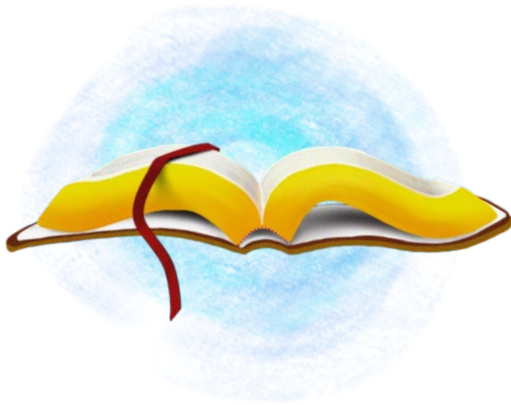


Jacob • Exodus



"Know the Bible, Fear the Lord"

2017 March 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 verses may be quoted for meditation and memorization depending on the context and as needed; thus, it may not be provided daily.

Jacob — The Grabber

Passage: Genesis 25:19-34

March 1

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 25:19-34 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: The "birthright" mentioned in Genesis 25:31 is a precious blessing for Jews. The eldest son would get double portion of his father's estate, as well as the authority to manage his household and to offer sacrifices for his family.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 25:19-34 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why did Jacob fight for the birthright? What was the result?
2. Why did Esau despise his birthright? What was the result?
3. From Hebrews 12:16-17, what does the red stew represent? What is the spiritual lesson for you?

Jacob's early stage of life reflected the sin nature of human after the fall. Jacob fought to be the first to come out when he was still in his mother's womb, but lost to his brother Esau. Jacob didn't want

to be out done by his brother, so he grasped Esau's heel to come out. Therefore, his parents named him Jacob. Originally, "Jacob" means "may He (God) protect"; however, since it sounds like "heel," it was used to describe Jacob's "heel-grasping." So, since the day he was born, he had been grasping with his own hands. What is "grasping"? It is the reliance on one's own strength and wisdom to fight, to get ahead and make a name for oneself.

In Genesis 25:23, it says, "one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." We can see that Jacob would one day grasp the birthright. If Jacob was so deceitful, why did God choose Jacob and not Esau? Romans 9:11 explains, "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls..." May God reveals to us His grace of election.

Verse 34 tells us that Esau preferred to have the red stew than his birthright, and his act was more than an unintentional mistake, but a despise on his birthright. The word "despise" has the connotation of "despising God." As Hebrews 12:16-17 says, "See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears." May God remind us not to give in to temptation or pleasure. We have to value the spiritual blessing and to fear God.

APPLICATION: We used to be corrupted like Jacob, living a self-centered life; but God has chosen you and me as His children. How then are you going to respond to God's "Grace of Election"?

MEMORY VERSE: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."
1 Peter 2:9

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

Jacob — The Cheater

Passage: Genesis 27:1-45

March 2

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 27:1-45 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: Isaac blessed Jacob according to the promise that God had given to Abraham (27:29):

① "May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you" — This was the blessing that Abraham received that he would become the father of many nations and peoples (cf. 17:4-6) .

② "Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you" — This was the blessing of birthright.

③ "May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed" — This was the status of Abraham's blessedness before God (12:3).

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 27:1-45 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. How did Jacob obtain his father's blessing by deception? What was the cost?

2. Why did Esau resent Jacob so much that he wanted to kill him?

Jacob, with his mother's help, took advantage of his father's old age and bad eyesight. Putting on Esau's clothes, he took the tasty food, lied to his father and received the blessing. This incident once again demonstrated how deceitful Jacob was.

After Jacob cheated for the blessing, he could no longer stay at home (41-44); this was the price he had to pay for obtaining the blessing by deception. God had promised to bless Jacob, but the promises of God, against human reasoning, do not require worldly methods to accomplish it! When people think that they are wise and do not depend on God, but act upon their own wisdom, the results may be costly. Despite human mistakes, God is still in charge, and He is able to utilize men's fault, so it could come into play for His plan.

Because Jacob received the blessing, Esau hated Jacob so much that he decided to kill Jacob. We can see that if one acts according to the flesh, when one gets hurt, the first response is to hold a grudge; then the grudge will turn into murderous thoughts, and perhaps even into killing. May the Lord help us to be alert, as Romans 8:8 teaches us, "Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."

APPLICATION: Genesis 27:20 tells us that Jacob considered his deceitful way as a "success" given by God. In your Christian life, did you ever achieve something using your own strength and consider that from God? Have you obtained something by improper means, nevertheless you said that God gave them to you? Please examine your life before the Lord and repent accordingly.

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.

Jacob — The Dreamer

Passage: Genesis 28:10-22

March 3

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 28:10-22 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: Jacob dreamed of a stairway (ladder) resting on the earth: Biblical scholars believe that this stairway to heaven typifies the bringing of blessings from heaven to Earth, and man's needs and prayers to God; as well as God's willingness to send His angels to help His people. This shows that heaven and Earth are connected, and God's promise will achieve on Earth as it is in Heaven.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 28:10-22 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. From Jacob's dream of the stairway and his encounter with God, what enlightenment do you have?

2. God promised Jacob: "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." How does this promise help you?

Jacob, on his way to Haran, dreamed of the ladder, the angels and the LORD God. God first introduced Himself as the LORD, the God of Jacob's grandfather and of his father; and there God promised to bless Jacob. From the passage, we can sense that Jacob did not really know God personally. God appeared and spoke to Jacob to let him know more about Him, and to have a personal relationship with Him. Likewise, it is important for Christians to know God personally. We need to experience God through our daily devotion, through prayer, and through worship; so that we could establish a personal relationship with God and grow to know Him more.

God promised Jacob and said: "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." The experience of Jacob that night helped him realize an immutable fact, that no matter where he went, the LORD's presence with him would never change. Likewise, God is always with us nowadays; as it says in Matthew 1:23, Jesus' name is called "Immanuel," which means "God with us".

APPLICATION: Evaluate the way that you do your daily devotion. Is it like gulping down fast food? Has that become a rut? Or do you spend time to communicate with God and to wait upon His words so that you could know Him more? In what way can you reconstruct the attitudes in your spiritual life?

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.

Jacob had stolen the birthright by deception, and now it was his turn to be deceived — by his uncle, Laban. Since he wanted to marry Rachel, he had to serve Laban for 7 more years after the first 7 years. Jacob later complained that Laban had cheated him by changing his wages ten times (31:7). Why did God allow Jacob to suffer under a person who was even more stubborn, more greedy, and more deceitful than he was? From God's perspective, Laban might be a tool that God used to discipline Jacob. Through this discipline, Jacob's life had been transformed to produce the fruits of patience, sincerity, and love.

Jacob wanted to marry Rachel and he served Laban for seven more years. Because of his love for her, he saw them as only a few days. This is the power of love! With love, we can labor and endure hardship as we work pleasantly, and time will fly by fast. Love is the best motivation to serve. If we serve through love, heavy burden will become much lighter; just like the love of parents, they will serve their children without much complaints. If we feel that serving the Lord is tiring, obligatory, and do it with a long face; it may reveal that our love for God is not deep enough, and we need to evaluate ourselves often.

APPLICATION:

1. In the environment which we live and work we may encounter some cunning, arrogant, and deceitful people. When you are with them, how do you rely on God and face them?

2. Try them today:

Meditate on God's love more — He loves me and sacrificed for me.

Experience God's love more — His care, comfort and help for me.

Share God's love more — the more you share God's love with others, the more you will experience God's love yourself.

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.

Jacob — The Wrestler

Passage: Genesis 32:22-32

March 5

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 32:22-32 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 32:22-32 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why did God wrestle with Jacob at the ford of Jabbok? What is the implication?
2. Why did God wrench the socket of Jacob's hip? Do you think it was good for Jacob or not? What we can learn from his experience?

There came a man wrestling with Jacob, this person initiated to overcome him. Prophet Hosea mentioned about Jacob's wrestling: "In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him..." (Hosea 12:3-4). The man wrestled with Jacob till daybreak, and Jacob insisted to have the man bless him! He probably thought that without God's blessing, he could not face his brother Esau; and without God's blessing, he could not live his life.

