

NEW LIFE

the creation:

The Bible talks of God creating the world and all the living things (Gen 1)

Day 1	(1:3-5)	Creation of light and separation from darkness.
Day 2	(1:6-8)	Separation of water above and below
Day 3	(1:9-13)	Separation of ground & seas, creation of plants
Day 4	(1:14-19)	Creation of sun, moon and stars
Day 5	(1:20-22)	Creation of living things in the water and birds in air
Day 6	(1:25-30)	Creation of creatures on the ground and man-kind.
Day 7	(2:2)	God rested on seventh day

Creation of Mankind:

God created man in His own image, He created them male and female (Gen 1:27). He named them Adam, which in Hebrew means mankind (Gen 5:2). The details of creation of woman is given in Gen 2: 18-15. God created woman and thus instituted marriage and family in the beginning of creation (Gen 1:27). To them God gave responsibility to increase in number and fill the earth and subdue it and rule the fish of sea and all living creatures on the earth. Gen 1:28

Fall of mankind:

The serpent tempted the women and both man and woman ate the forbidden fruit. The result of this is given in Gen 3. Because of this, judgment of God came upon mankind (Gen 3:17-19). God said that man has to toil for his food and he will die and his body will return to the ground. In Eccl 12:6 we read that when person dies the spirit goes back to God. Jesus tells in Lk 12:4 that God has authority to cast into hell.

The plan of redemption:

God out of His love has planned redemption for mankind and that plan included the creation of a people through whom He will reveal His mind and purpose. In order to accomplish this He called a man 'Abraham' out of a place called Ur and brought him to Canaan. God promised He will bless mankind through Abraham's family (Gen 12:1-3). In the fourth generation, He moved Joseph to the country of Egypt so that He can fulfill His promise to Abraham (Psa 105: 17-22). All the descendants of Abraham moved over to Egypt and lived there. When they multiplied they were under bondage of the Pharaoh, king of Egypt.

Redemption of Israel:

The children of Abraham were known by name Israel. In their bondage, they prayed to God (Exo 2:7). God sent Moses, through whom He brought out the children of Israel and led them to the land of Canaan. Before reaching the land of Canaan, God spelt out His purpose regarding how man should serve Him. These are given in the book of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They also contain the Ten Commandments and various laws concerning sacrifice and other rituals. God also instructed Moses to build Tabernacle for Him.

the tabernacle:

The Tabernacle is made in three parts, the outer court, the Holy place and the Holiest of Holy. The Tabernacle indicates how man can approach God. The entry point to approach God is through a sacrifice for sin at the outer court. The Holy place contained bread, 7 candle sticks and the Holiest of Holy contained Ten Commandments. The construction of the Tabernacle indicates that man first has to reconcile himself to God by acknowledging sin and paying the price for the same. The Holy place indicates the place of fellowship with God and his people and the Holiest of Holy indicates acquiring laws into our hearts (Heb. 8:10)

The History of Israel:

The Old Testaments records the history of Israelites which clearly shows that Lord blessed them and prospered them. Because of their prosperity they use to leave following the commands and statues of the Lord, because of which God brought punishment on them and when they returned back to Him, the Lord blessed them. Thus the history of Israel is a history which goes in circles, obedience, blessings, disobedience, punishment, repentance and then blessing again. (Judg. 2:11-23)

The Promised Messiah:

The God's plan of Redemption included the coming of Jesus Christ, the Word of God (John 1:1). Jesus came to the world and paid the penalty for the sins of mankind through His death on the cross. On the third day he rose again and is seated on the right hand of the father (Acts 7:56). God has provided salvation to mankind because of what Christ Jesus has done. Those who accept what Jesus has done and acknowledge their status and sins can receive forgiveness of sins and become sons of God (John 1:12,13). God on His part delivers them from the dominion of darkness and bring them to the Kingdom of God (Col. 1:13). Paul refers to this and says that such persons are new creation therefore this is new life (2 Cor. 5:17).

Repentance and Restitution:

Jesus started His ministry saying 'repent and believe the gospel' (Mk.1:15). What is repentance? Repentance means a feeling of regret for the past sinful acts and return to the Lord. Repentance therefore will involve a confession to the Lord. Repentance brings about a changed state in which the person will look for restitution. Restitution involves reconciling with others (Math 5:23-24) as well as repaying loss (Lk.19.8). Sometimes it may involve seeking forgiveness from others, paying back if something is borrowed or stolen. Please check if you have completed your act of restitution as Zacchaeus did. Repentance also helps a person to come out of addictive habits.

Testifying:

One of the outcome of repentance is testifying to others what Jesus has done in their lives. A good example is that of the Samaritan woman. (Jn.4:28-30). She went and told others what Jesus did for her. Another example is the demonic man whom Jesus healed (Mk

5:1-20). Jesus told him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and what mercy he has shown you”. He went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him and everyone was amazed.

For your consideration:

1. Have you confessed your sins to Jesus Christ and accepted His offer of salvation?
2. Have you sought forgiveness from those whom you had wronged?
3. Have you restored what you had taken which belonged to others?
Have you paid back what you had taken from others as loan?
4. Have you got freedom from addictive habits?

