

Several years ago, I decided I wanted to learn how to cook Vietnamese food. I bought a very cheap wok to use in my kitchen. Over time, I've learned to use my wok almost every day, for the majority of our cooking. It didn't cost as much as my fancy copper-bottomed pots and pans. But it is more *useful*.

The world sees things on our outside, but God knows what's inside. I may be a humble, "lowly" person by the world's standards. I may not have as much money, fame, or good looks as some people. But, because I obey Christ, I have become *useful* to my Father. If I hold fast to His Word of Truth, then He will know that I am His. I can help His people by teaching a class, caring for those in need, or raising my children quietly at home. None of those things are fancy work, and they may not be noticed by the world, but they are important to God!

In these verses, we also read how a young person can be useful to God: by running away from sin. When you run *from* something bad, you'd better have something good to run *towards*. Paul tells Timothy what to chase after: righteousness, faith, love, and peace with our church family. Won't these things make you useful to our Lord?

Keep yourself busy with good works. Ask God to make you useful and to give you opportunities to glorify Him. You are such a special, smart person – God has great plans for you!

Memory Verse:

"...make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need." 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

For Further Study:

To pursue something (verse 22) means to chase after it. You have to actively *go after* the good things of the Lord; they don't come naturally or accidentally. Here are some verses about other things we should chase after: Psalm 34:14; Proverbs 21:21; Romans 14:19; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 12:14

Journal:

You may not realize how much your simple, quiet, day-to-day life is important to God. List your daily schedule and activities. Next to each item, write down how you can be useful to God during that time. For example, when you go to school, do you listen to your teachers, and do you do good things for your friends? Do you pray for those you come into contact with, and hope that you can talk to them about our Lord? Our good works, and our obedience, are ways that we give our daily lives to God. Can you think of others? Can you make a plan to give more of your day to doing things for God and showing others that you are His child?

Here are some very encouraging words from Paul to Timothy.

First, Paul says that Timothy has been doing a good job from the time he was a little boy, learning about God from his family (do you remember that Timothy was taught by his mother and grandmother?). Paul says that Timothy's knowledge will be able to give him wisdom. Godly *knowledge* helps us know right from wrong, and when we're older our Godly *wisdom* helps us *choose* right from wrong. Then this wisdom will build up our *faith*.

Finally, Paul says that what Timothy learns from the Scripture is *complete*. With the words in our Bible, we can be taught, we can be warned, we can be corrected, and we can be trained to righteousness.

How wonderful that all of that is in our hands! How wonderful that you're already making such good use of it!

Memory Verse:

“...make it _____ to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.” 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

For Further Study:

What do we know about Timothy?

He was taught about God when he was young ~ 2 Timothy 3:15

His father was not a Christian, but his mother and grandmother were godly women ~ Acts 16:1, 2 Timothy 1:5

Paul had a close relationship with him ~ 1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:22

Worked with Paul, and often sent by him to work with other Christians ~ Acts 19:22 and 20:4; Philippians 2:19

Was imprisoned with Paul ~ Hebrews 13:23

Preached ~ 2 Corinthians 1:19

Encouraged others ~ 1 Thessalonians 3:2

From these readings we learn that Timothy was a hard worker, was a good student of the Bible, had good relationships with other Christians, and was willing to endure difficulty for Christ. These are qualities that all young people can have.

Read 1 Timothy 6:20-21. God wants us to be wise, but Paul warned Timothy against worldly wisdom – wisdom that was not thinking of spiritual things, but false “knowledge.” There were people in Timothy’s church who liked to argue, who liked to tell stories and talk about “empty” things, instead of really studying the Word of God. These people were not interested in making their souls wiser. They just wanted to have attention and stir up trouble. Paul describes them further in 1 Timothy 1:6-7 and 6:3-5.

So how can we make sure we’re gaining true, godly wisdom? Paul tells Timothy, the young preacher, how. 1 Timothy 2:1 and 8, he tells Timothy to be prayerful. In 1 Timothy 4:6 and 13, he tells Timothy to read the Scripture. In Chapter 6 and verse 8, he tells Timothy to be content, not covetous (in verse 17-18, he tells us to share what we have and do good works). 1 Timothy 6:11-12, he tells Timothy what kind of character he should have.

It takes a lot of work to become spiritually wise, doesn’t it? But read how Paul describes Christ’s return in 1 Timothy 5:14-15. Isn’t it a wonderful picture? Truly, the rewards of godly, spiritual wisdom are wonderful!

Journal:

Who are some wise older Christians in your life? Whom can you go to for encouragement and teaching? Write a note thanking these people for sharing their wisdom with you. What can you do to be wise someday?

"A Picture of God" was published in Tiger and Tom and Other Stories for Boys in 1910. The book is now in the public domain and may be read freely online.

A PICTURE OF GOD

It is fairly pathetic what a stranger God is in His own world. He comes to His own, and they who are His own kinsfolk keep Him standing outside the door while they peer suspiciously at Him through the crack at the hinges.

To know God really, truly, is the beginning of a normal life. One of the best pictures of God that I ever saw came to me in a simple story. It was of a man, a minister, who lived in a New England town, who had a son, about fourteen years of age, going to school. One afternoon the boy's teacher called at the home, and asked for the father, and said:--

"Is your boy sick?"
"No. Why?"
"He was not at school to-day."
"Is that so?"
"Nor yesterday."
"You don't mean it!"
"Nor the day before."
"Well!"
"And I supposed he was sick."
"No, he's not sick."
"Well, I thought I should tell you."

And the father said, "Thank you," and the teacher left.

And the father sat thinking. By and by he heard a click at the gate, and he knew the boy was coming, so he went to open the door. And the boy knew as he looked up that his father knew about those three days. And the father said:--

"Come into the library, Phil." And Phil went, and the door was shut. And the father said: "Phil, your teacher was here this afternoon. He tells me you were not at school to-day, nor yesterday nor the day before. And we supposed you were. You let us think you were. And you do not know how badly I feel. I have always trusted you. I have always said, 'I can trust my boy Phil.' And here you've been a living lie for three whole days. And I can't tell you how badly I feel about it."

Well, that was hard on Phil to be talked to quietly like that. If his father had spoken to him roughly, or--had asked him out to the woodshed for a confidential interview, it would not have been nearly so hard. Then, after a moment's pause, the father said, "Phil, we'll get down and pray." And the thing was getting harder for Phil all the time.

He didn't want to pray just then. And they got down. And the father poured out his heart in prayer. And the boy knew as he listened how badly his father felt over his conduct. Somehow he saw himself in the mirror on his knees as he had not before. It's queer about that mirror of the knee-joints. It does show so many things. Many folks don't like it.

And they got up. And the father's eyes were wet. And Phil's eyes were not dry. Then the father said:--

"My boy, there's a law of life that where there is sin, there is suffering. You can't detach those two things. Where there is suffering there has been sin somewhere. And where there is sin there will be suffering. You can't get these two things apart. Now," he went on, "you have done wrong. And I am in this home like God is in the world. So we will do this. You go up to the attic. I'll make a pallet for you there. We'll take your meals up to you at the regular times, and you stay up there as long as you've been a living lie--three days and three nights."

And Phil didn't say a word. They went up stairs, the pallet was made, and the father kissed his boy and left him alone with his thoughts. Supper time came, and the father and mother sat down to eat. But they couldn't eat for thinking about the boy. The longer they chewed upon the food, the bigger and dryer it got in their mouths. And swallowing it was clear out of the question. Then they went into the sitting room for the evening. He picked up the evening paper to read, and she sat down to sew. Well, his eyes weren't very good. He wore glasses. And this evening he couldn't seem to see distinctly--the glasses seemed blurred. It must have been the glasses, of course. So he took them off and cleaned them very deliberately and then found that he had been holding the paper upside down. And she tried to sew. But the thread broke, and she couldn't seem to get the needle threaded again. You could see they were both bothered. How we do reveal ourselves in the details!

By and by the clock struck nine, and then ten, their usual hour for retiring. But they made no move toward retiring. She said, "Aren't you going to bed?" And he said, "I think I'll not go yet a bit; you go." "No, I guess I'll wait a while, too." And the clock struck eleven, and the hands worked around toward twelve. Then they arose, and locked up, and went to bed, but--not to sleep. Each one made pretence to be asleep, and each one knew the other was not asleep. By and by she said (women are always the keener), "Why don't you sleep?" And he said gently, "How did you know I wasn't sleeping? Why don't you sleep?"