When the man saw that he could not overpower Jacob, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched. It seems

that Jacob had lost, but he would not let go unless the man bless him. Finally, the man gave him a new name: Israel, meaning God fights (could be interpreted as "the one who struggled with God and with men has overcome," or "one who became a victorious prince of God"), then he blessed Jacob. How could it be possible that a losing man could become an "overcomer"? Jacob's new name and wrenched hip became a symbol of his changed life; that his life has been overcome by God. This is a spiritual truth: if our lives have been overcome by God, we would surrender to Him and could become victorious believers.

APPLICATION:

1. Jacob wrestled with the angel of God till daybreak, and he insisted that the angels of God had to bless him! What lesson could you learn from Jacob? Have you ever prayed for something with this same attitude to insist of getting the blessing from God?

2. In the Jewish tradition, whenever God changed a person's name, then the sovereignty over that person's life belonged to God. Jacob's name implies his "grasping" everything, until he was renamed, he then had to surrender the sovereignty of his life over to God. Reflect upon your life, after you have put your faith in God, have switched from a life of "grasping," to a life of "reliance" on God? Meditate and write down areas in your life that have not been won over by God. Are you willing to follow God's desire and surrender to Him?

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

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.

Jacob — The Reconciler

Passage: Genesis 33

March 6

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 33 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "For to see your face is like seeing the face of God" (33:10) refers to Esau's "acceptance," typifying God's forgiveness and forbearance.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 33 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. "But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept." (33:4) Guess the reasons behind Esau's forgiveness of his brother's offense after 20 years.

2. Jacob "set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel" (33:20, meaning "God, the God of Israel"), why did he name the altar this way (try comparing his address to God in 32:9)?

The smooth reconciliation of Jacob and Esau happened after Jacob's hip had been wrenched and God had blessed him. Thus, the reconciliation involved God and how He answered Jacob's prayer ("Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau" 32:11), and not because of Jacob's gifts that settled his brother's anger.

God had promised to bring Jacob back home and now the promise was fulfilled. He was so grateful that he set up an altar and called it El Elohe Israel, meaning "God, the God of Israel." He used to address God as the God of Abraham, the God of his father Isaac; but now, he called God "God of Israel," with Israel being his new name, he addressed God as his personal God. Similarly, when we have experienced God, we would then establish a personal relationship with Him, and call Him "My God!"

APPLICATION:

1. Jacob desperately sought forgiveness from and reconciliation with his brother Esau. Have you ever offended someone or had a broken relationship? If yes, would you rely on God and take the initiative to reconcile and rebuild that relationship? List out their names and some practical actions of reconciliation (e.g. take the initiative to greet, to care for, to say "sorry," etc. to the person[s]).

2. After Jacob returned to the land of Canaan safely and settled down in Shechem, he bought a plot of ground and set up an altar to give thanks to and worship God. Remember all the turbulences that God has carried you through; in what ways you have given Him thanks? Write down some of your answered prayers, and how God had brought you peace. Think of some concrete ways that you could thank Him if you have not already done so.

MEMORY VERSE: ²³Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

Matthew 5:23-24

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.

Jacob — The Vow Fulfiller

Passage: Genesis 35:1-8

March 7

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 35:1-8 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 35:1-8 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. God told Jacob that He was the one who appeared to him when he was fleeing from his brother Esau (35:1). Why did God introduce Himself this way? What was the implication?
2. Jacob as a spiritual leader, did not only urge his family to get rid of the idols, to consecrate themselves, and to go up to Bethel to build an altar to worship the true God; he also testified to them what marvelous things God had done in his life. Jacob led his whole family back to God, what can you learn from him?

God said to Jacob: "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau." (35:1) God appeared to Jacob again and commanded him to go up to Bethel to build an altar, it was probably because Jacob's family was raised in a polytheistic culture, and God wanted them to get rid of all the idols, and to only worship the one true God, the LORD. At the same time, God also reminded Jacob of the vow that he made at Bethel ("...the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house,

and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." 28:20-22). Since God had answered all of his prayers, now it would be the time when Jacob needed to fulfill his vow.

Jacob shared with his family the testimony of his past 20 years, and he introduced God as: "God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." In other words, he could live until that day, have a large family, and have a lot of wealth all because God had answered his prayer and had blessed him. In response, Jacob told his family to get rid of the idols, to purify themselves and to worship God.

APPLICATION:

1. An idol is not necessarily an object that you can touch; it could be certain thoughts or desires. In any case, anything that would replace God in our hearts, is an idol. What are the idols, whether tangible or intangible, that you must get rid of? Be determined to do so lest it will hinder you from worshiping before the Lord!

2. God reminded Jacob that he ought to fulfill his vow. Are you like Jacob that you would easily forget His grace and your vow to God? Think of how you can concretely fulfill your vow to God!

3. Is your spiritual life influencing people around you that your life could be a testimony to impact lives? Ask God to remind you of the important mission in leading your family and friends to abandon false beliefs and turn to the true God! Write down at least three names of your unbelieving family members or friends, pray for their salvation and draft out some concrete plans to witness to them.

MOMORY VERSE: "Make vows to the LORD your God and fulfill them; let all the neighboring lands bring gifts to the One to be feared."
Psalm 76:11

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.

Jacob — The Homecomer

Passage: Genesis 35:9-15, 28-19

March 8

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 35:9-15, 28-19 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

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

1. God told Jacob, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." (35:10) This declaration first appeared in Genesis 32:28, what does it remind us of? The content of the passage is very similar to the promises that God had given to Abraham and Isaac. What does it imply?

2. Genesis 49:31, 35:19, 29, and 48:15 recorded that Jacob encountered death of his family members on his way back home, what could you learn from him?

Genesis 35:9-15 recorded Jacob's journey home, God appeared to him again in Bethel and blessed him. Again, God reaffirmed his "name change" from Jacob to Israel, as well as his receiving the blessings promised to Abraham. God's promises would not be in vain; with God's protection, Jacob had a lot of children and they went back to where his father Isaac lived. Without a doubt, Jacob's 12 sons later became the patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel, the heirs of God's eternal plan. Here God restated His promise to reaffirm Jacob's faith so that he could continue to move forward.

On his way home, Jacob encountered the death of his loved ones. After 20 years, as Jacob returned home from Haran, he didn't get a chance to see the mother who loved him dearly, for Rebekah had already been dead (49:31). Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, as well as his father had also died (35:19, 29). These hard blows in life happened to Jacob repeatedly. Yet, from the other point of view, the experience of Jacob receiving God's promise of blessings (35:9-13), was like a spiritual vaccination. Even though he had to face the series of trials and hard blows in life, he could still rely on God's power and His promise, for he had experienced God's faithfulness. Therefore when Jacob was at the last stretch of his life journey, before he died, he still had full confidence testifying in front of all his children that God was indeed his shepherd (48:15).

APPLICATION: Reflect before the Lord and write down how He has been a shepherd to you and led you through the valley of the shadow of death? Thank God for shepherding you and caring for you throughout your life, and continue to trust Him to be the unchanging God of your past, your present, and your future.

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.

Joseph — From Dreamer To Slave

Passage: Genesis 37

March 9

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 37 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Richly ornamented robe" is a long, wide robe, similar to those worn in Egypt and the nearby tribes by their prominent royal members. This robe had long sleeves representing the role of a leader; only those in leadership were worthy to wear long sleeves.

"Dreams" and visions were often used by God in the Old Testament to reveal His wills. (cf. Job 33:15-17)

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 37 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why did Joseph report the evil deeds of his brothers to his father?
2. Joseph had two dreams, what do they mean?
3. Why did Joseph's brothers treat him so cruelly?

Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers. Maybe Joseph was too straightforward; when he found his brothers doing evil deeds, he brought their father a bad report about them. Later, Joseph had two dreams that made the situation worse, causing his brothers more envy and hatred toward him.