SPIRITUAL GROWTH Part 1
(Focus on Personal Life)

introduction:

A believer who has been brought into the light is expected to change so that his life becomes totally new. Paul says (2Cor 5:17), “*therefore if any one is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old has passed away, behold the new has come*”. We will be studying this in two parts. In the first part we will focus on personal life, that is spending time with the Lord at home in study of the Word and prayer and how we can take corrective actions to grow spiritually. In the second part we will focus on corporate Christian life or church life in which we can grow spiritually through fellowship and corrective action of the church which is also called the body of Christ.

in the image of his son:

The call of God which envisages a salvation from the penalty and power of sin also includes a movement from the world of darkness of our social system and our thinking process, into His light. Consider the following statements of the Bible Isa 55:8,9; 2Cor 6:17, 1Pe 1:16. God is gathering people from the world whom He calls “my people”, who would reflect His nature, thus confirming that they are His sons and daughters. Humanity has moved very far away from the thoughts and ways of God, and due to the strong influence of the powers of darkness has evolved cultural systems whose values very often conflict with the standards set by God. The cultural and social environment has a strong bearing on a man’s thinking process. A man’s thoughts and ways dictate his actions and behaviour thus influencing his character. Jesus said, “*there is nothing outside a person can defile, but the things that come out are what defile*” (Mk 7:15). Therefore it is His desire that Christians move back into the very heart of God so that a Christian’s thoughts and ways are that of God himself. “*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. ...*” (Rom 8:29). He has given us many precious promises that through we may acquire divine nature (2Pe 1:4). Acquiring of divine nature can also be termed as “Character building”.

God’s call is not only for us to move out of the “world” into His kingdom but also for the “world” to move out of us (Rom 12:2, Jas 1:27 1Jn 2:15, 1Jn 5:4). What does the world in us

indicate? It indicates the convictions which are based on the influence of the “world” rather than His word. So our convictions are a mix of those based on the word and those based on the influence of the world. Further, because we live in the world we are constantly under the influence of the surroundings which again tend to bias our convictions. So while embarking on the process of conforming to His image the task before us is multifold. First we need to cleanse the conscience of all the convictions which are contrary to His thoughts. Paul calls these as strongholds (2Cor 10:4-6). Secondly test every new thought before it forms into a conviction.

Apart from these our actions based on our convictions also require guidance. Sometimes, even if our convictions are according to His thoughts, the actions that are initiated may not be appropriate for that situation. It is difficult to make a correct assessment of the situation without the guidance of the Holy Spirit because He knows the end from the beginning.

Our response should be to influence or change the thought patterns and the ways, thus bringing them closer to God’s thoughts and ways. If any man is in Christ Jesus he is a new creature and the image of His Son is reflected through such a man. If this is one of the purposes of our Lord in calling people out of this world, how does this happen? The NT talks of two processes which take place in the life of child of God, (1) Renewal of mind and (2) Leading of the Spirit.

renewal of mind:

Through the re-birth(bornagain) the spirit is made alive and a communion with the Lord is established by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9b, 15, Eph 1:13). However the mind needs to be renewed for two reasons as stated in Rom 12:2 “(i) *Do not be conformed to this world but (ii) be transformed by the renewal of your mind,*”. Peter echoes the same thoughts in his letter 1Pe 1: 13 -16 “ *Therefore gird up your minds,As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct;*”.

What is our response to His revelation? Are we willing to accept His concepts and precepts? Our minds are conditioned by the society and the environment. Also the powers of darkness are exerting their influence on our minds. In these circumstances are we willing to change according to the revelation given in His word? Renewal of mind results in a transformed life (Col 3:5)

What can we do to renew our minds? Even when we are born again our minds remain carnal. Our minds can be renewed through His word (Ps 119:11). Surely this requires a contemplative study and acceptance of His word as a guidance for our conduct. Psa 1:1,2 says that a man who does not walk in wicked ways spends time in meditating the word of God. As we study and meditate the word our mind and thinking process are changed. Slowly and slowly we are renewed in the mind and thus we start acquiring the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5).

Study of His word helps in two ways. First it tells the mind and precepts of God. So we can learn and understand God’s qualities and His mind. Secondly it helps us to understand ourselves (Heb 4:12). It is only when we understand God and ourselves we can bridge the gap in the thinking process by dropping our concepts and accepting His precepts. Thus we are renewed and

show forth the newness of life.

Along with the study of the word we should also embark on meditation of the word (Ps1:2). Meditation is a long term process and helps us to understand complicated issues facing life and society.

leading of the spirit:

A great privilege given to His children is the promise of guidance. The Bible tells us that God loves us and He interested in our lives to fulfill His purposes. We read in Ps 32:8, “I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go”. God has a plan for every life. God’s plan is suited to our personalities, talents, needs, potentials and environment. Ephesians 2:10 speaks of God having ordained certain specific tasks, and works for individual believers. The life of Jesus is the perfect example for understanding and fulfilling God’s will. Heb 10:7 “...I come to do your will O God”. Jesus on accomplishing what the Father had planned Him to do said, “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4). Paul echoes a similar thought when he says in 2 Tim 4:7 “...I have finished the race...” which can be linked to Ananias statement in Acts 22:14, “the God of our ancestors has chosen you (Paul) to know His will...”

