

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.

Obstacles to Victory

Passage: Joshua 7:1-26

May 1

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Joshua 7:1-26, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "The City of Ai" — Means "ruins" or "heap."

"Devoted thing" refers to all the clothes, cattle and sheep, and all other things that they seized.

The children of Achan were also condemned (vv. 24-25), probably due to the fact that they were accomplices in the crime; because Deuteronomy 24:16 clearly states that "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin."

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

1. What are the reasons for the unexpected defeat of Israel in Ai? Did Israel and Joshua commit any wrongdoings?

2. Describe the process of Achan's sinning (7:21)? What warning does it give us?

The thrill of victory was quickly replaced by the agony of defeat due to Israel's disobedience. Some say that Israel's defeat in Ai was because of their underestimation of the military power of Ai. When they spied on the city and found that it was small and the people were few, they thought that it was not necessary to send too many soldiers for the attack, so they only sent about three thousand. However, Joshua 7:1 & 11-13 tell us the main reason of their failure: "But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things"; because Achan had taken some of the devoted things after the attack of Jericho. Not only was Achan a thief, he was also deceitful. He had sinned against God and his own people; however, no sin could be hidden from the almighty and omniscient God. We may be able to fool ourselves and others, but we can never fool God. God demands us to admit our sins, to deal with them and not to hide them. Concealing sins would only hinder God's will and His plan, and even God's kingdom — just as the sin of Achan made the camp of Israel liable to destruction and brought trouble on it. It was sin that led Israel to this remarkable defeat.

Even though Achan's disobedience was the main reason of Israel's defeat in Ai; the Israelites, and even Joshua, had made another big mistake that contributed to their failure — they did not involve God in their planning. If only had they beseeched God, God would have let them know of Achan's sin and how they could make restitution for the situation. It was the victory of Jericho that overwhelmed them; thus, instead of beseeching God, they use their own ways to accomplish God's plan. Likewise, we often tend to rely on our own experiences, abilities, and achievements instead of inquiring and relying on God. In a nutshell, the failure of Israel, and especially the sinning of Achan ("I saw...I coveted them and took them" v.21) alerts us that we should "guard our eyes" ("I saw"), "guard our heart" ("I coveted"), and "be set apart" in our actions ("took them"); so that we could live a victorious life and enjoy God's blessings.

APPLICATION: Try to pause and evaluate your life...Are you lax in controlling your eyes, your heart and your action? Confess your sin and ask God for His mercy and forgiveness.

MEMORY VERSE: "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

Proverbs 28:13

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

Confess with our Hearts

Passage: Psalm 38:1-22

May 2

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Psalm 38:1-22, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTED: The Psalm is titled "a petition" (literally, "to bring to remembrance"). In his sin, the psalmist pleaded for God's forgiveness, compassion, and deliverance.

Warren Wiersbe divides this psalm into 3 sections: ①We can focus on ourselves and experience sin's painfulness (vv. 1-8), ②we can focus on others and experience sin's loneliness (vv. 9-12), ③we can focus on the Lord and experience sin's forgiveness (15-22).*

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

1. Please summarize how sin affected the body, mind and spirit of King David? Have you had a similar experience? Please describe your feeling at that time, what happened next?

*Warren Wiersbe, "Wisdom and Poetry," *Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament*, CD-ROM. WORDsearch Corp, 2004.

2. How did David experience God under the burden of sin (15-22)? Have you had a similar experience? Please describe your feeling at that time, what happen next?

Every action in life has its consequences. Whether the consequences are good or bad, mild or serious, hard to notice or obvious, seemingly unrelated or life changing, we cannot escape from the outcome of our actions. Joshua 6:11-13 tells us that the reason that the Israelites were defeated was not because they had underestimated their enemies, nor was it miscalculation; but because they had sinned. When it comes to sin, not only will there be depression as we pull away from God in disobedience, but sin will also affect our body, heart, and soul in such a way that our spirit will be unsettled, and even our body might be affected by aches and pain. David felt the unbearable weight of sin, and his suffering and pain were like symptoms leading to death. Just as someone who suffers from a heart attack would complain of a crushing pain in their chest, David groaned “in anguish of heart” (v. 8). Let us break away from the bondage of sin and learn from David to seek God’s grace. We can ask God for forgiveness, to heal our wounds, to answer our prayers, and to rebuild our faith. For He will never forsake us or leave us; but He will come quickly to our rescue in our times of need. Let us be honest and humble in the presence of the Lord, and confess with our hearts. God will listen to the sighs of our heart and will faithfully restore us.

APPLICATION: Reflect on your spiritual journey to see how God has disciplined, healed, broken down, rebuilt, reproached, and saved you. Then come before God and praise Him for not forsaking you or being far from you, but always coming quickly to help you in your needs.

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.

Victorious Warrior: Celab

Passage: Joshua 14:6-15

May 3

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Joshua 14:6-15, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTED: "Forty-five years" – includes 38 years in the wilderness and 7 years in Canaan

"Hebron" means United.

"Anakim" are the sons of Anak, the clans of Giants. They had been living in Canaan before the Israelites arrived.

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

1. Since the time Moses sent the spies into Canaan, what characteristics had Caleb demonstrated?

2. Which land did Caleb want for himself? How did his request show his confidence in God?

Caleb waited with determination for forty-five years. His faithfulness to God is evident in his wholehearted devotion. Caleb demonstrated great faith in God's promises when everyone around him doubted. He was determined to be fully devoted to God even when his peers refused to.

Forty-five years later, Joshua gave Hebron to Caleb. Caleb's faith never wavered, even though giants still lived on the land where he was inheriting, he believed that the Lord would give him victory. Furthermore, after a forty-five year military career, Caleb could have retired and been content with his success, but he was determined to follow God wholeheartedly to the end. He declared his zeal for the Lord when he said, "I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then" (v.11). We should aim for Caleb's kind of faith which forgoes personal success and fame for the sake of faithfully walking with God from the start to the finish line.

APPLICATION: To be faithful is to be obedient in all areas and circumstances. Examine your life to see whether there are areas where you find it hard to obey. Then think of goals and plans to help you obey God in those areas.

MEMORY VERSE: "The length of our days is seventy years – or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." Psalms 90:10

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 Best Choice

Passage: Joshua 24:14-24

May 4

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Joshua 24:14-24, 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. Based on all that the Lord has done, what did Joshua ask the people to do? What did he want the people to choose for themselves?

2. What was Joshua's choice in terms of his faith? How did the people respond to Joshua's challenge? Why?

Before his death, Joshua spoke a warning to the Israelites. He told them to be faithful to God, not to worship idols, nor to have interracial marriages with the Canaanites. They must obey, love and worship the one and only True God; otherwise, they would be cursed. Joshua then asked the people to make their own choice in response to his warning. They had to choose who they would serve as their Lord. Why did Joshua let the people choose for themselves? Joshua was giving them a chance to remember the grace of God as they decided whom they would serve. When they made their individual choice to serve the One True God, the LORD was no longer the God of their ancestors, or their leaders, or their tradition, but their own personal God.

In Joshua's last words, he reminded the people to recount God's faithfulness and grace, and to serve the Lord with all their might. Like all great leaders, Joshua led by example, and declared that regardless of what others would do, he would serve the LORD. (Joshua 24:15). Joshua tried his best to lead the people, and the people responded affirmatively — they acknowledged what God had done for them, and they chose to serve Him. At age 110, Joshua faced death with the same confidence as he did with life. His complete faith in God is an inspiration to us as Christians. Let us ALL, like the Israelites, give an affirmative answer to serve God wholeheartedly.

APPLICATION: Joshua has given us a great example to follow. Are you willing to follow Jesus Christ as Joshua did? What are the things that take your time and devotion away from following Christ? How can you remove these obstacles?

MEMORY VERSE: “.....But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15 b)

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.