Joseph had two dreams, he dreamed that he was rising up, having a glorious future, and would be in leadership position. Later the dreams came true, revealing the fulfillment of God's plan for the Israelites. The predictions revealed through dreams were ordained by God (cf. 41:32, 42-43). God gave Joseph the two dreams concerning his rising up, probably was to prepare him for his future challenges; and through the prediction of these two dreams, Joseph could face his impending trials without being discouraged.

Joseph was Jacob's 11th son, born to him at his old age from his beloved wife Rachel; that was why Jacob favored him so much and gave Joseph the robe. This was the cause that the brothers were at odds with each other. In fact, jealousy is also the origin of many sins. Because of jealousy, Joseph's brothers betrayed their brother and lied to their father.

Blinded by their jealousy and resentment, Joseph's brothers decided to kill him because of his robe and his dreams. Jealousy always creeps into our life in a subtle way; if we are not careful, Satan could use jealousy to cause us to sin. The deeper the roots of jealousy are, the harder it is to get rid of it; so, once we notice that we are jealous, we need to rely on God and deal with it right the way.

APPLICATION: Reflect and see what are some of the things that affect your interpersonal relationship, especially your relationship with your family members. Pray that God would help you become a peace maker.

MEMORY VERSE: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."
Matthew 5:9

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.

made him prosper in whatever he did. Often, the grace that God bestows upon us in times of our trouble would seem to be more than what he shows in times of our comfort. "God with us" does not necessarily mean that Christians will be free from suffering, but that we can experience God and His help in every circumstances, even in our most difficult times.

Joseph could overcome the sexual temptation of Potiphar's wife because he had a heart that revered God. As he was tempted, he replied: "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" and this was his secret of overcoming temptation. This experience of Joseph overcoming his temptation also reminds us that we must rely on and revere God daily, in order to have strength to overcome the various sexual temptations. Nowadays, whenever you turn on your computer or cell phone, you will be bombarded by all kinds of pornographic materials and images. "Now" is in fact a portrayal of the "adulterous generation" that Jesus had condemned. Furthermore, in order to overcome temptation, one of the best methods is to flee from it; as in Joseph's case, he fled from the seduction of his master's wife! Likewise, we should rely on God's power to flee from temptation and to overcome our lustful desires, so that we will not defile ourselves, but to live a life of purity as His holy and beloved children.

APPLICATION: In this ungodly generation, how can you live a godly life? Please write down some feasible ways along with some practical steps.

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.

Joseph — The Dream Interpreter

Passage: Genesis 40:1-41:36

March 11

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 40:1-41:36 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 40:1-41:36 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Joseph interpreted the dreams for the chief cupbearer and the chief baker; please list down the results, as well as the interpretations of the two dreams (40:20-23)?

Chief cupbearer —

Chief Baker —

2. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's two dreams, please write down the interpretation of the two dreams? (41:28-30)

3. After the chief cupbearer was released and restored to his position, how could he forget Joseph the dream interpreter? Do you think this is fair? What happened then?

Joseph did not only dream, he was also a dream interpreter. God gave him the wisdom to interpret dreams, and he interpreted dreams for the chief cupbearer, for the chief baker, and for Pharaoh; but he stressed that the interpretations belonged to God. That was how Joseph magnified God, gloried Him, and bore witness for Him. Humility pleases God, because "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." (James 4:6)

Although Joseph was put into prison, God let him meet two of the king's officials, so he had the chance to interpret their dreams; and finally, he got the opportunity to redeem his injustice. Therefore, we need to believe that God has the best plan to accomplish His good will in our lives.

Looking back, if the chief cupbearer remembered Joseph and he pleaded for his release from prison, Joseph might not have the opportunity to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Whether Joseph was remembered or forgotten, it was from God; and only God can control and arrange whatever happens in our lives. So we only need to trust God and to wait upon Him patiently, because God's timing will be the best. People may forget...even those who have bestowed grace upon them, but God will never forget His servants whom He has chosen, and will always remember His children. Just as Isaiah 49:15 recorded God's promise to us: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"

APPLICATION: Learn from Joseph and be courageous to bear witness in front of non-believers, try to reiterate to them the grace that God has bestowed upon 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.

Joseph — The Ruler

Passage: Genesis 41:37-52

March 12

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 41:37-52 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 41:37-52 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. What could you learn from Joseph's example to let others see that you have God's spirit within you?

2. Throughout the whole process of being sold as a slave, to being falsely accused and imprisoned, to becoming a ruler in Egypt, Joseph silently waited upon the Lord. What is the significance of his being still? Try to find out some clues from the naming of his two sons.

At thirty years of age, Joseph skyrocketed from a prisoner to Second In Command to Pharaoh; Joseph finally understood the plan God has laid out for him. He knew that behind all his calamities, therein lay God's will and permission — including the betrayal by his older brothers, life as a slave, the calamity of being imprisoned, and so on; and God was using all these to mold him, to

raise him up to where he was; and all the pain that he had undergone was beneficial to him (cf. Romans 8:28). The calamities and hardship that we have experienced often left dark spots in our lives. When we go through pain and sadness, we may not understand why God permits such things to happen to us; but when we are willing to put our lives in God's hand, to let him draw lines and dots all over, He will turn what we perceive as scratches and dark spots into music notes, lines into music scores, and transform our "imperfections" into a beautiful symphony. May we put our lives into God's hand, to experience his molding and to be transformed into beautiful lives that glorifies Him!

Joseph silently waited upon the Lord for over thirteen years while being sold as a slave, being falsely accused and was imprisoned to the time that he became the Second In Command to Pharaoh (37:2, 41:46). From the names Joseph gave to his two sons, we can see that Joseph honored God with a thankful heart (41:51-52). Looking back at the hardship that he suffered during those thirteen years, Joseph understood that only God could heal the wounds in his heart, and that he could forget all of his pain. As a result, he named his firstborn son Manasseh, which means "God has made me forget all my hardship". At the same time he also acknowledged God as the only one who could turn his calamities into prosperity, so he named his younger son Ephraim, which means "made me fruitful."

APPLICATION: Try taking those unforgettable painful experiences that you have, or the people whom you could not forgive on your own to the throne of God; ask God to grant you the grace of healing and the grace of remedying those pains. Try to thank God with the same words of Joseph: "For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

MEMORY VERSE: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."
Romans 8:28

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.

this time, he had never forgotten his father, and his father's face probably had never departed from his memory. From this passage, we can see how much Joseph's heart had been longing for his father.

Joseph's face beamed with joy as he found out his younger brother did not face the same fate he did. He hugged Benjamin and said, "God be gracious to you, my son." (43:29-31) Joseph looked at Benjamin as though he saw his own son, because they were the only two from the same parents from amongst the twelve brothers. and Benjamin was still very young at the time when Joseph was sold. Now when Joseph saw Benjamin, he called him "my son," reflecting how much he loved his younger brother and how close they must be. Furthermore, their mother passed away from giving birth to Benjamin, thus Benjamin must have reminded Joseph of their departed mother. By then, Joseph could no longer hold back his emotion and burst into tears as he quickly retreated back to his own quarters to weep.

Some consider people in our generation as robots, living each day in a mechanical manner; others describe our age as primitive — without feeling, without love. In this high-tech era with rockets and computers, undoubtedly technology has brought this distant world closer; but ironically, the distance between people becomes farther apart. May we learn from the love of Joseph towards his father and his brothers, to truly care for those whom God has put around us.

APPLICATION: In this fast pace, materialistic generation that neglects the nurturing of "genuine affection and concern," reflect on how you could improve the relationship between you and your family members. Think of some practical action that you can carry out in bringing your family closer in this coming month. Ask God to help you put your family as a priority and rebuild that loving concern that may be long overdue.

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.

standing before them was the younger brother whom they had sold. They must have been terribly frightened as they contemplated what revenge Joseph would bring to them. Joseph did not carry a heart of vengeance, but instead he forgave them and even comforted them. He asked them not to blame themselves for selling him to Egypt, because he realized that God was the ultimate one who had sent him to Egypt. Here, Joseph recognized that all that he had encountered was destined by God for a purpose, and with God's good will.