Guidance is necessary for His children because

(a) We are all accountable to God for all that we do (Rom 14:12)

(b) When we follow His guidance our works have eternal value (1 Jn 2:17, Rev 14:13)

When we abide by the guidance of the Lord we have the opportunity of dissociating ourselves from the world. (eg) Mk 1:32-39 Jesus was not seeking the crowds (eg) Philip Acts 8:26,27 Seeking the guidance of the Spirit helps us to develop an eternal perspective.

daily devotion:

The reading and meditating of His Word and waiting on Him in prayer should be done as often as possible, at least once in a day. Some call this as “Quite Time”. It is recommended to start the day in the meditation of the Word and prayer and end the day in examining the day’s activities to find anything which needs to be corrected. The day should be closed with prayer thanking the Lord for His protection, provisions and guidance. If there is anything to be set right it should be done as soon as possible with out any delay. To this it is good to add worship and intercessory prayer. Daily devotion both morning and evening will help a believer to grow spiritually.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH Part 2 **(Focus on Church Life)**

INTRODUCTION:

In order to grow spiritually we need to seek the Lord in our personal lives through the study of the word and prayer. This is not enough because the enemy is very active to stunt our spiritual growth. Therefore a warm fellowship with others of similar faith is also essential for the spiritual growth. A believer who has been brought into a relationship with the Lord is also brought into fellowship with other believers of similar faith. We learn from the Acts of the Apostles that the early Christians, in spite of severe persecution, were able to grow spiritually

through fellowship and meeting together. Acts 2:42 says, “they devoted themselves to Apostles doctrine (Bible Study) and to the fellowship and to the breaking of bread and to prayer”. When they continued like this Lord added to their number daily (Acts 2:47). The four areas that we will be studying are

1. Study of the Word (Apostles Doctrine)
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of Bread
4. Prayer

STUDY OF THE WORD:

The study of the Bible is can be done effectively through both the Church Bible study and personal study of the Word. The Church Bible Study is a collective effort in understanding the Word. Usually it is held during the week days.

While reading the Bible we come across passages which are difficult to understand. How do we understand what the Bible says? In Luke 10:26 Jesus talking about understanding the Scriptures asks two questions. What is written in the law? What (How) do you read (interpret) there? On hearing the answers for His questions Jesus further says in verse 28 “... do this and you will live”. From this we gather the three important areas for a fruitful study of the Bible. They are (a) What is written, (b) How to interpret, and (c) Do what the Scripture says. To understand “what is written” we need to know how the Bible came into being.

The Bible is a collection of 66 books, 39 of the Old Testament and the rest 27 the New Testament. The writers of the Bible wrote in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek over a period of 1500 years or more. During the Old Testament times there were many books were written by men claimed to have had revelation from the Lord. Similarly during the New Testament times about 120 books were written. About 90 AD the Jamnia council of the Palestine Jews canonised (officially accepted) 39 books as Hebrew scripture and in 397 AD the great Church Council held at Carthage in 397 AD officially listed 27 NT books as canonical. The division of a book into chapters and verses were introduced at a later date.

God revealed His word over a period of many centuries. God’s purpose and His concept of how He deals with mankind is progressively revealed. We are now living in the New Testament times and therefore we must interpret and understand the Bible portions accordingly. Avoid interpreting a text in a way that it contradicts rest of the Scripture.

Inductive Bible Study:

In this method the student forms conclusions only after observing and analyzing the elements of immediate context and normal word meanings. The overall strategy of the inductive student is:(a) prayer, (b)understanding the language (c) observing the contexts (d) interpretation, and (d) application.

Prayer

Being conscious of the fact that the Scripture is the inspired word of God and also aware of the inadequacy of human mind to grasp the things concerning God it is strongly advised that

the help of the Holy Spirit for interpretation and understanding is sought through prayer (Jas 1:5).

Understanding the written text

The first step is to understand the written text of the Bible. Recognising the type of the text whether a command (Math 22:37 1Cor 11:23), exhortation (Rom 12:1), narrative (Acts 2:43), prophesy, poetry or apocalyptic (Revelation) will enhance our understanding. The knowledge of the *historical, cultural or social background* helps to unravel the meaning (wedding garment, sheep following shepherd, washing of feet).

Observing the context

Find out the main focus of the section. Discover the meaning of the text in terms of the context. The contexts of reference in the order of their priority are

- (a) Immediate context
- (b) Local context (within the book)
- (c) Global context (within the Bible)

The individual parts of the Bible fit in with the whole of the Bible because God is the prime author. Understanding the text with reference to global context helps to protect us from making wrong observations.

Interpretation

Find out “What did they mean when they flowed from the pen of the original author? What was his intent?” The next question to consider is, what did God have in mind to put the text in that context? *Try to interpret a text through other parts of the Scripture.* It is advisable to get a second opinion particularly on issues which affect our public conduct. We also must learn to appreciate other’s point of view and at times agree to disagree.

Application What does this text mean to my life?

Only after discovering the meaning of a text in its own biblical time and place is the student encouraged to ask, “What does this mean to me?” Care is given to distinguish between cultural facts and timeless principles. Focus is put on the main idea. What are the primary issues? What does this say about my relationship to God? Bible interpretation may be singular, but the applications may be many.

Church Bible Study combined with a personal study of the Word can be much rewarding and will help greatly in renewing our minds so that God’s purpose for our life can be understood clearly.

FELLOWSHIP:

Human beings are created as relational beings. When God created man he said (Gen 2:18), “It is not good man to be alone”. Jesus said (Math 18:20), “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them”. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 spell out the advantages of fellowship. The Greek word used for fellowship is “Koinonia”. Out of this fellowship comes the Greek word “Ekklesia” which means Church. We are called into fellowship with Jesus Christ by God (1Cor 1:9). God’s children thus form a fellowship with the Lord. This results in a fellowship with one another (1Jn 1:1-4). Christian fellowship means spiritual communion, joint partnership, joint sharing and mutual partakers.

Basis of fellowship

God's children have fellowship with one another, the basis of which is listed below.