BOOK OF JUDGES

- Author: Unknown, possibly Samuel
- Date of writing: 1020 B.C. (during the time of Saul)
- Place: Shiloh (1 Samuel 3:21; Samuel's hometown)
- Purpose and Theme:
 1. To describe the tendency of human rebellion against God — just as the Israelites being delivered by God out of Egypt, and through His wonderful deeds they were led into Canaan, but they still chose to rebel against Him.
 2. To demonstrate divine judgment on Israel's apostasy.
 3. To illustrate God's grace and faithfulness. As long as the Israelites sincerely repented and cried for help, God would listen to their pleads and prayers, and would deliver them from the hands of the enemies — even through the seven cycles of rebellion, enslavement, repentance, and deliverance.
- Historical Background :

After the conquest of Canaan, the Israelites settled in the land; yet because they failed to remove the wicked influences from the Promised Land, they were assimilated by the Gentiles and started worshipping idols. As a result, they were entangled in sin, afflicted by their enemies, and eventually lost their lands and peace. When the Israelites cried out to the Lord, God sent judges to deliver them from their enemies. For this reason, the period after the death of Joshua to the time of King Saul is known as “the period of Judges.” The book of Judges emphasizes on the cycle of deliverance: sin, suffering, supplication, salvation, and silence. This cycle was repeated seven times.

In the book of Judges, God raised up 13 Judges. Some of them were in the same generation parallel to one another, while others spread across different times. None of the judges delivered all of Israel, so the deliverance in the book of Judges was never a complete rescue. The names of the thirteen

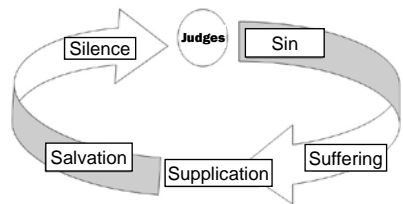
judges were Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah (with Barak), Gideon, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson.

The role of the judges did not only include judicial function, but also military and civil leadership. Through faithful heroic acts, the judges restored partial peace and freedom to the people by overthrowing the oppressors. The judges came from nine different tribes, and together they delivered God's people from the Mesopotamians, the Moabites, the Philistines, the Canaanites, the Midianites, and the Amorites. No one Judge ruled over the whole nation until the emergence of Samuel the prophet.

Outline

1. Deterioration Causes of the cycles (1:1-3:6)
2. Deliverance Curse of the Cycles (3:7-16)
3. Depravity Conditions in the Cycles (17-21)

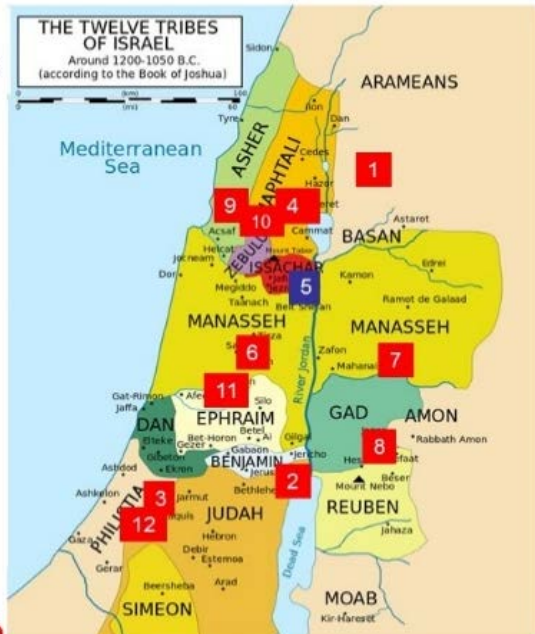
Deliverance Curse of the Cycles



Map for distribution of Judges

Yahweh raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who despoiled them. Judges 2:16

- Judges
1. Othniel
 2. Ehud
 3. Shamgar
 4. Deborah
 5. Gideon
 6. Tola
 7. Jair
 8. Jephthah
 9. Ibzan
 10. Elon
 11. Abdon
 12. Samson



When the Israelites entered into Canaan, they had not conquered all the land yet, so the war had to continue. On the surface, Judas and Simeon had conquered the Canaanites and had taken over Jerusalem; yet, in reality, they failed to obey God's command in many ways, and that became the root problem of their failure.

1. The Israelites failed to exterminate the Canaanites and left room for the Canaanites to corrupt them. They drifted from their fellowship with God. (1:19, 21, 28-31, 33)
2. They worshiped idols, and they did evil in the eyes of the Lord. (2:11)
3. They had intermarriages with the Canaanites and served their gods. (3:6)

The Israelites were not faithful to God. They did not carry out God's command to drive out all of the enemies, so the enemies continued to live among them for many years. Repeatedly, the enemies seized and oppressed them for periods as long as 8 years, 20 years, and even 40 years. When there was suffering, they cried out to the Lord for help. God was merciful and raised up leaders to deliver them from the oppressors. When the leaders were still around, the Israelites would listen to and obey God. Once the leaders passed away, they would be back to their original state of mind. The cycle repeated, not only once, but seven times. The root of the Israelites' problem was that they "did not drive out" the Canaanites. The rising of each "judge" was God's graceful response to the people's prayer of repentance.

APPLICATION: What are the "Canaanites" in your life? For example: your bad habits, evil thoughts, judging others or sin against God. Have you "driven them out" completely? Confess to God and ask Him for forgiveness.

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

Gideon — The Mighty Warrior

Passage: Judges 6:1-24

May 6

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 6:1-24, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTED: “Gideon” — The name means “hewer”

“Mighty warrior” — The term implies that God had given Gideon courage and strength for battle.

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

1. Once again, the Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD gave them into the hand of Midianites for seven years. Before Gideon, what was the situation like in Israel? How did the people respond to the oppressive situation?

2. How would you describe Gideon? Why did Gideon refuse to be chosen? How did the angel of God reassure him?

When God called Gideon to be the Judge over Israel, the Israelites were in their cyclical spiritual low; and for seven years, the Midianites and the Amalekites greatly oppressed them. The Israelites were suffering and again they cried to the Lord for help. The Israelites were not worthy of God's deliverance and mercy, for they had disbelieved and disobeyed God repeatedly. Yet, out of love, God still responded to their cries (6:8-10).

When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he was secretly threshing wheat in a winepress inside the city. Gideon did it secretly because of the Midianites' threat. Ironically, the angel of the Lord still called Gideon a "mighty warrior." This is not because Gideon was extraordinary or strong. It is only because God was calling Gideon to deliver His people and God would give power to Gideon to make him into a mighty warrior.

In the beginning, Gideon's heart was full of doubt and disbelief. He said, "If the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us...the Lord has abandoned us..." (6:13). He asked for a sign to reassure himself that it was really the Lord who was speaking to him, and the Lord graciously accommodated Himself to Gideon's unbelief. The miracle resulted in Gideon being astonished with the Lord. Consequently, he built an altar to the Lord and named the place "The LORD is Peace" (6:24). The angel of the Lord once again promise Gideon that "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together (6:16). Likewise, the Lord is still searching for Christians who are willing to serve and to rely on God's sovereign power and His grace as their strength.

APPLICATION:

1. From today's devotion, we can see Gideon's strength as well as his weakness. What do you see as your greatest strength and weakness? Does God see you differently? Please explain.

2. When you examine yourself, in which area would you need reassurance and guidance from God?

MEMORY VERSE: "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." Psalm 20:7

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 Elite Army

Passage: Judges 7:1-14; 2 Timothy 2:1-7

May 7

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 7:1-14 & 2 Timothy 2:1-7 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTED: "Lap the water just as a dog laps" means while still standing, the person holds the water in their palm for a drink while keeping watch for enemies.

According to 2 Timothy 2:1-7, when we serve there are three areas that we have to bear in mind. ①As soldiers, we have to be focused and be faithful to God's ministry for it will please our Lord. ②As athletes, we have to follow the rules in order to be crowned. ③As farmers, we must work hard in order to taste our own crops.

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

1. Why did God want to reduce the size of Gideon's army? What do you think of God's winning strategy? What is the result of the first test?

2. Why did God choose the 300 men in the second test? What was God looking for?

When Gideon set up the army, a total of 32,000 people had joined. It was still a tiny group as compared to the Midianites' army of 135,000 men. However, to his surprise, God told him, "You have too many men for me"; and surprisingly, this was the secret of God's winning strategy — The lesson that God wanted Gideon to learn was that victory did not depend on numbers, but on His presence and guidance.