Joseph was able to say to his older brothers after being betrayed: "It seems that it is not you who send me here, but God." (45:8) Revenge is the proper response when viewed from man's perspective; the betrayal of his brothers would probably be something that he would never forget. But Joseph chose to reflect from God's perspective, so he could overcome the urge to seek revenge and chose to forgive his older brothers, as he saw God's hand in all things despite his seemingly unfortunate circumstances. Indeed, if we can truly see God in all our circumstances, we will certainly be grateful even to the point of tears like Joseph. Let us notice that Joseph did not only cry when embracing Benjamin, he also wept over his older brothers and kissed them to restore their peace. What a moving scene it was! May God help us see His hand and His act in everything that we do, especially in our interpersonal relationship, that we would be able to be thankful and to forgive those who have hurt us.

APPLICATION: Go to God and have a time of quiet meditation. Ask Him to help you forgive those who have hurt you from the bottom of your heart. Also, list down some practical actions to substantiate your forgiveness.

MEMORY VERSE: ¹⁴"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Matthew 6:14-15

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.

have been uncertain that Joseph was truly alive in Egypt. To Jacob, it was a huge decision that he had to make. A wrong decision would impact not only his life but the lives of his whole family. The faithful God replied: "I am God, the God of your father, do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will go down to Egypt with you and I will make you into a great nation there." Furthermore, God foretold that Joseph's own hand would close his father's eyes. After receiving the precious promise of God, Jacob went down to Egypt in confidence.

It was recorded in Genesis 46:28-30 that the moment when Joseph reunited with his father, he let out an earth-shattering cry. It was like a bullied son weeping and pouring out grievances to his father, while the father embraced his son whom he thought was lost forever. At that moment, father and son both expressed their greatest joy in their hearts. The Bible recorded that Joseph wept numerous times. Joseph wept to show the affection that he had for his flesh and blood, but what is worthy of our attention is that Joseph had never wept for his own suffering!

APPLICATION: Recall some of the major decisions that you made in your life, such as where to live, where to work, marriage, ministry... and so on. Please list those things that you have sought God's will and ask God for guidance. What were the results? Offer your gratitude to God for His guidance.

MEMORY VERSE: ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

Proverbs 3:5-6

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

The Blessing Upon Joseph's Family

Passage: Genesis 48:8-22 & 49:22-26

March 16

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 48:8-22 & 49:22-26 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Genesis 48:8-22 & 49:22-26 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why did Jacob put Joseph's two children under his name (cf. 1 Chronicles 5:1-2)?

2. What is the secret behind Joseph being blessed by God to be fruitful?

Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons and put them under his name, that means Jacob gave the blessings of the "eldest son" to Joseph, for this, Joseph received a double portion of the inheritance (Chronicles 5:1-2). Jacob's blessing was based on the covenant between God and Abraham, and that God was the one who cared and delivered him from all harm (48:15-16). As the author of Hebrews called attention to the blessings that Jacob bestowed on Joseph's two sons, he explained that the whole process was in fact a worship: "By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff." On the other hand, Jacob blessed Joseph's younger son Ephraim, setting him above the elder son Manasseh. This reversing order between the older and younger occurred consecutively in four

generations: Isaac was over Ishmael, Jacob was over Esau, Joseph was over Reuben, and Ephraim was over Manasseh.

When Jacob blessed Joseph, his description of Joseph was: ① He was a fruitful vine (49:22). God blessed Joseph to become the prime minister after much tribulation in his life. God established Joseph, made him fruitful and he became well known and prosperous; but more important than that, his fruit was his life testimony. He started out as a shepherd, was thrown into the pit, and sold as a slave, and later became a prisoner. However, in the face of adversity, he did not hold onto resentment, neither did he use his authority as a Second In Command to Pharaoh to get revenge for himself, nor did he forget about God because of fame and fortune. Joseph's entire life reflected the fruit that he bore. The fruit was not for his own glory, rather his branches "climbed over a wall," thus the fruit became a blessing to others. This was the fruit that came from an abundant life. ② He was the branch that bore fruit by the spring (49:22), and the spring water continuously supplied the need of the branches. He was like a tree, the fruit was the visible part on the outside; and the root was the part that was not visible, representing Joseph's relationship with God. Throughout his life, Joseph feared God, walked with God, and had a close fellowship with God. This close relationship with the living God enabled Joseph to bear much fruit for God's glory (cf. Psalm 1:1-3). May Joseph's life be an example for you to follow.

APPLICATION:

1. Examine your spiritual life to see what fruit you have borne for God's glory?

2. Make an attempt to bless every one whom you encounter today. Either bless them verbally or bless them in your heart through prayer.

MEMORY VERSE: ²But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers." Psalm 1:2-3

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.

accompanied Jacob's burial to Canaan, and even all of Egypt mourned for Jacob for seventy days!

Joseph's love : After Jacob passed on, Joseph's brothers were fearful that Joseph still held grudges and would retaliate against them, so they pleaded with Joseph. Once again, Joseph revealed his love towards his brothers, making it clear to them that his forgiveness for them would never change; in all these, Joseph saw God's goodness. He even reassured them that he would willingly submit to God's good will and forgive them the wrongs that they did to him ("You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." 50:20). The secret behind Joseph's ability to overcome hatred is that he saw everything from God's perspective; so that not only could he truly forgive his brothers in his heart, but he also had the capacity to comfort them of their fears with his words.

Joseph's faith : It is said that the book of Genesis begins with God's creation, and it ends with a coffin. Nevertheless, inside this coffin lay the one who had complete faith in God as he departed this world with hope — Joseph. His last words still reflected his abundant faith, as he said to his brothers, "God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land He promised... and then you must carry my bones up from this place." (50:24-25) Hebrews 11:22 explains this as the evidence of Joseph's faith: "By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones."

APPLICATION: Are there any experiences in your life similar to what Joseph had gone through — that despite extremely difficult circumstances, you could see "God's will is good"? Consider how has God utilized all things to work together to benefit you? Thank God for all His wonderful plans for you.

MEMORY VERSE: "For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end."
Psalm 48:14

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.

Introduction To Exodus

- Author: Moses
- Date of Writing: Approx. 1400 B.C.
- Theme: God's mighty acts of redemption and the founding of the theocracy

In the Hebrew Bible, this book is named after the first few words of the book, *we'ēleh šemôṭ* ("and these are the names of"). The English title "Exodus" is a transliteration of the Greek word *exodos*, from the Septuagint (the pre-Christian Greek translation of the Old Testament), meaning "exit," "way out," or "departure."

Exodus is the second book in the Bible, a continuation of Genesis. Genesis recorded human's failure and sinfulness, as well as God's mercy and salvific plan. Exodus described in detail how God delivered and redeemed His people.

About 300 years elapsed between the death of Joseph (recorded in the last chapter of Genesis) and the birth of Moses (recorded in ch.2 of Exodus). The duration of time between Jacob's moving to Egypt and the Israelites' exodus was about 430 years (Ex. 12:40-41). Within this 430 years, the Israelites "multiplied greatly" (Ex 1:7). Their labor had proved to be beneficial to Pharaoh. But after Joseph and his generation died, the Israelites were seen as a threat to the new king. So, he put slave masters over them and oppressed them with forced labor. By the time they left Egypt, all Israelites 20 years or older who were able to serve in the army were approximately 603,550 (Num. 1:45-46). Therefore, it is likely that the whole population (i.e. Including women and children) were over 3 million. From 70 to 3 million in 430 years — their population had been doubled every 25 years.

This book described the rapid growth of Jacob's household, their plight in Egypt, and how God delivered them from slavery. It serves to remind His chosen people how God had delivered them and given them laws and commandments, so that they would have a moral standard to live by, and remembered that as a nation in the covenant relationship with God, they were to worship, to serve, and to submit to Him.