"Well, I just can't for thinking of the boy up in the attic."

"That's the bother with me," he replied. And the clock in the hall struck twelve, and one, and two. Still no sleep came.

At last he said, "Mother, I can't stand this any longer; I'm going up stairs with Phil." And he took his pillow and went softly out of the room, and up the attic stairs, and pressed the latch-key softly, so as not to wake the boy if he were asleep, and tiptoed across the attic floor to the corner by the window, and looked--there Phil lay, wide awake, with something glistening in his eyes, and what looked like stains on his cheeks. And the father got down in between the sheets with his boy, and they got their arms around each other's necks, for they had always been the best of friends, father and boy, and their tears got mixed up on each other's cheeks. Then they slept. And the next night when the time came for sleep, the father said, "Good-night, mother, I'm going up stairs with Phil." And the second night he slept in the attic with his boy. And the third night, again he said, "Mother, good-night, I'm going up with the boy again." And the third night he slept in the place of punishment with his son.

You are not surprised to know that to-day that boy, a man grown, is telling the story of Jesus with tongue and life of flame in the heart of China.

Do you know, I think that father is the best picture of God I ever saw. God could not take away sin. It's here. He could not take away suffering out of kindness to man. For suffering is sin's index finger, saying, "There's something wrong here." So He came down in the person of His Son, and lay down alongside of man for three days and three nights. That's God--our God. And beyond that He comes and puts His life alongside of yours and mine, and makes us hate the bad, and long to be pure. To be on intimate terms with Him, to live in the atmosphere of His presence, to spend the day with Him--that is the true normal life.

Memory Verse:

...make it ____ _____ to ____ _ ____ ____ and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

For Further Study:

Read Psalm 119 today. It's a very long psalm, but it will show you how important God's Word is. Verses 9-16 are written especially for young people. See if you can paraphrase these verses. Find a verse in this psalm that you'd like to memorize. This psalm was written long before the events of the New Testament. If people felt this way about the Old Testament scripture, how should we feel about God's Word now that we have it completely revealed?

Journal:

There are many Psalms praising God for His Word. Psalm 119 is one of them. See if you can find others. Write your own psalm, starting with, "Oh, how I love your Word!" Remember, psalms do not have to rhyme.

What kind of grownup do you see yourself becoming? Do you dream of a time when you are older? Where do you see yourself living? What do you see yourself doing?

These verses show us the kind of people God wants us to grow into. Adult Christians have control over themselves and can say “no” to sin. They know how to show love to others. They have learned the Bible well enough to be able to teach good things to others. They look forward to heaven, and this helps them please God in this life.

Notice that these verses say nothing about jobs, money, or social standing. They say nothing about how many friends a person should have, whether people need to be leaders in the community, or any political views. God cares first that we follow His Word, and how we live in service to our family and our church. Without a servant’s heart, and a firm and obedient faith, our other goals and activities do not mean anything to the Lord.

However, with a Christ-like heart and a clear understanding of what God wants from us, we bring glory to Him and bring others to His kingdom.

So keep dreaming of that wonderful life you want for yourself! Ask God to help you make your dreams come true. You can grow up to receive many of God’s blessings, and blessing those around you.

Memory Verse:

...make it _____ to _____ and _____ and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

For Further Study:

How do people know that you and your siblings are related? People from the same family usually have the same last name. Sometimes they have the same mannerisms in the way they speak, dress, and act. Families have rules in their home (you’ve probably already seen how some of your friends’ families have different rules in their homes than yours). The family looks to each other for love and help.

.....So how do people know who belongs to the family of God?

Christ’s church wears Christi’s name, not the name of a man ~ 1 Corinthians 1:11-15

Christians act in obedience to God’s Word, not to the rules of the world ~ 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:11-14

God teaches His family how to behave and how to love one another ~ 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 John 4:7 and 5:2-3.

Journal:

Think of the oldest Christian you know. Think of the oldest person in the Bible that you’ve learned about.

Think of the youngest baby you know. How old will you all be in Heaven? This is a trick question – we will never grow old in Heaven!

If we’re all going to be the same age in Heaven, why shouldn’t we learn to be best friends with all the young, old, and in-between Christians we know?

Think of the older Christians you would like to become better friends with. How can you get to know him or her better? What would you like to learn about them and from them? Remember, you will be the same age as them in Heaven, and God wants you to learn to be good friends with them now!

How does God want us to live? In these verses, Paul sums up the Christian life in just three words. God wants us to live....

sensibly (not foolishly),
righteously (obeying His commandments), and
godly (becoming more like Him).

Oh, that's a lot! How can we remember all that?

The answer is in verse 13. If we always keep our hearts focused on His appearing, then we can endure all the hard things on this earth.

I have found that the times when it is easiest to sin is when I let myself forget that I want to go to Heaven. I forget that I am "His own possession" and that I should be "zealous for (desiring) good deeds." I forget that He is COMING FOR ME. If I can just remind myself that I want to go to Heaven, it becomes easy to say no to sin.

Do you know what encourages me? Knowing there will be good children like you in Heaven someday too!

Memory Verse:

...make it _____ to _____ and _____ and _____, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

For Further Study:

God wants us to be zealous for Him. We should not obey Him grudgingly or half-heartedly. He knows if our hearts really have love for Him. How do we build our zeal for the Lord?

Luke 8:39 ~ tell others what good things God has done

John 2:13-17 ~ realize what a blessing it is to worship God

Romans 10:1-3 ~ love the souls of others, and build our knowledge of His Word

2 Peter 1:13 ~ listen to those who remind us to do good

Revelation 3:19 ~ know that God loves you; and be humble and willing to ask forgiveness

Christ was zealous for God (John 2:13-17). Christ was like this even when He was young. Read Luke 2:41-52. It is so good to see young people build their love for the Lord early. They are following in the footsteps of the Son of God!

Journal:

List the qualities that Paul wrote about in today's reading: sensibility, righteousness, godliness, hopeful, God's own possession, zealous for good deeds. Next to each item, write what you do that shows you are this kind of person. Write down what else you could do to demonstrate these virtues in your life.

Humility means you think of others before you think of yourself. You may have heard it called “being humble” or “being submissive.” It is like being a little lamb, following its shepherd, and trusting that the shepherd will bring it to the best place.

What a hard thing to do! As you become older you will hear people in the world telling you to “fight for your rights,” to demand that you be heard, to make sure you “get what you deserve.” Well, the child of God can’t think like that. Instead, we have to help each other and serve one another. It gives us such a good feeling when we can do good for others, and it makes us more like Christ. People in this world won’t understand it, but that’s all right, because we don’t belong to this world. Our Heavenly Father is pleased with His sweet little lambs!

“About Generosity” was written by Howard J. Chidley and published in Fifty-Two Story Talks for Boys and Girls in 1914. Now out of print, the book is in the public domain and may be read freely online.

When we speak of a person as being generous we usually think of someone who gives his money, or whatever belongs to him, freely to others. But did you ever think that people can be generous with their thoughts, too?

Let me show you what I mean by that. There were once two boys who went to visit at a farm where they kept Shetland ponies, and of course both boys wanted to ride them. So one day they persuaded the man in charge of the ponies to put the saddle on a handsome black one and lead him out into the yard for them to mount. But when it came to actually getting on the pony’s back, the younger boy was afraid. Although the older boy urged him, he would not take a ride. Finally the other boy mounted and rode gaily off, and came back beaming with delight. But instead of being proud, and thinking the other boy cowardly, he went over to the younger lad and said: “Now you get on. I know you can ride him.” And when at last the other did ride off, the older boy’s eyes danced with delight, and he clapped his hands to encourage the younger boy. That is one of the best forms of generosity.

Another illustration of it is when you are on a baseball or football team, or in a contest of any sort, to be able to say when you are honestly beaten that you were beaten by a better team. When you can say that, it takes half the sting out of defeat and makes those who win admire you more than ever.

Don’t be stingy with your thoughts about people. Always think the best about others, and believe the best, and you will grow to be open-hearted, friendly, lovable and big.

Memory Verse:

Make it your ambition to.... just as we _____, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

For Further Study:

Today’s reading in Titus 3 shows us how Christians should be humble and loving towards others. This isn’t easy to do, especially when other people don’t act lovable! But we have to treat others properly, even when we don’t feel very loving towards them. Our feelings change, and they can’t be the standard for our faith. We have to be willing to love even when we don’t feel like it.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Does love depend on how others act, or does it depend on what we know is the right thing to do? How did Christ decide to love men ~ because of how He felt, because of how men acted, or because it was the right thing to do? Read Isaiah 53:1-7 to see the extent of Christ’s love.

