the almighty God. We are created in the image of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We possess spirit, soul and flesh. Those three entities of human being could be kept healthy or sick depending on our free choices. But, the Lord always choose for us the right and healthy way to our flesh, soul and spirit so that we become the temple of His presence. The Lord always remind us by His words saying *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”*(Matthew 11:28-30).

### Applications:

- Study the Holy Word and experience its power: “for the word I speak are spirit and life.”
- Persevere in confession, as it is a positive power in regulating the direction of our life, and also observe communion regularly.



## WEEK 6. PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

- Be willing to take on some kind of responsibility and be involved in the weekly meetings of youth. This provides a friendly atmosphere. Also aim on channeling your individual effort with young people in order to help them and deliver to them the message of the Lord's love.

### **Exercises:**

1. How do you explain heavenly peace?
2. How does influence our spirituality being to our psychological being?
3. What will happen as the consequence of human beings failure of doing good things?
4. How do you perform a positive feeling of peace and happiness?
5. Define human being?

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## Week 7

# The Epistle of St. James

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### Objectives:

- To introduce the epistle of St. James to the students.
- To learn the characteristics of true faith.

### References:

- The Bible, Epistle of St. James

### Memory Verse:

*Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20)*

## Introduction

First review the order in which the New Testament is written. For example, first are the four gospels, then the book of the Acts of the Apostles, then the 14 Pauline epistles, then the 7 Catholic (Universal) epistles, and finally the book of Revelation. It would also be beneficial to mention that during the Coptic Orthodox liturgy we read a piece of each one of these sections except from the book of Revelation. However, the whole book of Revelation is read in the night of Apocalypse.

This epistle is the first Catholic epistle in the bible. It addresses issues that we frequently face and temptations that we usually place ourselves in. It is almost like St. James is talking to everyone of us personally and helping withstand the trials that we sometimes go through.

## Lesson Outline

- I. St. James: It is believed to be James the Just or Christ's brother/cousin as mentioned in Galatians 1:19. In the Jewish tradition, cousins were called brothers and sisters and so when the Bible refers to Christ's brothers, it doesn't mean St. Mary's children, but rather her nephews and nieces. St. James was one of the apostles, and he was the first bishop of Jerusalem. He was originally a very devout Jew that is why he was called the "Just".
- II. The Major Theme of this Epistle: The theme of this epistle is the harmony of faith and works, in other words how faith relates to works. St. James does not teach that works saves us, but he does teach that dead faith, one without works, does not save. There is a distinction between faith and works but never separation. St. James explains that grace does not nullify personal responsibility. Basically St. James wants to instruct us on how to be true Christians. It is very important for the Servant to simplify this concept for the students. Giving examples would be very helpful to distinguish between faith and works. But what does grace mean? Explain what grace is . . . , i.e. Christ's death that resulted in our salvation and washing of sins.

Do you really want to be a true Christian or do you want to be a hypocrite just like the Pharisees were? A true Christian believes in Christ and has a close relationship with Christ. As a result of this relationship, he/she would act like a Christian. St. James points out that we see the poor and tell them God would provide for them, but yet we do not physically do something to help them (James 2:14-20). The other biggest example of dead faith is when we read the Bible, but we do not do what it teaches us to do. Let's ask ourselves a question, are we doers as much as we are hearers or are we hearers only? If we were hearers only, it would be a shame because we would be missing the true meaning of being Christians. Let us pray to the Lord that He may help us do His will that is in His Holy Bible.

- a. Overview of the Epistle: Test of Faith (1:1 to 1:18) Characteristics of Faith (1:19 to 5:7) Triumph of Faith (5:8 to 5:20)
- b. Recipients of the Epistle: This epistle was written in elegant Greek; therefore it is believed that it was written to Jew and gentiles. Unlike typical epistles, the style of this epistle is more like a sermon instead of a letter. It is very similar to Christ's sermon on the mountain. Also, one of the main advantages of this epistle is that

it addresses everyday life issues, i.e. using profanity, the love of money, covetousness ...etc. It would be beneficial to point out verses from the Bible, which states these issues.

- c. Historical Setting: St. James was addressing people that were experiencing several trials: persecution from Jews, deception, economic injustice and poverty, and divisions in the church. As a result of these trials, they were tempted by:
- Depression from the persecutions.
  - Anger because their good will is being taken advantage of.
  - Bitterness because they were poor while the unrighteous were rich.
  - Impatient, waiting for the Second Coming of Christ.
  - Hypocrisy because they were having quarrels amongst them in church.

St. James encourages his readers to patiently endure the sufferings of the present life in view of the future prospect of the coming of the Lord (5:7-12).

## Conclusion

St. James' epistle is a very practical epistle that has very beneficial guidelines for the life of faith.

### Applications:

- Read the epistle of St. James and identify two of his teachings. Start applying them in your life and monitor your progress about every two weeks.
- With the help of your father of confession, continue to evaluate your performance and modify your efforts by which you are changing until you achieve your success in mastering that good behavior.

### Exercises:

1. Pray faithfully.
2. Remember things that God has answered your prayers and praise God for He has answered your prayer.