Gideon's force was reduced by two rounds of tests. Firstly, God gave the army a test of courage. Those who were fearful were dismissed and allowed to return to their homes. God only wanted the brave, so 22,000 were left. Then God told Gideon: "There are still too many men." God wanted to choose His elite troops for He values quality over quantity.

Secondly, God asked Gideon to test the way the soldiers drink water. Those who drank by cupping their hands to their mouths were chosen and these were the ones Gideon took with him to deliver Israel, while the others were sent home. What was God looking for? God was looking for the ones who were focused, watchful and disciplined. God reassured Gideon that victory was certain, even with only 300 men. Gideon could only trust in God because there was nothing else to rely on.

To be in God's army, we need to have courage, be focused, watchful and disciplined. In 2 Timothy 2:1-7, Paul also encouraged Timothy to have courage and strength to fight for God's truth. Just like soldiers, we have to focus and be faithful. As athletes, we have to follow the rules. As farmers, we must work hard. Today, we are part of God's elite army. We have to strive to be our best for the Lord. We cannot be boastful or fearful. We must leave behind all the sins that entangle us. We must always be ready to fight, to please our Lord, and to ask God to strengthen us.

APPLICATION: Let us examine ourselves, what are the sins or burdens that we need to let go? In what areas do we need self-control? In which areas do we need to work harder?

MEMORY VERSE: "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."
2 Timothy 2:1

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.

Gideon Defeated Midian

Passage: Judges 7:15-25

May 8

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 7:15-25, 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. What strategy did Gideon use to defeat the Midianites?

2. What role did God play in this battle?

It must have seemed impossible, and even suicidal, for three hundred men carrying nothing but trumpets and torches inside empty jars to fight against the Midianite army of 133,500. However, we can see the power of God manifested in this battle. The winning strategy of God does not depend how deadly the weapons, nor how numerous the army. The Lord instructed Gideon to divide the 300 men into three companies as they drew near to the enemy's camp. At the set time, they broke the empty jars, held the torches high and blew the trumpets. This sudden attack created a chaos among the Midianites, and they turned on each other as they fled. As a result, Gideon won the battle and secured all the land down to the fords of the Jordan; and Israel enjoyed 40 years of peace.

In this battle, Gideon and his army did not bring any weapons. All they had were empty jars, torches and trumpets; these three items were the key to their victory. Gideon's victory came from his absolute obedience to and complete confidence in God. Victory was not dependent on the numbers of the army or the weapons in hand.

APPLICATION: Gideon was not a brave leader, but he was able to lead a small troop to defeat the enormous Midianite army. His victory stemmed from his obedience to and complete confidence in God. Please write down examples of how God has fought for you in the past.

MEMORY VERSE: "With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies."
Psalm 108:13

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

Lost in Victory

Passage: Judges 8:22-35

May 9

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 8:22-35, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTED: “Ephod” was a sleeveless garment worn by Jewish priests, a skillfully woven tunic with gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and a breastplate with 12 precious stones engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel fastened to it.

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

1. What were the Israelites seeking when they asked Gideon's family to rule over them? Was their attitude correct? Why?

2. Gideon took the gold he received and made an ephod, which led the Israelites into idol worshiping and later became the snare to Gideon and his family (v. 27). What lesson can you learn from this?

After Gideon delivered the Israelites from the hand of the Midianites, he was not proud but remained obedient. When the Israelites asked Gideon and his son to rule over them, he declined

because he understood that the Lord would rule over the people of Israel and not him. Unfortunately, Gideon fell into a different temptation. Gideon felt the obligation to bring about reform, for the priests at that time were corrupted; so he ask the people to give a share of the plunder to him and collected a total of 42 pounds of gold. With this gold, he made an ephod (v. 27).

In regarding to the making of Ephod, Gideon did not seek for God's approval. Regardless of the motives for making the Ephod, Gideon made at least three mistakes: ①The priesthood belonged only to the Levites and the sons of Aaron. Gideon was not a Levite so he had no right to be a priest. ②Ephod should be made with blue yarn, not with gold. ③He relocated the worship center to Ophrah, his hometown. Even if the priests were corrupted, Gideon should not have disobeyed God's instruction.

Gideon thought that the Ephod could draw the Israelites closer to God, but he was wrong. The Israelites focused on the golden ephod's beauty and monetary value, so that it was worshiped as an idol and used for fortune telling. Scripture tells us that the ephod became the snare to Gideon and his family (8:27; 9:5). Often times, temptation would come after victory, and Gideon was saddened by what he had done.

Through Gideon, we learn that though humans have limitations, God is still willing to work through us. Yet, we also see that when we are not consistently surrendering to God, we might see ourselves higher than we ought to, and fall into the temptation to sin against God.

APPLICATION: Gideon's motive for making an Ephod might have been well intentioned, but it was against God's instruction. Often, ideas might seem logical, but it might be against God's will. We must seek for God's plan in all things so they will not become our snares. Were you ever a stumbling block to others? Of what do you need to be more mindful?

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.

Jephthah — Son Of A Prostitute

Passage: Judges 11:1-11

May 10

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 11:1-11, 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. Why could Jephthah not have a share of his father's inheritance? Was it reasonable for his stepbrothers to drive him out? Why or why not?

2. How did Jephthah go from an "outcast" to a respected man of faith? What was his secret to success?

The Israelites did not think of God until they encountered distress; yet there was no evidence of repentance for their sins. It was until the Israelites demonstrated genuine repentance by getting rid of the idols and confessing to the Lord, then God prepared Jephthah to come as their leader (10:6-18).

Jephthah was the son of Gilead, and he was known as a “mighty warrior” (11:1). His mother was a prostitute, so he grew up amongst his stepbrothers without the care of a mother. As soon as Gilead passed away, the stepbrothers bribed the local elders into casting out Jephthah, “the son of a prostitute.” Jephthah became a homeless wanderer, and he fled northeast to Tob in Syria (11:2-3).

In the turn of events, the same elders who cast out Jephthah came to beg him to lead their army when the Ammonites and Philistines made war with Israel. It was out of Jephthah expectations. They even asked him to be their “head over all who live in Gilead” (11:8-11). From a “son of a prostitute” to a “mighty warrior,” then later became the “head over all who live in Gilead,” it was a ride full of twists and turns for Jephthah. What was his secret to success? Jephthah trusted in God. The short description in verse 11 that said, “[Jephthah] repeated all his words before the LORD in Mizpah,” demonstrated Jephthah’s solid trust and intimate relationship with God. The author of Hebrews listed him in the “hall of fame of faithful heroes” together with Abraham, Moses, King David, etc.

APPLICATION: From the passages we have learned about:

1. God’s calling is not based on the person’s status or abilities; rather, God values a willing heart and obedient spirit. So hand over your status, abilities, and even your life into God’s hand, and ask for an obedient and willing heart in order to serve Him.
2. In spite of all the mistreatments from his family and the elders of Gilead, Jephthah chose to forget and forgive. Likewise, ask God for strength to forgive those who have wronged you.

MEMORY VERSE: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”
Colossians 3:13

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

The Secret Of Jephthah's Victory

Passage: Judges 11:12-29, 32-33

May 11

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 11:12-29, 32-33, 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. What method did Jephthah use to resolve the conflict with the Ammonite king?

2. How did Jephthah win his battle this time?

Not only was Jephthah skillful in military combat, he was also very diplomatic. His first step as commander of Gilead was to seek for settlement through negotiation. Jephthah was serious about God's words and he was knowledgeable about Israel's history regarding how they had acquired the land. Jephthah saw through the Ammonite king's strategy, and used God's words to support his argument. Yet, the Ammonites refused to back down so Jephthah went to war with them.

Since the king of Ammon “did not pay attention to the message Jephthah sent him” (11:28), the war between the two nations was inevitable. Just like the other judges, the Spirit of the Lord empowered Jephthah (11:29), and because Jephthah depended on God’s strength wholeheartedly, he was victorious and took back 20 towns. As a result, the Israelites were delivered from their enemy (11:32-33).