Journal:

You probably know what activities, school subjects, and appointments you have next week. Have you scheduled time to serve others? Make a Service Calendar for the next week, or month. Think of a different thing to do every day that will be of help to someone else.

This little book is a letter Paul wrote to Philemon, a Christian. Philemon's slave, Onesimus, had run away. In those days, this would have meant that Philemon could kill Onesimus. Fortunately, Onesimus happened to meet Paul, who taught him about Christ and baptized him. Now Onesimus was a Christian!

Since Onesimus had repented of his sins, it was time to make things right. He had broken the law by running away from his master, so he had to return to Philemon, even if it meant his death. Paul is sending this letter asking Philemon to forgive Onesimus.

Do you think Philemon forgave Onesimus? I think he probably did, because in his letter Paul describes Philemon as a faithful Christian. Christians are willing to forgive one another.

Here we have the example of three great Christians:

Philemon who *forgave*...

Onesimus who *asked for forgiveness*....

Paul who was a *peacemaker* between the two.

Peace between brethren is a very precious thing. It's something we should all pursue, because we're part of God's family. Keep praying for peace and harmony with your Christian family. It has an eternal reward!

Memory Verse:

Make it your ambition to.... just as we _____, so that you will _____ and not be in any need. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

For Further Study:

In Matthew 5:9, Christ said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Our ability to be peaceful shows others that we belong to God. Read Proverbs 15:8; Luke 6:35; and Romans 14:19. Even correcting others and showing them their sins can be done in a spirit of gentleness. See Galatians 6:1 and 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

Journal:

Do you need to ask anyone for forgiveness? Do you need to forgive someone? Can you be a peacemaker when others are angry? Think about how important you are to God's plan for peace in His family, and make a plan to be useful to Him in this work.

These verses show us how the Israelites angered and disobeyed God. Do you remember how they were punished for their disbelief? They had to wander for forty years in the wilderness, and then none of the adults could enter the Promised Land except for Joshua and Caleb. This story can be found in Numbers 14. Do you remember what the Israelites did to make God angry? What caused them to fear? Why did Joshua and Caleb escape punishment?

Verses 13 and 14 tell us how we can avoid falling away like the Israelites did. We have to encourage each other as much as possible. We also have to “hold fast” to our assurance ~ this means not to forget our belief in God.

Verse 13 says that sin is deceitful ~ the devil is a liar (John 8:44). The devil tries to tell us that it’s not possible to fall away. The devil tries to tell us that it’s all right to please ourselves and not listen to God.

But we don’t have to be like that! God tells us everything we need to avoid punishment. Let’s listen to this warning from Hebrews. How disappointing it would be to come so close to our Promised Land, and not be allowed to enter! Let’s not allow that to happen. I want to be there someday, don’t you?

Memory Verse:

Make it your ambition to.... just as we _____, so that you will _____ and not be _____. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

For Further Study:

Verses 13 and 15 of this chapter tell us about a heart that is hardened against God. Have you ever had a callous or hard spot on your skin? I have them at the ends of my fingers from playing guitar. When I first started playing the guitar, it hurt my fingers to strum on those strings. But the more I strummed, the harder my fingertips became, and then it became easier to play.

The same thing happens with our hearts when we sin over and over again. At first, it may bother us when we do wrong. This is when we should ask God’s forgiveness and help. The more we sin, the easier it becomes, and the less sorry we feel. That is why it’s so important to ask for help *as soon as* we do wrong. There is so much danger from becoming hardened against God’s Word.

Read Isaiah 9:13; Proverbs 28:14; and Romans 2:5-8. God included these warnings in the Bible because it’s so important to Him that we ask for His help and wisdom.

Journal:

Are you hoping for heaven? Why? Write down the reasons and the EVIDENCE you have for your hope.

Imagine a sword that is sharp on both sides. It would cut you going in *and* going out. In these verses God describes His Word as a living, two-edged sword. It pierces all the way to the “bones” of your soul. The Bible can show us, very plainly, how we should think and act. The Bible tells us how to be righteous, and it also opens our eyes to evil.

Are my thoughts, wishes, and plans right? Well, the Bible will tell me. Should I worry about this or that? There are words in the Bible to comfort me. Would it be a sin to do this or that? There is wisdom in the Bible.

Having such a powerful weapon at our disposal should be a comfort to us. Bible is POWERFUL and SURE. It was given to us out of LOVE to HELP us know God’s mind. When we are unsure and scared, the words in it are LIVING and can make our faith firmer. If our thoughts and cares are wrong, He *wants to help us* make them right.

Verses 14 –16 remind us how sympathetic Jesus is to our needs. He walked on this earth and saw all the ways that men can be tempted. That’s why He stands with us when we ask His Father for help. How blessed we are!

Memory Verse:

Recite 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

For Further Study:

Verse 15 says that Jesus was tempted in all things as we are. Read (or recite) 1 John 2:15-17. Do you remember that there are really only three types of sin? Read Luke 4:1-13. Do you remember when Jesus was tempted? Read (or recite) 1 Corinthians 10:13. Is there any sin that Jesus doesn’t understand and can help us overcome?

Journal:

If possible, talk to a former soldier today and ask him or her about the respect soldiers have for their weapons. Do soldiers use weapons carelessly? Do they use weapons without training? Do they maintain their weapons? What can we learn from soldiers about the way we should respect the Word of God?

Do you know what an anchor does for a ship?

The Word of God can be our anchor when we use it to decide how we should think and act. We know all His promises are sure and steadfast, because it is impossible for Him to lie. When He said He loves us and will provide for us, we know those promises are true and immovable.

Consider what Abraham was going through when God made the promises to him (Genesis 12). Abraham was about to leave his home, friends, and relatives for a new land that he had never seen. Can you imagine how difficult that must have been for him and Sarah? And they were close to 75 years old. Traveling in those days was rough and dangerous. It took a lot of faith in God to leave Haran without question. Abraham knew how to rely on God.

There have been many times when I needed my Anchor. Reading the Bible helps me remember His wonderful promises of Heaven. I can read the familiar stories of Bible heroes, and this reminds me to be strong. I am reminded that He created the world, and He created me. He is in control of the world, and I want Him to be in control of me, because then I am safe and content.

As you grow and learn, and as you overcome the trials in your life, you'll see that God really is an Anchor, a "hope both sure and steadfast." He doesn't want you to feel like this world is out of control. He won't let you drift here and there in the unknown. He has a plan for your wonderful little life, and all you have to do is hold on to HIM!

Memory Verse: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

For Further Study:

What are some of the promises that God has made? Read these verses and list what God has promised to His children: Proverbs 8:17; Isaiah 65:24; Matthew 6:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 6:35 and 38; John 14:1-2; Ephesians 6:2-3; 1 Corinthians 10:13 (can you recite this one?); Revelation 21:3-4.

Journal:

Is there something new or scary happening in your life right now? Are you worried about anything? How can God be an anchor for you? What can you pray to God about this?

Even if you're used to having your Bible lesson read to you each day, it will help to have your own Bible and look up passages for today's lesson.

Dec. 11

Day 345

Hebrews 10:19-25

You know that in times past people were not always free to worship God. And even in some countries today, Christians have to hide or meet secretly when they worship God. In some parts of the world, people still walk to worship, and they meet in shacks, tents, or under trees. How lucky we are to be able to assemble (come together) and worship Him! We should not forsake the assembly.

It's not always easy to be ready for church on time, and yes, sometimes it is boring to sit at church. And sometimes the classes aren't easy, and not everyone at church is always easy to get along with.

But we have to look beyond all that and see how important worship is to God, not because it helps HIM, but because it helps US. Did you know that when you go to the assembly....

.... God and Christ are with you (Matthew 18:20)?

.... God is pleased with the wonderful "aroma" of our songs and prayers (Hebrews 13:15; Revelation 5:8)?

.... you show God that He matters most of all (Malachi 1:11)?

.... it makes the devil angry (Matthew 4:10)?

....you encourage others who might also have hesitated to come to worship that day (we read this in Hebrews)?

....the preacher and teachers are thankful see the reason for their hard work in preparing lessons and sermons (Hebrews 13:17)?

