



The Lame Take the Prey

A Daily Devotional

*Inspired by half a century
of missionary work in Japan*

by Peggy Verwey

*The Lamé Take
the Prey*

A Daily Devotional Book

*by
Peggy Verwey*

The Lame Take the Prey
A Daily Devotional

© 2008 by Peggy Verwey
All rights reserved by Japan Mission

Japan Mission
7-40 Monzen Cho, Ikoma, Nara, Japan 630-0266
Tel: (0)743-73-1754 Fax: (0)743-73-1681
E-mail: jm@japanmission.org
Japan Mission's Website: www.japanmission.org

Published by ICM Press
983-2 Tawaraguchi-cho, Ikoma
Nara, Japan 630-0243

Cover design by SonShine Works

ISBN 978-0-900748-50-9

Scripture taken from the New King James Version.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Print production by Bookprint Creative Services
<www.bookprint.co.uk>
Printed in Great Britain

JAPAN MISSION

Japan Mission was founded by Neil and Peggy Verwey in 1957. It is a faith mission endeavouring to reach the seeking ones among the 127 million Japanese people.

Japan Mission is interdenominational, not forming churches, but rather linking those reached through many avenues of ministry to already existing evangelical churches which believe and teach the fundamental doctrines of the Bible.

The main emphasis of the work is to aid Japan's approximately 7,800 churches, which have an average attendance of about 35 people. Because of their small congregations, the pastors are often in need of assistance with literature and their evangelistic programs.

Areas of Outreach

- Hospital Evangelism
- Evangelistic Meetings
- English Teaching Evangelism
- International School Outreach
- Bible & Literature Publication & Distribution
- Audio Visual Outreach

Other Books by Neil & Peggy Verwey

- The Voice of Joy
- No Greater Love
- On All Bare Heights
- On Eagles' Wings
- Even Unto Death
- On Dry Ground
- Half a Century in Japan

Contact Information

Japan Mission

7-40 Monzen Cho, Ikoma, Nara, Japan 630-0266

Tel: (0)743-73-1754 Fax: (0)743-73-1681

E-mail: jm@japanmission.org

Website: www.japanmission.org

Foreword

When the Lord first laid it on my heart to attempt to write a devotional daybook, the words, '*The lame take the prey*' (Isaiah 33:23) would not leave my mind. These words are probably a reference to the passage in 2 Kings 7:3, in which the lepers found the food that the Syrians had left over and, in the midst of famine, were fed! I pray that someone who is conscious of a spiritual hunger, upon reading some passage contained in this book, will find their hunger satisfied.

We find a similar thought in Isaiah 35:6, where it says, "*... the lame shall leap like a deer*". I pray that someone who is feeling inadequate, even 'lame', when reading it, will take courage and press on to be a blessing to those that he or she may be seeking to contact for the Lord.

My husband, Neil, and I arrived in Japan from our respective countries, he from South Africa and I from England, as missionaries at the end of 1951. After two years of a concentrated study of the Japanese language, we were married.

Now, together with our son, David, and his wife Sue, who later joined us in the ministry, with their three sons, Jesse, Alex and Chris, who have also found the Lord – we are seeking to bring the precious Gospel to the needy Japanese.

Without Neil and David's help and encouragement, this book would not have become a reality. Aaron Wilson, our most efficient office manager, kindly laid out the book and helped in many ways. His wife, Crystal helped by proof-reading the text.

It goes out with the earnest prayer that some part of it may be a blessing to someone, somewhere, and result in the salvation of precious souls.

PEGGY VERWEY

January 1

THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW YEAR

“ ... the land which you cross over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the Lord your God cares; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.” (Deuteronomy 11:11-12)

We are now standing at the beginning of a new year, with its unknown future before us. But no matter what happens, we need to remember that every moment is in the Hands of our loving heavenly Father. This is true, not just of today, but of every day of the year ahead.

As we face the coming year, maybe there are some concerns in our hearts as to what the future could hold. We may be recalling the difficult times we experienced in the past and also the times when we felt that we failed the Lord. Those memories we should, however, now leave in the Hands of the Lord. As we commit them to Him, they are dealt with and never need to be remembered again.

You may be YOUNG as you face the challenge of another year and the way ahead may look very uncertain. There will doubtless be mountains to climb and valleys to go through. But what a privilege it is to remember that the future is in His Hands and He has promised to guide you every step of the way.

You may be MIDDLE-AGED today and the future does not look as bright as it did when you were young. But remember, “He holds the key of all unknown” and the future is as bright as the Promises of God!

You may be OLD at the beginning of this new year, but remember, as Dr. Dobson has so well expressed it in the title of one of his books, ‘Old age is not for Sissies’, there is nothing that is going to happen to you today (or in any of the future days) that you and God cannot handle together!

For all ages let’s remember His ageless promise, “... *the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.*” (Isaiah 52:12)

As we look ahead, may we have a deep consciousness of His presence and His undertaking and may we walk in faith with Him every step of the way.

January 2

IN A WAITING ROOM FOR HEAVEN

"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come." (Hebrews 13:14)

It was marvellous to hear Hanako Kimura, who was living in a senior citizens home, joyfully tell us one day, 'I am now in a first class waiting room for heaven'.

After the war, as a young girl of seventeen, she went to the devastated city of Hiroshima to be with her brother. He had been a soldier in the war and was said to be dying of tuberculosis. But Hanako was amazed to see, in spite of his physical weakness, how radiant he was when he spoke of his Savior, Jesus Christ.

He told her that, when he first got back from the war, he had gone every morning to the local temple to worship. Then, one day, on the way home, a kind lady had greeted him and offered him a cup of goat's milk. As there was a great shortage of food at that time, he had gladly accepted it. From that time on, she had given him goat's milk every time he passed her door, and, being a Christian, the lady had taken the opportunity to tell him about Jesus. As a result, he had found Christ as his Savior too.

Hanako says that his testimony had such a great influence on her life that she too had found Christ as her Savior. She later went to Bible College and subsequently joined the staff of the Japan Mission. There she had a wonderful ministry, telling sick people in various hospitals about her Savior.

Now, she herself is handicapped with rheumatism and has to spend most of her time in a wheelchair. She still operates her computer, however, as a means of testifying for her Savior, but has to do so with her toes! Hanako especially delights to tell others about the tremendous way in which she found the Lord as her Savior and how even a cup of goat's milk can be used by the Lord.

No matter how handicapped we may be, we can follow her example and testify for our Savior, until He takes us to be with Himself.

January 3

THE BENEFITS OF FELLOWSHIP

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

We always need to remember that fellowship is a God-given gift and that we have significant privileges which come with our ‘new life’ in Christ. We have personal access to God through Jesus and can draw near to Him so easily, any moment of the day.

It has been so well expressed by an anonymous writer:-

*“Go up to the mountain of blessing
Alone with the Master in prayer;
Then down to the work in the valley below,
Your face with the love-light of Jesus aglow.”*

We also need to remember that others benefit when we have fellowship with them. If we neglect getting together with them to share our faith, they and we will lose much blessing.

Fellowship with other Christians builds strong relationships. Paul had such a close bond with the believers that when he had to leave them, we read that he said, *“I have shown you in every way, laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’. And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more.”* (Acts 20:35-38)

Paul’s relationship with those believers is a beautiful example of Christian fellowship. He cared for them and loved them and they responded in the same way to him.

Whenever we have the opportunity, may the Lord help us to reach out in love and fellowship to those around us.

January 4

THE BLACK SHEEP

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?” (Luke 15:4)

Shozo Yamamoto did not think that he would ever forget how his father had made him sit for hours in front of the god-shelf at home, when he did not do well at school. He was told that his lack of interest in getting educated had to be discussed right in front of the gods!

When his father was drunk, Shozo really had to watch out for himself and often wondered why his sister was not treated in the same way. She was obviously the favorite and always highly praised by his father.

Having no sense of fulfillment at home, Shozo sought it outside and loved playing in the mountains and catching fish in the local stream. But, above all, he longed for recognition and started to run around with the wrong crowd, smoking, drinking, stealing and even driving at high speeds without a license.