Jephthah was skillful in communication, studious in God Word, and always dependent on God’s strength; these formed the key to his secret of victory. Likewise, we have to face different daily spiritual battles in a world where the truth is constantly twisted and distorted. As Christians, how can we live a victorious life? What is the source of our strength? Let us learn from Jephthah’s example to build a solid foundation in God’s word, to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we can fight a good fight for our Lord Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION: In the coming week and beyond, pay close attention to your daily activities as you dwell on God’s word and rely on His power in your daily spiritual warfare. Write down your plan of actions in the space below.

MEMORY VERSE: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”
Philippians 4:13

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

The Vow Of Jephthah

Passage: Judges 11:30-40

May 12

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 11:30-40, and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTED: "whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me ...will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." (11:31) — There are two different views on Jephthah's vow and the sacrifice of his daughter: ①Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as a live burnt offering. ②Jephthah offered his daughter as a lifelong virgin in service at Israel's sanctuary. While both explanations are possible, the latter one is more probable. This is because ①God forbids human sacrifice. ②This verse could be translated as "whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me...will be the LORD's **or** I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering"; meaning that "if what came out was a human or something that was not an appropriate sacrificial animal, it would be dedicated for God's service; but if it was a sacrificial animal, Jephthah would sacrifice it as a burnt offering. ③Jephthah's daughter and the young women of Israel wept for her remaining as a virgin for life, and not for her death. Verse 39 states that Jephthah did to her as he had vowed, and she was a virgin and never marry. The whole passage's emphasis is on the daughter's singlehood and not on her death.

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

1. Was it necessary for Jephthah to make a vow to the Lord before the battle with the Ammonites? Why or why not?

2. Why must Jephthah fulfill the vow that he made?

With confidence and a dream, Jephthah made a rash vow to the Lord, "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering" (11:30-31). This vow was made too hastily, and it led to turmoil and bitterness. Once Jephthah was met at the door of his house by his rejoicing daughter, Jephthah torn his clothes and said, "Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break" (11:34-35).

In order to have victory over Ammon, Jephthah made a rash vow. He would not have thought of a result like this. He deeply regretted, being devastated and saddened. Still, Jephthah anticipated the fulfillment of his vow to the Lord. Jephthah offered his daughter, his only child, as a lifelong virgin to serve in the tabernacle (11:36-39). On the same token, Jephthah's daughter knew that once a vow was made, it needed to be fulfilled. So, the daughter submitted herself to her father's vow, she roamed the hills and wept with her friends because she would never be married nor bear any children; yet, she was willing to serve the Lord in her lifetime.

The story of Jephthah's vow is an unnecessary tragedy. On the one hand, Jephthah's battle against the Ammonites was not won because of his vow, but because of God's presence. On the other hand, Jephthah demonstrated that he was only knowledgeable in the history of Israel, but neglecting God's merciful character and the Mosaic Law. Regardless of the result, Jephthah's only focus was "I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break" (11:35); however, he was ignorant in God's merciful provision. Leviticus 27:1-8 clearly explained that the dedicated person could be redeemed by payment in silver according to the sanctuary shekel, but Jephthah did not use this provision that "demonstrated God's mercy behind His righteousness." Let us stay away from the example of Jephthah in making hasty decision. More importantly, let us not forget about God's mercy and the second chances that He would provide us in spite of our failures.

APPLICATION: Come before the Lord and think of all the second chances that God has given you to make up for your mistakes. Thank God for His mercy and grace.

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

A Virtuous Woman

Passage: Proverbs 31:10-31

May 13

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Proverbs 31:10-31, 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. According to the passage, what qualities does a virtuous woman have (vv. 14-16, 18, 19, 21, 27)?

2. The virtuous woman in the passage focuses more on virtue and characters than on outward beauty. What qualities should a Christian woman aim to develop (vv. 20, 26, 28, 30, 31)?

The virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31 has these following qualities:

She is cherished by her husband — We can see that the ideal marriage does not only start well, but the marriage continues to mature as the couple's love deepens. There is complete trust, support, and appreciation between the couple (vv.11, 12, 23, 28).

She is very competent at home — “Home” here means “family.” In spite of her established status, she focuses on building up her family with her husband, children and servants. She is competent in handling all the family matters (vv. 13-27).

She is loved and respected by her children — She is willing to make sacrifices and to consider others’ needs. She is disciplined, sensitive and wise. “She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.” (vv.15, 17, 26, 27)

She is generous to her neighbors — She selflessly stretches out her hand to the poor and reaches forth to the needy. She is sympathetic and generous in her giving. In addition to financial support, she also personally cares for her neighbors in practical ways. She is an example of a good neighbor (v. 20).

She fears the Lord — The key to being a virtuous woman is in verse 30. Charm and elegance can be deceptive, and beauty is meaningless for it is fleeing; but the woman who fears the Lord should be praised!

APPLICATION: Regarding the various virtues mentioned above...

- If you are a sister, which virtue or inner quality do you desire the most? Which one have you acquired? Which one do you still need to improve on?
- If you are a brother, which virtue or inner quality do you admire or appreciate the most? How can you help cultivate and nurture these virtues and qualities in the life of the females in your life (i.e. wife, family members, close friends, sisters in Christ, etc.)?

MEMORY VERSE: “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” Proverbs 31:30

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.

Harmony Of The Family

Passage: Proverbs 14:1, 26; 1 Corinthians 3:8-11

May 14

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Proverbs 14:1, 26; 1 Corinthians 3:8-11, 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. According to Proverbs 14:1, how can we build a warm and blessed home?

2. In 1 Cor. 3:8-11, it is said that Jesus is the foundation on which we build our life and church; how does this relate to our family?

A Chinese proverb says, "When there is harmony, there is prosperity." In fact, we need to build our family in harmony where every member would take up his/her share of responsibilities. In other words, unity is important in building a family.

From Proverbs 14:1, we understand that in building a blessed family, the role of the wife is crucial. That is why the Scripture says "the wise woman builds her house."

①A wise woman: She fears the Lord and she is a woman who is courageous, strong, and spiritual. She is the virtuous woman depicted in Proverbs 31 who builds a beautiful family.

②Build a family: Building a family is like building a house. Just like solid foundation and quality material are needed for constructing a house, the same things are needed to build a family. 1 Cor. 3:8-11 reminds us that Jesus is the foundation of our church and our life, and this principle can be applied on the building of family. It means that Jesus Christ is the foundation of our family. Parents can help build a solid foundation for their children by intentionally leading them to know God and nurturing their relationship with Christ when they are young. When children learn how to pray to God and know Christ through meditating on Scripture, their lives will be founded on Christ, the cornerstone. In this way, Jesus Christ can be the foundation to our family, children, and life. Jesus has taught that when we have heard and obey his teaching, we are like houses built on a rock, both the foundation and the material are of high quality. Thus, we must follow God's teaching in building our family.

A foolish woman does not know or fear the Lord. She does not follow the Word of God nor does she follow His guidelines to build a family. Such a woman who is away from God will tear her family down with her own hands! Thus, in order to build up our family, we must first wait upon the Lord and grow in Him, then in turn, we could build up the whole family.

APPLICATION: How can you use prayer, Bible reading and meditation to deepen your understanding of Christ and let Him build up your life? Please list out 1 to 2 action items that you can implement in the coming near future.

MEMORY VERSE: "The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down." Proverbs 14:1

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.

Christ is the Lord of my House

Passage: Ephesians 5:21-23; Deuteronomy 6:6-9

May 15

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Eph. 5:21-23 & Deut. 6:6-9 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTED: "Obedient" in Greek is *"hupotasso."* The word has the meaning of "voluntarily and willingly place oneself in the lower status or position."

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

1. According to Ephesians 5:22-23, what are the different roles that God has assigned in a husband and wife relationship?

2. What are the things that Moses reminded parents to do in Deuteronomy 6:6-9?

To have a Christian Home, we have to first start with the assertion that "Christ is the Lord of my household." Since both husband and wife are Christians, their value system should base on the Word of God. Ephesians 5:23 says, "the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church." The husband is the head of the family and his role will not change regardless of his ability, salary, gifts and status; for the role of the husband is determined by God.