So many wonderful things happen when you go to church! Remember that worship is what we will be doing eternally in heaven (Revelation 7:11-15). When you assemble with the saints, you are with the family that will be gathered around His throne someday.

*"I was glad when they said to me,
'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'"
Psalm 122:1*

Memory Verse: Now faith is the assurance of _____, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

For Further Study:

Did you know that you were created to glorify God? Read Isaiah 43:6-7 and Ephesians 2:10. When you assemble to worship God as He commanded, you are fulfilling not only a duty, but part of your purpose in God's kingdom.

See also 1 Corinthians 15:58 and 1 Peter 4:11. You were not some random mistake, as evolutionists want to believe. You have a wonderful and holy calling. The great thing is, all people can choose this calling if they want it.

God's Word has given us everything we need to know to be a fruitful worker in His vineyard. This work includes offering up praise and glory to Him when we worship. That's why worship of our Creator should be seen not only as a duty, but a great blessing.

Read Malachi 1 and paraphrase it.

Journal:

List all the things that are done in the assembly of the saints every Sunday. Next to each one, write down why you're thankful for it.

The holidays can be such an exciting time. Everyone is getting out their decorations and planning what presents to buy (or which ones they want to receive). People are planning parties, making special food, trying to decide which relatives they will visit. A lot of planning goes into holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas.

How do we know Christmas is coming? We believe it will, so we plan for it. When December rolls around, we expect that Christmas will soon be here.

How do we know Christ is coming? The Bible says so. We don't know when, we can't see it, but should be as real to us as if it were marked on a calendar. We should plan for it. These verses in Hebrews show us that faith means we are sure of Christ, even though we can't see Him. We joyfully, hopefully expect to see Him someday.

So much, time, thought, and energy goes into being ready for Christmas. What about being ready for CHRIST?

Abel and Enoch were ready. They were ready to obey Christ at all times. Therefore, they were ready to meet Christ when their time here was over. Both of these men pleased God with their faith. It was a faith that looked forward to that heavenly home with God. Because these men had planned for a future in Heaven, their lives on earth were pleasing to God. Let's try to have that kind of faith in God ~ a hopeful faith that works for God and others, knowing that soon we will be at home with Him.

Memory Verse: Now faith is , the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

For Further Study:

Philippians 2:12 tells Christians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." As we grow in Christ, studying and serving, we learn to make our faith sure and solid. We learn to make His Word part of our lives, not something we blindly follow. We learn to answer the hard questions of life from His Word on our own, not always relying on older people to "spoon-feed" the answers to us. This makes us more mature, and ready to teach others also.

Read Romans 1:16-17. The word of God is very powerful. It saves men. It shows men the righteousness of God. Upon this one true faith, we can build our own personal faith. This is what makes us righteous – when we live by the faith that obeys His Word.

It is a wonderful thing to slowly become older and wiser, more and more an active part of God's kingdom. Pray to God to give you the time and opportunity to do this for Him. For encouragement and review, read 1 Corinthians 13:11 and 14:20; Ephesians 4:11-16; and Hebrews 5:14.

Journal:

What does a mature, strong faith look like? Perhaps you're thinking of an older, wiser Christian you know, or a Bible hero whom you admire. Write down the qualities of their faith that make it strong. What can you be doing NOW to have a faith like that someday?

Some of the favorite things our family has done together include going on walks, playing or watching baseball games, and having people from church over for dinner or singing.

Don't you love it when things feel perfect, as if everything was complete and you needed nothing more? Why can't our whole lives be that way?

Some people believe that we should never feel pain or sadness. They believe that life should just be full of pleasure until we die. But God doesn't have this in mind for us. It may sound strange, but in order to be perfect, complete, and whole, we have to get "broken" a few times. God says that perfection will come only with hard work and perhaps some difficult trials. When life is hard, we have to remember that doing hard things is the way we learn.

So it is with our faith. God will give you strength if you read the Bible and practice good works. That way, when hard times come, you will be able to endure them. And when Jesus comes, you will have built that wonderful, strong faith that shows Him that you belong in His family.

Memory Verse: Now faith is the _____ of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1

For Further Study:

Read a little further in James 1:12-15. These verses go very well with what you have just read about endurance. What is the difference between a trial (a test) and a temptation?

God expects us to overcome our trials and temptations with His help. How does God help us? Do you remember 1 Corinthians 10:13? Read also James 1:5.

Can you think of how Abraham, Noah, David, Jesus, Paul, and other Bible heroes overcame trials and temptations? Remember that God has not left us to fight our battles alone in this world. He loves us very much and wants us to be victorious.

Journal:

When have you had to work really, really hard for something that you wanted very much? How did you feel when you finally accomplished your goal? What kind of person do you think you would be if everything came easily to you, and if you never had to work or wait for what you wanted?

The following story was written by Howard J. Chidley and published in *Fifty-Two Story Talks to Boys and Girls* in 1914. Now out of print, the book is in the public domain and may be read freely online.

THE FIERCEST THING IN THE BIBLE

I suppose if I should ask you which is the fiercest animal mentioned in the Bible, I should get many different answers. Some of you would say the lion; some, the bear; some the panther; some, the wolf; and so on. But none of these is right, and I will tell you why. All of these animals can be tamed, more or less; but there is one fiercer thing than all these, and it cannot be tamed, so one of the apostles says.

It is kept behind two red doors and more than twenty white bars, and its name is spelled as follows: T-O-N-G-U-E. Yes, that is it, the tongue. James says, "The tongue can no man tame."

It is not only one of the fiercest things mentioned in the Bible, but it is also one of the crudest. I suppose you never thought that you could kill a person with your tongue, did you? And yet I have known some people say such mean things about others that those people were killed as far as living in their town was concerned, and had to move away, for all their influence was dead.

A pretty safe way when you are tempted to say anything unkind about another boy or girl, who is not present, is to ask yourself if it is fair play, since the other cannot defend himself; for I know that you all want to play fair. That is the basis of all true sport.

And then remember also that when once you have said an unkind thing you cannot take it back, for it lives on in spite of you.

Perhaps you recollect the interesting idea which the old Hebrews had of the separate existence of words as soon as they were spoken. A curse once uttered could not be recalled because it now existed independently of the speaker. You remember the story of the blessing of Jacob by Isaac. Isaac could not give it to Esau, because it had passed beyond his control.

"Boys flying kites, haul in their white-winged birds;
You can't do that way when you're flying words,
Things that we think may sometimes fall back dead,
But God Himself can't kill them when they're said."

Memory Verse: Now faith is the _____ of _____. Hebrews 11:1

For Further Study:

How powerful are your words? Read the following verses and write down what words can do: Proverbs 6:16-19; Ecclesiastes 10:12; Malachi 2:6; Titus 2:8

Journal:

Have you ever said words that you wish you could take back? Has anyone ever said words to you that broke your heart? Think about the power of your words. What can you pray to God about your speech?

*"Dearest Heavenly Father, please help to be good tomorrow, and to have Brain."
Matthew, 4 years old*

It is such a joy to hear little children praying, because little children really tell God what is on their minds at the moment. Many times adults feel like they have to “pray a certain way” or say certain words. It’s important to talk to God respectfully, but it’s also important to just remember to TALK TO GOD all the time.

How would you feel if your family members spent the entire day ignoring you, not talking to you at all? God wants His loved ones to talk to Him too. Do you tell God your wishes, plans, and dreams? Remember, He holds this universe in the palm of His hand. He can make whatever you wish come true, as long as it will be good for you. Do you thank God for the things He has given you?

“The prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” Since little children have no sin, God hears ALL their prayers! Pray to God, then wait for His answer.

Memory Verse: Recite Hebrews 11:1

For Further Study:

The Bible says that giving thanks (Psalm 50:14) and prayers (Revelation 5:8) are our sacrifices and offering to God. How important were the sacrifices of the Old Testament? How often were sacrifices made?

Do we only give thanks when great things happen, or do we thank God for being there even when times are difficult? Do we plan and set aside time to pray, or do we “fit it in” when we really need God to help us? Read John 17, Jesus’ prayer before His death. What were the things that Jesus prayed for when He talked to God?

Nehemiah the prophet was a prayerful man. We have nine of his prayers recorded in the Old Testament. Look through the book of Nehemiah and read his prayers. What kind of things did he pray about? Paraphrase one of his prayers.

Journal:

What would you like to improve about your prayer life? Would you like to pray more often, be better at remembering what to pray for, or learn to lead others in prayer? Make a plan for becoming better at prayer. Having a good prayer life is one way to build up your faith.