More than once the police caught up with him and eventually he was virtually expelled from school. The principal urged him to stay at home and reflect on his conduct. As a result, Shozo was utterly discouraged and felt, more than ever before, that he was good for nothing.

In the meantime, his sister became a Christian and started to pray for his conversion. Due to her influence, though also more out of boredom than anything else, Shozo started to listen to a radio broadcast that she recommended, called, ‘Voice of Joy’. What Shozo heard over the radio caused him to write in for more information.

His sister also invited him to go with her to church one day and the very evangelist, Rev. Karasawa of the Japan Mission, who he had heard speak on the radio, happened to be the visiting speaker there. On that day Shozo took Jesus as his Savior. Later he went to Bible College and eventually became a minister, leading many others to his Savior.

Maybe you know someone who is also utterly discouraged and desperately needs the Savior. If you reach out to that person in some way, how wonderful it would be if he or she also found Him.

January 5

EXPERIENCING GOD'S FORGIVENESS

"For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me." (Psalm 51:3)

This Psalm contains David's confession to God, after he had consciously committed sin. He was truly sorry for what he had done and realized too that he had hurt many people. He knew also that to experience God's forgiveness he had to confess his sin and repent of it.

How wonderful it is to know that God forgave him and will always forgive our sins, no matter how great they may be, if we confess them and repent of them before Him.

The Bible tells us that confession is the only way to enable us to enjoy fellowship with God and also to ease our consciences. But some Christians feel so guilty that they confess the same sin over and over again and still do not gain the assurance of forgiveness.

When we confess a sin, it is so important to claim the promise that we find in 1 John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

We should never forget that God really wants to forgive us. He allowed His beloved Son to die so that He could pardon us. But we don't need to confess the sins of the past over and over again. We don't even need to fear that God will reject us if we sin again. Our relationship with Christ will never change, but we need to confess any fresh conscious sins that we may have committed to ensure maximum fellowship with Him.

Experiencing forgiveness comes through confession and repentance. As we read in the above quotation from the Psalm of David, he was truly sorry for his sins. He knew that his sins had hurt many people. But because he repented, God mercifully forgave him. No sin is too great to be forgiven! But, while God forgives us, He does not always erase the natural consequences of our sin. David's life was never the same as a result of what he had done.

Something that we must never forget is that confession from the heart always reestablishes our relationship with God.

It is possible not only to experience this wonderful truth personally, but also to convey it to others, whenever we have an opportunity.

January 6

SLEEPING WITH THE SHOES

"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth."

(Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Little Riyu never tired of hearing her mother tell her stories of her grandfather, who was a great 'samurai' (a member of the military caste), whose code of conduct demanded out-and-out loyalty and obedience to his superiors, no matter what it cost. Although she was just a little girl, she too was determined to live by the strict code of the 'samurai'.

When Riyu was fourteen years old, she went to live with her eldest sister. Every morning and evening her sister's husband read a passage from the Bible and twice on Sundays they went to church. As a result, Riyu began to realize that the Christian way was far superior to that of the self-imposed discipline of the 'samurai'. Her parents, however, were very worried and tried to discourage her from believing in a 'foreign god', but little Riyu was not convinced. In fact, she became more and more inclined to believe in the teachings of the Bible.

At 25 years of age, a marriage was arranged for her with Mr. Shibazaki, a keen Christian, and many of their neighbors joined them in worshipping the Lord. Their joy overflowed when a little girl was born to them, but great grief followed when she died at four years of age. That same year Riyu had another baby daughter, but she too died three years later! As if her burden was not enough, before long Riyu's husband also died and in despair she took up a job at an old people's home.

Not long afterwards, Riyu's nephew had financial difficulties and she decided to let him and his family share her two-bed-roomed house, just keeping one bedroom for her own use. They eagerly moved in, but when she got home from work one evening, she found that they had moved her belongings out of her room and made a bed for her at the entrance to the house, where the shoes were kept.

When her Christian friends heard of what had happened, they wanted to get her nephew and his family out of her house, but she stopped them. With tears in her eyes, she told them that she did not care what happened to her, as long as her nephew and his family found her Savior.

As a result of her testimony, her nephew eventually became a devoted Christian and an elder in his church, deeply respecting her for all she had done for him and his family.

Let's be determined to live before others in such a way that they will see Christ in our daily actions, no matter what the cost might be to us.

January 7

"JESUS THE VERY THOUGHT OF THEE"

1. *"Jesus, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.*

2. *"Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find;
A sweeter sound than Jesus' blest name,
O Savior of mankind!*

3. *"O, hope of every contrite heart,
O, joy of all the meek,
To those who ask, how kind Thou art!
How good to those who seek!*

4. *"But what to those who find? Ah! This
Nor tongue nor pen can show;
The love of Jesus, what it is,
None but His loved ones know."*

(Bernard of Clairvaux – 1091-1153)

This famous hymn was written in Latin by Bernard of Clairvaux, who was the son of a French knight. He was born in his father's castle near Dijon in Burgundy. The rank of his family could have opened up a wonderful career for him, but he was led, partly by a dream of his mother's, to become a monk. As a result of his dedication to God, he and his uncle and two of his brothers entered a monastery in 1113. He wrote a lot of hymns, many of which were translated into English by Rev. Edward Caswall and others. This one was not translated until 1848.

Whatever worldly temptations there may be to do otherwise, let us follow the Lord's leading in all the decisions we make.

January 8

SHOULD THERE BE FEAR IN OUR HEARTS AS CHRISTIANS?

"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Psalm 118:6)

We should always remember that respect, not fear, needs to typify our approach to God as Christians. We need to have a reverent awe and respect for our loving Heavenly Father, but there should not be a fear of God that leads to uncertainty about His love for us and our dearness to Him as His sons and daughters. Concerning such fear, Paul says: *"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"* (Romans 8:15-16). From this we can see that we no longer have to be afraid of God, because, as His sons and daughters, we are greatly loved by Him.

Alongside of that, we need to remember that we do not need to fear the devil or death! Why? Because Jesus shared in our humanity and He has said, *"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."* (Hebrews 2:14-15)

The devil no longer has a foothold in our lives and so we have absolutely nothing to fear! We do not need to fear any circumstances that may come our way. Why? Because we know that God is always working towards the good of those that love him. The Apostle Paul has expressed this so well in one of his Epistles, *"... we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28).

We must always remember that it is far better to fear God than to fear man. The fear of people can hamper everything that we try to do, whereas, the fear of God is liberating. Why should we fear

people who can do us no eternal harm.

Also, we never have to fear any circumstances that come into our lives, because He has said, *"... we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28)

We should always remember that we have absolutely NOTHING to fear, if we have taken Jesus as our Saviour! In fact, it has been said that the phrase, 'do not fear' occurs 366 times in the Bible. In other words, one for each day of the year, including leap year!

There is a monument in Westminster Abbey in London, England to Lord Lawrence. Just his name and date of birth are on the tombstone, followed by the words, "He feared man so little, because he feared God so much." May that precious truth be true of us too!

January 9

A COMFORT TO THE COMFORTLESS

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion." (Romans 12:15-16)

Tears sprang into Kiyō Ohashi's eyes as she watched her four-year-old son, Yoshio, happily playing with his toys by her side. She kept wiping the tears away as soon as they appeared, so that he would not notice that she was crying. How could she possibly live without him, she continually wondered. She loved him so much.

As she sat there, her tortured mind went back to the past. She had been such a fool to marry the man who had become his father. Why had she not listened to her parents' advice? At the full bloom of youth, when she was just 22 years old, he had seemed so wonderful. It was only after they were married that she had come to realize that he was a hopeless drunkard and, not only that, when he often ceased to come home at night, she realized that there was another woman in his life.

She could have put up with all that, but now he was even demanding to have the custody of their only child and, afraid of his temper, she did not have the courage to resist his demand. A few

days later, the parting came and a puzzled little boy left the warmth of his mother's love for an uncertain future with his father.