According to the Bible, the “head” represents the one who is responsible, the protector, leader, and provider of the family. When the husband assumes the role of the head, he needs to love his wife just as Christ loves the church by sacrificing Himself and dying on the cross. Take Romans 5:12-14 as reference, Eve was the first one who sinned, but the Bible said that sin entered into the world through Adam. Why was Eve not mentioned? All because Adam had to bear the responsibility for Eve. Furthermore, the Bible said that, “as wife, submit to the husband just as you submit to the Lord.” A wife’s submissiveness is not to be imposed by her husband; it should be spontaneous, self-initiated and voluntary. This does not mean that wives are inferior, but these are the role differences between husband and wife.

When a family starts to have children, the parents should lead by example to instill biblical truth in their children. Parents’ attitudes towards their faith have significant influence on the spiritual growth of their children. According to Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Moses clearly instructed parents to teach their children diligently, and they should grab every opportunity to teach them the truth at anytime and at anywhere. This is an important ministry for parents that no one can replace.

When husband and wife want to establish a “Christian home,” they need to come together and discuss how to “Let Christ be the Lord of their household,” and set measurable goals. For example, do they need to change their lifestyle? How could they offer more of their resources (i.e. time, gifts, and money)? How could they spare more time with families? Etc.

APPLICATION: Adopt “Christ is the Lord of my household” as your family motto. Reflect on what you need to do in order to build a “Christian Home.” List out some measurable goals for your plan.

MEMORY VERSE: “Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”
Colossians 3:24

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.

Iron Sharpens Iron

Passage: Proverbs 27:17; Acts 2:42-47

May 16

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Proverbs 27:17 & Acts 2:42-47 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. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man (person) sharpens another." What does it mean? What kind of positive or negative experiences would you encounter when you go through the process?

2. How does Acts 2:42-47 describe the fellowship of believers in the early churches?

Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." If done correctly, there are mutual benefits in rubbing the two iron blades together. Even though they may not feel good during the process, their edges would become sharper, making the knives more efficient in cutting and slicing. If the knife is blunt, it would still continue to be a knife, but it would be less effective and

less useful in service. Likewise, we as Christians, may have conflicts in our body life, but it is not necessarily all negative. Let us spend more time together in exhorting, encouraging, admonishing, praying and sharing God's Word with one another; so that we could sharpen and build up one another with the Word of God.

A knife that has been sharpened will also shine more because all the dullness has been rubbed off. Likewise, we will shine better for our Lord if we continue to fellowship with and sharpen one another; just as the psalmist says in Psalm 133:1, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity." In the same way, the author of Hebrews says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24–25).

Proverbs 27:17 indicates the need for constant fellowship with one another. Clearly, this was recognized by the saints of the early church who had "devoted themselves" to teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer (Acts 2:42–47); and these body life did provide opportunities for them to sharpen one another. Eventually, when they met together, they were filled with awe and they praised God. Likewise, when we gathered in His names, we will be blessed.

APPLICATION: Please evaluate how you "fellowship" with other believers, did you have the situations of rubbing against one another? Is that positive or negative? Please list examples of how you could deal with other Christians in love.

MEMORY VERSE: ²⁴"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching."
Hebrew 10:24-25

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.

Control our Tongues

Passage: James 1:19, 3:2; Proverbs 10:19, 15:1;
Ecclesiastes 3:7; 5:1-2

May 17

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read James 1:19, 3:2; Proverbs 10:19, 15:1; Ecclesiastes 3:7; 5:1-2 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. What does “taming” mean in James 3:2? What are the benefits of taming your tongue?

2. How can we truly tame our tongues (Prov. 10:19, 15:1; Jas. 1:19; Eccl. 3:7; 5:1-2)?

James 3:2 instructs us that, “We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.” It is important for Christians to learn to control their tongue. Today’s passages teach us how we can truly tame our tongue.

① Be attentive and talk less — “Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.” Proverbs 10:19

② Slow to speak and slow to become angry — “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” James 1:19

③ Always answer gently — “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1

④ There is time to speak — “A time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak.” Ecclesiastes 3:7

⑤ Be still and listen to God’s guidance — “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.” Ecclesiastes 5:1-2. When we listen to the proclamation of God’s words, we are not listening to man but to God. Therefore, we should not criticize but to pray for the speaker, for criticism does not build up people.

APPLICATION: From 1-10, 1 is the lowest and 10 is the highest, how satisfied are you with your effort to control your tongue? Are you content with your score? What can be improved?

MEMORY VERSE: “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.” Proverbs 10:19

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

A Model Couple — Aquila And Priscilla

Passage: Acts 18:1-26

May 18

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

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

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

READING GOD'S WORD: Read Acts 18:1-26 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. The Scripture teaches that husband and wife should be united as one. Throughout Acts 18, please list examples of the togetherness of Aquila and Priscilla.

2. Please also list out how Aquila and Priscilla were zealous in serving God and in showing hospitality towards other Christians in Acts 18.

Aquila and Priscilla were a godly couple who gave beautiful testimonies for God; Paul even mentioned their names many times in his epistles. They are a role model for Christian married couples.

① Unity of husband and wife — when Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned in Scripture, they are always mentioned together. They

lived and worked together as tent makers. Tents were an important part of Hebrew's daily life. Tents were made with fabric woven from rough goat's hairs, which took great skill and time to cut and to sew properly. The couple worked together in unity — Priscilla did not mind the labor-intensive nature of her husband's work, but she assisted in his work without complaint.

② Hospitality towards the Apostle and other Christians — Later in Corinth, they met Paul and became great friends. Since they were all in the same field, Paul decided to stay and work with Aquila and Priscilla (v. 3). It was likely that by that time, the couple had already accepted Christ or at least heard of the stories of Jesus; for the Jews who had not accepted Christ were very much against Paul, but the three of them were able to become close friends (v. 6). The two must have been eager to learn so they asked Paul to stay and to teach them the truth about Jesus. They went with Paul to the synagogue every Sabbath day to share about Christ with the local Jews and Greeks (v. 1). In the year and half that Paul stayed in Corinth, the couple learned a great deal from Paul's teaching.

③ Willingness to engage in ministry, willingness to share — Later when Paul left Corinth for Ephesus, the couple accompanied him on the missions journey. At the end, Aquila and Priscilla decided to stay in Ephesus while Paul continued his journey to Caesarea, then to Jerusalem. (vv. 24-26). In Ephesus, they met Apollos, a Jewish teacher who was mighty in the scriptures, but he only knew of the Baptism of John. The couple brought him home, and took the initiative to share what they had learned from Paul with Apollos. Their willingness to share what the truth they had received was the key to shaping Apollos into the servant whom God greatly used, and is therefore listed with Paul in the book of 1 Corinthians.

APPLICATION: Aquila and Priscilla were not only role models for couples, but also for all Christians in general. Out of the three qualities above, which one would you like to acquire the most? Why? What are some practical steps that you can take to work towards that goal in the near 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.

Nazirite

Passage: Judges 13:1-5, 24; Numbers 6:1 – 21

May 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 Judges 13:1-5, 24 & Numbers 6:1–21 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: “Nazirite” means one who is “consecrated” or “separated”

Judges 13 recorded the birth of Samson and how he was dedicated as a Nazirite. Before we study the life of Samson, let us first understand the requirements and characteristics of a Nazirite.

RE-READING GOD’S WORD: Read Numbers 6:1–21 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. It was not easy to be a Nazirite, what laws did they have to keep?

2. What truth and principles can you get from the laws a Nazirite had to keep?

Chapter 6 of the book of Numbers recorded the vows a Nazirite would make. It shows that they were the kind of people who wanted to live differently. They were consecrated and holy to the Lord. Any man or woman, who would like to dedicate his or her life to God for a certain period of time or for life, could be a Nazirite.

There are three kinds of prohibitions that a Nazirite should follow:
① They must not eat the fruit of the grapevine or anything came from it, including grape juice, wine, fermented drink, vinegar made from wine, etc. (Num. 6:3), in order for them to lead a “separated

life.” ②They must not cut their hair (Num. 6:5), in order for them to be a “good witness in life.” ③They must not go near a dead body, in order for them to lead a “selfless life.”

