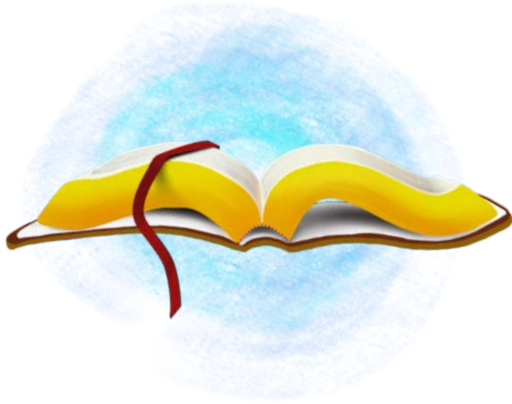


# Creation to Noah



"Know the Bible, Fear the Lord"

2017 January Devotional Booklet

(Published by Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese Church)

## Introduction To Quiet Time/Personal Devotion

**What Is Quiet Time/Personal Devotion:** Quiet Time or Personal Devotion is more than just reading the Bible, it's a time of fellowship and dating with God. It's a time to get to know God and His will more, as well as, to enjoy His presence. Since personal devotion is a process of communication, it involves both "listening" (Reading His Word, Meditating, and Reflecting) and "talking" (Praying, Responding, and Devoting) to Him.

**Time and Place:** Choose a quiet place and a set time. If possible, morning is most ideal. If you must choose another time, choose a time when you can be most serene and alert. Also make sure that you do your devotion before you spend time on the computer, TV, internet, or games so that your mind will not be filled with distractions that prevent you from meditating on God's words.

**Focus:** Ask God to quiet your heart and to open your eyes so that you can understand God's words. You can also praise God or sing a short hymn to Him.

**Read & Reread:** Read the Scripture carefully and meditate on what God is telling you. Usually, you may not be able to understand the meaning and essence of a passage when you first read it; only through repetition and meditation can one gain meaningful insights.

**Using the Devotional Booklet:** ①Please follow the steps in this booklet to first calm your heart with a short prayer and praise, then read and reread the given passage, and answer the questions accordingly. Then read the contributor's insights and see how you could apply what you have learned in your life. Finally, end your Quiet Time with prayer and ask God to help you live out His words. ②Besides the reflection questions, notes, and applications, this booklet also asks the reader to fill in the date and time of each daily devotion, so that the reader can evaluate his/her devotional life more precisely. ③The Scriptures quoted in this booklet are from NIV (1984). We would encourage you not to use the Bible Apps in your cell phone to read the Scriptures lest you will be distracted by the notifications or incoming calls. ④This Devotion booklet is contributed by various staff of the Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese Church and is first written in either Chinese or English, and translated by other brothers and sisters. The contribution of the staff, as well as, of the translators is deeply appreciated. At times, some devotions are written in both languages by the contributor. ⑤Memory verse may be quoted for meditation and memorization depending on the context and as needed; thus, it may not be provided daily.

## Introduction To Genesis

- Author: Moses
- Date of Writing: Approx. 1400 B.C.
- Theme: Divine blessings, and the conflict between good and evil

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." This is the introduction of the Book of Genesis, as well as, the entire Bible. Not only did Genesis describe how God created everything out of nothing, but it also recorded how human beings rebelled against God, and reaped the terrible consequences of sin. However, God did not forsake His creation because of their rebellion. Instead, He chose a specific group of people from among all mankind, and through this group bestowed blessings upon all nations.

The Hebrew word for "account" (*tôledôt*) is repeated throughout the book of Genesis. The Chinese Bible translated this word as "origin," "descendants," "accounts," and the like. The English title "Genesis" comes from the Greek word "*geneseōs*," which was the Greek translation of "*tôledôt*." This key word links up the following major sections of the book of Genesis, giving an account of the origin of this world and the development of the Hebrew nation:

1. Creation (1:1-2:3)
2. The origin of heaven and earth (2:4-4:26)
3. The descendants of Adam (5:1-6:8)
4. The descendants of Noah (6:9-9:29)
5. The descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth (10:1-11:9)
6. The descendants of Shem (11:10-26)
7. The descendants of Terah (11:27-25:11)
8. The descendants of Ishmael (25:12-18)
9. The descendants of Isaac (25:19-35: 29)
10. The descendants of Esau (Edom) (36:1-8; 36:9-37:1)
11. The descendants Jacob (37:2-50:26)

The first eleven chapters of Genesis recorded four events that affected the whole world. The next thirty-nine chapters described the lives of four patriarchs chosen by God and how God used their families to influence the history of mankind.

Four Events				Four People			
Creation	Fall	Flood	Nations	Abraham	Isaac	Jacob	Joseph
1	2	3	5	6	9	10	11
12	24	25	26	27	36	37	50
Beginning of Human Race				Beginning of Hebrew Race			



### Important places in the book of Genesis

1. The mountains of Ararat: Noah's ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat (8:4)
2. Babel: God confused the language of the world (11:8-9)
3. Ur of the Chaldeans: the birth place of Abraham (11:28)
4. Harran: Abraham stayed in Harran temporarily on his way to Canaan (11:31)
5. Shechem: Abraham left Harran and arrived in Canaan, lived for a period of time in the city of Shechem (12:6)
6. Hebron: Abraham settled in the city of Hebron (13:18)
7. Beersheba: Abraham and Abimelek made a treaty there (21:31). God appeared to Isaac, and renewed with him the covenant He had made with Abraham (26:23-25)
8. Bethel: Jacob saw in his dream a stairway which reached from earth to heaven (28:10-22)
9. Egypt: Joseph was sold as a slave, and then taken to Egypt (37:28); Jacob and his whole family moved to Egypt (46:3-4)

## From Emptiness To Very Good (1)

Passage: Genesis 1

January 1

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis Chapter 1, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read the chapter again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

- Fill in the following table and pay attention to the sequence and symmetry of God's creative activity:

Solving the Problem of "Formlessness"		Solving the Problem of "Emptiness"	
God created boundary and orderliness		God created the "governors" of the created world	
Day 1		Day 4	
Day 2		Day 5	
Day 3		Day 6	

The creation account reveals a Creator who can make everything out of nothing, and can turn chaos into orderliness. In the first 3 days, through "Separation," He turned "Formlessness" into "Orderliness." In Days 4 to 6, God brought "fullness" into the world that was "empty". Although He finished His creation after the sixth day, His creative power can still be displayed in our lives today. He is still capable of turning chaos into order, and emptiness into fullness. Are you willing to allow God to reorder your life, and let you experience His creative power and tremendous grace?

**APPLICATION:** Can you identify any area of your life that is chaotic or out of control, needing God's help to put things back in order? Or is there any void in your life that only God can fill?

- Chaos that need to be in order:

- Emptiness that needs to be filled:

**Prayer:** Reflect upon what you have learned today and ask God to help you live out His will.

## From Emptiness To Very Good (2)

Passage: Genesis 1

January 2

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis Chapter 1, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read the chapter again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

- Look up the following repetitive phrases in Genesis 1. What truth do they convey? What do they mean to you?

a) And God \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29)

Significance: \_\_\_\_\_

b) And it \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30)

Significance: \_\_\_\_\_

c) God saw that \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31)

Significance: \_\_\_\_\_

d) According to \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 11, 12, 21, 24, 25)

Significance: \_\_\_\_\_

e) And there was \_\_\_\_\_,

and there was \_\_\_\_\_ (vs. 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31)

Significance: \_\_\_\_\_

God loves us and created us in His own image. He prepared everything FOR us before He created us: the sun, moon, and stars; different vegetation; animals, birds, and other creatures. As the psalmist said, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.” (Psalm 8:3-8); how then can we say that we are worthless or not valuable? Indeed, we are God’s children who bear His image, let us live as such with boldness and assurance. No matter what circumstances we may find ourselves in, let us entrust ourselves into God’s hands; for He is able to turn chaos and emptiness into “very good”.

Furthermore, God’s words are powerful, and He created everything with His words (except in the creation of man). As the Psalmist said, “For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm.” (Psalm 33:9); so, let us hold tightly to God’s promises, and trust that He will fulfill them.

**APPLICATION:** Try to pay more attention to the amazing nature — the trees and flowers, the blue sky and fluffy clouds, the moon and the stars; and thank God for His gracious creation. Furthermore, thank Him for creating you as someone who is “very good”!