After Yoshio left her, Kiyo was inconsolable and decided to go back to live with her mother, who was delighted to have her. But Kiyo was soon to discover that her mother had become religious and kept on mentioning to her that Jesus Christ had become her Savior. When her mother tried to talk to her about the things of God, however, Kiyo merely laughed. But her mother persisted and left a copy of the New Testament in the sitting room, praying that her daughter would pick it up and read it.

God answered her prayers and it was not long before Kiyo found that her mother's bright testimony was influencing her and she too opened her heart to the Savior. From then on, Jesus became the center of her affections and, although she did not love Yoshio any less, her heart was at last satisfied by the Lord Jesus.

In those early days as a Christian, however, there were many bitter struggles for Kiyo, but God undertook for her and showed her that He had a great purpose for her life. She soon began to realize that He was leading her to go to Bible College to equip herself to reach out to others.

When she graduated, she joined a Christian organization that ministered specifically to the sick in tuberculosis hospitals and it was such a joy to tell them about the miracle that Jesus had done in her heart and to be able to lead many to her Savior.

January 10

MINISTRY

"... no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." (1 Corinthians 3:11-13)

The most important thing in our life, as Christians, is not how much work we are doing for Him, but how much work He is doing through us.

We read in Acts, chapter 2, verse 47 that “... *the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*” It is He alone who can save people. It is not through our eloquence, fervor or efforts. He may use us as He thinks fit, but it is only His Power working through us that is of any avail.

The great man of God, George Muller, wonderfully revealed this truth when he said, “It has pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, the benefit of which I have not lost during more than fourteen years. The primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul happy in the Lord.

“The first thing to be concerned about is not how much I might serve the Lord, but how I might get my soul into a happy state and how my inner man might be nourished. I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed. I might seek to behave myself as is fitting for a child of God in this world, and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in the right spirit.

“Before that time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer after having dressed myself in the morning. Then I realized that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God, to meditate on it. As a result, my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warmed, reproved, instructed, and that thus, by means of meditation on the Word of God, my heart would be brought into communion with the Lord.”

May the Lord enable us to follow the example of this great man of God.

January 11

A BURDEN ROLLED AWAY

“Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved” (Psalm 55:22)

Akiko Tanabe could not look into a mirror without cursing the day that she was born. She had been stricken with polio as a small child and all her memories were somehow connected with her deformed body.

She would never forget the day when she had stood before the open door of the 'butsudan' (the Buddhist family altar) and violently slammed it closed. Literally shaking with rage, she had cried out, "All right, Buddha, do your worst! Send some dreadful punishment on me for slamming the door in your honorable face. I am waiting!"

In those moments all the bitterness of the past years bore down upon her again as she looked at her deformed right hand and her virtually useless left leg and again cursed the day that she was born.

Her mother had always told her that her deformity was a sign that the wrath of the gods was on her and that she must be humble and always willing to do the lowliest tasks.

As she grew up, Akiko decided that her life should be a short and merry one and that at the age of 25 she would commit suicide. Until then, she would try to forget her deformity by theatre-going, night-clubs and anything else that her companions were involved in.

On visiting a friend's home one day, Akiko discovered that her mother was a Christian. She was so taken aback, when she was suddenly asked if she did not find it very difficult to be a cripple, that tears welled up in her eyes. She did not know what to say, but sensed such a deep sympathy in the question that she accepted her friend's mother's offer to go to church with her.

Akiko had never understood why she had been chosen to bear such misery, until the minister spoke of a man who had been born blind and Jesus told him that it had happened "*that the works of God should be revealed in him*" (John 9:3).

On that wonderful day, the burden that Akiko had carried for so many years suddenly rolled away. From then on, she dedicated her life to her matchless Savior. She later became one of the deacons of her church and was much used of the Lord in personal work.

If we take any burden, which may come our way, out of His Hands, He will then use that very burden as a blessing to others.

January 12

IT IS POSSIBLE!

“Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes’.” (Mark 9:23)

IF WE HAVE FAITH!

IT IS POSSIBLE, if we reckon on the power of the Lord for keeping us and victory over sin, to lead a life in which His Promises are taken as they stand and are found to be true.

IT IS POSSIBLE to cast all our cares upon Him daily and to enjoy deep peace in the process.

IT IS POSSIBLE to see the will of God in everything and to receive it with joy and not with sighing.

IT IS POSSIBLE to lay aside all bitterness, anger and evil-speaking every moment of every day.

IT IS POSSIBLE to lead a life in which His promises are taken as they stand and are proven to be true.

IT IS POSSIBLE to trust God in every circumstance of our lives because He has said, ***“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.”*** (Psalm 32:8)

IT IS POSSIBLE to come to the realization that faith is not waiting for something to happen, hoping for it to come to pass. Real faith counts on God and believes before it sees the result of its faith.

IT IS POSSIBLE in all circumstances to realize that FAITH is the cable that links earth to heaven. If that cable is broken, we will never experience the wonder of His Promises!

If we would be spiritually strong, we need to integrate FAITH into every area of our lives. It needs to be the foundation of who we are and everything that we do.

It has been well said that FAITH is like learning to float on water. If we would learn to float, we must utterly abandon ourselves to the water, believing that it can hold us even although it may look as if it is absolutely impossible for it to do so! It is only through FAITH that ALL things are possible!

January 13

ONE IN THE LORD!

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff,
they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)*

As Nobuo lay on his hospital bed, sick with lung tuberculosis, the thought uppermost in his mind was whether his wife would have time to visit him that day. He was so lonely and desperately wanted someone to talk to.

To his relief, Yukiko, his wife came during the course of the afternoon. He had never appreciated her so much as now that he was sick. He expected that the conversation would, as usual, mainly center around the children and he was quite surprised when she started to talk about a subject they rarely discussed - religion! They had been nominal adherents of Tenrikyo, ('Heaven & Earth' Religion) for a long time, but Yukiko went on to tell him that she had a friend who was a Christian and that she had gone with her to one of their meetings.

Nobuo could see that his wife was most enthusiastic about the idea of becoming a Christian, but he certainly did not want to get involved in any foreign religion. He told her in no uncertain terms that the idea of gaining salvation, without working for it, sounded most strange!

Yukiko said little more on the subject that day, but from then on, every time she visited Nobuo, she told him a little more about her new-found faith, praying that God would open his eyes to the simple truth of salvation through Jesus.

Somewhat curious to hear more on the subject from another angle, Nobuo discovered that there was a weekly Christian meeting for the patients in the hospital and he started to attend. The Words from the Bible that were spoken there somehow eased the fear in his heart, especially in the middle of the night when he lay awake, wondering if he would ever make it through the tuberculosis and asthma from which he was suffering.

Soon afterwards, when the evangelist entered Nobuo's room, he had the joy of leading Nobuo to the Savior. From then on, although his physical condition did not soon improve, Nobuo knew without a shadow of doubt that, no matter whether he lived or died, he was

sure that one day he would go to heaven.

The circumstances, which were pressing so hard upon him at the present time, were the very tools that God was using to fashion him for eternity.

January 14

“THY WAY, NOT MINE, O LORD”

1. *“Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be;
Lead me by Thine own hand.
Choose out the path for me.*
2. *“Smooth let it be, or rough,
It will be still the best;
Winding or straight it leads
Right onward to Thy rest.*
3. *“I dare not choose my lot;
I would not if I might;
Choose Thou for me, my God,
So shall I walk aright.*
4. *“Take Thou my cup, and it
With joy or sorrow fill,
As best to Thee may seem;
Choose Thou my good and ill.*
5. *“Choose Thou for me my friends,
My sickness or my health;
Choose Thou my cares for me,
My poverty or wealth.*
6. *“Not mine, not mine the choice,
In things or great or small;
Be thou my guide, my strength,
My wisdom and my all.”*

(Horatius Bonar – 1808-1889)

Dr. Horatius Bonar was born in Edinburgh, Scotland and became a minister of the Free Church of Scotland. During his lifetime, he wrote about a hundred hymns. He was apparently a man of a tender,

loving spirit. His denomination only used the Psalms in their church in those days, but he was able to use his hymns in the Sunday School meetings. It was not until nearly the end of his life that Dr. Bonar was able to introduce his hymns into the church services, but still praised God that He was leading him every step of the way.