Born of the same Father	Jn 1:13
Bought with the same price	1 Cor 6:20
Members of the same body	Rom 12:5
Guided by the same Spirit	Jn 16:13
Heirs of same inheritance	Rom 8:17

The binding factor

The binding factor of our fellowship with one another is our fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 Jn 1:2,3). When the fellowship with the Lord is snapped we cannot continue our fellowship with one another. It is like the telephone exchange. When a telephone is connected to a telephone exchange, it is in effect connected to every telephone on the net work. When the connection to the telephone exchange is disconnected, that telephone is disconnected from all other telephones. The disconnection in fellowship happens because of sin (1 Jn 1:6,7). To keep the fellowship warm in the Church it very important to keep our relationship with the Lord intact.

Activities

Christian fellowship involves sharing with others what the Lord has done in our lives. Apart from this fellowship also involves working together. The outcome of a good fellowship are well conducted Sunday services, Prayer meetings, Bible studies, Gospel meetings, Outreach activities and friction free administration. The New Testament talks of providing (2 Cor 8:3,4, Phil 1:5) support to the needy believers. Paul talks of support during dissensions as a form of fellowship (Gal 2:9).

Fellowships to be avoided

The New Testament clearly mentions to avoid fellowship with (1 Cor 10:20) Devils by directly involving in certain activities. It also cautions us to avoid fellowship with (Eph 5:11) deeds of darkness, which means not to associate with those whose activity involves works of darkness. Quite often even believers get involved with deeds of darkness, we need to be careful in associating with them. Again the Bible speaks of (2 Cor 6:14,15) associating with unbelievers. In this case we need to carefully weigh the types of association with them.

Christian fellowship with other believers helps us to grow spiritually because of mutual help, support and encouragement.

BREAKING OF BREAD:

The breaking of bread was initiated by our Lord when he celebrated the last Passover with his disciples before his death. After his resurrection the early Church continued this practice of breaking of bread (Acts 2:46). As Churches grew in different places the practice of breaking of bread continued. It was Paul while writing his first letter to the Corinthian Church explained the significance of the breaking of bread (1 Cor 11:23-32). Paul brings out certain salient features associated with the breaking of bread.

To be observed in remembrance of Christ	1 Cor 11:24-25
The Bread denotes the body of Christ	1 Cor 11:24
The cup is the cup of New Covenant	1 Cor 11:25
Members must take part in it worthily	1 Cor 11:28
To be observed till he comes	1 Cor 11:26

In remembrance of Christ

Jesus talked clearly of the Kingdom of God and mentioned that he will return and establish it. In fact the disciples were curious to know when he will establish it (Act 1:6). In order to usher us into that Kingdom he laid down his life. The centrality of our faith is Christ Jesus. The foundation of our faith (Heb 12:2) and Christian life is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11, Eph 2:20). Therefore always be conscious of the presence of Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

The Bread

Jesus said he is the bread which came down from heaven (Jn 6:33-35, 41, 48). While celebrating the last supper Jesus took the bread broke it and said it is his body (Math 26:26, Mk 14:22, Lk 22:19). Breaking of the bread indicates the suffering he went through in his body. Taking part in the bread indicates our identification with him (Heb 2:10-18).

The cup

Again while celebrating the last supper Jesus took the cup said it is his blood of the covenant (Math 25:28, Mk 14:24, Lk 22:20). The shedding of the blood gives us the forgiveness of sins as well as a new covenant (Heb 8:10, 10:16). It establishes a new relationship with the Lord through which he pours out his Spirit upon us and we are able to understand the mind of God. The writing of the laws on the hearts as mentioned in the Hebrews chapters 8 and 10 refer to his children acquiring the mind and nature of God (2 Pe 1:3-4).

Take part in it worthily

Paul talks of the provision made to examine ourselves before taking part it. Thus a periodical examination is provided by the Lord to set things right while we walk our journey on the earth. This type of periodic examination also prepares us for his coming when our Lord will hold the final judgment. In fact a promise is given in 1 Cor 11:31 that those who examine themselves and set things right before taking part in the breaking of bread would not come under judgment

Observe till he comes

Gathering together for the breaking of the bread also indicates our hope that we will be observing this till he comes. It is a preparation for his coming so that we may be ready.

PRAYER:

The early Church continued fervently in prayer (Acts 1:14, 4:24, 12:5). They relied on the Lord for everything. So prayer was their main weapon to tackle all problems and trying circumstances. Whenever possible they used to gather together and spend time in prayer. So the Lord worked on their behalf mightily. Although they were fervent in their individual prayers they also learnt the secret of collective prayer. Speaking on this subject Jesus said, "if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my father in heaven..."

(Math 18:19).

The Bible talks of not only praying for our needs but for the needs of others also. The latter one is known as intercessory prayer. Jesus after the resurrection lives forever and is interceding for all of us (Heb 7:24-25). James exhorts the believers to pray for each other (Jas 5:17).

The Bible speaks of the assembly of God's children as the dwelling place of God or house of God (Eph 2:21-22). The Lord called this house as a house of prayer (Math 21:13, Isa 56:7). The Church prayer in our Assemblies is conducted after the breaking of bread on Sundays and on one of the week days. To grow spiritually it is essential therefore to take part in these prayers.

For your consideration:

1. Are you able to attend the Sunday Worship Services regularly?
2. After listening to a message in a Sunday Worship Service how do you react to the message?
3. Are you able to attend the Church Bible Studies? If not why not?
4. Are you able to join the weekly prayer meetings and pray with other believers?
5. Have you shared your testimony in any of the meetings? If not why not?