**MEMORY VERSE:** <sup>6</sup>By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth... <sup>9</sup>For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." Psalm 33:6, 9

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.



## In God's Image...Be God's Representative

Passage: Genesis 1:26-31; 2:15

January 3

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 1:26-31 and 2:15, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** In verse 26, "let us make man in our image, in our likeness," the plural subject "we" can be interpreted as "plural of majesty" or "potential plural" — to express God's power through the plural form. However, the use of the plural "we," also implies the doctrine of "Trinity" (i.e. Only one true God who has three distinct persons of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit).

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read the above passages again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. God blessed mankind, but also gave man responsibilities; please list out man's responsibilities.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How are man's responsibilities related to the fact that he was made "in the image" and "in the likeness" of God?

"With great power comes great responsibilities." When we understand that we are made in God's "image" and "likeness," possessing God's characters and attributes, and to be God's representatives on earth to rule over all creation (1:26); we ought to keep watch to live a godly living. Even more surprisingly, God gave mankind the command to "be fruitful and increase in number." On the surface, procreation may not seem like much of a mission, but indeed, it involves great blessings and grace. What privilege it is to be given this great responsibility as the successor to God, taking up the task that only God can accomplish — creating human. This is such an unfathomable power, such a shocking mission, as well as, a blessing! Likewise, today, we too have the responsibility and mission to live out God's image and likeness, to be God's representative on earth, and to finish the mission that God has entrusted to us. For Adam and Eve, they were given the mission to "fill the earth and subdue it," what do you think your mission from God is? How do you think God is commanding you to become a representative for him in your network?

**APPLICATION:** Try to list out some of the godly attributes that God has imparted to mankind (i.e. holiness, kindness, goodness, justice, etc.) and how you can live out these attributes.

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5:48

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

Sabbath Rest

Passage: Genesis 2:1-3, Hebrews 4:8-11

January 4

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD’S WORD:** Read Genesis 2:1-3 and Hebrews 4:8-11, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** The word “rested” does not only refer to “resting” as we understand it today, but also means “ceased” or “stopped”. God did not “rest” due to exhaustion from labor; He ceased from working after 6 days of creative work, and He rested to commemorate and to celebrate the work being completed.

For the Jews, Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. While Christians today do not observe the Sabbath, they go to church and worship on the Lord’s Day (the first day of the week), to celebrate Christ’s resurrection.

The Sabbaths in the Bible		
Past	Present	Future
God's Sabbath rest	Salvation rest	Heaven
Israel's Canaan rest	Submission rest (victory in Christ)	

**RE-READING GOD’S WORD:** Read the above passages again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

- 3. Why did God “blessed the seventh day and made it holy”?  
What is the meaning behind this day being “made holy”?

4. Hebrews 4:10 says that anyone who enters God's rest also rests (*meaning stops / completes*) from his own works, just as God rested from His. What do you think is the task/mission that God would like you to complete here on earth?
  
5. Why are we being admonished to "make every effort to enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:11)? What are some areas in your life that you need to put more effort in, so that you can faithfully fulfill the mission that God gives you?

God created the world in six days, and then rested on the seventh, sanctifying this last day and made it holy. The word "holy" means to be "set apart". God's people are to set apart the 7<sup>th</sup> day as sacred, as a day dedicated to the LORD in the midst of their busy lives. Sabbath is not meant to be used for feasting and relaxing after a week of hard work, but for worshipping and serving our Father who created us. While Christians are not required to observe the Sabbath like the Jews do, how then should we set apart the Lord's Day?

The Sabbath Day and God's promise of rest for the Israelites (after entering Canaan under the leadership of Joshua) typify the entering into an eternal joy and resting in heaven through believing in Christ. The author of Hebrews also reminds us that we should make every effort to complete the tasks that God has given us; so that we could go into eternity with exuberant joy, when we offer up to God the fruits of our labor.

**APPLICATION:** Reflect to see which areas of your life in that you would need to put more effort, in order to faithfully finish the mission that God has entrusted you. Try to put your convictions into action.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## The Beginning Of Human History

Passage: Genesis 2:4-17

January 5

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 2:4-17, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** Starting from Genesis 2:4, the author added the name "Yahweh" (LORD) to the name of God, emphasizing that God is not only a creating God, but also a covenant God. The title "Yahweh" probably related to how God first revealed himself to Moses (Exodus 3:13-14 — Moses said to God, "...and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM [*'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*]. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM [*'ehyeh*] has sent me to you.' "

The creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3 gives us an overview of God's turning formlessness and emptiness into "very good" in six days. And Genesis 2 (starting v.4) is more like a "close-up shot", presenting the focal point of creation — the beginning of mankind.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2
Concise description of the 6 days creation	Detailed description of the creation of mankind on the 6th day
A chronological account	A focused narrative

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 2:4-17 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. What is the difference between the way God created man and the rest of the creation?

2. What are the blessings, privileges, and excitements in life that humans get to enjoy? Compare those with the restrictions and limitations that God imposed on human.

Blessings:

Restrictions:

Mankind is the pinnacle of God's creative work. The Bible tells us that God simply spoke everything into existence—the vast universe, the most magnificent mountains, the most beautiful landscapes, the cutest animals, the most lovely flowers...But when it came to the creation of man, God took special attention to form him from the dust of the ground, breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and made him into a living being. God also gave human the authority to govern all things on earth and the privilege to enjoy numerous blessings. The only request that God has on man is this: to obey Him and to do His will. God is still asking us to do the same today! If we are willing to submit to Him and follow His guidance, He will certainly pour into our lives His indescribable riches.

**APPLICATION:** List the various blessings that God has given you:

Spend time to reflect on this during the week. Re-dedicate yourself to the LORD with a grateful heart, and be obedient to Him in every way.

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"  
2 Corinthians 9:15

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.



3. How does the phrase "For this reason" in verse 24 relate to the teaching in that verse? How does this verse add to your understand of marital relationship?

In the whole creation account, God saw everything as "good"; the only time that the phrase "not good" appears is in 2:18 — "It is not good for the man to be alone." In response, God created a helper suitable for man, so that they could complement and support each other. The way that God created female was ingenious, using a rib from the man's side to create woman. A famous British Bible scholar, Matthew Henry, once said, "Eve was not taken out of Adam's head to top him, neither out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be loved by him."

In addition, the name "helper" does not mean that female is inferior to male (like teaching assistant, sous chef, etc.). On the contrary, "helper" is a word that is often used to describe God's help for us. In other words, female is what God created to fill in for male's weakness, to help him accomplish work that he cannot finish alone. This "God ordained complementary marital relationship" is also an essential part of the "unity" and "oneness" for husbands and wives.

**APPLICATION:** If you are married, you can give thanks for your spouse; also, express your gratefulness to your spouse for his/her supports and helps. If you are single, you may thank God for the thoughtful design of the complementary relationship between male and female; also, ask God to help you use your current status of singlehood effectively, to faithfully serve Him, to please Him, and to "be fruitful" for God ("I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs — how he can please the Lord." 1 Corinthians 7:32. Note: the phrase "increase in number" in Genesis 1:28 in the original language means "bear much fruit".)

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.



## What Is Man?

Passage: Psalm 8:3-9

January 7

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Psalm 8:3-9, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** "Heavenly Beings" (v.5) is "*Elohim*" in Hebrew, the same word is translated as the "God" who created the heavens and the earth. The KJV followed the Septuagint in translating this word "angels." The NIV has chosen heavenly beings, which follows the same interpretation. Most Bible scholars consider "God" to be a better translation.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Psalm 8:3-9 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. From Psalm 8:3-9, what evidence has the psalmist given to prove that God is mindful of us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How has Psalm 8:3-9 helped you understand or gain insight of our value?

When you see the grandness of God's creation, have you ever burst into praise from within? Mankind is so weak, so insignificant, so self-centered, and often disappoints God — yet God is mindful of us. When God created us, He made us only a little lower than Himself; what an important and precious spot He has placed us at! Satan always want us to believe that our value is equal to our performance plus other's opinions. If we believe in his lies, then we will fall into his trap of inferiority and self pity. Yet, God's word reassures us that our value is solely depend on how God sees us. Therefore, no matter how hard we got hit or how tough the situation is, do not fall into Satan's scheme of self-pity because God has clearly declared our distinguished value.