Have you ever seen a baby drink milk from a bottle or nurse on its mother? Most babies do this with great eagerness. A newborn baby drinks milk about every 2 hours! That's how God wants us to desire the Word – as if we would starve without it!

How often do you eat? How would you feel if you skipped a meal? What happens if you don't eat nutritious, healthy food?

Every time you read the Bible, go to church, sing a hymn, or pray, you are feeding your soul. When we starve our soul, our faith becomes weak and vulnerable. Then we are more prone to sin. We are also less able to overcome trials and problems, and to become discouraged when things go wrong.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Matthew 5:6

If we're truly seeking after the Word of God, we are guaranteed satisfaction. God has promised to give us all we need to know to serve Him faithfully and be with Him in Heaven. Isn't that a wonderful thought?

Memory Verse:

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

There are many reminders in the Bible to "hunger and thirst" for spiritual things instead of physical things. This is how we can be more like Christ. Read Psalms 38:9, 42:2, 63:1, and 73:25.

Read Matthew 6:25-33 and paraphrase it.

Journal:

Write down your daily meal plan – list the times you eat and the approximate amount of food you eat at each meal and snack. Now write down your daily "spiritual meal plan." Include times of prayer, meditation, study, talking with others about the Bible, and serving others. Do you think your spiritual meal plan is a healthy one? How can you improve it?

I memorized verses 12 and 13 during an especially hard time in my life, when I felt like I was going through a “fiery ordeal.” Children of God will go through many trials if they live a life that is different from everyone else in the world. It’s hard to “keep on rejoicing” when others are hurting us because we want to do what’s right. It’s hard to do what’s right when you feel alone.

Remember that even though you feel alone, you really aren’t. Being hurt or persecuted for doing what is right means you are sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Christ knows *exactly* how you feel. Do you remember the trials and problems He went through, and how unpopular He was sometimes? John 15:18 tells us not to be surprised by this.

You are also sharing in the sufferings that were endured by other faithful men and women of God. Since the beginning of the church’s history, people have given up relationships, jobs, and homes in order to obey their Lord and Savior. There are people who do it today, also. If we have close and loving relationships with our church family, we will realize that all of us struggle with living in a world that often misunderstands us. 1 John 3:13 tells us not to be surprised by this.

Even though it hurts, being persecuted for doing good is part of being *sanctified* – set apart, different from the world. This is what makes us more fit for heaven, and more useful to God. Don’t try to overcome the “fiery ordeals” yourself, God never intended it to be a one-man battle. He has given you the guidance of His Word, the power of prayer, and the comfort of Christian friends to help you endure. And endure we shall!

Memory Verse:

“I have _____, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

Read Job chapter 1 and paraphrase it. What kind of attitude did Job have about his trials? Now read chapter 42 and paraphrase it. What can we learn about God and Job from this chapter?

Journal:

Write down 3 things (verses and/or evidence) that convince you that God is the Creator.

Write down 3 things that convince you that Jesus is coming again.

Write down 3 things that convince you there is a Heaven and a hell.

Write down 3 things that convince you that God loves you.

Keep this list and look back on it during your “fiery ordeals.” It will be a great comfort to you!

"Come" was written by Bruce S. Wright and published in The Children's Six Minutes in 1922. The book is now in the public domain and may be read freely online.

COME

There is not a girl or boy here this morning who does not feel within the desire to do good. The drawing power of good--in other words, the drawing power of God. He it is who says to you, "Come."

I want to illustrate this by a few things which I have here. The first is this magnet. And here are some small nails. These tiny nails represent girls and boys of about eleven or twelve years of age. I apply the magnet to these nails and I lift up--can you see me--twenty-five or thirty nails. You see it is a great deal easier to respond to the drawing power of good, to answer the great "Come," in girlhood and boyhood.

Now here are some nails that are a little larger. I can lift up only five or six of these larger nails. They represent young people of eighteen or nineteen. As one gets older he does not hear as readily, at least he does not answer, Christ's blessed "Come."

Next we have some nails still larger. The magnet will lift up only one or two of these. They stand for men and women in mature life. Oh, if one has not responded to Christ's call in childhood or youth, it becomes increasingly difficult as the years pass. How seldom, how very seldom, does an aged one answer the divine call and give his heart to the Lord!

Here is a very large nail, and it is rusty. Indeed it is literally coated with rust. This represents the life that is deep in sin. For long years this life has been persisting in his evil ways. As the magnet must be very strong to penetrate the rust and grip the nail, so Christ's call must be strong and loving to reach the sinful soul. Christ can save "from the uttermost," but how much better it is to say in early youth, "I hear thy voice, my Lord. Gladly I come."

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

God has given us many commands to be *watchful*. The child of God does not have to be surprised by the devil. He's been using the same tricks he has used since the beginning of time (do you remember the three types of sin that are mentioned in 1 John 2:16?). Here are some other warnings about being watchful for temptation: Matthew 26:41; 1 Corinthians 16:13; Colossians 4:2.

Journal:

Has there been a time when the devil surprised you with temptation when you were least expecting it? Perhaps you were in a new place, or with a new acquaintance. Perhaps you were someplace familiar, and the devil still found a way to threaten your faith. Think about that time, and see if there is something you could have done to prevent the temptation. Sometimes it's unavoidable, but GIVING IN is always your choice. Pray to God to help you be strong even when temptation comes your way.

We have in our house a pantry door that is used for measuring the children as they grow. It is covered with marks, names, and dates. My children have always been excited to see how much they've grown, and they can't wait to be taller, bigger, and stronger.

If my children never grew, I would take them to the doctor. I would change their diet. I would look for vitamins or supplements to help them. I would ask my friends for advice, I would worry and pray for their growth.

But very often we know of Christians who take that first step to obey Christ and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins... and then they progress no further. Year by year, they make no effort to grow. Even though they look full-grown on the outside, their faith is still the size of a helpless baby. The problem with this is that faith can actually *shrink*. It grows weaker and weaker, and then it can disappear.

Do we think about our growth? Do we think about adding to our faith so that we'll be more useful to God, and more ready for Heaven?

I hope you will read these verses today and become excited about all the ways that your faith can learn and grow. God has wonderful plans for you, and He needs you to work to make those plans come true!

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have _____; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

Make a list of the qualities that are given in today's reading: faith, moral excellence, knowledge, etc. Next to each quality, write down what you think this looks like in a Christian's life. How does a child of God show that he or she has attained this virtue? What would YOU need to do and learn in order to reach this goal?

Read today's passage in 2 Peter again and write down the PROMISES that are given in these verses. What does Peter say will happen to us if we keep adding to our faith and growing as a child of God?

Journal:

Make a list of numbers, starting with your age, and progressing to 20. If you are already a teenager, you may want to keep going to 30. Write down something you would like to learn each year in order to add to your faith. Maybe you would like to memorize a certain number of Bible verses or hymns. Maybe you'd like to learn how to improve your prayers or singing. Maybe you'd like to become better friends with a certain number of people in your congregation. Maybe you'd like to learn about Christians in other countries. The possibilities are endless. There are many ways to grow and learn in the body of Christ!

Our family used to play a game where someone starts a story and the next person adds a sentence, and the next person adds another sentence. We never know what's going to happen next in the story. Anything could happen as we make it up. Our family also loves reading fairy tales and folktales. But we know those stories aren't true.

In today's reading, Peter writes that the Word of God *is* true. It's not a fairy tale. It's not a collection of nice sayings that one man can read one way and another man can read a different way.

The Word of God came when the Holy Spirit told men what was in God's mind. They were not ordinary men either. They had been with Jesus and they had heard God say He was pleased with Jesus. All of these men were willing to DIE for Christ because they knew that God's Word is true.

Would you be willing to die in order to prove that a fairy tale was true? We have to appreciate how precious the Word of God is. When we don't obey it and live by it, then we are saying that it's not important to us. When we twist it to say what we want, when we ignore parts of it, then we're saying that it's not important to us. To do this also means that the blood of Christ, the prophets, and the apostles are not important to us either.

The Scripture is important to God. It is the last thing God has given to men for their salvation. No other true prophecy has come since the apostles died (2 Peter 1:3). That is why we are warned not to treat it lightly.

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have _____; in the _____ there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

Read some more about how God revealed His Truth to men: 2 Samuel 23:2; Luke 1:70; Acts 1:16; and Acts 3:18.