DISCERNING GOD'S GUIDANCE

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

The Bible speaks of a plan and purpose which God has for every one whom He has brought into His kingdom (Eph 2:10, Jer 29:11). Our Lord is keenly interested in communicating His purpose to us. This He does through guiding His children continuously in the path in which they ought to walk. It is a privilege for all those who trust in Jesus to be led of Him. In fact Paul lays this down as a condition to remain as a child of God (Rom 8:14). What then is leading of the Spirit?

2.0 LORD HAS DONE ALL THINGS FOR US:

When Jesus came to the world to fulfill the Father's will (Heb 10:7) Satan tried to disrupt it. Similarly when we try to do His will there will be many hindrances and obstacles; but the Lord has made all provisions for us.

- (a) He has established a relationship with us through Jesus (Rom 8:15)
- (b) Disarmed the powers of darkness Col 2:15)
- (c) Given us the light of knowledge (2 C Cor 4:6)

3.0 IMPORTANCE OF DOING HIS WILL:

Jesus said, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister and mother"(Mk 3:35). John says, "world passes away.. but he that does the will of God abides for ever". Paul says, "do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is ..". The parable in Lk 12:47 mentions that,

“the servant who understands Master’s will but does not prepare himself or does not do what the Master wants ...” Therefore from these Scripture verses we can infer that with respect to God’s will in our lives we need to

- (a) Understand what is meant by the will of God
- (b) Prepare ourselves
- (c) Discern and do the will of God

4.0 UNDERSTANDING GOD’S WILL:

While discussing God’s will, we need to understand that He as the omnipotent ruler of this universe exercises his “Sovereign Will” which can be seen in the history of mankind. It is interesting to note that the prophecies of the Lord concerning various kingdoms and cities have come true. Apart from this there is also a desire on the part of God that mankind should follow certain norms and values as they all live together. This we can term as the “Moral Will” of God. Large sections of the Bible speak clearly about the precepts and ordinances of God. Therefore in order to understand God’s moral will we need to read and understand the Scriptures well.

The question that concerns us most is how can a person know the will of God? God’s eternal purpose connects His children to the establishment and expansion of His Kingdom. All our activities are linked to it. The mile stones that we face in our lives, like education, job and marriage are also linked to it. We need to understand that our Lord has a role in all these and we should prayerfully seek His guidance.

4.1 REVEALED WILL FOR AN INDIVIDUAL:

Before going through the details of God’s will for an individual it is interesting to look at a few verses in the Lord spells out His guidance clearly on certain issues.

Eph 6:6	Work ethics, relationship and productivity at workplace
1The 5:19	Attitude of thanks under different circumstances
1Pet 2:15	Dealing with adversity
1The 4:3	Relationship with persons of opposite sex

5.0 PREPARATION:

Romans 12:1, 2 states that to find God’s will one’s life should be (a) Living sacrifice (b) Holy (c) Acceptable to God (d) under transformation through the renewal of mind. From this it appears that the Lord is interested in us conforming to his image (Rom 8:29) so that our life, behaviour and even thinking process and mind set conform to that of Jesus Christ. Psalm 37:23 says when the Lord delights in our way he orders our steps or in other words he leads us in our way. Therefore we should plan to lead a life pleasing to God and thus initiating the process of conforming to the image of His son. During the experiences of new birth, the spirit is made alive whereas body and mind remain the same. Paul while mentioning (Rom 12:1-2) the pre-requisites for knowing God’s will, talks of bringing the body and mind under the purview of the Lord.

5.1 LIVING SACRIFICE:

The first stage of preparation is to present the body as a living sacrifice. What does this mean? It involves life in its totality 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. Take the example of Jesus during 12 to 30 years. What was he doing? We can infer from the scriptures that he learnt carpentry (Mk 6:3) and reading and writing of Hebrew language (Lk 4:17). How many of us are willing to sit and learn in a school or college and do well scoring good marks? Jesus learnt Hebrew, which is a difficult language to learn. Paul was from a well to do family to study under Gamaliel. Jesus had to study by himself. How many of us are willing to do that? A living sacrifice means fulfilling the role and responsibilities as expected by the Lord; if you are student be a good student, if a worker do your job efficiently, if a husband take care of your family and so on. The preparation involves fulfillment of the role & responsibility in each stage of life.

5.2 HOLY:

We are expected to live a clean and a righteous life. In this connection Paul talks of periodical examination of ourselves (1Cor 11:28) to keep ourselves holy and pure. We should constantly check our lives against the Scriptural guidance given in Eph 4:25-32 and Col 3:5-10. Prepare for this kind of a life.

5.3 ACCEPTABLE TO GOD:

Another important factor for discerning God's guidance is acceptance by Him. How can we know that we are accepted by God. The peace and joy that He provides are indicators of His acceptance. Further we also should check constantly our convictions of God's will against real life situation. Otherwise a situation may arise where we may be totally unacceptable to God yet thinking within ourselves that we are doing God's will.

5.4 RENEWAL OF MIND:

What can we do to renew our minds? Even when we are born again our minds remain carnal. Our minds can be renewed through His word (Ps 119:11). Surely this requires a contemplative study and acceptance of His word as guidance for our conduct. Psa 1:1,2 says that a man who does not walk in wicked ways spends time in meditating the word of God. Study of His word helps in two ways. First it tells the purpose and precepts of God. So we can learn and understand God's qualities and His mind. Secondly it helps us to understand ourselves (Heb 4:12). It is only when we understand God and ourselves we can bridge the gap in the thinking process by dropping our concepts and accepting His precepts. Thus we are renewed and show forth the newness of life.