January 15

UNCONTROLLED ANGER

“So the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?’” (Genesis 4:6)

When Cain brought an offering of the fruit of his labor to the Lord, which we read of in the above passage of Scripture, it does not really make it clear in words why God rejected it. Maybe Cain had a bad attitude or maybe his offering was not up to God’s standard. We maybe cannot easily define what happened on that occasion, but there is no doubt that God always evaluates our motive for giving a gift, as well as the quality of the gift we offer. In other words, when we give to others, we should do so out of a joyful heart and not out of a grudging spirit.

Furthermore, we need to consider how we react when someone suggests that we have done something wrong. Do we make an effort to correct what they have pointed out to us or indignantly deny it. In Cain’s case, God encouraged him to right his wrong and try again, but Cain refused and, for the rest of his life, was an example to us of what happens to us, if we refuse to admit our mistakes.

We always need to remember that uncontrolled anger will lead to sin. The next time that someone suggests that we are wrong, let’s take an honest look at ourselves and choose God’s way instead of Cain’s.

We also read in the Bible that anger’s tool is very often the tongue. *“...the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.”* (James 3: 5-6)

How strongly this is expressed. It tells us that an uncontrolled anger can do tremendous damage. We need to remember that

idle words can spread trouble very quickly and no one can stop the result. Even if we apologize later, the scar will remain.

We need to look to Him to control each word that comes out of our mouth and to remember that anger's choice tool is the tongue. Before we speak, we need to bear in mind that a few words spoken in anger can destroy a relationship that took years to build and that our lives and that of others are vitally affected by every word we speak.

If we are tempted to be angry, maybe all that we need to do is to slow down, always remembering that *"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy."* (Psalm 103:8)

January 16

WITH EVERY BREATH

"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Matthew 10:29-30)

Koji's fight for life started when he was born with a congenital heart condition. To make matters worse, at the age of two he contracted measles and whooping cough and the after-effects resulted in his heart condition deteriorating even more. At that time, the medical opinion was that it would not be likely that he would survive for very long.

In spite of his fragile health, however, when he was seven, Koji was enrolled in the local grade school. But during the wintry months he was often too sick to attend and it was only his strong determination that kept him abreast of his studies.

Koji then contracted lung tuberculosis and no adequate medicine was available. He was hospitalized and it was reckoned that rest and fresh air were the only cures. Even with snowdrifts visible outside, there was no form of heating and the hospital windows were kept wide open.

One day, while Koji was lying on his bed feeling really sorry for himself, a man, who he had not seen before, entered the ward. After talking to several of the other children, he approached Koji's bed and began to speak to him, too. Something about the stranger

attracted Koji and, before long, he opened his heart, telling him of his life-long battle with ill-health.

After listening to Koji's story intently, the hospital evangelist, Mr. Karasawa, told Koji of One who loved him so much that He had even numbered the very hairs of his head and who could also save his soul. Koji just could not believe it. It all seemed too wonderful to be true! The gods that he had heard of up 'till then had only brought fear into his heart. But this One was different. He was the God of love!

At 27 years of age, very complicated heart surgery was carried out and, as a result, Koji suddenly found that he could breathe properly for the first time in his life. Soon after he left the hospital, he offered himself as a trainee to the mission that had sent the evangelist to speak to him. At their suggestion, he enrolled in a Bible college to equip himself for the ministry, praising God for the miracle that had taken place in his life.

He is now happily married and the minister of a church, daily rejoicing that he is able to tell all those with whom he comes into contact about the miracles that God has done in his life.

January 17

WHAT ASSURANCE DO WE HAVE?

"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things." (Acts 13:38-9)

Do we sometimes lack assurance in our lives? If so, it is most important to remember that we can obtain nothing from God, unless we believe Him. He first wants us to believe what He says and then our feelings will follow. What does He tell us we can we receive, if we only believe?

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION – because He has said, *"... whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"*. (Romans 10:13)

ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE - because He has said, *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life"*. (1 Peter 5:13)

ASSURANCE OF ANSWERED PRAYER - because He has said, *"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him"*. (1 John 5 14-15)

But let us always remember that FALSE ASSURANCE leads us away from dependence on God. We read of such a case in the Bible of the rich man in Luke, chapter 18. He reveled in the fact that his riches gave him power and prestige. But when Jesus told him to sell everything that he owned, he could not do so. He just did not understand that he would have been even more secure, if he had done so and followed Jesus.

What a glorious Savior we have! Let's trust Him every moment of every day, no matter what difficulties may seem to come our way. We need to realize that all that He asks us to do is to get rid of anything that is more important to us than following His will for our lives, because He knows what is the very best for us.

If our basis for security has shifted from God to what we own, it would be far better for us to get rid of those possessions and commit ourselves completely to Him.

How forceful is the testimony that we read in the Scriptures, when Peter's said of the Lord Jesus, *"... whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls"*. (1 Peter 1:8-9)

January 18

ACHING TO BE TOUCHED

"But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles." (Matthew 13:20-21)

Elana was brought up as a Catholic, but had no personal relationship with God. In fact, she was sure He was waiting to punish her and was really afraid of Him. She was convinced that before you

could have a relationship with God, you had to be someone special, like a priest, who alone could talk directly to Him.

Her family moved around a lot and so Elana constantly had to make new friends. As a result, she was afraid to get too close to anyone in case she had to face the pain of leaving them again. As an adult, she was even more of a loner. People thought that she was just carefree, but deep down in her heart she was lonely and desperately unhappy.

When she was at university, Elana was somewhat taken aback one day when a fellow-student, with whom she had had no contact before, suddenly spoke to her about Jesus, urging her to accept Him as her Savior. Being pretty desperate, Elana tried to do so, hardly knowing what she was doing. For a while, she read the Bible, but before long, instead of taking her problems to God, she ran away from Him.

For the next nine years, in vain Elana looked for people and things to bring her happiness, but remarkably she again found a friend who longed to help her turn to Jesus. She then realized that she had never completely yielded her heart to Him and this time she did so and He became a reality in her life. From that time on, Elana had a burden to help others find her Savior and that led her to join the staff of the Japan Mission as an English teacher, so that she could reach out to the Japanese by teaching them conversational English language, which they very much wanted to learn.

During that time, one night, she went to help some other missionaries, who were ministering to the “down-and-outs” in the center of a nearby large city. When she saw the pathetic cardboard boxes that comprised their beds on the streets, Elana was deeply moved. At one place, she lightly touched a man’s hand and saw tears spring into his eyes. From that time on, Elana’s greatest desire has been to touch as many as possible with the Gospel, so that they too may find peace in the Savior.

There are so many people, longing to find peace in their hearts. We need to reach out daily with the precious Gospel to them in our actions and prayers.

January 19

TRUE FRIENDSHIP

"No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)

How magnificent it is to think that Jesus calls us friends. He therefore expects us to be a friend to others as He is to us. It is unlikely that we will have to go so far as He did when He died for us. But there are many ways in which we can show sacrificial love by listening, helping and encouraging others.

Maybe we need to examine our hearts and discover what sort of friend we are, because there is a great difference between knowing someone and being a true friend. The real evidence of being a true friend is to be conscious, when those around us are going through times of distress and sorrow and to be especially available to them at such times.

God has designed us with a need for one another, so we need friends. The time to make friends, however, is before we ourselves need one. How well the anonymous writer has put this thought in the following words:-

*"I went out to find a friend
But could not find one there.
I went out to be a friend,
And friends were everywhere!"*

But maybe we need to ask ourselves what kind of friend we are. The greatest evidence of real friendship is to love a person, no matter how difficult it may seem or how difficult they may appear to be. How well this thought has been expressed by the Words, *"A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."* (Proverbs 18:24)

In other words, to make sure that we will have friends in our times of need we have to make friends whenever we can. Then we will always be a mutual blessing the one to the other.