It is so easy to be "carried away" by false teaching. Read these warnings from the Bible about false teachers and prophets: Jeremiah 14:14; Habbakuk 2:18; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Peter 2:1-3; God wants all men to know the Truth, but there are people out there, sometimes even in the church, who want to change God's Word. That is why it's so important for us to read the Bible every day, so that we can know what God really wants us to know.

Journal:

What do you think a false teacher looks like? How would you recognize one in your midst? Talk to some older Christians and ask them about times when they've realized someone has been teaching them falsely. How did they come to this knowledge? How did they feel about it? What did they do about it?

Sometimes it's hard to wait for the holidays! Every day we check the calendar to see if the time is near. The same thing happens when you know it's almost your birthday.

Some days feel longer than others. Some days, we wake up and are so busy that before we know it, it's time for bed! How then, can we look forward to heaven when it seems so far away?

God has a different sense of time than we do. He has always been here, and He will always exist. To Him, our lifetime goes by in the blink of an eye. Or, He can sloooooow down like a snail and spend as long as we need listening to our prayers.

Sometimes it feels like Christ is slow in coming. How can He not be mad at all the sin in the world? Why won't He just come now and end our suffering?

Christ is not slow – He is *long-suffering*. Remember, there are a lot of people who still haven't obeyed God. Let us pray for them every day, while God still gives them time to repent. And let US make the most of the days God has given, by preparing ourselves for our Heavenly home.

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have _____; in the _____ there is _____
the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only
to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

Can you remember what you studied in Bible class when you were four years old? What about last year? You may not realize it, but ever since you started going to worship and Bible class, your knowledge of God has really, really grown!

God expects us to make the most of our time here on earth. "Making the most of our time" means that we spend as much of it as possible doing the Lord's work. Remember, there is work that is good for this life, but there is work that has *eternal fruit*. Can you think of what some of that work is?

I didn't start making a habit of daily Bible study until I was past 30 years old. Isn't that something? I just thought that my days were too busy with running my home and raising my children. But I realized that God commands us to know His Word, and if He commands it, then He will provide a way to obey His commandment. I just wasn't making good use of my time so that I could follow this commandment.

Finally, I realized that if I set aside time for God every day in study and prayer, then He would also provide the time I needed to get everything else done that was important.

Daniel was the governor, second to the king, and he *purposed in his heart* to obey the Lord (Daniel 1:8). He *made it a habit* to pray three times daily (Daniel 6:10). Daniel found the time to be with God, and I could too. The key was this: realizing that *not everything* is important.... and some things are *very important*.

Read some of God's warnings and encouragement about this in Psalm 90:10-11; Luke 12:16-34; Ephesians 5:15-16; James 4:13-14.

Journal:

What do you see yourself doing when you are 30 years old? Write down an imaginary schedule for yourself as an adult. How will you fit in time for worship, Bible study, prayer, and teaching others?

Devotional Poetry for Children (Second Part) was written in 1870. Now out of print, the book is in the public domain.

As you read this poem today, think about how sin often starts out small, but can have a big effect. Fortunately, small kindnesses and acts of love can also have big effects in our lives and the lives of others.

A LITTLE SONNET ABOUT LITTLE THINGS

The little, smoky vapors
Produce the drops of rain ;
These little drops commingle,
And form the boundless main.

Then, drops compose the fountains;
And little grains of sand
Compose the mighty mountains,
That high above us stand.

The little atoms, it is said,
Compose the solid earth ;
Such truths will show, if rightly read,
What little things are worth.

For, as the sea of drops is made,
So it is Heaven's plan,
That atoms should compose the globe,
And actions mark the man.

The little seconds soon pass by,
And leave our time the less ;
And on these moments, as they fly,
Hang woe or happiness.

For, as the present hour is spent,
So must the future be;
Each action lives, in its effect,
Through all eternity.

The little sins and follies,
That lead the soul astray,
Leave stains, that tears of penitence,
May never wash away.

And little acts of charity,
And little deeds of love,
May make this world a paradise,
Like to that world above.

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have _____; in the _____ there is _____
the _____, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to
me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

The Bible has many passages about our ability to fight sin and the devil. What do the following verses say we should do? Ephesians 4:26-27 and 6:11-18; James 4:1-10; 1 Peter 5:8-9.

Journal:

Write down the three main types of sin (lust) that are mentioned in today's reading. Give 3 examples for each one. Which one is the most difficult for you? What can you pray to God about it?

Have you ever heard someone say, "Love makes the world go 'round?"

Someone once told me, "It's not really love that makes the world go 'round. It's *work* that makes the world go 'round!"

I think that's what these verses are saying. We can talk all day about how much we love others, but until we are willing to *show* our love, it will not really be worth much.

Christ showed His love by dying for us. Love means *sacrifice*. Why would we hold back giving to our brother who is in need, when Christ gave Himself so freely to us?

These verses also tell us that we can "assure our hearts before Him." We can have confidence that we belong to God. There doesn't have to be any doubting or wondering if God notices us, or if He cares. If we love others and obey His Word, we know that we abide (live) with Him. The Spirit, who gave us His Word, also gives us this wonderful promise!

The following story is part of a collection called The King's Daughter and Other Stories for Girls. Published in 1910, the book is now in the public domain.

THE LITTLE SISTERS

"You were not here yesterday," said the gentle teacher of the little village school, as she placed her hand kindly on the curly head of one of her pupils. It was recess time, but the little girl had not gone to frolic away the ten minutes, she had not even left her seat, but sat absorbed in a seemingly vain attempt to make herself mistress of an example in long division.

Her face and neck crimsoned at the remark of her teacher, but looking up, she seemed somewhat reassured by the kind glance that met her, and answered:--

"No, ma'am, I was not, but sister Nelly was."

"I remember there was a little girl who called herself Nelly Gray, who came in yesterday, but I did not know she was your sister. But why did you not come? You seem to love to study very much."

"It was not because I didn't want to," was the earnest answer, and then she paused and the deep flush again tinged her fair brow; "but," she continued after a moment of painful embarrassment, "mother can not spare both of us conveniently, and so we are going to take turns. I'm going to school one day, and sister the next, and tonight I'm to teach Nelly all I have learned to-day, and to-morrow night she will teach me all that she learns while here. It's the only way we can think of getting along, and we want to study very much, so that sometime we will be able to teach school ourselves, and take care of mother, because she has to work very hard to take care of us."

"The teacher asked no more questions, but sat down beside her, and in a moment explained the rule over which she was puzzling her young brain, so that the hard example was easily finished.

"You would better go out and take the air a few moments; you have studied very hard to-day," said the teacher, as the little girl put aside the slate.

"I would rather not,--I might tear my dress,--I will stand by the window and watch the rest." The dress was nothing but a cheap calico, but it was neatly made and had never been washed. While looking at it, she

remembered that during the whole previous fortnight, she had never seen her wear but that one dress. "She is a thoughtful little girl," said she to herself, "and does not want to make her mother any trouble. I wish I had more such scholars."

The next morning Mary was absent, but her sister occupied her seat, there was something so interesting in the two little sisters, the one eleven, and the other eighteen months younger, agreeing to attend school by turns, that the teacher noticed them very closely.

They were pretty faced children, of delicate forms, the elder with dark eyes and chestnut curls, the other with eyes like the sky of June, her white neck covered by a wealth of golden ringlets. The teacher noticed in both, the same close attention to their studies, and as Mary stayed indoors during recess, so did Nelly; and upon speaking to her as she had to her sister, she received the same answer, "I might tear my dress."

The reply caused Miss M---- to notice the dress of her sister. She saw at once that it was of the same piece as Mary's, in fact, she became certain that it was the same dress. It did not fit quite so nicely on Nelly, and was too long for her, and she was evidently ill at ease when she noticed her teacher looking at the bright pink flowers that were so thickly set on the white ground.

The discovery was one that could not but interest the teacher. Though short of means herself, that same night she purchased a dress of the same material for little Nelly, and made arrangements with the merchant to send it to her in such a way that the donor need never be known.

Very bright and happy looked Mary Gray on Friday morning, as she entered the school at an early hour. She waited only to place her books in neat order in her desk, ere she approached the teacher, and whispering in a voice that laughed in spite of her efforts to make it low and deferential.

"After this week sister Nelly is coming to school every day, and oh, I am so glad!"

"That is very good news," replied the teacher kindly. "Nelly is fond of her books, I see, and I am happy to know that she can have an opportunity to study them every day."