6.0 CONTINUOUS GUIDANCE:

We as His children need to trust His promise that His presence is with us always (Mat 28:20). In Ps 32:8 the Lord says, "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you". The Lord has promised to keep a close watch on His children and to lead in the way they ought to go. This He does constantly and continuously. Most of the believers do not look for continuous guidance but they seek the Lord's will at critical junctions of their life. The two most important decisions a person make in his/her life are selection of career and choice of life partner. These two decisions have a very great influence on the life of that person. Therefore it is necessary to seek God's continuous guidance at all times so that it will be easy to know His will at these critical junctions.

6.1 HOW CAN I KNOW THE GOD'S WILL?

Heb 11: 6 suggests that without faith it is impossible to please God. Our Lord delights in our faith in Him and the revelation of God's will usually comes one step at a time, requiring an unwavering faith from our end. From the example available in the Scripture it can be observed that the Lord uses one or more of the methods mentioned below to reveal His will.

- a) Word of God & prayer (understand, meditate & act)
- b) Circumstances - 2Cor 2:12,13
- c) Registration of the Spirit - Act 16:6
- d) Involve others where needed - Dan 2:17, acts 13:2
- e) Sign fulfilled - Judges 6: 36-38
- f) Lookout for blocked ways - Act 13:46

God is interested in guiding His children in the paths they should walk. Psalmist tells in Psa 23:3,"He leads me in right paths for His name's sake". Further Jesus says in Jn 10:4, "He goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know His voice". We need to follow him and also listen to him.

7.0 CONCLUSION:

God has a plan and purpose for each one of His children. He delights to reveal that plan to each one concerned. We need to learn to discern His guidance and walk accordingly. It is like the sheep following the shepherd (Jn 10:4). They learn to recognise His voice and follow him. His guidance is through one step at a time. Following those steps helps us to discern His mind and know His will.

TESTIMONY

INTRODUCTION:

Testimony is an outward expression of inward experience. Those who have experienced the new life in Christ Jesus have a tendency to express verbally to others what they had experienced inwardly (Jn 4:28-29, Mk 5:20). This is sometimes called (verbal) "sharing the testimony". There is another testimony which pertains to our actions and life style. When our outward life style is an expression of inward experience it will be distinctly different that of others. People around us will take note of it. Such a testimony will be the trail or legacy that people leave behind. This is what others will remember them for after they leave the earth. The Bible says that the deeds of such a life style will continue to bear fruit even after the person has left the earth (Rev 14:13). When we live such a life style it is known as "raising a testimony". John in the book of Revelation mentions that when the fifth seal is opened he saw those who have been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained (Rev 6:9). Testimony is making known to others by word and by actions the inward experiences of ours and the hope that we have of the Kingdom of God.

Some believers in their enthusiasm tend to share their testimony and the gospel to as many people as possible. In one sense they are good in personal evangelism. However they neglect

life style testimony resulting in a contradiction of their verbal and life style testimonies. This should be avoided at all costs.

TESTIMONY OF ENOCH AND MOSES:

The Bible talks of the testimony left behind by men of God. Speaking of Enoch (Heb 11:5) it is mentioned that he had this testimony that he pleased God. About Moses it is mentioned in Heb 3:5 that he was faithful as a servant in God's house. When we do actions as per God's desire then they become a testimony. For example we read in Num 21:8-9 that Moses lifted up a bronze serpent for people to be saved from the judgment of God. This became a testimony that Jesus refers to it in Jn 3:14-15 and talks of his death on the cross. An action done as per God's desire and guidance remains as a testimony.

TESTIMONY OF JESUS:

Jesus by his life style, teaching and purpose in life left a legacy, it is called the "testimony of Jesus" (Rev 1:2, 9; 12:17, 19:10). However the world was not willing to receive the testimony of Jesus (Jn 3:32). Paul says in 2 Tim 1:8 that he is not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord.

In Rev 19:10 we read that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophesy. Prophesy talks of the future. Jesus had a hope therefore he could endure the suffering of the cross (Heb 12:2). Similarly we can raise a testimony if we hold on to the hope the Lord has given to us. What is this hope that we can hold on to? Paul states this hope as (Col 1:27), "Christ in you hope of glory". Conviction and certainty of the future hope of glory will enable us to live a life reflecting the very qualities of Jesus Christ. Therefore while visiting Corinth Paul says that he is interested in nothing except to know if they are following the life of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2:2).

NEED FOR LIFE STYLE TESTIMONY:

The Bible talks of the schemes and deception of the powers of darkness (2 Cor 2:11). Their main aim is to draw the children of God away from the dominion of his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus bound Satan before embarking on His ministry (His temptations in the wilderness Math 12:38-39). Jesus is involved in a conflict which concerns us and He has promised to bruise Satan under our feet (1 Cor 15:25, Rom 16:20). We live to show our allegiance and faithfulness to the Lord who gave his life for us (Job1:6-12).

The Bible list many areas of our life and provides guide lines for relationships, attitudes and behavior. Some are listed below.

Childhood environment Lk 2:51-52, Eph 6:1, Bringing up children Eph 6:4, Attitude towards parents Eph 6:2, Supporting family members 1Tim 5:8, Husband wife relationship Eph 5:21-33, Behavioural issues Tit 2:2-8, Attitudes of workers Tit 2:9-10, Eph 6:5-8, Behaviour in Fellowship 1 Pe 5:5, 1 Tim 5:1-2

It is important to understand these God given principles. Quite often Satan deceives us in these areas, thus making our testimony a failure.