It was not easy to be a Nazirite. The three laws mentioned above, might seem easy on the surface, but it was quite difficult to implement. Nazirites could not enjoy the secular pleasure with the world, they could not just follow the trend, and even when their family members died, they could not be close by; all because they consecrated themselves to be holy to the Lord, to a point that the requirements of their lives were even more stringent than that of the priests. There were two types of Nazirites: ①the temporary ones who took the vow for a period of thirty days to seven years. Once dedicated, a Nazirite could not deviate from the law. The apostle Paul had been this type of Nazirite. ②The lifelong Nazirites who were consecrated to God at the time of birth or before birth. The Bible recorded three of them: Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist.

If the focus of a Nazirite was to be set apart for the Lord, to be a good witness and to lead a selfless life, then we can find a perfect Nazirite in our Lord Jesus. Likewise, He also asks those who follow Him to live such a life. He once said, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;” (Matt. 10:37). That is because He asks his followers, like the Nazirites, to put God in the first place in our lives.

APPLICATION: Try to have a humble moment of Introspection: Are you able to live a life set apart for the Lord ① in your inner thoughts (i.e. be honest, be kind, be compassionate, be humble and so on); ② in being a good testimony; and ③ in setting yourself apart from the world when it comes to your attitude towards God, towards people, towards fame, and towards fortune and power? Is there anything preventing you from becoming a modern version of the “Nazirite”? If there is, how should you face it?

MEMORY VERSE: “For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”
John 17:19

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.

Samson — The lustful Hercules

Passage: Judges 14

May 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 Judges 14 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "...Plowed with my heifer" (14:18) — a heifer is a young female cow that has not borne a calf and not usually used for tillage. Israelites often refer to a lover or wife as a heifer.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 14 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. What kind of a person was Samson as we observe from the passage (His character, his philosophy of life, and his relationship with God and with others)?

2. As a Nazirite, what had Samson done that he should not have?

Samson was a judge who gave into his lust. His improper relationships with various women were the key causes to his future demise. As soon as Samson saw a young Philistine women in Timnah, he demanded his parents to get her to be his wife (14:2), even though he did not really know her until he talked to her later

on (14:7). Since Israelites were not supposed to marry foreigners (cf. Gen. 24:3; Deut. 7:1-4), Samson's parents were upset about the proposal (14:4); but Samson insisted and prevailed. God knew Samson's weaknesses, but He used these weaknesses to fulfill His plan to save the Israelites from the Philistines.

Samson was a very strong man, capable of tearing apart a lion with his bare hands. Such incredible strength was given to Samson through the Spirit of the Lord as the means to save the Israelites (14:6). As a Nazirite, Samson should not have come into contact with corpses, but not only did he eat the honey from the lion's carcass, he gave some to his parents to eat, completely disregarding the rules of the Nazarites (14:9). Samson brought his father to see the Philistine women in Timnah, "and there Samson held a feast" (14:10), probably drinking and partying with the people. Moreover, he even took the garments from those he killed (14:19).

Samson should not have gone to Timnah, and he should not have married a Philistine woman. These were his first mistakes. Of the three major rules that Nazarites had to follow — not coming into contact with corpses, not drinking alcohol, and not shaving the hair — Samson thus far had obeyed only the last one. Even so, God was still faithful to Samson, using his mistakes to help defeat the Philistines, rescuing His people and glorifying His name.

APPLICATION: Compromising is usually the first step that leads us to fall, whether it be compromising with the world, compromising with lust, or compromising with Satan. Reflecting on your own life, what are the areas that could lead you into the danger of compromising? List out these areas, and remind yourself to stay alert so as not to succumb to the temptations.

MEMORY VERSE: "Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.'" John 8:34

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.

God made Samson attack the Philistines viciously and slaughtered many of them due to various reasons. He burnt up many fields of the Philistines because his father-in-law betrayed him. Samson then retaliated against the Philistines who burnt up the household of his father-in-law. With a deliberate plan, Samson was taken to the Philistines, where he struck down a thousand men with a fresh jawbone of a donkey; in fact, that was the only weapon that Samson ever used in his life. Samson did all this by himself. By comparison, Judges 15:9-13 mentioned three thousand men from Judah, and they did not dare to have any direct clash with the Philistines. Israelites had little faith in their God at that time.

This had been Samson's biggest killings so far. Throughout all this, the self-centered Samson never praised God. Instead, he wrote a poem to celebrate his victory with swagger. However, as powerful as Samson was, he still cried out to God when he was very thirsty (15:18), which demonstrated his need of relying on God. God answered him and opened up the earth and water came out of it to quench Samson's thirst. After that, Samson led Israel for twenty years as a judge.

Samson was very gifted, full of courage and ability to lead. However, when the most important character trait faltered, his life took the wrong turn and the vicious cycle started to repeat itself. The Bible did not sugarcoat the weakness of Samson; instead, it was recorded truthfully. Through the failure of Samson, we would know how terrible sin is and how indefensible we really are. On the other hand, it allows us to experience grace, mercy, patience and the power of God.

APPLICATION: We all know that we should put God first, yet often we succumb to weaknesses and put our own needs first. Is there a way to help us make adjustments in our lives? How do you deal with your weaknesses?

MEMORY VERSE: ¹¹Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. ¹²With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies.”
Psalm 60:11-12

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.

With every step he took, Samson seemed to get into more trouble and was not able to extricate himself. He was intimate with a prostitute as soon as he set foot in Gaza, and then he fell in love with Delilah when he saw her in the Valley of Sorek. Although he was extremely powerful such that he “took hold of the doors of the city gate, together with the two posts, and tore them loose, bar and all. He lifted them to his shoulders and carried them to the top of the hill that faces Hebron. (16:3)”; yet, he was powerless when faced with women. The cunning Philistines soon found out Samson’s weakness, so they used Delilah to seduce Samson in order to discover the secret of his incredible power. The Philistines enticed Delilah with 1,100 shekels of silver to do their bid (16:5).

Samson repeatedly withheld truth from Delilah. He told her the fake secret (16:6-15); but Delilah did not give up, she tried hard to test Samson in order to find the real secret. In the end, Samson was not able to withstand the relentless seduction from the woman (16:16), and divulged the great secret to Delilah (16:17). In fact, the true source of Samson’s power was not actually in the braids of his long hair. Long hair was only a symbol of his covenant with God. The true source of his power was God’s presence. Poor Samson lost his power in his sleep, and was seized by the Philistines. They gouged out his eyes and took him back down to Gaza — a place where he used to display great power and prestige. Now he became a prisoner and was subjected to all kinds of humiliation. He was shackled in a cell and was used by the Philistines as a service livestock (16:21). Samson reaped everything he sowed.

APPLICATION: “A powerful man enslaved by seduction,” the relentless seduction of Delilah had the effect of “a pestle made into a needle”. What should you do with the temptations that have a constant negative effect on your spiritual life (e.g., the need to vent your anger, the need to revenge, the need to follow evil desires)?

MEMORY VERSE: “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” Galatians 6:8

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 Sad Triumph

Passage: Judges 16:23-31

May 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 Judges 16:23-31 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

NOTE: "Dagon" — agriculture God of the Philistines.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 16:23-31 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. How many Philistines did Samson kill at the end (cf. 14:19; 15:8, 15; 16:27)?
2. In Samson's final prayer, what were the words that he used to describe God? Do you think he was sincere in asking for forgiveness? Why or why not?
3. How would you evaluate Samson's life? In what way can Samson's experience serve as a warning in your spiritual life?

When the Philistines assembled at the temple of Dagon, they brought Samson out to the center of the temple floor so that they could all be entertained by “watching Samson’s performance” (16:25, 27), with the sole purpose of humiliating him. The Philistines overlooked the fact that Samson’s hair started to grow again at that time and they might also have forgotten that long hair was the source of his power.