Major Divisions of the Book of Exodus

1. The Oppression of Israel in Egypt (1:1-22)
2. The Preparation for the Exodus (2:1-6:30)
3. God's Judgment on Egypt through the 10 Plagues (7:1-13:16)
4. From Egypt to the Red Sea (13:17-15:21)
5. From the Red Sea to Mount Sinai (15:22-18:27)
6. The Giving of the Law at Mount Sinai (19:1-24:18)
7. The Building of the Tabernacle (25:1-40:38)

Major Events in the Book of Exodus*

THE BOOK OF EXODUS										
Focus	Slavery		Salvation				Sanctification			
Divisions	Birth of Moses	Call of Moses	Conflict with Pharaoh	Exodus from Egypt	Red Sea Crossing	Journey to Sinai	Laws and Ceremonies	Tabernacle Blueprint	Golden Calf	Tabernacle Dedication
	1	2 3	6 7 10	11 12 13	15 16 18	19	24 25 31	32 34 35	36 38	40
Topics	Deliverance from Oppression					Preparation for Worship				
	Getting Israel Out of Egypt					Getting Egypt Out of Israel				
Place	In Egypt		On the March				At Sinai			
Time	430 Years (15% of Exodus)		2 Months (30% of Exodus)				10 Months (55% of Exodus)			

* Chart from The Daily Walk Bible, eds. Bruce H. Wilkinson, Paula A. Kirk, and John W. Hoover (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1997), 67.

God seemed to be silent during this long period of oppression. Perhaps we can identify with that feeling — that God appears to be distant and silent when we cry out to Him for help. We may have concluded that as recipients of His gift of salvation, we are also entitled to be "saved" from all other sufferings (such as sickness, failure, discouragement, unemployment, accidents...etc.). Try to recall those incidences when God has come to your rescue during difficult times. Remember that God has never left you, and He never will.

Imitate the faith of the midwives who trusted and feared God (1:17). They defied Pharaoh's order to kill Hebrew baby boys, risking their very own lives. Likewise, God does not want us to be afraid of or blindly obey those in power, especially those who reject God and His Word. If we are ever asked to violate God's commands, we should always obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29), no matter the circumstances.

APPLICATION: Approach God's throne of grace and tell Him all about your difficulties, your struggles, or how your situation has become progressively worse. Ask Him to let you experience His presence and His comfort. For the Lord will never forsake you, have faith in Him and He will grant you grace and strength to help you overcome adversity and be victorious over evil.

Your current struggles or hardships:

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 Birth And Early Life of Moses

Passage: Exodus 2:1-22

March 19

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 2:1-22 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 2:1-22 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. What does Moses' birth, and how he was protected, nurtured, and educated, mean to you?

2. Why did Moses flee to Midian? What can you learn from that?

3. Comparing Moses' living in the palace and in the wilderness, which style of living do you think propelled his inner growth? Why?

The birth and upbringing of Moses was indeed a miracle to his whole family. By God's grace, little Moses' life was preserved. Not only that, Moses' mother miraculously got to nurse her own baby for Pharaoh's daughter and be with him! In the short life of little Moses, God had used four women to keep him alive: the midwife, Moses' mother, his sister, and the Pharaoh's daughter. Through their protection, nourishment and education, a future leader and national hero was born. Moses was educated by his birth mother

when he was young, and was later educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). God's plan to save the Israelites from Egypt had thus begun. Similarly, we may feel that the work we could do towards God's salvific plan and ministry is insignificant; but as long as we are willing to offer up ourselves, God can use us mightily in spite of the work feeling seemingly insignificant to us.

After Moses had grown up, he went out to observe the hardship experienced by the Hebrews, obviously already knowing that he was a Hebrew himself (2:11). He cared about his own people, but his attempt to fight against the Egyptians with his own strength had proven futile, consequently leading to his own people's rejection, as well as the persecution by Pharaoh. According to Acts, Moses was forty years old by that time, and he thought that his own hands and strength were what God had planned to use in the deliverance of his fellow Hebrews (Acts 7: 23-25). But Moses' action was not of God but of his own might, culminating to the persecution of his life and his exile. Have you ever acted hastily, without patience, and out of your own might? What were the consequences?

Moses lived forty years in the wilderness of Midian (Acts 7: 29-30). He endured significant trials during these long years. Try to imagine the hardship of someone who was used to palatial living but now living in the wilderness. However, God is kind and merciful, those forty years were the very preparations that Moses needed in order to live with the Israelites in the wilderness in the future. He was able to understand the geography and environment of the wilderness. More importantly, he learned humility and patience through life as a shepherd (Numbers 12:3). He was also able to experience how God took care of him — providing him with a marriage, a family (2:21-22), and other needs. All these had helped him learn to completely surrender and to rely on God. No amount of book learning would ever be able to prepare him equally.

APPLICATION: Come before the Lord in the morning and put forth your day's events in front of Him. And remember: "not your will, but God's will; not your own timing, but God's timing". Before going to bed, praise the Lord for what He has accomplished for you today!

MEMORY VERSE: "Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it." Psalm 37:5 (NASB)

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.

God's Call To Moses

Passage: Exodus 2:23-3:22

March 20

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 2:23-3:22 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: The name of the LORD has the same root word as the word "I AM" in Hebrew, so when God revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14, God said, "I AM WHO I AM."

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 2:23-3:22 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. How did God respond to the cry out of the Israelites?

2. God allowed Moses to see the bush being on fire and yet not get burnt up. What do you think this means?

3. How did Moses respond to God's calling?

God "heard" the cry out of the Israelites and "remembered" the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God "looked on" the Israelites, and was "concerned" about their affliction (2:23-25). These words — heard, remembered, looked on, and concerned,

show that God was well aware of everything that was going on. Though the pain continued from an earthly point of view, God had never given up the deliverance of His people. In the end, God responded: "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt...I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians (3:7-8)." In fact, God had long promised to lead the Hebrews out of slavery from Egypt (Genesis 46:3-4), but in His own timing. Because God has the best plan, His timing must be the most appropriate timing.

The significance of the vision seen by Moses: ① A bush in flames but not burnt up — revealed the divine power of the Almighty God, and foreshadowed the impending deliverance of the Israelites. ② The place where Moses stood was deemed holy ground — that wherever God is present, the land is holy. God's order for Moses to take off his sandals signified that we also ought to be clean and humble when we worship before God. ③ God's declaration that "I am the LORD, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" revealed that the faithful God would not forget the covenant and promises that He established with the fathers of the Israelites (3:16-17).

Through the dialogue between God and Moses, we could see that Moses wanted to turn down God's calling (11-15). He was afraid because he did not know who was standing before him. He did not have the courage to face the future. But God wanted Moses to tell the Israelites: "I AM has sent me to you." God wanted Moses to know that it was the creator of the universe, the Almighty, who was sending him, and that His immense patience and presence would be with him always, because He had specifically chosen Moses for this monumental task. Likewise, Christians often make excuses and reject God's calling. Take a moment to think about how you should respond to God's calling.

APPLICATION: Think about how you come before God each Sunday. How do you worship Him?

MEMORY VERSE: "But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."
Habakkuk 2:20

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.

Moses' Faith Was Tested

Passage: Exodus 4:10-16; 5:1-9, 15-23

March 21

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 4:10-16; 5:1-9, 15-23 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 4:10-16; 5:1-9, 15-23 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. What excuse did Moses use to get away from God's calling? What happened then? Did you ever try to get away from God's calling? Why?
2. Under what circumstances did Moses come to God and complain? Have you ever complained to God? How did God respond to you?

Using the excuse of not being eloquent enough to accomplish the mission, Moses shirked God's calling. God said to him, "Who gave man his mouth?" (4:10-11). And God said, "I will help you speak," the original text means "God will be with Moses' mouth." Whether it was because Moses was not born with the gift of eloquence, or he had lost fluency in his mother tongue and could speak only the local language after living among the gentiles for 40 years; but when God said I would be with your mouth, God would give him the power to fulfill his mission. Likewise, today the Lord promises to be with us when we spread the Gospel and He will empower us to fulfill His mission (Matthew 28: 19-20).

Once more, Moses rebuffed God and said, "O LORD, please send someone else to do it" (4:13); and when Moses again shirked his responsibility, God was angry with Moses. After God showed His wrath, Moses finally surrendered himself. Like Moses, we attend church worship but often would draw a line on further involving ourselves in the ministries. Or, when we do get involved but run into difficulties or interpersonal problems, we would be quick to say: "God, I want out." Does that sound like you? If so, why?

When Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh to make a request, Pharaoh did not allow the Israelites to leave Egypt, but instead accused Moses of encouraging the people to stop working. Moreover, Pharaoh ordered that the Israelites gather their own straws to make bricks; therefore, their work became more intense and laborious. Pharaoh added the charge of "laziness" to the Israelites (5:8). This aggravated oppression made the Israelites angry at Moses and Aaron and so they complained to them. Moses was so frustrated that he turned around and complained to God. He said, "O LORD, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? . . . you have not rescued your people at all." (5:22-23). Moses was frustrated and his faith was tested; though he seemed unqualified, he was still willing to come before God; and though he seemed to be complaining, he did not leave God! Were there times when your faith was tested? Did you continue to believe in God then?

APPLICATION: Reflect to see if God has entrusted you with any missions? Make a commitment before God that regardless of any setbacks or difficulties, in all circumstances be submissive and not evasive; turn complaints into prayers; and determine to rely on God's power to complete the mission that He entrusted to you.

MOMORY VERSE: ¹¹ The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." Exodus 4:11-12

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.

God Reconfirmed His Covenant

Passage: Exodus 6:1-13

March 22

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 6:1-13 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 6:1-13 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why did God appear to Moses again?

2. Why did Moses come before God again?

Once again, God appeared to Moses and assured him that God's people would be delivered through His mighty hand. This time God revealed himself as "the LORD" and "God Almighty" (6:1-3). It meant that the Lord did whatever pleased Him and He was not subjected to human intervention. In other words, nothing could have kept the will of God from coming to fruition. God wanted Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and it was so decided. No one could have stopped God from fulfilling His will. Are you aware of this fact about God?

However, the Israelites were not ready to believe in God's covenant. They rejected the good news that Moses brought to them. Their spirit of hope might have been totally crushed due to many centuries of being enslaved. So when the Israelites struck back at Moses, he went back to God and argued: "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?" (6:12). Let's pause and think about it: if Moses was successful the first time after he answered God's calling, he could have thought more highly of himself than he ought to. But when he had doubts about his abilities, that fact forced him to come before God again and again. And that was the only way that Moses could have moved forward to fulfill God's calling. This is also the way that God would train His chosen vessels (those who do God's work). Is that also your experience?

APPLICATION: Reflect upon what God has used (whether through circumstances or whatever means) to train you to be his instruments? Please write down these experiences and give thanks for them.

MEMORY VERSE: "...Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty." Zechariah 4:6b

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 Three Plagues

Passage: Exodus 7:15-8:19

March 23

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 7:15-8:19 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 7:15-8:19 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Try to briefly describe how the first three of the ten plagues impacted Egypt.

2. Why did God bring the plagues upon Egypt? What was the purpose?

The following summarizes the first three plagues God brought to the Egyptians through Moses:

① The First Plague — Water turned to blood: The water of the Nile and its canals, ponds and their vessels for carrying water all turned to blood. The Egyptians had many songs of praise for the "god" of the Nile, their most important "god" (Hapi). They believed that all their blessings and harvests depended on this "god." The fact that water turned to blood brought the Egyptians to realize that this "god" could not even save himself, let alone to protect them. Furthermore, depending on this false god would lead its believers to curse and suffering.

② The Second plague — Frogs: "Heqet" is the goddess of birth (with a frog head) that the Egyptians worshipped, since ancient Egyptians favored fertility and frogs give birth to multitudes; but

now they became a plague. The land was full of frogs, spoiling everywhere...even in the palace, in the bedroom, and on the bed of Pharaoh whom the Egyptians revered as God. This plague affected the entire land of Egypt proving that Heqet was not god.

③ The Third plague — Gnats: Gnats covered Egypt like a dust storm as they fed on man and animal. Bible scholars believe that this disaster was related to the god of the desert (Set). Once again, God confronted the Egyptian superstition. The plague of the gnats is frightening because gnats are known to bring infectious diseases and they feed on human's blood and reproduce rapidly. Even Pharaoh's magicians could not produce gnats by their secret acts; for this reason, they publicly admitted to Pharaoh saying: "This is the finger of God." (8:18-19) However, no matter how painful this plague was, Pharaoh's heart was hardened and would not let the Israelites leave Egypt.

The main purpose why God brought the plagues upon Egypt was to let the Egyptians who did not know Him and despised Him to come to a realization that the LORD God was the almighty, everlasting true God.

These plagues also:

① Brought judgment and punishment towards Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Genesis 15:14), invalidated the false gods in Egypt (12:12), and demonstrated God's power to let the Egyptians know that He was the LORD God (7:5).

② Rescued the Israelites from under the Egyptians' burden of slavery (6:6) as God had promised to their ancestors (Genesis 15:16). God also displayed His power to let the Israelites "know" and "personally experience" Him as the LORD God (6:7).

③ Let all the people know that there is no one like the LORD God in all the earth (9:14), and there is no true God besides Him.

APPLICATION: Reflect upon the experience of how you turned and believed in the one true God, then respond with thanksgiving.

MEMORY VERSE: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."
Acts 4:12

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.

Plague 4 to 6

Passage: Exodus 8:20-9:12

March 24

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 8:20-9:12 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 8:20-9:12 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Try to briefly describe how the fourth to the sixth plagues impacted Egypt.

2. Why did God let the plagues come upon Egypt one after another? What was Pharaoh's response and the overall result?

The following summarizes the fourth to the sixth plagues that God brought to the Egyptians through Moses:

④ The Fourth Plague — Flies: These flies were larger than the ordinary one and they would bite both man and animals. Egyptians also treated them as gods (Uatchit, represented by a fly; or Re, the Sun god). The plague of flies affected all of the Egyptian living spaces. God demonstrated His miraculous work in that the flies did not enter the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived so they were not affected by the plague (8:22). However, Pharaoh went back on his word, once again he hardened his heart and did not let the Israelites go. From this we can see that Pharaoh was extremely deceitful and he did not fear God.

⑤ The Fifth Plague — Death of Livestock: This confronted the "bull god" (Apis) that the Egyptians worshipped. This plague resulted in the death of the livestock in the field, but God protected the livestock of the Israelites from this plague. Once again, Pharaoh was unwilling to yield, but he sent men to spy out the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived, and found that their livestock were all living. Poor Pharaoh still held onto his stubbornness and refused to let the Israelites go.

⑥ The Sixth Plague — Boils: This confronted the goddess of healing (Sekhmet) that the Egyptians worshipped. Due to Pharaoh's stubbornness, the boils resulted in sores with pus covering the bodies of man and livestock, including their magicians (9:11). The boils also resulted in a lot of pain and caused skin ulcers. It was a more severe punishment than the first five plagues.

After so many disasters, Pharaoh's reaction was the same every time: when the disaster was serious, he called for Moses to stop, and promised to allow the Israelites to leave; but when Moses prayed to stop the disaster, Pharaoh went back on his word, bringing about more serious disasters. Pharaoh's schemes gives us a deeper understanding of the temptation of Satan. Please refer to the following examples:

① Pharaoh said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land." (8:25)

Satan says, "It's fine just to believe in your heart, there is no need to attend church regularly."

② Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the LORD your God in the desert, but you must not go very far." (8:28)

Satan says, "It's ok to believe, just don't be too devoted!"

APPLICATION: Think about our generation today; sorcerers, heresies, cults and occults are still around. How can you stand firm and not be shaken by all kinds of heresies and false teachings? (Cf. Ephesians 4:13-14)

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.

Plague 7 to 9

Passage: Exodus 9:18-35; 10:12-29

March 25

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 9:18-35; 10:12-29 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 9:18-35; 10:12-29 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Try to briefly describe how the seventh to the ninth plague impacted Egypt. What response did Pharaoh have?