It is most important to remember that the only real and lasting friendship that we can have is found in our relationship with Jesus. He specifically tells us that He is our friend in John's Gospel, chapter 15, verse 15 *"... I have called you friends"*! What an honor and what a privilege!

January 20

THE ANSWER!

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you ... that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (John 15:16)

“Can this possibly be the answer?” mused Toshihiro Tsuru one day, as he was deeply engrossed in a book on Bushido, the code of law which had governed the lives of the ‘samurai’, the aristocratic warrior class of Japan, in the 12th century. The precepts he found there strongly appealed to 18-year-old Toshihiro. The idea of so disciplining your mind that you could open up your own way in life, without seeking outside help, had a real appeal to him.

Yet, as Toshihiro looked back on his childhood, he so vividly recalled the strange feeling he had had, when the ‘kitoshi’ (faith healer) had visited their home and said that his mother was possessed by an evil spirit, which was making her ill. He had allegedly driven the spirit out, but Toshihiro could see that his mother was not at all convinced that she was free from its influence and a dark shadow had seemed to hover over their home for a long time.

Then, later, when she had come into contact with Christianity, the course of her life had completely changed. He had never seen her so happy as when she had told him about the Christian message. It had gripped his soul, but he was not quite sure whether it was really true or not and hesitated to believe in anything without a thorough investigation.

The lack of real purpose in life made Toshihiro very morbid and sometimes for days on end he would sit alone in his room, trying to escape from reality. Then, one day, a university friend invited him to a special film gathering in his church. Having nothing else to do, he decided to go.

The movie turned out to be about the faith, love and sacrifice in the life of a family, who was serving the Lord in the snowy parts of Japan. Toshihiro was impressed and also listened very intently to the message that followed.

That night he knew that he was standing at a crossroad. He had tasted the things of the world and found them without real purpose. Now he saw the possibility of a new life that offered him forgiveness of sin, peace of heart and a clean break with the past.

As soon as he could, he went to see the local minister and yielded his life to the Lord.

As he began to grow in grace, a deep desire was born in his heart to serve God. On hearing of the need of someone to help in the film section of the Japan Mission, he offered himself to God for this ministry, remembering that it was a movie that had brought a desire in his heart to become a Christian.

January 21

THERE WERE NINETY AND NINE*

1. *"There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold,
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.*
2. *"Lord, Thou hast in fold Thy ninety and nine,
Are they not enough for Thee?
But the Shepherd made answer:
"This of Mine hath wandered away from Me;
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep.
I go to the desert to find My sheep.*
4. *"Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way
That mark out the mountain's track?
They were shed for one who had gone astray,
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back,
Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?
They're pierced tonight by many a thorn,
They're pierced tonight by many a thorn.*
5. *"And all through the mountains, thunder-riven, And up from
the rocky steep, There arose a cry to the gate of heaven, "Rejoice,
I have found My sheep!" And the angels echoed around the
throne, "Rejoice! For the Lord brings back His own! Rejoice! For
the Lord brings back His own!"*

(E.C.Clephane)

One day in 1874, the famous evangelist, D. L. Moody and Sankey, the singer, were holding revival meetings in Scotland. On the way, Sankey purchased a newspaper. In the process of reading it, he noticed a poem printed there.

The next day, at a meeting, Moody was speaking on 'The Good Shepherd' and asked Sankey to sing something appropriate. Sankey, immediately remembered the poem and cried to the Lord for guidance. Note by note, the tune came forth and, when Sankey had stopped singing, the congregation, deeply moved, echoed the words, 'Rejoice! For the Lord has found His sheep!'

We, too, should go after the lost sheep whenever we can.

**Verse 3 had to be omitted due to space considerations.*

January 22

WHAT IS THE WORD OF GOD?

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:32)

The Bible tells us a great deal about the Word of God. But it will mean nothing to us if we do not realize its importance in our lives. We are told that it is:-

1. A SEED - which germinates His Life in our hearts and brings forth spiritual fruit – *"... having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever".* (1 Peter 1:23)

2. A LIGHT - to guide us step by step as we walk in this sinful world – *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* (Psalm 119:105)

3. A SWORD - to help us deal with anything in our lives, which is not glorifying to God. - *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12)

4. A FIRE & A HAMMER - to cleanse our hearts and constantly remind us of God's will for our lives. - *"Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?"* (Jeremiah 23:29)

5. A MAP – to guide us. The Psalmist says that he is a “*stranger in the earth*” and therefore needs guidance. How true that is of us too. We need His guidance day by day. (Psalm 119:19)

As we use His Word day by day, it will help us to grow in grace and be a blessing to those with whom we come into contact.

January 23

A COLLAPSED WORLD RESTORED

“... whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” (Mark 11:25-26)

Eight years after Lee Schaninger graduated from university, his whole world collapsed. He had been a successful engineer and a computer scientist and also had a small real estate business. His future had looked most promising and his dream had been a ten-year plan to get rich, marry, have a family and retire young! But within five months he lost everything! Because money had always been his real love, he was not only financially, but also emotionally destitute and wanted revenge. His shattered dreams also left him bitterly angry.

Just at that time, however, a friend told him about Jesus and that he needed to be ‘born again’. Not knowing where else to turn, Lee started to read the Bible and, within six months, took Jesus as his Savior. But his motives for doing so were, in a measure, selfish. He had searched for a real meaning in life for many years and had tried just about everything, including eastern religions, mysticism, extravagant living and human relationships, always looking for material gain, but all in vain.

So why not try Christianity, he thought, reckoning that he had nothing to lose! He somehow hoped that Jesus would undertake for his real estate business and restore his losses, but it did not quite work out the way he had expected. As he started to read the Bible, Lee began to see that Jesus rather wanted to save him from the deep bitterness in his heart. He then knew that he had to forgive others unconditionally, as many times as were necessary and that a lack of forgiveness would separate him from God.

So it was that Lee realized that he had to put the Lord completely in charge of his life and needed to stop putting the blame on others for his failures. It was not easy to begin with, but he soon realized that there was no other way than to forgive those who had wronged him in the past and he also discovered that forgiveness had to be an act of his will and not of his emotions.

Lee first went to his parents to ask them to forgive him, because they had such angry and bitter arguments in the past. He confessed specifically everything that he could remember that he had done to hurt them. Their relationship was instantly changed and instead of visiting them a few times a year, he started visiting them once a week and soon moved back in to live with them. Within a year, seeing their son's changed life and in answer to his prayers, they too became Christians!

If someone has wronged you in the past, wholeheartedly forgive them. If you do so, God will greatly bless you and them too.

January 24

GOD'S MEASURE OF GREATNESS

Jesus said: "... but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

(Mark 10:42-5)

We see from the Scriptures that greatness does not concern itself with always being recognized by others. James and John wanted the highest positions in Jesus' kingdom, but Jesus told them that true greatness only comes in serving others.

Most people measure greatness by high personal achievement, but in Christ's kingdom, serving is the way to get ahead. The desire to be great will certainly not help, but rather hinder us.

True greatness is measured by service. It comes from giving ourselves to help others. It keeps us aware of others' needs and stops us from thinking only about ourselves. Jesus came as a servant and His whole life was spent in serving others.

True greatness is also characterized by profound humility. John the Baptist said that he was not even worthy to perform the humble task of unfastening Jesus' shoes, but Jesus said of him, *"For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist.* (Luke 7:28)

Although John was a well-known preacher who attracted large crowds, he was always content for Jesus to take the higher place, revealing true humility.

We must always remember that humility is the basis for greatness in anything we may seek to do for God. When we are content to do what Jesus wants us to do and not seek to take the honor for it, God will do great things through us.

Aim to be great in God's eyes. That will only be possible through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. But if we do receive praise at any time for anything we do, we need to immediately attribute what we did to Him. If we do so, even although we may not expect them to, others will doubtless notice and appreciate us all the more.