VERBAL TESTIMONY:

Jesus said in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, ...". This

could be done by being witness to what he has done in our lives (Acts 1:8). About this Paul says in Romans 1:14, "I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise." In like manner today we are debtors to every non-Christian because we have the good news that can save his soul. In our witness we also bring to others notice Christ as the Saviour and the need for the listeners to respond to his call. Some call the testifying to others about Christ as "personal evangelism"

In 1 Peter 4:17 the question is asked, "What shall be the end of those who do not obey the gospel?" The answer is given in 2 Thess 1:8 which says when the Lord comes He will come "In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." We should not want to see anyone lost but as Paul says in 2 Cor 5:11, "Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men." People are going to be lost forever if we do not teach them now! Paul says in 1 Cor 9:16, "Woe is to me if I preach not the gospel." How are we going to answer the Lord if we have not bothered to tell the good news to others? There is an urgency to teach the lost for Jesus says in Matthew 9:37-38, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Our Lord was speaking of the spiritual harvest of souls who would be lost in eternity if they are not harvested.

In the first century the good news of the gospel caused such great excitement that "Daily in the temple and from house to house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus" (Acts 5:42). We need to be as excited today. And even when they were being heavily persecuted, some even to death, we read in Acts 8:4, "Therefore those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."

JESUS IN ACTION:

Jesus tells us that there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God when one sinner repents (Luke 15:7,10). The joy of teaching one the gospel and seeing them obey it is beyond description.

A good example of personal evangelism is Jesus' encounter with the woman of Samaria as recorded in John 4:1-26. From this encounter we can learn seven aspects which help in being a witness for him.

CONTACT PEOPLE SOCIALLY:

Develop Social Contacts:

The importance of Jesus passing through Samaria (Jn 4:1-6)

Many Jews, because of their disdain for Samaritans, avoided Samaria, however Jesus chose to pass through Samaria, assuring contact with them (Jn 4:1-6). A similar example of Jesus making social contact is mentioned in Lk 5:29-32. We must go where the fish are!

Do not Confuse Separation with Isolation:

The Bible says we must be separate (2 Co 6:14-18), but this does not mean we are to isolate ourselves from the unbelieving. Note the prayer of Christ (Jn 17:15) and the command of Paul (1 Co 5:9-11). Withdrawing ourselves from those who have not heard or obeyed the gospel is contrary to the will of the Lord.

Opportunities for Social Contact

What are the areas for social contact? For those who are students schools provide the social contact with other students. Seizing such opportunities will help to sharpen the skills in personal evangelism and will be of great value in later years. In work place we have the greatest potential to influence fellow workers by our life style and work ethics. Home and neighbourhood provide good arena for social contacts. Finally church gathering provide an excellent opportunity for social contact as well as personal evangelism. Jesus said "Go into all the world..." (Mk 16:15). We must go where the people are.

ESTABLISH A COMMON INTEREST:

Common Interests Create a Bridge:

Note Jesus' first words to the woman (Jn 4:7-8). She had come to draw water and he was thirsty. His first words centered around their common interest (water). A common interest allows opportunity for meaningful dialogue, thus opening the door to build a rapport. Once a bridge for communication has been established, it will be easier to discuss God's word with the other person.

Common Interests are Many:

They include family (such as children, grandchildren), activities (such as work, community projects, hobbies) and shared experiences (such as travel, or even tragedies). Do not feel that you must immediately begin talking about spiritual matters. Take time to nurture common interests. Yet at some point we want to reach the next stage, which will lead to spiritual matters.

AROUSE SPIRITUAL INTEREST:

Through Your Actions:

Spiritual interests can be awakened through thoughtful actions. Jesus aroused interest by simply speaking to the woman (Jn 4:9). She was taken aback because a man spoke to her, that too a Jew. We can arouse spiritual interest by our example, by showing kindness and compassion to all, even the evil and wicked, by not harboring racial or social prejudices to those who are different and by our own example of faith and hope (1 Pe 3:1-2,15).

Through Your Words:

Jesus led her into a discussion on a common spiritual interest (living water Jn 4:10-14). We find that Jesus' statement shifted their conversation to spiritual matters. Similarly we can raise questions or make statements that shift conversations to spiritual matters. The discussion should first involve matters of common agreement. Start with things upon which you agree, to build rapport and instill confidence. This was the practice of apostolic preaching (Act 13:16-22).

DO NOT GO TOO FAR, TOO FAST:

Give a Person What They are Ready For:

During discussion the other person may talk of many issues, quite often they may not be ready for it. Note Jesus' discussion with the woman (Jn 4:15-16). She wanted the "living water", but did she really understand? Jesus saw the need to slow her down and provide the proper ground work. She needed faith in Him as the Messiah. He needed to provide evidence that He was the

Messiah. So instead of giving her the "living water", he tells her to get her husband. This eventually resulted in her conviction of Him as a prophet. Sometimes people do not realize what they need. They may want to talk about a particular subject, but in reality it is not what they need.

Some Examples:

For example some want to study Revelation, when they need to be grounded on the rest of the Bible first. Some want to discuss issues related to church organization, work, worship, etc., when they really ought to focus on the "first principles" of the gospel. It is important that a person not choke on the "meat" of the Word (1 Co 3:1-2).