The following summarizes the seventh to the ninth plagues that God brought to the Egyptians through Moses:

⑦ The Seventh Plague — Hail: This was to confront the "sky goddess" (Nut) that the Egyptians worshipped. The hail containing fire struck man, beast, as well as vegetation in the fields. Its effects reached throughout the land, which had never happened since the founding of Egypt. Its destructiveness was stronger in comparison with the earlier plagues. Even though Pharaoh was fearful to the point of admitting his sin, his heart had not truly repented as he continued to stand against God. After he begged Moses to pray to God to stop the plagues, not only did he not keep his word, he sinned again as he and his servants hardened their hearts in refusing to let the Israelites go (9:34-35).

⑧ The Eighth Plague — Locusts: This was to confront the "god of crops" that the Egyptians worshipped. This disaster was unprecedented. The locusts covered up the entire land in a short time, even the whole land turned dark. The vegetables, trees, as well as the fruits on the trees that remained after the hail plague, were all eaten on the entire land in a moment's time. Pharaoh saw that this plague was much more serious than the previous ones, he summoned Moses and Aaron, admitting that he had sinned against God, and begged Moses to intercede on his behalf, and let him depart from death this time (10:16-17). But as soon as the plague departed, his heart remained as hard as iron as he refused to let the Israelites go once again.

⑨ The Ninth Plague — Darkness: This was to confront the "sun gods" (Re and Horus) that the Egyptians worshipped. The entire land of Egypt was covered in darkness for three days, only the house of the Israelites had light (10:23). The darkness was so severe that their fear grew, for the sun gods whom they believed were powerless. Pharaoh called Moses again, but this time he only allowed the Israelites to go worship the LORD; they were not allowed to leave with their livestock. However, Moses asked Pharaoh to give them their livestock as sacrifices to worship God. Pharaoh rejected Moses' request and ask him to leave!

APPLICATION: Come before God and reflect on how God has been blessing you and protecting you from harm in this troubled generation. Then thank God that you are His beloved child!

MEMORY VERSE: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
John 16:33

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.

Warning Of The Last Plague And Pharaoh's Heart Hardened

Passage: Exodus 11

March 26

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 11 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 11 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. What was the warning of the tenth and final plague, what was its impact? Why did God forewarn the Egyptians before the coming of every plague? What were the results?
2. Exodus mentions numerous times that the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8), but it also mentioned that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7). Which is correct? Who is at fault?

The tenth plague was the last disaster that God gave to Egypt. But before the disaster, Moses warned Pharaoh that the LORD God would go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt would die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the firstborn son of the common people, and all the firstborns of the animals as well. But the Israelites were singled out and their lives would be preserved (11:5-7). And before the Israelites went out of Egypt, they could ask for gold and silver from their neighbors. All of these were mentioned already in chapter 3 (3:22). In the eyes of the people, how could this be possible? How could the mighty Egyptians let the Israelites ask for their gold and silver? But Moses predicted that among the Israelites that "not a dog will bark at any

man or animal" (11:7). This is a proverb, meaning that there would not be any obstacles, everything would go smoothly. It was the work of God that the Israelites were able to get out of Egypt. The main point of the author is that the Israelites were not leaving Egypt empty-handed but loaded in plenty, no longer assuming the identity as slaves, but truly a nation of free people leaving Egypt.

Moses repeatedly warned Pharaoh before the calamities of God came upon Egypt, manifesting God's righteousness and love. God did not want to destroy Egypt in one blow, but to divide the disasters into ten different stages to warn Pharaoh and the Egyptians, in hope that Pharaoh would come to his senses and repent. But Pharaoh chose to harden his heart and not to listen to the severe warning from God, resulting in his own punishment and destruction. As Ezekiel 18:23 reveals, "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" Thus, we can see God's love, righteousness, tolerance, patience, and compassion. And God set apart the Israelites from the Egyptians in all of the plagues, showing that God's chosen people were blessed and protected in the midst of disasters (Pss. 27:1-3; 46:1-3).

Regarding Pharaoh's hard-heartedness, though the Bible mentions that the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart in Exodus 4:21 and 7:3; if we look closer at the ten plagues and how Pharaoh responded to the pleads of Moses, the Bible says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart in the first five plagues (7:13-14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7). And until the sixth plague, the Bible starts to record that it was God who hardened Pharaoh's heart (9:12; 10: 1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14: 4, 8). It is evident that it was Pharaoh who hardened his own heart first, only after he rejected all the opportunities of repentance that God had given him, God simply let him continue his rebellion and hardened his heart. In other words, God did not harden Pharaoh's heart from the beginning; instead, He simply predicted what would happen early in 4:21 and 7:3. Pharaoh's hardheartedness reminds us not to take God's grace for granted without appropriate response, lest "delay" makes our hearts cold and harden, thus we would miss the opportunity that God has given us to repent.

APPLICATION: Examine your life to see if there are issues of hardheartedness, disobedience, and even resistance to God's discipline and warning? Determine to repent and respond to God with obedience and reverence as you run the race ahead.

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. Why should "all the firstborn" be consecrated to God?

On the night of the Passover, the children of Israel slaughtered the lambs at twilight, and put the blood on the sides and tops of the doorframe as a sign (12:13), then the whole family would eat the lamb in the house, waiting to leave Egypt. Because of this sign of identification, the "destroyer" would not kill but pass over houses with this sign; thus the eldest son of the Israelites and the firstborn animals were preserved. Therefore, the sign of "Blood" saved them, and became the assurance of their salvation. On that day, God commanded them to commemorate Passover as a festival from generation to generation, to remember God's salvation in Egypt, and to forever keep in mind the redemption of God. The Passover also typifies the everlasting salvation that God has prepared for the world. As recorded in John 1:29, "John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" Only the blood of our Lord Jesus on the cross can redeemed those who accept Him. Likewise, Ephesians 1:7 teaches us "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."

Exodus 12:37 recorded the number of Israelites who left Egypt, "There were about six hundred thousand men on foot in addition to the women and the children." If the women and the children were counted, the total number of people out of Egypt could have been more than two million people. From human's point of view, moving millions of people to another place at that time was impossible, and something that no one would try. And the problems of settlement after entering the new place was also inconceivable. But under the guidance of God, all these were accomplished — ending the 430 years of Israelites' sojourn in Egypt; ending the pain and oppression of the Israelites during these long years; and ending their inhumane living as slaves. Just imagine how upbeat, excited and grateful the Israelites would be; because "the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt" (12:42). In the same way, today God has also led us out of darkness into the light — out from the bondage of slavery in sin into God's promise land of abundance and grace.

God commanded that all the firstborns were to be consecrated to Him (13:1-2), because all the "firstborns," whether Egyptians or Israelites, were supposed to die before the Exodus. However, the blood of the lambs saved the firstborns of the Israelites, therefore they should be consecrated to the LORD to serve Him. Later, God chose "the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring" to serve Him (Numbers 3:12). As in the past, we are the people who have been redeemed by God; likewise, we should offer ourselves to God to serve Him. Just as Romans 12:1 teaches us that offering ourselves as a living sacrifice is our "true and proper worship" (NIV 2011 or "Rational Service" [ESV]).

APPLICATION: Recall the time before you accepted Jesus as your personal Savior, how were you bound and oppressed under the power of Satan and sin, without freedom and could not save yourself? Try to come before God to thank Him, and think of ways that you can response to God for the His gift of redemption.

MEMORY VERSE: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship."

Romans 12:1

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

God's Leading And The Red Sea

Passage: Exodus 13:1-14:31

March 28

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 13:1-14:31 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 13:1-14:31 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why did God lead the Israelites to go the longer route around by the desert towards the Red Sea instead of the shorter route through the Philistine country?

2. Why did the Israelites complain to Moses?

3. How did Moses appease the Israelites who were fearful and hesitant?

God led the Israelites to the long route around by the desert towards the Red Sea instead of the short route because He knew that if they walked through the Philistine country they would give up easily and return to Egypt when confronted with the fear of war. From such arrangement, we can see that God was well-intentioned and considerate of the weakness of the Israelites. Also, God led them with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, a physical sign of His presence and protection (13:22). Similarly, for

those of us who follow God, we also need to learn the lesson of faith that regardless of where God lead us, it is for our own good. Even though we may face trials and troubles, we do not have to retreat, to lose heart or to be discouraged; for God's "pillar of cloud" and "pillar of fire" will never leave us.