January 25

AN IMMOVABLE FOUNDATION

"... But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God." (1 Corinthians 6:11)

Mrs. Kiwa always wanted her life to be based on something solid and unshakable, but she somehow searched in vain for that kind of stability. When she saw senior citizens playing gate-ball, she was horrified, fearing that her life too would end up as meaningless as theirs seemed to be. How utterly pointless life would be, if in the end, all one had left was some insignificant hobby, she reckoned!

When she took the time to look into her heart, she gave herself pretty good marks. She was proud of her exemplary conduct. She got along with her in-laws, even better than her husband did! She also reckoned that she was a very compassionate person, having an understanding of the feelings of other people. She was not at all swayed by social position, financial status or educational background!

Then, having an interesting in speaking English, she got in touch with a missionary and before long started going to church. She knew that one of the key words of Christianity was 'sin', but she was determined never to think of herself as a sinner.

When she started to read the Bible, however, she began to realize how disgusting she actually was in the eyes of a holy God. For the first time, she saw herself as bound to material things and could not stand the sight of herself. She had always placed herself on a high plane, feeling secure and having a real sense of superiority. Now she saw herself as being enslaved to sin and felt utterly miserable.

She tried to improve herself by zealously clapping her hands in front of the family god-shelf and by worshipping her ancestors. She even crossed herself when she passed the Catholic church building and folded her hands when she went into the Protestant church. But still she felt like a hypocrite and her pride was pulverized.

Then, one day, she shouted at her oldest son, because he was not grateful for something she had gone out of her way to do for him! As soon as she had done so, she had felt so convicted of her own shortcomings that she immediately apologized to him and then suddenly realized that she could never have done so in her own strength. God was surely now in charge of her life and had filled it with His Love. It was then that Mrs. Kiwa experienced the joy of the Lord in her heart and knew that she had yielded herself completely to Him and believed wholeheartedly in His Word.

May we be so completely yielded to the Savior that we can rest in His redeeming Love moment by moment no matter what our circumstances may be.

January 26

THE POWER OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:13)

In one of the hospitals of Japan there was a patient, Ishikawa San, who all his life seemed to have been a seeking soul. When he was only 18 years old, he became deeply conscious of his need of rest for his heart and had tried the Japanese sect, called Konkokyo, but to no avail.

He then met a Buddhist priest and for the next twenty-three years tried the teachings of Buddhism. But there he found no peace either, but with determination said to himself, "Even if it takes me a lifetime, I will find peace, no matter what the cost may be!"

Soon after, he came across the 'Garden of Light & Happiness' and studied that religion for three years, to no avail. Then, Ishikawa San, having been diagnosed with tuberculosis, was more desperate than ever to find peace for his soul and decided to try his wife's religion, 'Tenrikyo'. She sent a priest to visit him and he was told that there was dust in his heart and that he would not get healed unless that dust was removed. But the process by which he could get rid of the dust was so complicated that Ishikawa San didn't know where to begin.

He then entered Toneyama Hospital, completely confused with the teachings of four religions. There he came into contact with Christianity through a group which was in the hospital and started to attend their meetings. The hospital evangelist also visited him and told him about the saving power of the Blood of the Lord Jesus.

At first he could not understand this either, until suddenly he had a lung hemorrhage. As his life blood flowed out, he suddenly saw the reality of the shedding of the Life Blood of the Lord Jesus and peace flooded his heart - after a search of nearly thirty years!

Let's always be on the lookout for those to whom we can bring the truth of the reality of the power of the precious Blood of Jesus.

January 27

A LOAD OF DIRT WORKS WONDERS!

"Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days." (Ecclesiastes. 11:1)

When our next-door neighbor's wife, Mrs. Sonoda, developed cancer and needed a mastectomy, we longed to tell her about Jesus. However, every time we went to her house to try to speak to her, her husband told us that she was too tired to see us. So we just cried to the Lord to open up a way that we could contact her.

Then, one day, we saw that Mr. Sonoda was building some containers with cement blocks outside his house. When we passed

by his house, he told us that his intention was to use them to plant some shrubs to beautify his garden and that he needed some topsoil for that purpose.

What Mr. Sonoda did not then know was that God was about to provide some topsoil the next day. That night, as a result of heavy rain, the topsoil Mr. Sonoda needed was deposited on our property! To Mr. Sonoda's surprise and delight, we soon delivered it to his garden in our little truck.

Doubtless, as a result of that, the next time we asked to see his wife, his attitude was quite different. Then, for the first time, we had the opportunity of explaining to her the way of salvation. As a result, God gave such a wonderful peace in Mrs. Sonoda's heart that she asked her husband to let us go back to see her. From then on we were able to visit Mrs. Sonoda regularly and had the joy of leading her into assurance that her sins were forgiven.

Her cancer spread quite rapidly, however, and before long, she was unable to move about without the aid of crutches. Later on, she deteriorated so fast that she needed to be hospitalized. Her hospital bed was under a window with a good view of the hospital parking lot, however, and, although she was too weak to sit up, she often held up her mirror to see what was going on outside. Whenever she saw us coming to visit her, she would say to her husband, 'The Verweys are coming' and she would also follow us in her mirror as we left the hospital!

One day when we visited her, she asked us to open the Bible at Isaiah chapter 12, verse 2 and she read it to us in her weak voice, *"Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; for Yah, the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation."*

She gradually weakened and soon after, unexpectedly went home to be with the Lord. We happened to be away from home at the time, but Mr. Sonoda told us that she died with real peace in her heart. 'I'll be waiting for you in heaven', were the last words she spoke to him.

May the Lord help us to be available at all times to serve Him, even if it is just through some simple act of love to those around us.

January 28

“DAY BY DAY”

1. *“Day by day, and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment,
I’ve no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure,
Gives unto each day what He deems best,
Lovingly its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.*
2. *“Every day the Lord Himself is near me,
With a special mercy for each hour;
All my cares He fain would bear and cheer me,
He whose name is Counsellor and Power.
The protection of His child and treasure
Is a charge that on Himself He laid,
“As thy days, thy strength shall be in measure”,
This the pledge to me He made.*
3. *“Help me then, in every tribulation,
So to trust Thy promises, O Lord,
That I lose not faith’s sweet consolation,
Offered me within Thy holy Word.
Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
E’er to take, as from a father’s hand,
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
Till I reach the promised land.”*

(Lina Sandell - 1832-1903)

When sailing to Gothenburg in 1858, a great tragedy occurred in Lina Sandell’s life, when she could only look on helplessly while her father was accidentally drowned. However, she never lost her simple trust in Jesus and always had a deep assurance of His abiding Presence with her. She wrote this hymn, revealing her trust in the Lord.

January 29

HIS YOKE

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

(Matthew 11:29)

So often when we feel that we are carry a ‘yoke’, in other words, a burden of some sort, we forget that it may well be the Lord’s burden that He has given us for a special purpose and which we need to carry for Him.

It is important to realize that each burden, if it is His burden, will be light and only feels so heavy because we are trying to carry it ourselves. Any load, which He has laid on us, will never be too heavy for us, because He will give us strength every moment to carry it.

We just need to be careful lest someone tries to lay a burden on us that the Lord never intended us to bear. This even happened to some of the disciples and in that situation those seeking to lay a burden on the disciples were rebuked by the words, “ *... why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*” (Acts 15:10)

If we are resting in Him, He will lighten any load that He wants us to carry by putting Himself underneath it. So, in reality, we won’t even feel it because we are at rest in Him.

It has been well said that our burdens can be likened to the wings of a bird. At first the bird may well wonder why it needs them, but when it feels the urge to fly, how grateful it will be for the seeming burden.

So, may the Lord help us to continually cast our burdens on Him in faith, remembering that there is no burden that will not become a blessing to us, if the Lord has allowed it to enter our life.

However, if the burden is not one that He has entrusted to us, may we speedily cast it off in faith, thus rebuking the devil for seeking to unnecessarily load us with a burden, which is not the Lord’s will that we should bear.