**APPLICATION:** Is there any difference between how you view your own value and how God view yours? Why?

**MOMORY VERSE:** "<sup>3</sup>When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,<sup>4</sup>what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" Psalm 8:3-4

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Booby Trap

Passage: Genesis 3:1-6

January 8

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 3:1-6, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 pointed out clearly that the serpent is the devil, or Satan. Whether Satan used the body of a snake to tempt Eve, or physically changed into a serpent, the bible did not give a clear explanation. However, the Bible does portray the serpent as “more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made”, and as one being cursed by God (“cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals...will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.”). Thus, we may reckon that the serpent was involved throughout the temptation process.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 3:1-6 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. What methods did the serpent (Satan) use to tempt Eve?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Compare Eve's response to Satan (3:2-3) and God's admonition to man (2:16-17), and try to figure out what could have caused her to yield to temptation:

<b>God's Admonition (2:16-17)</b>	<b>Eve's Reiteration (3:2-3)</b>
You are <b>free to eat</b> from <b>any tree</b> in the garden	_____ from the trees in the garden

you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil	You must not eat fruit from the tree...and you must not _____
for when you eat from it you <b>will certainly</b> die	...or _____ die

This whole scene of Eve’s falling into temptation reveals our undeniable human weakness as well as the trickery that Satan uses. First of all, Eve had a reduced view of God’s provision, not recognizing that she is “free to eat from any tree” and thus should have been grateful about her privileges. She also added her own words to God’s prohibition, and said “and you must not touch it.” This calls to mind how the Pharisees added manmade rules to God’s laws. Lastly, she weakened the penalty of disobedience by distorting “you will certainly die” into “or you will die.” At first glance all the statements above might not look very different, but we need to be aware that one is not to add or take away any word that God has spoken!

Satan’s deceptive maneuver also included casting doubt on God’s command (“you will not certainly die”) and defaming His motives—the pivotal point of the temptation. Let us trust God’s words completely and hold tightly to His promises, and acknowledge that His plan for us is truly the best. Submit to His will and allow Him to help us face various challenges in life.

**APPLICATION:** What are some of the tricks that Satan is using on you? Would it be the doubting of the truthfulness of God’s Word? Or the downplaying on the consequence of sin, tempting you to compromise and trek into dark terrains such as pornography, greed, slander, cheating, tax evasion, gambling, internet/computer addiction...etc.? How about the lure of fame, wealth, pleasure, and power? Take some time to examine your life. Ask God to grant you His power to overcome those temptations.

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

1 Corinthians 10:13

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

And I Ate...

Passage: Genesis 3:6-13

January 9

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 3:6-13, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 3:6-13 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. What was the reaction of Adam and Eve after they sinned?

2. What excuses did they make for their sinful behavior?

- Adam (3:12)

- Eve (3:13)

“The dog ate my homework!” “It was the cat who broke the vase!” “There’s a lot of traffic!” Do these excuses sound familiar? We have a tendency to make excuses when we do not want to take responsibility for our mistakes, to make others sympathize with us, and to help ourselves feel better. Although making excuses may help reduce guilty feelings in the short run, they can eventually turn us into irresponsible people, even unrepentant.

Adam and Eve felt ashamed after they sinned, so they hid from God among the trees in the garden. This illustrates an important truth: sin alienates man from God and from one another; as relationships become strained, people would blame and criticize one another. Notice how Adam replied God: “The woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” He shifted the blame swiftly to his wife while subtly suggested that this was all God’s fault! And the woman did the same thing by accusing the serpent.

May we learn from the tragic mistakes that they made, and learn not to blame others (or God). Don’t say that it is our society’s fault, or your spouse provoked you and made you short-tempered, or you have to drive above the speed limit in order to keep up with the traffic flow or avoid being late...etc. Rather, own up to your mistake and repent, and say, "I blew it! LORD, please forgive me!"

**APPLICATION:** What are the excuses that you often use to avoid taking responsibility for the wrongs that you’ve done? Bring them to God and seek His forgiveness.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## From Very Good To Curses

Passage: Genesis 3:14-24

January 10

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 3:14-24, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** The “offspring of the woman” (3:15) besides pointing to Cain and all humanity at large, its ultimate fulfillment will fall on the ultimate battle between Jesus Christ (the offspring of woman) and the devil.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 3:14-24 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. What are the consequences of sin?
  - on the snake (3:14-15)
  - on the woman (3:16)
  - on the man (3:17-19)
2. Did God give up on mankind because of sin? How can you tell? (Cf. 3:21-23)

There is a sharp turn from Genesis 1 to Genesis 3. A beautiful perfect world, became a piece of thorns-filled land of curse. Furthermore, man was supposed to have dominion over all things, but sin had turn man into a weakling under the unending cycle of hard labor. However, though man was faithless, God was still faithful. Even though man had to suffer the consequences of sin, God did not give up on mankind. From how God had prepared skin garments for Adam and Eve, we realize that God was more than willing to fill the void of our weaknesses. (1) Covering their bodies with leaves was only temporary; when there was cool breeze, God made leather garments for them. (2) Making leather clothing involved the killing of animals, which foreshadowed substitution, redemption and forgiveness; showing that God actively bestowed His mercy upon men (this was the first death after creation). (3) God prophesied that the offspring of woman would crush the serpent's head, and the serpent would strike his heel (3:15). This typified how Christ would have victory over the devil through His suffering, thus, bringing redemption to the world.

On the one hand, we need to be careful not to fall into the devil's temptation, understanding that one has to bear the bitter consequences of sin. On the other hand, Genesis 3 gives us a very precious promise that God will never give up on His children. Let us come before Him to confess our sins and thank Him for His forgiveness.

**APPLICATION:** Try to recall your past experiences of sinning against God and yet, experiencing His forgiveness afterward. Spend time to savor the bittersweet experience between sins and forgiveness (bitter = bondage in sin, thus, separated from God; sweet = sins being forgiven and your being accepted by God again), and to thank Him for His forgiveness .

**MEMORY VERSE:** " <sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.<sup>16</sup>Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:15-16

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.



## Do Not Love The World

Passage: 1 John 2:15-17

January 11

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read 1 John 2:15-17, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read 1 John 2:15-17 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. How do you define "love the world"?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why is it that Christians cannot love the world and love God at the same time?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. In these three areas: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," which one do you struggle with the most and which one is the hardest to resist? Why?

Many think that "loving the world" only refers to external behaviors, like how we interact with others, places that we go and activities that we join, etc. In reality, "loving the world" is more of an internal attitude! It is possible to avoid worldly pleasure and entertainment, while still desiring and lusting after the world deep inside our hearts.

John separated "the things of the world" (meaning the world view and values that are without God) into three categories: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of this life. In fact, many temptations and trials stem from these three areas. For example, in the process of Eve's fall, Genesis 3:6 said that the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food (the lust of the flesh) and pleasing to the eye (the lust of the eyes), and also desirable for gaining wisdom (the pride of this life), she took some and ate it. In the same way, when Satan tempted Jesus, he also focused on these three areas: tempting Jesus to turn rocks into food (the lust of the flesh — hunger), luring Jesus with the kingdoms of the world and their splendor (the lust of the eyes), and challenging Jesus to throw himself down from the height of the temple as a proof of His identity as the Son of God (the pride of this life). It is evident that Christians need to carefully guard ourselves in these three areas. John reminded us that this world and all its evil desires are temporary and will end. The only thing that will last is our obedience to God's will. May we live an abundant life by the strength of the Lord, and carefully handle the evil desires in our hearts so that we will not be tricked by this world.

**APPLICATION:** Think of an area in life that you often struggle and stumble, try to identify which one of the three areas does the struggle come from. Pray that God will empower you to deal with your struggle(s) and to obey God's will.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Be A Nobel Instrument

Passage: 2 Timothy 2:20-22

January 12

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read 2 Timothy 2:20-22, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read 2 Timothy 2:20-22 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. How can someone "cleans himself"? Please give examples.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Please list the four benefits of "cleansing ourselves"? What does the promise ("...he will be...") mean to you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How did Paul teach Timothy to handle his evil desires? Try to approach it from both the negative and the positive aspects.