Samson repented sincerely to God; he prayed that God would strengthen him just one more time. With a single breath, he called out the three names of God: “Sovereign LORD” (from two separate names of God in Hebrew — “Lord” and “the LORD” [i.e. Yahweh, the personal name of God]) and “God” (16:28). God answered Samson’s prayer and gave him the strength that he needed to topple both stone pillars at the same time. The whole temple collapsed, thus “he killed many more when he died than while he lived” (16:30). Although Samson faced a tragic end, it was indeed a grand and heroic finish. He, together with other judges, was listed as a man with heroic faith in Hebrews 11:32. The failure of man does not change God’s eternal plan; yet when man repents, God will reverse the tide. The life of Samson reminds us that though man suffers moments of weakness, God will give His people a second chance.

Samson experienced numerous failures in his life; however, at the end, it was the simple faith, as little as a mustard seed that turned him away from his failures. By the grace and mercy of God, he received God’s acceptance. Likewise, we cannot but admit that we are also weak in faith. Like Samson, we often compromise with the world and succumb to temptations. However, God is gracious and compassionate; He will wait to give us the second chance to be awakened and to return to Him for His use.

APPLICATION: Reflect on all the second chances that God had granted you through all your ups and downs, and be grateful for His grace and mercy. Furthermore, commit to be steadfast in your faith and ask God to continue to use you.

MEMORY VERSE: “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Hebrews 11:6

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.

Micah — One Who Made Idols

Passage: Judges 17:1-18:31

May 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 Judges 17:1-18:31 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Judges 17:1-18:31 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. Why was it not appropriate for Micah to have a shrine, and to make an ephod and idols in his house (cf. Exodus 20:4-5; 32:4, 35)?
2. Why did the young Levite leave Bethlehem to make a living? Do you think the Israelites in those days treated the Levites according to the commands of God (cf. Numbers 18:21; Deuteronomy 26:12)?
3. What characteristics did you observe from this chaotic period of Judges?

Micah was from Ephraim. He stole a handsome sum of silver from his mother. After some days, he was cursed and could not use that money, so he returned it to his mother. Now his mother wanted to lessen the effect of the curse, so she solemnly consecrated her silver to the Lord (17:3). After that, Micah used that money to cast an idol. Not only that, he set up a “shrine” and treated his home as a sanctuary (17:5), he further installed his son as his priest. The casting of idols, the provision of the temple and the appointment of Micah’s son as a priest were all contrary to the teachings of the laws of Moses.

In those days, the Israelites began to reject the laws of Moses as the standard of their conduct. Having no king, not only contributed to military and political chaos, but also revealed their spiritual corruption. “Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (17:6; cf. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Unfaithfulness of the Israelites was present not only among the people, but also among the Levites, the spiritual leaders of Israel. Micah foolishly thought that by “possessing” a priest, he would possess the blessings of God.

From the life of Micah and his family, we can find the three main traits of Israelites’ unfaithfulness during the latter time of the judges: ①religious compromise, ②moral relativism and ③materialism. Our spiritual and moral life will be in ruins if we act as we see fit, instead of letting God be the Lord of our life.

APPLICATION: In whatever you say or do, ask the Lord to help you watch your motivation closely, lest you would fall into temptation. Reflect on any bad habit that you may have and ask the Lord to help you remove it. May you surrender your life to the Lord and rely on God’s guidance.

MEMORY VERSE: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
Romans 12:2

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.

Book of Ruth

- Author: Anonymous
- Date of writing: Around 1150 B.C.
- Place: The Land of Moab and Canaan
- Theme: The Book of Ruth demonstrates the kind of love and faithfulness that God has towards those who trust Him. God accepted the devoted Moabite woman, Ruth, as one of His chosen people. This shows that God would extend His mercy to even Gentiles so they could also be blessed. Another purpose of this book is to trace the genealogies of King David (and as we know it now, the genealogies of our Lord Jesus Christ, cf. Matt. 1:5, 16).
- Historical Background:

The setting for the Book of Ruth began in the heathen country of Moab, and took place during the dismal days of failure and rebellion of the Israelites. At that time, there were no great leaders like Moses or Joshua, so Judges were raised up. Even the deliverance by the Judges was not a completed rescue, they only restored partial peace and freedom to the Israelites. As the end of the Book of Judges (25:21) stated: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes"; from then on, it seemed that there was no hope for Israel.

Although the situation at that time seemed hopeless, the story of Ruth suddenly brought a light at the end of the tunnel and we are able to see a beautiful ray of light in the darkness. The book of Ruth is an important book in the Bible; it ended the desolate period of Judges and led into the glorious time of King David. The bible recorded Ruth's eventual marriage to a wealthy man named Boaz, by whom she bore a son, Obed, who became the grandfather of King David. Not only that, the marriage brought Ruth into the privileged lineage of Christ.

- Outline
 1. Naomi & Ruth went back to hometown in Bethlehem (ch. 1)
 2. How Ruth & Boaz met and how their relationship began (ch. 2-3)
 3. Boaz served as a kinsman redeemer and married Ruth, which later became the ancestor of King David (ch. 4)

Elimelek was an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. At that time, Judah was known as the “land of praise,” and Bethlehem was the “house of bread,” Ephrathite had the meaning of “being fruitful,” and Elimelek meant “my God is king.” Regrettably, Elimelek did not seem to fully comprehend the meaning of these names. If he did faithfully regard God as his king, he would have seen that the “house of bread” was exactly where he was, and the famine was nothing but a temporary trial that God had allowed to lead his children back to Him.

Elimelek's decision to leave for Moab proved that ①he was a man of little faith, and he chose the seemingly easy path in the face of a trial. ②He was not a man who would seek God; otherwise, he would have understood His will. ③He was not familiar with the Word of God, as God had clearly warned the Israelites in Deuteronomy that He had cursed Moab. Instead of witnessing “his God is king,” Because of his lack of faith and unfamiliarity with the Word of God, Elimelek did not beseech God, but instead, moved from the “bread house” to a “cursed land.” Likewise, how do we make our choices when we encounter difficulties? Remember that only through persistent prayers and reading of God's words can we understand God's will and make the wisest decision amid challenging situations.

APPLICATION: Examine your confidence/faith in God (especially during difficult times). On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the highest), what is your level of faith? Why? What are some of the ways that could help you strengthen your faith?

MEMORY VERSE: “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”
Hebrews 4:16

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

Naomi's two young daughters-in-laws had no hesitation to accompany her when she decided to return home, showing that Naomi must have been a compassionate and loving mother-in-law. Nevertheless, not knowing what the future might bring, Naomi could not bear the thought of seeing her daughters-in-laws in misery should the decision to return to Judah turned out badly. Upon her explanation of their situation and repeated urge, Orpah left, but Ruth would not abandon Naomi, saying, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." Seeing Ruth's determination, Naomi relented, and the two arrived at Bethlehem. It could not have been easy for Ruth to adopt Naomi's country and her God. It is therefore evident that Naomi must have been a faithful witness of the Lord.

In order to be a Christian who pleases and glorifies God, we must bear good witness; whether it is in our faith, our life, or our work, we need to bear good witness to glory God.

APPLICATION: Come before the Lord for quiet meditation. List down incidents where you were a good witness of the Lord, and incidents where you were not. Ask the Lord to grant you what it takes to make improvements and to be His good witness.

Good Witness

Witness That Needs Improvement

MEMORY VERSE: "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." 1 Peter 2:12

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.

The unflinching Ruth

Passage: Ruth 1:6-22

May 27

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 Ruth 1:6-22 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read Ruth 1:6-22 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. From Ruth's response to Naomi, what was the reason that Ruth did not want to leave Naomi?
2. As a Moabite woman, how did Ruth get to know the Lord of the Israelites? Furthermore, why would her faith be so strong?
3. As a Moabite widow, what kind of challenges would Ruth face as she followed Naomi to Bethlehem in Judah? How did her challenges compare to those faced by today's Christians as Christians are considered a "minority" in the society?