January 30

A NEW PURPOSE IN LIFE

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” (Revelation 3:20)

Eric Minoura always thought that people who went to church were the most stupid people on earth. He just could not fathom why anyone would want to go to a place every week where someone stands on an elevated platform and yells at you! It seemed to him that they just tried to make you feel as unworthy and depressed as possible. In his deep aversion to the church, he decided never to be associated with church people. To his mind, to expose oneself Sunday after Sunday to such abuse was purely simple-minded!

In fact, Eric was not at all interested in contemplating anything spiritual. Having been brought up in a quasi-Buddhist home, he reckoned that he had learned enough spiritual values by observing his parents. They were very strong believers in Buddhism, and out of tradition, he followed in their footsteps.

There was, however one subject that intrigued him. He was somewhat interested in the after-life and could not help but wonder what would happen to him after he died. Therefore, he sometimes delved into astrology, magic and reincarnation for an answer.

Then, one day, he overheard his sister talking to their mother about someone called Jesus, who came to the earth to die on a cross for our sins. She said that He promised us eternal life if we believed in Him. But if we rejected Him, we would be eternally lost! As Eric listened, he sensed that she really believed in what she said.

The mention of eternal life particularly captured his attention and he asked his sister to tell him more about what she believed. She therefore gladly gave him some Christian literature.

In the course of reading it, Eric came across a written prayer, specifically asking Jesus into the heart and, as he read, he made that prayer his own. In those moments he knew that Jesus was a real Person, not just an historical character, and the peace of God flowed into his heart. He knew too that he had radically changed and suddenly had a purpose in life.

If you know any people who seemingly are indifferent to the Gospel, don't be put off giving them some Christian literature or telling them something about the Savior, who can make such a difference in their lives. They may be just like Eric, who seemed indifferent on the surface, but whose heart was really hungry for the Truth.

January 31

BUT GOD!

"My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:26)

Although we may not always have been conscious of it, if we look back, we will be able to recollect many times in our life when things would have been so different if God had not stepped in and undertaken for us in most difficult circumstances.

If we also recall some of the happenings in the Bible, we are often reminded of the incidents when God stepped in and overruled circumstances.

For instances, let us think of Joseph, who testified concerning the many times when God overruled in his life.

For example, when his brothers in jealousy deserted him and threw him into a well to die, he could later testify, "*... you meant evil against me; BUT GOD meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*" (Genesis 50:20)

Then, again we read in Acts 7:9-10 – "*And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. BUT GOD was with him and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.*"

We read too of how God's servant, David, was protected when Saul sought to kill him, "*... David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, BUT GOD did not deliver him into his hand.*" (1 Samuel 23:14)

So we can very clearly see from the Scriptures that, no matter what may happen to us, God always has the last word if we are open to His Will for our lives. So, let's look to Him every moment

of every day to overrule in all the circumstances which may cross our pathway, no matter how unexpected they may be, knowing that He holds everything that can possibly come our way in His blessed nail-pierced Hands.

February 1

THE LONELY HEART

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Ikuko and her three sisters were brought up on the idea that there is good in every religion. Her parents told her that she would need Tenrikyo (religion of heaven and earth) to give her a good moral standard in life. Then she would need Shintoism when she got married and Buddhism when she died to take care of the spirits of her ancestors. They told her not to be afraid of religion, but not to become fanatical!

Then one day, when she was eleven years of age, Ikuko saw a poster outside the local city office, advertising a Christian Sunday School gathering. Why not try Christianity, she thought, so she attended, and liked what she heard.

Her parents were quite happy for her to go to Sunday School, but, at seventeen, when she told them that she had become a Christian and wanted to get baptized, they resisted her. That was going too far, they said!

Ikuko resented her parents' attitude and felt frustrated and lonely. Her loneliness was considerably accentuated when, within a short period of time, marriages were arranged for two of her sisters and her other sister eloped! She alone was left! But her loneliness drove Ikuko nearer to Jesus. He became more precious to her than ever before and the Word of God consoled her lonely heart day by day.

Two years in college were followed by two years working in an orphanage. Ikuko then heard of the need of help in the office of a Christian organization and joined the staff, rejoicing to be able to serve the Savior.

Two years later, the minister of her church asked to see her and told her that he felt led to arrange a marriage for her with a keen member of his church. Ikuko was overjoyed. God had answered her prayers!

Ikuko stopped working when she married, but, having no children, restarted nine years later on a part-time basis in the same office that she had worked in before, happy again to be able to serve the Lord in her spare time.

If you are conscious of loneliness in your heart today, remember that the Lord is in control. In His own wonderful time, He will meet your deepest need!

February 2

THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST

“Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire. But a body You have prepared for Me.” (Hebrews 10:5)

When we read the Old Testament of the Bible, we see that the law, which was laid down there, was just a *“shadow of the good things to come”* (Hebrews 10:1). As a result of the offerings that were made in those days by the sacrifices of the law, sins could not be dealt with, because *“there is a reminder of sins every year”* (Hebrews 10:3). It was just a reminder of that which was to come when Jesus came to this earth.

God did not want burnt offerings, He wanted the sacrifice of Someone who would do His perfect will. That is why He had to send His only Son, Jesus, to this sinful earth.

When Jesus came into the world, He offered His Sinless Body to God. Through one man’s body, Adam, sin had entered the world, but Jesus gave His Body to God, to atone for all the sin of the world.

But, more than that, Jesus gave up His Will. Up until then, man had always wanted to have his own way. However, Jesus chose God’s Way and because of His Sacrifice our salvation became possible.

But, when we think on these things, what is our responsibility? We need to ask ourselves, (a) Is our will really in God’s Hands, (b) Is our body only used for God’s Glory? What of our strength, our possessions, our money? Are they really at His disposal?

No matter what the future holds, is God’s Will our prime concern? If so, His sweet Peace will reside in our hearts, no matter what happens.

Let us be utterly at His disposal, no matter what He may allow to come into our life.

February 3

THE POWER OF A SIMPLE TRACT

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)

A baby girl, Hideko, was born in a pathetically poor home in Northern China in the bitterly cold winter of 1938. The next two winters were equally cold, but there was no heating in the home. As a result, Hideko's hands and legs became so badly affected by frostbite that her legs eventually had to be amputated. So it was that Hideko San spent all her young years carried around on the back of some willing bearer, instead of running around in energetic delight, as the other boys and girls did.

When Hideko was seven, unable to stand the bitter privations of the land, the family decided to return to their native land, Japan. Even there, however, Hideko's hands grew gradually worse and they too had to be amputated.

By the time Hideko was eighteen years of age, such an accumulation of bitterness, misery and resentment had built up in her heart that she just longed for death. The cold, dark room in a lodging house was virtually her prison. She could not bear to go out and be stared at by those who passed her by. But then, one day, God moved in on her pathetic circumstances, when a simple Gospel tract was put under her door.

Hideko's yearning heart devoured the Words she read there, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28) and, as a result, she eventually managed to get in touch with a church not too far from her home. There God showed her that the state of her heart was much worse than the state of her body and she trusted Him to make her a *"new creature"* in Jesus. In addition to that, at last among the believers, she found the love and fellowship for which she had so long sought.

Hope and courage then flooded her heart and she even started to practice walking on the stumps of her legs and learnt to use the remnants of her arms as best she could. The next step for Hideko was to look for a job and, remarkably enough, she managed to find one in a factory. Her first task was to wrap soap and, with much prayer, Hideko managed to do the job efficiently. In fact, she did

the job so well that she later became the supervisor, earning more money than many girls of her own age!

Her heart was full of praise to God for undertaking for her so wonderfully. She knew that her mother had always thought that she would be a burden on others all her life, but when Jesus saved her, He changed her heart completely and gave her a desire to live and testify for Him. *“Even if I could choose the most wonderful pair of legs and the most skilful hands in the world, what use would they be to me without Jesus”*, is her simple testimony.

Let’s never forget the power of a simple tract, prayerfully given out. It may well result in the salvation of some needy soul.