To be able to do good works for noble purposes, and be useful to the Master is the ultimate goal of a Christian. Here Paul taught Timothy that one must "cleanse" oneself from "ignoble purposes" in order to ① become an "instrument for noble purposes, ② made holy, ③ useful to the Master and ④ prepared to do any good work." If one wants to be used by the Lord, one must set aside oneself from the flow of the world. Even with the smallest thing in life, if it is something against the holy standard of God, we cannot let it go. We must have a strong sensitivity to sin, and a high standard for holy living.

In addition, Paul also gave two practical ways for "cleansing" ourselves. Negatively speaking, we are to "flee from evil desires". This is not done out of the fear of Satan, nor is it an act of kneeling to his evil power. On the contrary, it is done out of our unwillingness to be associated with sin — just as when someone walks pass a foul smelling dumpster, it is a natural reaction to move away quickly. On the other hand, we also need a spiritual partner for support and to keep us accountable as we continue to grow in our character and to live out our various spiritual virtues.

**APPLICATION:** Examine your life to identify the evil desires from which you need to flee. Also, what are the spiritual virtues that you need to pursue? If you do not have a spiritual partner to walk with you, first pray that God will provide you with one; then pay attention to the brothers and sisters around you to see if you could find a "same-gender" accountability/prayer partner (Brothers should look for brothers, sisters look for sisters, or you can choose your spouse as your spiritual partner.)

Evil desires to flee from:

Spiritual Virtues to pursue:

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." 2 Timothy 2:22

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Evil Desire And Temptation

Passage: James 1:13-18

January 13

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read James 1:13-18, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** The phrase "evil desire" in the original language means a strong urge; in and of itself it is neutral. Paul used this phrase to describe his desire to depart and be with Christ (Philippians 1:23) and his hope to be reunited with the Thessalonian believers. However, in the New Testament, this phrase is mostly used to describe negative desires, lusts, and greed, etc.

The word "tempt," in the original language, means fishing with baits or catching preys with a trap.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read James 1:13-18 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Try to repeat in your own words the whole process of temptation; of what does this process remind you?

2. Here James described two types of "giving birth" (note: the term "gives birth" in 1:15 "it gives birth to sin" and in 1:18 "give us birth through the word of truth" is the same word in the original language; and these are the only two occurrences of the word in the whole Bible), what was his intention? How does this relate to resisting temptation?

In this passage, James detailed the source of temptation (1:13-14), the process of man being tempted (1:15-16), and the ultimate solution to temptation (1:17-18). James described two very different types of "giving birth": ①Satan uses the evil desires in our heart to set traps to lead us to sin. From this, we can see that "uncontrolled desires" will lead us to sin, and "unconfessed sins" will lead to death (broken relationship with God). ②God is the Father of heavenly lights; not only will He not lead us to sin and eventually death as Satan does; on the contrary, God will give abundant grace that would lead us to eternal life.

When we compare these two distinct "births," we will realize that the solution to temptation is based on our intimate relationship with the Father and His Word (1:18 "the word of truth"). Martin Luther once said, "You cannot keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair." In the same way, we cannot prevent the occurrence of temptations; but we can rely on the Word of God and draw strength from Him, so that temptation will not unite with the evil desires within us, thus, leading to conception and the birth of sin.

**APPLICATION:** Whenever you face temptation in the future, try to picture the scene of Satan building a nest in your hair. Then pray immediately to chase away this horrible "bird."

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." James 1:12

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## To Die And To Live With Christ

Passage: Romans 6:1-14

January 14

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Romans 6:1-14, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** "Baptism" here is not referring to the sacrament of baptism, but to the baptism of the Holy Spirit when one accepts Christ. ("For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body...and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." 1 Corinthians 12:13).

"Dead to sin" — "dead," whether referring to physical or spiritual death, always means separation and not extinction. Being dead to sin points to a separation from the power of sin, escaping from evil ("set free from sin" 6:18, 22), and not the extinction of sin (non-existence).

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Romans 6:1-14 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. In verse 11, Paul said, "Count yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus", what does he mean?
2. In verse 14, "For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace", how can this be applied in the life of believers? What does this mean to us as believers?

In this passage, Paul exhorted the believers of the Roman church against using God's grace as an excuse to continue in sin. They falsely asserted that as sin increased, the grace of God would increase as well; in this way, they should sin more in order to experience more of God's grace. Paul's response to their argument could be divided into three main points: "to know", "to count", and "to offer". First, believers need to "know" that we have been united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Having this identity means that we are separated from sin and out of its control (i.e. moving from the helpless state of "I cannot not sin" to the freedom of "I can choose not to sin"). Since we know that we have this "freedom not to sin," we should practice it in our daily life and must "count" ourselves as dead to sin, without response nor movement. Finally, believers must be willing to commit and to "offer" ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness for Him to use.

When we are weak in sin, often we might say, "My spirit is willing, but my body is weak"; or we might blame in on Satan, saying, "Satan is too crafty! so I fell!" Yet, from our passage today, we can see that the power and punishment of sin could no longer control us. Even though we might fall down from time to time, we are no longer slaves of sin, and under its control. We could rely on Christ and choose to live for God and to become a new person who is shaped and transformed by Him. From now on, let us stop making excuses, but live a victorious life through our faith in God.

**APPLICATION:** Think of the excuses that you have used to sin, and bring them all before God and ask for His forgiveness.

**MEMORY VERSE:** "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Romans 6:11

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.



## To Master Or Be Mastered

Passage: Genesis 4:1-7

January 15

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 4:1-7, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** "4...The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup>but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor..." That was not because Abel offered the lamb and Cain offered his crops from the soil. The description of Genesis 4:3-4 suggests that the sacrifices made by Abel were thoughtful and with extra efforts in order to please God (the firstborn and the fat of the sheep represent the best; and Hebrews 11:4 indicates that his offering expressed his faith in God); and Cain seemed to be just fulfilling an obligation and discharging his duty (in fact, Cain could also offer the first fruits of his produce, which would be pleasing to God).).

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 4:1-7 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Try to evaluate the "spiritual activities" that you are involved in (i.e. devotion, prayer, confession, offering, saying grace before meals, Sunday worship, Sunday school, fellowship, etc.), which one makes you feel excited that you are willing to put in extra efforts to do? Which activity has become a rut and you have lost the initial excitement over it, and it has gradually become merely a responsibility?

Feel excited, willing to put in extra efforts:

Lose excitement and become a rut:

2. What life principles can you glean from 4:7?

3. What sins are crouching at your door, desiring to have you? Bring them to God, and ask Him to grant you strength to "master" them.

Chapter 4 may evoke in its readers a feeling of sadness, as the series of events unfolds before their eyes. One irony follows another: Cain, whose name means "to acquire or get", became the reason for a grievous "loss" for his parents, as Adam and Eve lost both of their beloved sons due to Cain's rebellion (Abel was murdered, and Cain was banished from God's presence and became a wanderer). Also, offering sacrifices is for the purpose of communing with God and pleasing Him; yet, it got degenerated into some muddling, perfunctory religious rites and duties. And reacting to his offering "not being looked with favor", Cain committed the sin of murder, which made it even more impossible for God to "look upon (him) with favor." Finally, God advised Cain to "master" his evil desires, but he became "mastered" by sin, and consequently "mastered" his brother and murdered him. Such is the horror and sad reality of sin. May we be mindful not to desire the pleasures of sin; but instead, be alert and of sober mind, and live a life that pleases God.

**APPLICATION:** Remind yourself as you are involved in any personal or public spiritual/religious activities, that you are not to let your relationship with God become a routine. Also be mindful not to give the devil any opportunity to lure you to sin.

**MEMORY VERSE:** "and do not give the devil a foothold."  
Ephesians 4:27

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## The First Murder

Passage: Genesis 4:8-16

January 16

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 4:8-16, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** When Cain complained to God, saying, "My punishment is more than I can bear...whoever finds me will kill me", God responded with putting "a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him", you might wonder, "who were these people and where did they come from?" Obviously, they were all descendants from Adam and Eve. At that time, marriage between brothers and sisters were permitted.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 4:8-16 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Please list out all of Cain's mistakes (relating to God, to man, to himself, to sin, etc.).
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. God put a mark on Cain, what does that mean?