The Lord had blessed His people again, and the famine passed. With an utterly broken heart, Naomi could do nothing but to return to her homeland of Judah, where she still had some relatives in Bethlehem; and perhaps she could get some support to survive. After repeated persuasions, the elder daughter-in-law reluctantly agreed to go back to her parents, but Ruth was determined to follow Naomi back to Bethlehem. This could not have been an easy decision for Ruth, and from her decision, we could observe two things:

① Ruth's decision was based on her love for Naomi:

Through the hard days since their husbands passed, the mother and daughter-in-law had built a profound relationship and they were inseparable. Ruth knew that as a Moabite woman, she would face various sorts of discrimination as she followed Naomi to Israel. But with her love for Naomi, she was willing to face the utterly uncertain future to be by Naomi's side for the rest of her life. She was so resolute in her decision that she declared only death could separate them.

② Ruth's decision was based on her faith in the Lord:

As a Moabite woman, Ruth declared that Naomi's country was her country, and Naomi's God was her God. Not only was she willing to sever ties with the god of her own people, she was willing to become a part of Israel and to earnestly follow her God, the Lord. Ruth's resolve clearly demonstrated her unflinching love for Naomi and the Lord.

APPLICATION: Put all your hardships and challenges into the hands of the Lord. Have faith that He will take care of you, and follow Him with an unwavering heart, as did Ruth.

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 harvesters (cf. Lev 19:9; 23:22; Deut. 24:19). Naomi was not able to assist with the gleaning because of her old age, so Ruth gleaned on her own, and “as it turned out,” in Boaz’s field (2:3). From a human point of view, these events were coincidental, but if we take a broader view of the whole story, it is hard to imagine how Ruth could run into Boaz had it not been God’s hand in the works.

Perhaps because of Boaz’s own background, he was sympathetic towards Ruth as soon as he learned of her background. Boaz’s mother Rahab was also a foreigner, as a result, Boaz was likely to have been bullied and humiliated when he was young because of his gentile mother. As such, he made all the special arrangements for Ruth so not only she could glean for wheat but also to ensure a gentile woman being protected. As if that was not enough, Boaz arranged for Ruth to dine with him and his servants. These gestures clearly demonstrated Boaz’s compassion for those in need. Because of Boaz’s special care for Ruth, her gatherings amounted to an “ephah,” the equivalent of 20 liters or 30 pounds. Frankly, Boaz’s mercy and care for Ruth outweighed what she deserved.

Likewise, many events in our lives seem coincidental, but are not these events all arranged by our eternal God? And is not true that God’s attention and care for us also outweighs what we deserve? May we trust in our Lord in all circumstances, because if we do so and stay under His wings, we are bound to be richly rewarded.

APPLICATION: Try to imagine yourself gleaning for blessings in God’s field. What kind of blessings would you wish for? “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32)” Come before the Lord and tell Him your needs, and watch how He would provide for 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.

To solve the problem that there was a closer kinsman-redeemer of Ruth, Boaz went to the town gate the next morning, and when he ran into the kinsman, he immediately called for 10 elders to resolve the matter. This “running into” of course was another prearranged “coincidence” in the plan of God! The first matter is to handle Elimelech's property (vv. 5, 9), the witty Boaz redeemed Naomi's land and Ruth from the closer kinsman. He explained that if this kinsman wanted to be the redeemer, he had to acquire Ruth as his wife to maintain the name of the dead. Boaz specifically mentioned that Ruth was a Moabitess and a dead man's widow; this was to let the kinsman know of the responsibilities. In the end, this man chose to give up his rights so he took off his sandals, signifying that he was willing to let it go. Since the closer kinsman publicly gave up his right on the matter, Boaz could then rightly redeem Naomi's land, and properly marry Ruth.

Ruth's faithful choice resulted in a fruitful outcome — a Moabitess loved by a local wealthy and capable man who was willing to redeem her and her mother-in-law's family. It was not only a favorable outcome for Ruth, but also meant preservation for Naomi's family name and inheritance. It was a perfectly happy ending. Ruth was able to receive blessings from God, and Naomi was covered by God's grace as she received a child in her lap and caused those around her to give praises to God. Yet, this was not the full measure of their blessing, for they went on to become part of the genealogy of King David and the Messiah Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION: Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz all shared the same virtue, which is being considerate to others. Pray that God would help you to possess the same virtue. Think about how you can practice being considerate to others in this coming week and beyond.

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 Book of 1 Samuel

- Author: Anonymous
- Date of writing: 930 B.C. or later
- Theme: 1 Samuel is the turning point of the history of Israel as they moved from the rule of judges to being a unified nation under kings. Samuel emerged as the last judge, and he anointed the first two kings, Saul and David.
- Outline:
 1. The life of Samuel (1:1 — 4:1a)
 2. The drifting of the Ark (4:1b — 7:1)
 3. The beginning of the monarchy ruling (7:2 — 12:25)
 4. The fall of King Saul and the rise of King David (13:1 — 31:13)

- Historical Background:

After the Israelites entered into & settled in the land of Canaan, they still had to face many challenges & enemies. One of the most powerful enemies were the Philistines and they were stationed around the Mediterranean coast. The Philistines were brutal, wealthy and had the best weapons of all. That is why they often bullied their neighbors, and especially wanted to devour Israel.

The Israelites felt very insecure, thus demanded Prophet Samuel to anoint a king to rule over them. When Saul ascended to the throne as the first king of Israel, the period of the judges ended.

Saul was tall, macho, and handsome; he came from a well-to-do family, and had a very disciplined life. He had enough qualities to lead Israel to become a powerful nation; unfortunately, he was selfish, jealous, suspicious, and did not seek the Lord wholeheartedly. As a result, the Lord chose another person who was after God's heart to replace Saul. This person later became the most influential king of Israel — David. In fact, "David" is said to be the most widely used name nowadays.

The Birth And Dedication Of Samuel

Passage: 1 Samuel 1:1-28

May 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 1 Samuel 1:1-28 and think about what God is trying to say to you.

RE-READING GOD'S WORD: Read 1 Samuel 1:1-28 again with careful observation and answer the following questions:

1. What can we learn from Hannah's prayer?

2. What can we learn from Hannah's nursing and offering of Samuel to God?

As the career of Samson the judge drew near the end, there was a family in the city of Ramathaim — that of Elkanah and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. According to Hebrew traditions, every family must make an annual sacrifice at the Temple. After the offering of sacrifice, Elkanah divided the meat between Peninnah and her children; even though God had closed Hannah's womb, Elkanah gave Hannah double portion because of his love for her. Yet, Hannah could not be comforted, so she prayed to God in her heart; while her lips were moving, she did not make any

noise, only pouring her heart out to God in prayer. She vowed to God that if she was granted a son, she would give him to the Lord for all the days of his life.

Eli, who was sitting at the entrance of the Temple and learned of Hannah's situation, answered her, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him." It was like Hannah had heard God's words from Eli, for she received it with faith and said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes", and then she ate and her face was no longer down-cast.

Hannah received peace from her prayer, and returned home full of faith. God remembered Hannah's prayer and she conceived. In the course of time, she gave birth to a son, and gave him the name Samuel, meaning "Because I asked the Lord for him."

Hannah nursed Samuel at home, and when he was weaned, she brought him up to Shiloh — the Lord's Temple. Elkanah also went with Hannah and the boy to show his support for Hannah's fulfillment of her vow in dedicating Samuel to God. Hannah was not only faithful in her prayer, but also in her dedication — she did just as she had vowed to God.

Samuel was born out of Hannah's prayer and God's grace; Hannah did not withhold Samuel from God, but left him in the Temple to learn to serve. We can learn from this that it is the parents' ultimate duty to teach their children about loving God and serving others.

APPLICATION: When Hannah was "provoked and irritated," she "pour[ed] out her heart" to God in prayer. Try to come before God and "pour out your heart" of all the irritations or feeling of injustice, asking God to help take away your burdens.

MEMORY VERSE: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

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.

Monthly Reflection

Passage: Mark 9:35b

May 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 Mark 9:35b, 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 this Bible passage or your respective insight as a beginning prayer of today's reflection.

*“If anyone wants to be first,
he must be the very last,
and the servant of all.”*

Mark 9:35b

YOUR FEELINGS:

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

1. Please count and write down the various situations that you experienced God's grace in your life in the past month.

2. List down areas that you need to improve on.

3. Other reflections:

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

Overall Insights In May

Write down the overall spiritual insights that you have learned in your daily devotion this month:

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