Then she continued, a little good-natured mischief in her eyes,--"But can your mother spare you both conveniently?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, yes ma'am, she can now. Something happened that she didn't expect, and she is as glad to have us come as we are to do so." She hesitated a moment, but her young heart was filled to the brim with joy, and when a child is happy, it is as natural to tell the cause as it is for a bird to warble when the sun shines. So out of the fullness of her heart she spoke and told her teacher this little story:--

She and her sister were the only children of a poor widow, whose health was so delicate that it was almost impossible to support herself and daughters. She was obliged to keep them out of school all winter, as they had no suitable clothes to wear, but she told them that if they could earn enough to buy each of them a new dress, by doing odd chores for the neighbors, they might go in the spring.

Very earnestly had the little girls improved their stray chances, and very carefully hoarded the copper coins which usually repaid them. They had nearly saved enough to buy a dress, when Nelly was taken sick, and as the mother had no money beforehand, poor Nelly's money had to be used for medicine.

"Oh, I did feel so bad when school opened and Nelly could not go, because she had no dress," said Mary. "I told mother I wouldn't go either, but she said I would better, for I could teach sister some, and it would be better than no schooling.

"I stood it for a fortnight, but Nelly's little face seemed all the time looking at me on the way to school, and I couldn't be happy a bit, so I finally thought of a way by which we could both go. I told mother I would come one day, and the next I would lend Nelly my dress and she might come; that's the way we have done, this week. But last night, don't you think, somebody sent sister a dress just like mine, and now she can come too.

"Oh, if I only knew who it was, I would get down on my knees and thank them, and so would Nelly. But we don't know, and so we've done all we could for them,--we've prayed for them,--and Oh, Miss M----, we are all so glad now. Aren't you too?"

"Indeed I am," was the emphatic answer.

The following Monday, little Nelly, in the new pink dress, entered the schoolroom with her sister. Her face was as radiant as a rose in sunshine, and approaching the teacher's table, she exclaimed:--

"I am coming to school every day, and oh, I am so glad!"

The teacher felt as she had never done before, that it is "more blessed to give than to receive." No millionaire, when he saw his name in public prints, lauded for his thousand dollar charities, was ever so happy as the poor school-teacher who wore her gloves half a summer longer than she ought, and thereby saved enough to buy that little fatherless girl a calico dress.

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have _____; in the _____ there is _____
the _____, which the ___, the _____, will award to me on that day; and not only to
me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

To be "assured" of something means to be made sure of it. The book of 1 John has a lot of assurances for us. There is no reason for the child of God to feel insecure or doubtful about God. God wants us to feel confident in His love for us. Psalm 139 is a wonderful psalm about God's knowledge of us and our needs. Read this Psalm today and paraphrase it.

Journal:

Make a list of ten friends and family members. How have they shown their love to you? How have you shown your love to them?

Have you ever dreamed of being a superhero? What kind of superpowers would you like to have? What would you do with your superpowers?

In today's reading from 1 John, we are told about some "superpowers" that we can have. Nobody can have these powers unless they love God and keep His commandments. What will happen if we do those things? We will have a faith that overcomes the world. All of the sins, disappointments, and temptations of this world will not be able to keep us from Heaven, if we can have that kind of faith.

Verse 3 tells us that God's commandments aren't burdensome. They are not too difficult for us. God has made His plan of salvation very simple for us – we just have to be more humble and willing to listen to God through His Word. You are a great example to others in this! Keep studying and learning, because you're on your way to those "superpowers" that He has promised.

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have _____; in the _____ there is _____
the _____, which the ___, the _____, will _____ on that day; and not only
to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

God has always put *love, faith, and obedience* together. Our love for God is not complete unless we show it by obeying Him (see 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6; and John 14:15). Faith is not complete unless you show it by your obedience (read James 2:14-26). 1 John 3:18 tells us to love with our actions, not just with our words. God could have said over and over that He loves us, but He chose to *show it* by sacrificing His Son (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

How about you? Do you have love, faith, and obedience to God? How do you demonstrate these things to God and others?

Look through the book of 1 John and note how many times the word "KNOW" is repeated. What kind of things does God want us to know? What kind of confidence can we have in Him?

Journal:

Draw a large heart in your journal today. Inside it, write the things that you are sure of in God.

I had a friend who used to call the books of 2 John, 3 John, and Jude, “Bible postcards.” These books aren’t as long as the other letters in the New Testament, but they are still full of wonderful teachings. What kind of promises are given in this little book? What kind of warnings are given?

Imagine that you are a Christian family reading this letter just after it was written and delivered to the saints. In those days, there was great persecution against Christians. Imagine that your jobs, home, and your very life were in constant danger of being taken away because of your belief in Christ. What kind of help would this letter be to you? How would you face your problems after reading a letter like this?

God has preserved this “Bible postcard” because it has exactly what we need to face our problems. It helped the Christians of yesterday, and it can help us now. It reminds us that His Word, our Bibles, has everything we need to stand strong in this world. We must abide in it so that we won’t be deceived, so that we can continue in His commandments and be a shining light to others!

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have _____; in the _____ there is _____
the _____, which the ___, the _____, will _____ on _____; and not
only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

Paraphrase the book of 2 John.

This book warns us against “deceivers.” The greatest deceiver, of course, is satan.

What did Christ call satan in John 8:44?

How can someone be like a child of the devil? Read 1 John 3:7-8

How was satan a “murderer and liar from the beginning”? Read Genesis 3

How can WE be stronger than satan? See 1 John 4:4 and Romans 8:31-39

Journal:

Imagine you are writing to Christians in great turmoil and suffering persecution. In 50 words or less, what would you tell them?

December 26

Day 360

3 John

Imagine if your body was only as healthy as your soul! I wonder how many people would be in the hospitals? I wonder how many people would go to church on Sunday, if it determined how strong our bodies were on Monday.

Think of today's reading as a "prescription" for spiritual health. Would you like your soul to be healthy, fit, and strong? The book of 3 John tells us how. It tells us to walk in the Truth. It tells us to encourage others, especially those who preach the Word of God. It tells us not to imitate evil.

Have you been doing these things? Can you help your family members and friends to do these things? If so, then your soul is very healthy indeed!

Devotional Poetry for Children (Second Part) was written in 1870. Now out of print, the book is in the public domain.

EXAMINATION.

Before we close our eyes to-night,
Oh, let us each these questions ask!
Have we endeavored to do right,
Nor thought our duty a hard task?
Have we been gentle, lowly, meek,
And the small voice of conscience heard?
When passion tempted us to speak,
Have we repressed the angry word ?
Have we with cheerful zeal obeyed
What our kind parents bade us do ?
And not by word or action said
The thing that was not strictly true ?
In hard temptation's troubled hour,
Oh! have we stopped to think and pray,
That Rod would please to give us power
To chase the naughty thought away ?
Oh, Thou ! who seest all my heart,
Do Thou forgive and love me still '
And unto me new strength impart,
And make me love and do Thy will.

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have _____; in the _____ there is _____
the _____, which the ___, the _____, will _____ on _____; and _____
but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

Paraphrase the book of 3 John.

A healthy soul is very important. What kind of things do you do to keep yourself healthy?

Exercise ~ 1 Timothy 4:7-10

Eat ~ John 4:34

Rest ~ Luke 5:15-16

Journal:

Draw the outline of your body in your journal today. Write down how different parts of your body can serve God – your hands, mouth, feet, etc.

December 27**Day 361****Jude 20-25 (older students may read the whole book)**

I think these verses are very important because they help us protect ourselves from sin.

First, we should build up our faith. Verses 20-21 also say that we should pray and love others, and remember that Christ is coming back for us someday. If we remember that this world is not our real home, then we will choose to do the right thing.

Next, we should have the right approach towards other people's sins. Everybody sins, and most people "slip up" and make mistakes. Perhaps others are going through a hard time and have some doubts. We need to be merciful towards them, be patient and encouraging, and pray for them.

Some people may be making a habit out of sinning, and they need to be snatched "out of the fire" of hell by someone. Everyone in God's family must do this for each other. But the book of Jude also warns us to keep *ourselves* safe from sin. Some people are so hardened by sin, and caught up in it, that they are a danger to the Christians around them. Even though we pray for those people and try to encourage them about doing better, we also have to make sure they are not influencing *us* to do wrong, or to agree with their deeds.