Cain fully demonstrated that he was an unteachable, unrepentant, and unquestionably an outright rogue, culprit, and evildoer. In 1 John 3:12, he is described as one who "belonged to the evil one". Not only did he ignore God's warning and killed his brother, even when he was questioned by God on the whereabouts of his brother, he was not ashamed of his sin as Adam and Eve did; on the contrary, he talked back and argued with God that he was not his brother's keeper. At the point where God pointed out his sin and pronounced his punishment, he was still without remorse, but complained that his punishment was unreasonable. Even though Cain was not repentant, God was still full of grace and mercy and would not forsake His children. Even though Cain had sinned, God still gave him a mark as his protection.

The life of Cain deeply demonstrated the horror of sin, and his attitude was heinous. Nevertheless, he was not the only one with that problem. Are not you and I unquestionably evil doers and chiefs of sinners? If it was not because of God's grace and mercy, how then could we become the children of God with hope for eternal life? Let us not take God's grace for granted, but instead, come before God humbly and thank Him for not abandoning us while we were still stubborn.

**APPLICATION:** Reflect on your life journey, think of a time when you have stumbled or even fallen away from the Lord; how did God pull you through those dark times and carry you on? Try to count those "blessings in the midst of defiance."

**MEMORY VERSE:** "if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself." 2 Timothy 2:13

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

The Two Opposing Lines
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Passage: Genesis 4:17-26

January 17

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 4:17-26, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 4:17-26 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. What kind of impact did the descendants of Cain bring to the ancient civilization?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Compare the descendants of Cain (4:23) with the descendants of Seth (4:25-26). What are your thoughts?

Cain's descendants had brought civilization to the ancient era, Lamech's three sons helped shape the ancient culture — Jabel was the founder of the animal herding industry, Jubal was the founder of the music industry, and Tubal-Cain was the founder of the heavy metal industry. However, civilization does not necessarily bring happiness to mankind; on the contrary it could lead people to rely more on themselves, and move away from God. First of all, Lamech violated the monogamous marriage blueprint that God had created and married two wives. Moreover, he despised the value of human life, boasting that he had killed the strong and ruined the young. He proudly claimed that whoever killed Lamech would be avenged "seventy-seven times." Yet, towards the close of Genesis chapter 4, in the midst of all the gloominess, God gave us a ray of hope — that outside of Cain's evil line, God brought forth from Adam and Eve the God-fearing line of Seth. And the fourth chapter of Genesis also ends with the hopeful statement "At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord," reminding us once again that God longs for us to return to His loving embrace.

**APPLICATION:** Survey the civilization and technologies that surround you today, are they leading you closer to God or pulling you away from God? Let "calling on the name of the Lord" be your spiritual goal for this week, and reprioritize your life through prayer.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Dead Or Alive...To Walk With God

Passage: Genesis 5

January 18

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 5, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 5 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Compare Genesis 5:1 and 5:3. Write down your feeling.
2. Identify the person with the shortest life span in this passage. How different was his life as compared to the others? Which one of these people would you rather be? Why?
3. The author used repetitive phrases to describe the lives of Adam's descendants: "had lived...years", "became the father of...", "lived...years", "had other sons and daughters", "lived a total of...years", "and then he died". What comes to your mind as you go through them in this chapter?

Why did God use a whole chapter to show us the genealogy from Adam to Noah? On the one hand, for sure, it is to let us see the development of the human race. On the other hand, we could also learn the following lessons: ① In 5:1, the Bible clearly stated that God created mankind in His likeness, and through human procreation, His “image” and His “likeness” (5:3) were passed down from generation to generation. Mankind is given the privilege to bear His glorious image, in spite of their sinfulness.② Enoch lived the shortest among those listed in the genealogy, only 365 years (5:23); yet, his life seemed to be the most abundant. Amidst the monotonous “lived...had lived...and then he died” descriptions, Enoch’s life stands out in sharp contrast, a refreshing breakthrough indeed. Enoch “walked faithfully with God” (vss. 22-24), and God “took him away”. His life may be the shortest, but his “walking with God” resulted in him becoming one of the only two persons in history who had never experienced death.

Enoch’s example shows us that it is not how long we live that matters, but whether we have walked with our LORD. May we cling tightly onto God as He leads us through hills and valleys! Little may we understand the struggles we are going through; reluctant may we be in accepting what happened in the past; very limited may our ability be to foresee what will happen tomorrow... A question we may need to ask ourselves is: do I truly believe that God loves us to the end, that I can entrust my past, present, and future in His mighty hands? Am I willing to walk closely with Him, and to live an abundant life?

**APPLICATION:** Imagine God is always walking with you, right by your side. How would that affect the way that you interact with others and the way that you handle different situations? May you keep in mind this perspective throughout this coming week, and allow God to guide your every step.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “<sup>20</sup>... Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup>For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”  
Philippians 1:20-21

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.





The author of "Ecclesiastes" is King Solomon, he was regarded as a man of great wisdom; yet, with all the wisdom and enriching experiences that he had as king, he declared that everything in life to be meaningless! He further supported his statement by referring to the ceaseless cycles of generations (v.4) and of nature (v. 5-7). He even concluded that people's hard labor produced nothing permanent but only resulted in indescribable weariness and lack of satisfaction. Therefore King Solomon drew the conclusion that all things were meaningless! Ever since the fall, mankind has to experience the cycle of life and death, emptiness and helplessness.

From the "lived...had sons and daughters...then he died" cycle of life and death of Genesis 5, to the "Everything is Meaningless" in Ecclesiastes; seemingly, mankind could not breakthrough this endless cycle of "under the sun." However, we thank God for His unending grace and mercy, because of the redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ, we could possess the hope of eternal life, and could look at life from "above the sun." Come, let us no longer be content with all the struggles, entertainment, busyness "under the sun"; but instead learn to focus on the eternal and look at life from "above the sun."

**APPLICATION:** Try to stop and think about your daily operation from morning till night. In the midst of a busy life filled with various demands and pressures, have you ever wondered what is that for? Do the activities that you participated in matter much? At the end, are they meaningful? Do they carry eternal value? Is God asking you to do it, or you do it just because of peer pressure or the influence of the world? Calm down, use this time to seriously rethink how you should wisely invest your time and your life. Do what pleases God and make your life count!!

**MEMORY VERSE:** "What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?" Ecclesiastes 1:3

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## In His Time

Passage: Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

January 20

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-14, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. How would you understand the author's purpose, as he used a series of 14 opposites in verses 2-7?.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. After a series of sighs and despair, the author surprisingly made some positive affirmations of life in Ecclesiastes 3:11-14, please list them out accordingly.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. In Ecclesiastes 3:14, what kind of attitude are we encouraged to have in facing life's uncertainties? What does it mean by "men will \_\_\_\_\_ Him?"

At a first glance, Ecclesiastes appears to be a book filled with despairs and pessimism; however, if we look deeper, we may be able to discover the many great wisdom in it! First, the author

affirms that God still has a great plan despite the meaningless routine that he has observed. Therefore, one could be happy and do good, to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in all his toil. And even in situations that are beyond our control, and in the endless and meaningless cycle of life, God could make all things work together for good and "has made everything beautiful in its time." Furthermore, "He has also set eternity in the hearts of men."

The author also realizes that everything happening in the world has its own timing, and everything is controlled by God and not by man! For that reason, we puny little humans, instead of trying with all our wits to take control of life, we should learn to trust and to appreciate the beautiful plan that our omniscient and omnipotent God has prepared for us. The author also emphasizes that we are finite being with so many limitations, and there is just no way that we could comprehend the works of an infinite God. So, in order to live a meaningful life, we need to have a clear understanding of God and His Word, so that we will no longer live a self-centered life; but instead, with a God fearing attitude, to humbly recognize that everything that we are entitled to, is all by the grace of God!

**APPLICATION:** The author used both positive and negative experiences to describe life, try to reflect on and write down what God has allowed you to experience throughout last year.

Positive experiences:

Negative experiences:

When you look back at the positive, as well as, the negative experiences, do you agree with what the author has affirmed in verse 11 — "He has make everything beautiful in its time" ? Why or why not?

**MEMORY VERSE:** " <sup>11</sup>He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men...<sup>14</sup>...God does it so that men will revere him." Ecclesiastes 3:11, 14

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Do Not Wait Till...