The Israelites murmured because of their fear of the Egyptians' pursuit (14:10-12). They complained to Moses out of fear that the Egyptians would seek revenge for the enmity of the ten plagues and kill them all in the desert. When they compared the imminent hardship with their slavery in Egypt, they decided they would rather live as slaves than to die in the desert. Their problem was their excessive fear of their immediate difficulties. They lost faith in God, forgetting that the LORD was the one who used the miracles of the ten plagues to deliver them from the bondage of Egypt.

Since Moses was called by God to take on the responsibility of a leader, he encouraged the Israelites to have "faith" in God. His exhortation to the Israelites contains four areas: ① "Stand Firm" — the preparation of faith; ② "See" — the hope of faith; ③ "Be Still" — the waiting of faith; ④ "Move On" — the action of faith (14:13-15). When the Israelites acted according to the words of Moses, miracles happened, and they were able to walk on dry land through the Red Sea. When Pharaoh's army pursued them, God used the raising of Moses' staff to cause the water to return to its natural state, and drowned them (14:27-28); even when things seem like crises or like the end of the road from human's perspective, from God's perspective, these could be "turning points" for Him to miraculously turn troubles into blessings. Therefore, when we encounter difficulties, it is important that we do not focus on the circumstances, but rather gaze above and focus on God — believing that He is the God of blessing and preservation, then we will see His mighty work.

APPLICATION: Come to God in quiet meditation, reflect on and record the times when God has turned your "crises" into "turning points," and "sufferings" into "blessings"?

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 Test In The Wilderness

Passage: Exodus 15:22-16:36

March 29

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 15:22-16:36 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 15:22-16:36 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. On the path to Mt. Sinai after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, what sort of complaints did they make? What could we learn from their responses?
2. What were God's requirements for the Israelites on the supply of "manna" for their sustenance? Why? What does the gathering the "manna" each day remind you of?

Moses brought the Israelites to the wilderness of Shur after crossing the Red sea, they did not find water; and when they did, the water was too bitter to drink. It is extremely dry in the wilderness and in the desert areas, even if the body does not perspire, the moisture of the body will evaporate due to the dry heat, thus a person will get dehydrated easily. The thirsty Israelites complained to Moses, and God ordered Moses to perform the miracle of turning the bitter water sweet. Afterwards, they arrived at Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and there they camped by the water. In this matter, God "tested" the Israelites to see if they would obey His statutes and commandments, and to let them know that trusting, relying on and

obeying God would bring them blessings (15:26). In our life journey, we will more or less taste the bitterness of life; will we be complaining like the Israelites and forget that God has always been our blessing and preservation?

The Israelites further journeyed from Elim to the Desert of Sin, and there they complained again because they had no food! Despite that, God showed His mercy to them, in that He not only provided them quails to eat, but also gave them manna every morning. God set up rules, requiring that they only gathered a day's portion in order to test their obedience to His instructions (16:4); but on the sixth day, they were allowed to gather a double portion because they had to observe the Sabbath on the seventh day. In addition, God commanded the Israelites to prepare a container to store the manna and to place it in the presence of the LORD, so that they would remember God's providence and His favored care. In what way was the supply of manna a method for God to test the Israelites' obedience? Let us look at Exodus 16:16-20 and focus on the instructions of gathering the manna: "...he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. ¹⁹ Then Moses said to them, 'No one is to keep any of it until morning.' ²⁰ However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell..." From the whole process of gathering, the focus was on requiring the Israelites to completely rely on God's providence, and to trust that God would supply all their needs. For the lack of faith, the manna they saved for the next day was full of maggots and began to smell. God meant to teach them not to worry for their livelihood, but to rely and to follow God each day. Likewise, we need to learn the lesson of faith from the "provision of manna," and not worry about tomorrow but to trust in the Lord of Provision.

APPLICATION: Come before the Lord and give Him all your needs, and trust in His generous provision.

MEMORY VERSE: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."
Matthew 6:34

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 Test In The Wilderness And The War

Passage: Exodus 17

March 30

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

PRAYER: Ask God to calm your heart and 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 Exodus 17 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Exodus 17 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. The "request" of the Israelites came naturally from the needs of daily living, so why did Moses get angry? What was the problem?
2. What was the secret behind Israelite's ability to defeat the Amalekites? What valuable lesson could you learn to prepare you for fighting your own spiritual battle?

Water and food are humans' most basic need for survival. These are the elements that are most lacking in the wilderness; as a result, these needs for the Israelites became their test of faith. Once again, due to their lack of water, the people gathered and complained to Moses. Their complaint was the same as before, that they regretted their departure from Egypt due to the difficulties in living in the wilderness which they did not expect. Moses said to them in anger, "Why do you quarrel with me, why do you put the Lord to the test?" (17:2). The Israelites "tested the Lord saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'" (17:7). The Israelites again failed the test through these difficulties; they murmured and retreated in their fear. The fact is, on the one hand, rough conditions could lead to spiritual growth; but on the other hand, it could reveal our old self and hidden sins, and expose our hidden unbelief and rebellious attitudes towards God. The desire to return to Egypt demonstrated the Israelites' lack of faith in God's leading. In the same way, the

difficulties that we face in life could become our wilderness experience — God's test of our faith and opportunities for Him to strengthen our spiritual life. May the failure of the Israelites become a lesson for us.

When the Israelites were warring against the Amalekites, they were fighting at the bottom of the hill; but on the other side, Moses raised his hands on the top of the hill. In another words, there were two battles going on at two different locations — one at the bottom of the hill and the other on top. The leader below was Joshua, and the one on the top of the hill was Moses; the wonder of it all is, the outcome of the war below depended on the battle above. As Exodus 17:11 describes, "Whenever Moses raises his hands, the Israelites win; whenever his hands lowers, the Amalekites win." This is a portrait of a Christian's spiritual battle; whenever we pray we win, whenever we stop praying, we lose.

Yet, Moses was not battling alone on the top of the hill; he had brought along Aaron and Hur. When his hands were tired, the helpers on either side would be there to lend their much needed support. This allowed Moses to keep his hands raised to draw power from God. Do you know that we as Christians are facing spiritual battles every moment of our lives, because Satan seeks to attack us in different ways every moment that he can (1 Pet 5:8)? From our daily living and our relationship with others, to where we serve God in different areas, we will encounter different adversities, frustration, suffering, and even illness and so on; and Satan would continue to attack the children of God in different areas. What we need is spiritual power to face the frightening spiritual warfare, to help us face every step of challenge in our live, and to enable us to win these spiritual battles. Our spiritual life could be long and difficult, and if we walk alone, we may lack the strength to keep going; but if we have a spiritual partner(s), we could continue to support each other with prayer, then we could continue "raising our hands" to draw power from God. Let us not only be a prayer warrior by ourselves, but also seek to find spiritual partners to pray together, to support and to encourage one another.

APPLICATION: Try to evaluate your "prayer life." How much time do you spend praying besides praying before your meals? Try to take a minimum of five minutes in your daily schedule to pray. Also pray that God will prepare a "prayer partner" for you, to face your spiritual battle together!

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 1:2-3

March 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 1:2-3, 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.

**"² But his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.
³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers."**

Psalm 1:2-3

YOUR FEELINGS:

Appendix: Memory Verses

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

1 Peter 2:9

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

2 Corinthians 12:9

"²³ Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

Matthew 5:23-24

"Make vows to the LORD your God and fulfill them; let all the neighboring lands bring gifts to the One to be feared."

Psalms 76:11

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God."

Matthew 5:9

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Romans 8:28

"¹⁴ For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Matthew 6:14-15

"⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

Proverbs 3:5-6

"² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

Psalms 1:2-3

"For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end."
Psalm 48:14

"Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it."
Psalm 37:5 (NASB)

"But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."
Habakkuk 2:20

"¹¹ The LORD said to him, 'Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?' ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."
Exodus 4:11-12

"...'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."
Zechariah 4:6b

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."
Acts 4:12

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
John 16:33

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

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."
Matthew 6:34

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