DO NOT CONDEMN UNNECESSARILY:

The Example of Jesus:

Jesus could have dwelt on her being an adulteress (Jn 4:17-18). As stated elsewhere, He came to save the world, not to condemn it (Jn 3:17). Of course one day He will judge the world, but that the primary purpose of His first coming was to offer salvation (Jn 12:46-48).

In Our Evangelistic Efforts:

Though we preach against sin, our primary purpose is to save, not judge (1 Co 5:12-13). Our focus should be to inform others of the forgiveness God offers (2 Co 5:18-20). God seeks reconciliation with sinners and ours is a ministry of reconciliation.

STICK WITH THE MAIN ISSUE:

In the Case of the Samaritan Woman:

When Jesus focused on her sinful life, she turned the subject away from herself to where one should worship (Jn 4:19-20). Jesus answered her question, while effectively turning the conversation back to the original subject, who He is and what He offers (Jn 4:21-25, Jn 4:10)

Remain Steadfast to Your Objective:

If seeking to establish a common ground of agreement, avoid jumping ahead. As you move from common to uncommon ground. Take one step at a time. Do not go on until agreement at each step has occurred. If your objective is simply to obtain consent for a home Bible study, avoid getting into a detailed discussion at that time (Pro 15:28)

CONFRONT DIRECTLY:

Jesus Example:

At some stage we need to confront them with Jesus and the Gospel. In the case of the Samaritan woman Jesus confronted her with His identity (Jn 4:26). This came after He had laid the groundwork

Examples Today:

Have one primary objective that is to help them understand their need and gospel plan of salvation (Mk 16:15-16; Co 1:5-6). Be open to comments that indicate a spiritual interest, while demonstrating your own faith through actions and words. Avoid fruitless arguments, emphasize instead common beliefs. Stress the gospel message; don't obsess on their individual

shortcomings. One of the objectives can be to encourage them to study the Bible. Note the example of Aquila and Priscilla with Apollos (Act 18:24-26). At the appropriate time confront them directly with the invitation to obey the gospel of Christ.

CONCLUSION:

The result of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman was the conversion of many people in the city of Sychar (Jn 4:39-42). This demonstrates the potential of personal evangelism. Who knows whether the one person you teach may in turn bring many to Christ? That one person may be like a seed from which seeds may come forth. Realizing this potential, we can better appreciate the words of Jesus:

"Do you not say, 'There are still four months and [then] comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (Jn 4:35)

BAPTISM

INTRODUCTION:

The Bible starts with the creation narrative in the beginning and goes on to describe the alienation of mankind from the creator God. It also talks of God's redemptive plan with the call of Abraham, creation of the nation of Israel, giving of the laws and precepts and preparing for the coming of the Messiah. The Old Testament ends with the book of Malachi. The New Testament starts with the gospel of Matthew. There is a gap of 400 years between Malachi and Matthew and there is no written prophetic book like Malachi during that period. There was a 400 years of silence. The act of baptism is not mentioned in the Old Testament.

During the 400 years the Romans starting expanding their rule and eventually brought Israel under their control. It was during this period the expectation of the coming Messiah was high among the Jews. They were expecting Messiah to bring freedom to Israel (Acts 1:6). There were at that time a section of Jews known as Zealots (Lk 6:15) who embarked on physical fighting to gain freedom. It was during this period that the sects of Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes established themselves among the Jews. The Pharisees followed the Mosaic law by the letter (Math 23:2-3). The Sadducees were more liberal compared to the Pharisees, however they did not believe in resurrection (Lk 20:27). The New Testament talks of Pharisees and Sadducees. Essenes are a community of Jews who practiced a strict life of purity. They were practicing baptism as a symbol of purification.

BAPTISM IN NEW TESTAMENT:

John the Baptist

John the Baptist was the forerunner for Jesus Christ (Isa 40:3-5). We read in Lk 3:2-3 that the word of the Lord came to John and he went into all the country around Jordon preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Talking of the baptism John said (Lk 3:16), "I baptize you with water, but one more powerful than I will come...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire".

Baptism of Jesus

We read that Jesus before starting the ministry was baptized by John (Math 3:13-17). When Jesus came to him John tried to stop Jesus saying, "I need to be baptized by you.." For which Jesus answered, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness". Jesus approved of the baptism of John.

Baptism practiced by disciples of Jesus

While Jesus ministered when any joined as his disciple he was baptized. It was Jesus' disciples who performed the baptism. The disciples of Jesus baptized more people than John (Jn 4:1,2). After resurrection, when the position of Judas was to be filled the disciples looked for a person who was a witness beginning from the baptism of John till the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:21-22, 10:37, 13:24).

WHAT DOES BAPTISM SIGNIFY?

Peter when he preached the first sermon on the day of Pentecost, he preached repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). And he mentioned that they will receive the gift of Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). Paul talks of the significance of baptism. In the act of baptism the person to be baptized is immersed in water and he comes out. In Romans 6:4 Paul explains this.

v4 Buried with Jesus through baptism. The significance of this is old self crucified, body of sin destroyed, no longer enslaved to sin v6
v3 Risen with Him, walk in the newness of life (v4) and alive to God in Christ Jesus (v11)

We the children of God are watched by others and angels (1 Cor 4:9). Baptism is an external testimony to an internal transformation

WHEN TO TESTIFY IN BAPTISM?

Acts 2:38 Repent
(Acts 19:4 Believe in Jesus)
Rom 10:9 Confess with mouth and believe in heart (Testimony)
Rom 5:4 Walk in the newness of life (2 Cor 5:17)
Acts 8:34-39 Why shouldn't I be baptized?
Anyone who has gone through these experiences can be baptised.