Passage: Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

January 21

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** The meaning of the phrase "Remember your creator" is to revere God, to obey His commandments, and to serve Him faithfully.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 can be divided into three smaller sections, each starting with "before the..." (12:1, 12:2, 12,6); the emphasis is on the fact that life is short, so we must seize the opportunity to live every moment to the fullest.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-8 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. What is the theme of Ecclesiastes 12:1-8?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. The teacher used a series of word pictures in Ecclesiastes 12:2-7 to describe the aging of a human being leading into death. Try to ponder upon these word pictures to see what each word picture represent.

Ecclesiastes 12 is the conclusion of the whole book which reiterates the theme of the whole writing: advising the readers to remember their creator while they are still young, so that they will fear the Lord, obey His commandments, and serve Him faithfully in order to live a meaningful life. Although different Bible scholars may disagree on some details of the explanations of the word pictures in 12:2-7, the general ideas can be summarized as the following:

- 12:2 — clouds bringing darkness = the process of aging, weakening, and the unavoidable end of death
- 12:3 — keepers of the house tremble = the shaking of hands and arms
  - strong men stoop = the weakening and bending of legs
  - grinders cease because they are few = falling out of teeth
  - windows grow dim = eyesight becoming blurry
- 12:4 — doors to the street are closed = due to the lost of teeth, the lips sink into each other
  - sound of grinding fades = not being able to chew or hear
  - rise up at the sound of birds = elderly wakes up early
  - songs grow faint = the shaking and weakening of voice
- 12:5 — afraid of height and of dangers in the street = afraid of heights and falling
  - almond tree blossoms = hairs turn grey
  - grasshopper drags itself along = lost of strength
  - desires no longer is stirred = lost of desires (appetite or sex drive)
  - people go to their eternal home...mourners = death
- 12:6 — silver cord is severed, ...golden bowl is broken = death
  - pitcher shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well = death

In whichever ways we understand the word pictures in Ecclesiastes 12:2-7, the point is to advise us to treasure our time to live for God!

**APPLICATION:** No matter how old you are, offer up your every day to God so that God will help you live your life well.

**MEMORY VERSE:** "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them.'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Stop Grieving God

Passage: Genesis 6:1-8

January 22

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 6:1-8, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** "the sons of God went to the daughters of man and had children by them" (6:4) mainly has four different interpretations. ① "Sons of God" are fallen angels who went on to marry daughters of man; but this view conflicts with Matthew 22:30, as angels were described as "neither marry nor be given in marriage". Though some may argue that the restriction is only for the unfallen angels; however, why would God in the first place, create sexual functions in angels who were not supposed to get marry or be given in marriage? ② "Sons of God" is pointing to rulers or leaders with authority. ③ "Sons of God" is referring to the godly line of Seth, while "daughters of man" is referring to the evil line of Cain. ④ Combining the first two views, "Sons of God" were probably powerful rulers, despots, or warriors, who were controlled or indwelt by fallen angels to the point that they were given to adulterous desires, marrying "any" woman as they pleased (Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Daniel 10:13 also mentioned that great kings of the earth had "princes" ruling behind them—their power is demonic). View ③ and view ④ are the most probable ones.

"His days will be a hundred and twenty years" (6:3) refers to the age limit that God gave to the new generation, instead of being eight or nine hundred years like the older generations, they could live until around 120 (120 is a just rough number, Abraham lived till 175 while Esau lived to be 180). Another explanation is that 120 years was the time that God would tolerate the evil generation until the Flood came, then the world was to be destroyed.

"Nephilim" (6:4) means "the fallen," could be translated as Giants, also appeared in Numbers 13:33.

"The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth" (6:6) is a confusing verse. Isn't God all knowing? Why then would he regret? The word "regret," in the original language, can mean comfort or be comforted. The intended meaning here is not to say that God regretted and thought that it was a mistake to make man; rather it means God was saddened by the fallen state of man.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 6:1-8 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. How does the author describe the many sins of the generation at that time?

6:2,4

6:3

6:5

2. Please re-read verse 3, what does it tell you about God's grace toward man?

3. What was God's attitude toward the world that was filled with evil? How did the author depict the conflict between God's justice and compassion? In what ways that God's regret and sadness impact and/or inspire you?

Genesis chapter 6 has recorded the sinfulness of man, and how God was still merciful and allowed them to live to the old age of 120 years. Furthermore, no matter how we interpret the terms "sons of God" and the "daughters of man," the issue at hand is that men were controlled by their evil desires, disregarded God's design for



and the need of fidelity in marriage, and "they married any of them they chose" (i.e. being licentious, lustful, and polygamous). Nevertheless, God was not a spectator who is indifferent to the failure of mankind; rather, when God "saw how great the wickedness of mankind had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil all the time," God's heart "was deeply troubled." The author repeatedly used the word "regret" to describe how sad and troubled God was. Just imagine, because of man's failure, the Almighty God who had created the whole universe and all that was within, needed to be comforted ("regret" in the original language) repeatedly? How can we not be moved by such grace?

As we survey the world today, is it not just as dark and just as sad for God to see? As we live in the general trend of "disrespectfulness toward God", do our life testimonies "go with the flow", or do they "stand above the water" like that of Noah's? May we always remember God's grace toward us, and determine to never trouble God's heart but truly live out a God fearing life.

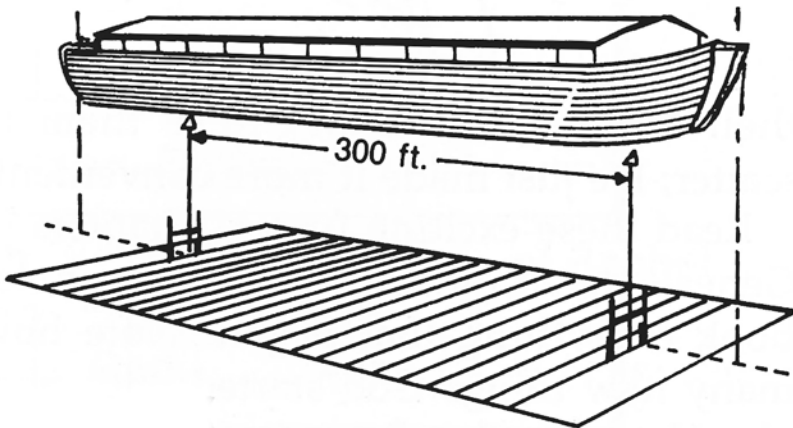
**APPLICATION:** Examine your life and see if there are specific areas that trouble God, and God has been graciously waiting for you to change? Hand these dark facets of life into God's hand and ask for His forgiveness

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Chronology of the Flood (Noah's Family spent 377 days in the Ark)

7 days Waiting	150 days Water rising		150 days Water receding					70 days Drying	
7d	40d	110d	74d	40d	7d	7d	22d	13d	57d
Noah's family entered and waited in the Ark	Heavy rains for 40 days	110 days later, water receded, Ark rested on Mount Ararat	74 days later, tops of mountains were visible	40 days later, Noah sent out raven and dove. Dove returned	7 days later, dove was sent out and returned with an olive leaf	7 days later, dove was sent out and did not return	22 days later, water had gone down	Noah removed the covering from the ark and saw dry land	Land completely dry, and Noah exited the Ark

## Noah's Ark Compared to A Football Field



The Ark was 450 feet long,  
75 feet wide, 45 feet high

## Noah's Ark

Passage: Genesis 6:8-22

January 23

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 6:8-22, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 6:8-22 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. From v. 8-9, what do you learn about Noah's character? See what you could learn from the fourfold description of Noah.

①

②

③

④

2. What do you see as the biggest obstacle(s) for Noah to accomplish his task?

### 3. Why did God bring forth such a flood?

The Bible describes Noah as a man who had "found favor in the eyes of the Lord," being "a righteous man" who was "blameless among the people of his time," and "he walked with God." This is not to say that he never sinned, but that Noah was willing to fulfill God's desire for His children, and was justified by faith ("By faith Noah... save[d] his family. By his faith he...became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." Hebrews 11: 7). Many people often misunderstand that the Old Testament believer were saved by following the commandments and offering sacrifices. In fact, in both the Old and New testaments, people are always justified by faith rather than by works or by observing the religious rituals.