As you grow, you will learn to see sin with open eyes and keep yourself safe. Pray for God's help and wisdom. You are becoming such a good student of His Word. You are learning properly how to please God and help others!

Memory Verse:

I have _____, I have _____, I have _____; in the _____ there is _____
the _____, which the ___, the _____, will _____ on _____; and _____
but also to _____. 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

To *restore* something means to bring it back to the way it was before, like it was new again. I have restored old furniture by taking off layers and layers of paint, to find the original wood underneath. Sometimes the wood has to be repainted, or stained and varnished. Then the piece of furniture looks like new again. It is useful and beautiful. I love doing this because I love beautiful old furniture.

Restoring a Christian who has wandered away from God also takes love, patience, and work. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20; Matthew 5:23-24 and 18:15-17.

Journal:

Are there people in sin who need your prayers? You can pray to God about obstacles in their lives, or attitudes that need changing. You can also pray for *yourself*, so that you can be merciful, as well as protected from their sin. You can pray for the people who are trying to teach them. You can pray for more opportunities to encourage them and be a good example to them. Think of people who need these prayers, and write down the specific things you can do for them.

Can you picture Jesus standing at a door and knocking? He has been knocking, knocking, knocking at the door of men's hearts for over 2000 years.

Jesus wants to come into our hearts *to live*. He wants to "dine with us." Do you sit down and eat with strangers? Jesus doesn't eat with strangers either – He likes to be with His family, with people who love Him.

Jesus wants to come into our hearts and do some housecleaning! You don't like living in a dirty house, do you? Jesus can only live in a clean house, a heart that is obeying Him by obeying His Word.

Some men don't hear the knocking. Some men hear it and say, "I'll let Him in some other time." Some men want to let Jesus in, but only if He doesn't clean! They don't want to change their lives for Him.

You were born with a *beautiful* heart! Others can see this, because your words and deeds are beautiful too. Keep the door of your heart open for Him!

Memory Verse:

I have in the future... there is... which the Lord,.... and not only... 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

Read Matthew 12:41-45 and paraphrase this parable. How is it related to today's reading from Revelation?

What are the things we should be "filling up" our hearts with, so that evil cannot enter? Do you remember the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5? Also, read 2 Peter 1:5-11.

Journal:

What would Jesus find if He visited you today? What kind of things would need explaining and correcting?

What kind of things would receive praise?

The holidays are a beautiful, almost magical time. There are music, lights, food, and presents everywhere. People are in a joyful mood.

But even the holidays must end. Usually by the end of the year, we're a little tired from all the sweets, noise, and playing.

Today's verses give us a glimpse of Heaven. Imagine a place where every day is a "holy-day." Imagine singing, light, food, and blessings all around us. Imagine thousands and thousands of angels and Christians sitting with God and Jesus. Imagine that it never has to end, and you never get tired.

Can you imagine this? It will all happen someday, if we're faithful to our Lord! He is preparing it for us!

Memory Verse:

Recite 2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

Sometimes you may hear people using the words "heaven" and "hell" in a funny way or a common way. But heaven and hell are very real places. For example, see Matthew 12 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. Neither Jesus nor the apostles saw life after death as just an idea, or something to make light of. It was a very real fact to them, and it should be to us as well.

Journal:

Find one of your favorite hymns about Heaven and copy it into your journal today. Write your own poem about Heaven and why you long for it.

Christ was never married, but the Bible says that one day He will come down to earth to claim His bride, the church. God could have just said that one day Christ would come for His people. But why do you think God described this like a wedding? Is a wedding something ordinary, that happens every day? God uses a wedding to show us how special and wonderful it will be when Christ returns.

Weddings have their own special music, clothing, and speeches, and it is all very extraordinary. It is extraordinary because two people are going to make a new home together. You know, the night before my wedding, I was so excited that I didn't fall asleep until 3:00 in the morning!

Shouldn't we all be excited about that great day when we go to Heaven? All the Christians here will be taken up to live with Him forever. He has been preparing a home for His Bride, the church, for a long, long time.

That is why the Bible tells us to make ready now. Our wedding day is coming. Before a wedding, there is a wedding rehearsal, where everyone practices all the things they will be doing during the ceremony. Some people spend a lot of time planning a wedding. How many people are actually planning for the Heavenly wedding of the Lamb and His Bride? We love Christ, and He loves us, and we will soon be going home together. Every day is our wedding rehearsal!

Memory Verse:

Review these memory verses for this quarter:

James 5:16

John 15:5

Matthew 7:21

Philippians 2:3

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Jeremiah 10:23

For Further Study:

God has told us that Christ loves the church just like a husband should love his wife. Read Ephesians 5:22-33. How does Christ love the church? How should the church be towards Christ? What does this tell us about the way husbands and wives should love each other?

Read Matthew 22:1-14 and paraphrase this lesson from Jesus.

Journal:

Many people do not believe in life after death. Many people believe in reincarnation. How would you describe heaven and hell to someone like this?

Here we read that the Bible is COMPLETE. As the last words are written, Jesus promised that nothing else is needed but the Bible. It is His gift to us, and we should treat it as something very special. We do not add to His Word by doing things that He did not tell us to do. We do not take away from it by leaving things out that seem too hard or less "fun."

We can be sure that we have all of His commandments and promises in our hands. We have everything we need to be ready for our home in Heaven someday!

A Series of Tales for Children was published in 1858. Now out of print, the book is in the public domain and may be read freely online.

THE STRAWBERRIES

An old soldier with a wooden leg came, once upon a time, into a certain village, and fell suddenly ill. He could not proceed any further, and was obliged to lie on straw in a barn, and it fared very hard with him. Little Agatha, the daughter of a poor basket-maker, felt real sympathy for the sick man. Every day she sought him out and presented him with a sixpence. One evening, the honest warrior, much concerned, addressed her as follows : " My dear child, I have learnt this day that your parents are poor people. Tell me now honestly how you manage to procure so much money. Gladly would I endure hunger rather than take a penny at your hands, unless you can give it me without a stain on your conscience."

" Oh," said Agatha, " quiet your apprehensions on that score, the money is honestly earned. I go to school at the market-town near this, and on the way thither one has to go through a wood where there are many strawberries. Of these I

gather every day a basket full, and carry them into the town, and I always get a sixpence for them. My parents know this very well and they have made no objection to it. They often say, ' There are many people poorer still than we are, and therefore we must do them as much good as our situation admits of.'"

Tears ran down the cheeks of the old soldier. " Dear child," said he, " God will surely bless thee and thy parents for these kind feelings." Nothing is wanted but good will, Innumerable griefs to still.

Some time afterwards there rode through the village an officer of rank, who wore the insignia of many orders. He stopped with his splendid carriage at the roadside inn in order to bait his horses, and, hearing of the sick soldier, he sought him out. The old veteran forthwith related to him the story of his benefactress. " What!" exclaimed the officer, " has a poor child done so much for you ?—surely then I, your old commander, must not do less. I will, forthwith, make an arrangement with the landlord to supply your wants." He accordingly did so, and then went to the cottage of little Agatha. " Dear child," said he, much moved, " the sense of *your charity* has warmed my heart, and brought tears into my eyes. Many a sixpence have you bestowed on the old soldier; accept at my hands a

corresponding number of guineas." The parents, amazed, exclaimed, " It is far too much." But the general said, " No ! No ! This is only a trifling reward; a still better one awaits the dear child in heaven."

Pity and kindness find their worth
Requited both in heaven and earth.

Memory Verse:

Review these memory verses for this quarter:

Philippians 4:8

Colossians 3:17

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

Hebrews 11:1

1 Peter 3:9.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

For Further Study:

From its beginning to its end, the Bible gives commandments from God not to change His Words. Can you remember why Adam and Eve got into so much trouble? What about Cain? From the beginning of time, men have tried to change what God has said to suit their needs. Now here in Revelation, we read that God still has the same requirement: for people to love and honor Him and His Word. There are similar commands in Deuteronomy 4:2 and 5:32, and 1 Corinthians 4:6.

Read (or recite) 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Now try to think of the opposite of this verse. If a person does not want to believe and obey all of God's Word properly, then what is he giving up? He is giving up good teaching, knowing when he is acting correctly, training in righteousness, and being prepared to do every good work. That is giving up a lot!

Journal:

Think of your spiritual goals for the coming year. Is there a book of the Bible you'd like to study more fully? Is there a topic you'd like to study more? Is there something you'd like to learn to do to be of better service to others in the family of God?