Of course, Noah had to pay a high price to fulfill God's mission; however, behind his deeds was his faith in and his obedience to God (cf. Hebrews 11: 7). For this reason, Noah became a sharp contrast to the people in his generation: Noah was described as "a righteous and blameless man who found favor in God's eyes and had been walking with God," while the others were described as "corrupt...full of violence... corrupt...corrupted...[God will] put an end to...filled with violence...to [be] destroy" (Genesis 6:11-13). The judgment of the Flood depicted the sharp conflict between God's righteousness and His love: On the one hand, God could not tolerate sin, so He had to destroy the evil generation at that time; on the other hand, God loved His creation, thus, he chose to give His people a second chance through Noah's family.

**APPLICATION:** Think of something difficult that God wants you to accomplish; learn from the life of Noah and not to be afraid, but to follow God's will in obedience. Put all these difficulties in the hands of our Lord, and ask Him to grant you strength to accomplish the mission that He has entrusted to you.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## The Cleansing Flood

Passage: Genesis 7:1-24, Hebrews 11:7

January 24

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 7:1-24 & Hebrews 11:7, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** The flood at Noah's time is a global flood and not a local one.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read the above passages again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Noah is described as a man of faith with "holy fear" (Hebrews 11:7), how was faith demonstrated in Noah's life?
2. Imagine how Noah had to bring so many animals into the Ark and had to stay inside the Ark for 377 days, what obstacles did he have to overcome?
3. How high did the water rise up to, what do you think it implies?

Although Genesis 7 seems to be just a record of Noah's family, along with the animals entering the ark, as well as, the severity of the flood, it allows us to learn the importance of obedience. The author repeatedly emphasized Noah's obedience ("Noah did everything just as God commanded him." [6:22]. "Noah did all that the Lord commanded him." [7: 5], "as God commanded Noah" [7: 9, 16]), and because of the obedience of Noah's family, human race and the animals on earth are preserved.

However, Noah's obedience was costly. Besides the tons of hard work that needed to be put in to build a huge ark, Noah's family needed to face all the criticism from their unbelieving generation. Also, they had to spend all their time, 24/7, with a large number of animals, all cramped inside the ark for over a year (just imagine the smell...). On top of that, they could not say, "How lovely this panda is, I want to bring in a couple more," or "the skunk is too stinky, I will not take it on board," or "taking seven pairs of clean animals is just too much, let's just bring one pair." Without any words said, all is done according to what the Lord has commanded.

Let us ignore the criticism of others, nor should we follow our own impulses. Focus on doing what God wants us to do, strive to fulfill God's plan in our lives; because only God deserves to be our "Audience Of One."

**APPLICATION:** Try to make a commitment before God, that you will do what the Lord has commanded you at all cost.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## A Whole New World

Passage: Genesis 8:1-22

January 25

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 8:1-22, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** "Whole burnt offering" is the sacrifice where the animal is killed, washed, skinned, cut into pieces, and burnt on the alter as a whole (including internal organs); this sacrifice is a representation of the worshiper's complete surrender and offering to God.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 8:1-22 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Think through the whole process when Noah was in the Ark, from the stopping of the rain, to the receding of the water, and all the way to the time when Noah could finally leave the Ark, what important lesson can you learn from Noah?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What was the first thing that Noah did after he came out from the Ark? Why did he do that?

3. The burnt offering that Noah made to the Lord after he came out from the Ark became a pleasing aroma, and because of that, God said that He would never curse the ground because of man (v.21). What life lesson can you learn from this incident?

Noah's wait inside the Ark was a long and burdensome process. Imagine that Noah and his family had been in the Ark for almost a year, and even though they knew that the ground was dried, they did not leave the Ark according to their will. He waited quietly for God's words to come, patiently for the instruction of God to be given. Noah's obedience to God and his unshakable faith is a worthy example for us to meditate on. Growing up in this age of instant gratification, a generation with "instant noodles" and "microwave ovens," "waiting patiently" has become a lost art; and yet, a necessary spiritual discipline. Let the life of Noah become our reference as we learn to obey God and to wait on His timing for His will to be done.

Noah was a righteous man, he surrendered to God's calling and gave his best to build the Ark even before the rain had started. And for over a year in the Ark, he experienced God's presence and protection. Even when the rain had stopped, he patiently waited for God's instruction before leaving the Ark. Throughout the whole process, he must have experienced God's grace, especially the grace of saving him and his family from the judgment of the Flood, and replacing it with a new beginning. That is why the first thing that Noah did after getting off the Ark was to build an altar and to sacrifice a burnt offering to express his thankfulness and total surrender to God. God accepted his response of thanksgiving with favor; and his family's obedience became the blessing for the generations to come. Let us learn from Noah's example and respond to God's blessings with gratitude.

**APPLICATION:** Examine your life to see in what area that you need to practice "Patience in Waiting," and in what area for that you need to give thanks?

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.



## The Covenant Of The Rainbow

Passage: Genesis 9:1-17

January 26

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 9:1-17, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** "Rainbow" (9:13, 14, 16) in the original language means "bow," and in most of the other Bible passages where this word is used, it describes the bow used in battle. After the judgment of the Flood, God used the rainbow as a sign to mark the covenant with man, symbolizing God hanging His bow on the cloud, and not to judge the world with a worldwide flood again.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 9:1-17 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. Compare and contrast God's commandment to Noah and his sons with the commandments given to Adam and Eve (cf. Genesis 1:28-30)? What does that imply?

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." <sup>29</sup>Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."<sup>30</sup>And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground — everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. (Genesis 1:28-30)

2. From this passage, how can we see that God values life?

As we examine God's instructions to Noah and his sons, we can easily see that they are similar to the mission given to Adam and Eve. Both charged them to "be fruitful and increase in number." However, Sin had severed man's relationship with the natural world; mankind went from being the "manager of animals" to being "hunters." Man and animals would harm each other; sad enough, mankind would harm each other too ("And for your lifeblood...I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too..." 9:5). By then, man started eating meat after Noah's time.

Even though the flow of the natural world was disrupted by man's sin, God still wanted to emphasize the value of life. Not only did God forbid the eating of meat with blood in it, He also declared severe punishment for "whoever sheds the blood of man." What is more, God "hanged" the rainbow (which man had never seen before) on the clouds, as a warrior putting away his battle bow, to symbolize that He would not judge mankind with a worldwide flood again.

God is full of grace and mercy. Even though man has ruined God's creation with their sins, God still gave mankind a second chance. Through cleansing the world with the flood, all things were started anew. Furthermore, He made a covenant with a rainbow, thus, mankind could have a fresh start through the family of Noah.

**APPLICATION:** Recall a time(s) when God has given you a "fresh start." With a thankful heart, think about how you could best utilize the second chance(s) that God has given you.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.



Even a faithful, obedient and righteous man like Noah, was found drunk and left naked before his sons! This account tells us that even the most godly man cannot escape from the influence of sin. Just as the Bible reminds us, "Be self-controlled and alert, your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5: 8). It is noteworthy that Noah had just experienced a beautiful victory, he was destined to begin a new era for mankind; however, right at this critical moment, he fell. Being a Christian is like running a marathon, no matter how successful we were, how many obstacles we have overcome in the past, we still have to focus on the finish line, and keep running faithfully towards the end. Be watchful, so that we will not fall into the devil's trap!

In addition, "Ham" saw his father's nakedness, yet, he did not grab anything to cover his father's body; but instead, he exposed his father's mistake to his brothers. This was rude and extremely disrespectful. On the contrary, when his brothers heard the news, they immediately grabbed a garment and laid it across their shoulders, then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness. This showed how much they had borne with their father, and how much they had respected him. In the same way, we should also respect and bear with one another.

**APPLICATION:** Evaluate your spiritual life, even if your relationship with the Lord has improved, do not be lax, but stay alert and be aware of the devil's schemes. Ask the Lord to give you a humble and watchful attitude.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Be Prepared

Passage: Matthew 24:32-44

January 28

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Matthew 24:32-44, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** The phrase "one will be taken and the other left" is not talking about the Rapture of Christians at the end times. During the time of Noah, the flood washed away the evil generation leaving only the family of Noah on earth; in contrast, at the Rapture, the righteous ones will be taken away while the evil generation will be left behind to go through the Great Tribulation. Here, Jesus is using Noah as an example, to point to the fact that the unbelieving generation will be judged as those during the time of Noah.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Matthew 24:32-44 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. In what ways is the flood similar to Jesus' second coming?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. If we do not know when Jesus will be coming back, how can we practically prepare ourselves to meet Jesus? Please make suggestions.

In this passage, Jesus continued to answer the questions raised by the disciples, regarding when the prophecy of the holy city and temple being destroyed would be fulfilled. Jesus first taught the disciples to learn from the lesson of the fig tree — just as one would know that summer was approaching when new leaves were coming out of the tender twigs, they would know the coming of the Son of Man when there was a dramatic increase of disasters and false prophets. Jesus continued on with the example of Noah to warn the disciples that no one would know the exact timing of the coming of the Judgment Day. In contrast to the days of Noah, when people were eating, drinking and marrying, and did not keep watch to live a godly living; the disciples were to be alert and to prepare for the second coming of the Lord.

Let us take the warning from the example of Noah's generation, let us stop focusing on just seeking for a comfortable living, fulfilling our desires regarding what to eat and what to drink, while neglecting our spiritual life. It is so easy for us to find excuses, saying, "I can wait a little while! It is not too late to do it tomorrow!" Yet, reality tells us that there may not even be a tomorrow or another chance for us to make up for our laxity and procrastination. That's why, while we still have today, we must focus our attention, keep watch, and faithfully complete the mission that God has charged us to fulfill. This way, even if Jesus comes back tonight, we can be free of worries, doubts, and regrets; but instead, we can look forward to meeting our Lord with excitement, and giving thanks to Him for saving us from the wrath of God.

**APPLICATION:** Examine your life for areas that God wants you to change or things that God wants you to accomplish, but yet, you have been procrastinating. Pray that God would grant you a willing heart to take the first step, to prepare to meet your God with action!

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Lost In Translation

Passage: Genesis 11:1-9

January 29

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 11:1-9, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** "tower" (11:4) refers to a fortress and emphasizes security. It may be associated with the pyramid-shaped ziggurats that humans in early Mesopotamian cities used to access the divine world of the gods they worshiped.

"Babel" means confusion, and is often translated as "Babylon" elsewhere in the Old Testament. Babylon becomes symbolic of human opposition to God.

"nothing they plan to do will be impossible" (11:6) It does not imply that God was afraid of the power of men, thus, He went on to confuse their language. In fact, the very limited ability of man, as compared to the omnipotence of the Almighty God, is not even worth mentioning. God confused their language merely because God did not want to see the gathering and multiplying of evil activities, leading mankind to a rebellious pathway that had no return.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Genesis 11:1-9 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. What is the motivation behind the building of the Tower of Babel?

2. Recall similar experiences that you have strived to build your own "tower" with your own strength? What happened?
  
3. From the way God resolved the problem by confusing the language of the people and scattered them all over the earth, what is God's message to you?

The Tower of Babel incident fully demonstrated man's rebellion against God! They built the Tower of Babel in order to make a name for themselves, so that they would not be scattered throughout the land (11:4). For one, we can feel their arrogance; once again, mankind was blinded by the "pride of this world," and embarked on the road of rebellion. Moreover, they purposely went against God's command of "filling the earth" (1:28; 9:1) and to "multiply on the earth and increase upon it" (9:7); thus, they were determined not to be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

As we reflect upon our lives, we often do not know how to respect and to fear God; and we often take all the blessings that He has bestowed upon us for granted. We are prideful and self-centered; and we like to use our own ways and abilities to deal with things instead of simply obeying God. At the same time, from the way God handled the Babel incident, we can clearly see that God will never allow proud rebellious acts to be accomplished, nor will He tolerate the arrogance of the proud. Therefore, we need to learn to humble ourselves, and to honestly deal with our inner pride. Only when we are willing to admit that the Almighty God is the one ultimately in control, we can then gain the right perspective to handle life! In a nutshell, pride provokes our self-centeredness and our disobedient nature; while humility can help us build our trust and obedience to the Lord.

**APPLICATION:** Try to give God your Tower of Babel (dreams, ideals, personal kingdom, etc.) that you have or wanted to build. If it is not pleasing to God, surrender your dream before Him and let Him take charge.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.



## A Blessed Life

Passage: Psalm 1:1-6

January 30

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PRAYER:** Ask God to calm your heart, open your eyes, so that you can understand His Word.

**ADORATION:** Be still before God, praise Him in your heart, or sing a praise song or hymn.

**READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Psalm 1:1-6, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

**NOTE:** "Prosper" (1:3) can be translated as smooth, prosperous, flourishing and so on. This is not to say that the life of a Christian is just smooth sailing, without difficulties and struggles; but that the believers can have the power to accomplish God's will and plan in his life, and to live a triumphal life.

**RE-READING GOD'S WORD:** Read Psalm 1:1-6 again with careful observation, and answer the following questions:

1. How could a person be "blessed"? Please look at both positive and negative aspects. Please write in your own words, do not simply copy the scriptures. Take note of the progression.

Positive: ①

②

Negative: ①

②

③

2. In verse 3, the psalmist says "which yields its fruit in season" instead of "which yields its fruit always," how do you understand that?

Psalm 1 describes how one can become a blessed man. The author compares two different paths of good and evil and their end results. He uses the word "blessed" to begin the Psalm; emphasizing the blessed way is passively, to stay away from evil; and actively, to desire the Word of God and to meditate on it day and night. It is worthwhile to note the progression between the two. On the negative side, "walk," "stand," and "sit" mark a gradual increase in involvement. And on the positive side, "delight" and "mediates day and night" also indicates an increase in intensity, that the blessed person is willing to deepen his/her relationship with God.

The main focus of the psalm is to encourage people to build their life rooted in the Word of God, and to take time to read and to meditate on it. This does not mean casual reading or skimming through the Bible, but to let God's Word take effect in our heart, and impact every aspect of our daily living. Also, we need to be careful in choosing our friends because their behaviors and attitudes towards life will unknowingly affect our faith! Take an honest look at your friends, who among them are helping you build a closer relationship with God? And who, may be in a subtle way, are weakening your spiritual walk? When we are willing to stay away from bad influences and to keep God's Word in our heart, we will then be empowered, and be able to successfully accomplish God's plans in our life.

**APPLICATION:** The Psalmist clearly indicates that the more we are willing to spend time in God's words, the more we are able to grow spiritually; and our life will never be the same! 2017 has already begun, the Lunar New Year has arrived. Try to evaluate your spiritual life, examine your spiritual appetite, and be determined to seriously spend 20 to 30 minutes a day in God's Word.

**PRAYER:** Tell God what you have learned and how you would like to respond to Him. Pray for His empowerment to live out His will.

## Monthly Reflection

Passage: Psalm 139:23-24

January 31

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ End Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**QUIET DOWN:** Use one to two minutes to quiet down yourself, try not to think about anything. If light music (without lyrics) helps, you could play some light music to help you focus.

**PRAYER AND MEDITATION:** Ask God to calm your heart, then read aloud Psalm 139:23-24, slowly and repeatedly (you may repeat it three to five times or more, but avoid rushing through it). As you read, try to pay attention to specific words, moods or feelings, or any particular thoughts that speak to you between the lines. Use the above Bible verses or your respective insight as a beginning prayer of today's reflection.

**"<sup>23</sup>Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.<sup>24</sup>See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."**

Psalm 139:23-24

**REFLECTION:** Please meditate quietly and answer the following questions.

1. Please count and write down the various situations that you experienced God's grace in your life in the past month.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In your daily words and deeds, are there areas that you need to improve on?

3. In establishing your daily devotions as a habit, what are some areas that you need to improve?

4. Other reflections:

**PRAY:** Ask the Lord to grant you strength to live out what you have learned today.

1. **To Flee** (2 Timothy 2:22)

"**Flee the evil desires of youth**, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

2. **To Be Alert** (1 Peter 5:8)

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

3. **To Pray** (Matthew 26:41)

"**Watch and pray** so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

4. **To Submit to God** (James 4:7)

"**Submit yourselves, then, to God**. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

5. **To Know the Bible** (Psalm 119:11)

"**I have hidden your word in my heart** that I might not sin against you."

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## Acknowledgment

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