February 4

NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD

1. *“Now thank we all our God,
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom his world rejoices,
Who, from our mothers’ arms,
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.*

2. *“O may this bounteous God,
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us,
And keep us in His grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.*

3. *“All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The Son, and him who reigns
With them in highest heaven,
The one, eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore;*

*For thus it was, is now,
And shall be evermore."*

(Martin Rinkart)

Martin Rinkart was a minister of the Gospel, who lived in Germany in the beginning of the seventeenth century, when wars and famine and pestilence were rife. A plague apparently swept through the town where he lived and he sometimes had to conduct up to fifty funerals a day - some of them for his own family members!

During those years of darkness and death, Pastor Rinkart is said to have written sixty-six sacred songs, among them - *'Now thank we all our God'*! How well he has brought home to us the fact that thankfulness does not only have to be in times of peace and prosperity. No matter what happens, we need to keep on praising God for the wondrous things that He has done for us in the past and will go on to do for us in the future, if we keep looking to Him!

February 5

IF WE ONLY BELIEVE

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." (John 11:25)

A missionary in Africa experienced great difficulty in trying to translate the word, *'believe'* in the Gospel of John, into the local dialect.

Then one day a runner came into the camp, having traveled a great distance with a very important message. After blurting out his story, he fell completely exhausted into a nearby hammock. He then muttered a phrase that seemed to express both his great weariness and his contentment at finding such a delightful place of relaxation. The missionary asked someone what the runner had said. *'Oh, he is saying, 'I'm at the end of myself, therefore I am resting all of my weight here!'*

The missionary then knew that at last he had found the right words to complete his translation!

Believing is a confession from the heart. If anyone asks us how we became a Christian, all we have to say is that we believe what Jesus said in His Word, that *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9) In doing so, they may well realize that that is just what they need to do too!

How well an anonymous writer has expressed the real meaning of the word 'faith'!

*"I asked for strength, that I might achieve:
I was made weak, that I might learn to humbly obey.
I asked for health, that I might do great things.
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy.
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for,
But everything that I hoped for.
I am of all men most richly blessed."*

February 6

ALWAYS CHOSEN LAST

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ... that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Corinthians. 1 27-9)

Aaron Wilson was born in Northern Ireland. He worked very hard at school, but somehow never seemed to be able to get good grades. He was pretty bad at sports and always seemed to get chosen last for teams. To make things worse, other boys picked on him because he was not very tough. As a result, Aaron felt that he must do something to prove his worth, so he started using offensive language to look macho and even started stealing sweets from the local store.

Then, one night, when he was thirteen years of age, he suddenly thought about dying. He had never really thought about the possibility before, but then he got scared, wondering what would happen to him after he died.

Just about that time, his mother and one of his brothers became Christians, and, watching them, Aaron saw a marked difference in their behavior. Many of the bad habits they had had before disappeared and this caused Aaron to realize that the most important thing in life was to ask their Savior to save him. So, he asked Jesus to forgive him for all the wrong things that he had done and, from that moment on, the peace of God flooded his heart and also took away his fear of death.

From that time on Aaron's great desire was to be used by God. He got a degree in business administration and worked for five years in the printing industry. Then God called him to serve Him in Japan, where he not only reached out to the lost, but also became a most valued addition to the office of the missionary society in which he served.

The Lord then brought across his pathway a dedicated Christian girl from Canada, who was also serving Him in Japan by teaching in a kindergarten. After their marriage, the Lord led them to unitedly serve Him in Japan where Crystal now teaches in an international Christian school and Aaron is in charge of the missionary society's office.

Do you know someone who is burdened by a sense of inadequacy? If so, Jesus is the answer. He will take hold of such a one and strengthen that person by His Spirit and go on to use them to His Glory.

February 7

OUR WINGS

"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

Are we sometimes restricted by some difficult circumstances, for instance, by illness or by people around us with whom we are not compatible? At such times it is so easy to sink into discouragement

and despair and to feel as if we are being weighed down by our circumstances.

If we will only remember at such times that the Lord is trying to teach us that we just need to look to Him so that He can make our weights become wings. He wants to teach us to get out from under our circumstances and experience His rest. He wants us to remember that we have wings and to use them whenever we have the opportunity. In doing so, we will not only be helped at such times, but also demonstrate His wonderful Power to those around us.

Let's remember what David said when God delivered him from the hands of his enemies – *“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; the God of my strength in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge”* (2 Samuel 22:2-3).

Then, our strength will also be renewed, we will walk and not faint and will even run and not be weary. We will no longer be discouraged or in despair, no matter what happens to us, because we will then see our circumstances from His perspective and His Strength will renew us moment by moment.

How well this thought has been expressed in the following words;-

*“The little birds trust God, for they go singing
From northern woods where autumn winds have blown,
With joyous faith their trackless pathway winging
To summer lands of song, afar, unknown.”*

The Lord can enable us to trust Him at least as well as the birds do!

February 8

THE STONE ROLLED AWAY

“In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.”

(Zechariah 13:1)

Yumiko Miki longed to present her husband with a baby. They had an unusually happy marriage, but she knew that he longed to have some children in their home. After three miscarriages,

Yumiko eventually gave birth to a baby boy and they were both overjoyed.

When Yumiko needed to go to the hospital for a post-natal examination, her husband decided to go with her for a routine checkup. He did so and two weeks later was hospitalized. Two weeks after that, he suddenly died of leukemia, at less than thirty years of age!

Yumiko was heartbroken and soon realized that she would have to find a job to earn money. But who would look after her little baby was the uppermost thought in her mind and she was so relieved when a neighbor offered to do so. Then later, when the neighbor invited her to go to church with her, it was difficult to refuse. More out of obligation than anything else, Yumiko did so once or twice, but thought little about what she heard.

Some five years later, when she visited her husband's hometown to pay respects to his spirit, Yumiko discovered that her husband's brother and his wife were Christians. While she was there, a cottage meeting was held in their home. The speaker told the story of Lazarus who had died, but who, at Jesus' command, had been called out of his tomb and raised from the dead.

Yumiko had often felt as if there was some heavy weight on top of her, weighing her down and she longed for it to be removed. On the next Sunday, Yumiko went to church and the message was on verse 1 of Zechariah, chapter 13, telling them that Jesus had died to cleanse their hearts from its sin and there and then she opened her heart to Jesus and asked Him to come into her life. A weight suddenly lifted from her heart and a great joy took its place. She knew then that she would never be alone again!

Are you feeling very alone or are carrying a burden that you long to get rid of? Just offload it at the feet of Jesus and His sweet peace and joy will enter your heart, just as it did in the heart of Yumiko.

February 9

THE BENEFITS OF OBEDIENCE

“If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you.” (Exodus 15:26)

God promised that if the people obeyed Him, they would be free from the diseases that plagued the Egyptians. How often God’s laws are designed to keep us from harm and we don’t realize it.

If we obey God, the circumstances in which we find ourselves will always be in our best interest. God has called us to keep His commandments and His laws are clearly written in the Bible. Obeying them is all that we need to do, but we must just remember not to put off doing so!

We may sometimes feel that obeying Him presents difficulties and that hardship may result from obeying. In such cases, we need to remember that we may only be suffering because we are doing good in an evil world and have not fallen out of God’s favor.

We must always remember too that the ability to obey God results from His working in us and that we are free to obey because He will always lift us up into His Presence. If we should stumble, we will not fall back, but be caught up and held in His loving Arms.

Sometimes we don’t understand the importance of obedience, but we should always realize that true freedom comes from obedience and knowing what not to do. All the restrictions that God places upon us are only for our good, helping us to avoid evil.

Not only should we obey the Lord, but we should also tell others in spiritual need of His wonderful mercy and love. We can remind them of the truth found in His precious Word that to obey will always be in their best interests.

February 10

ON SOLID ROCK

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

(Matthew 7:24)

While Hiroji Doi wandered through the streets of Fujiidera, looking for some kind of employment, he felt utterly frustrated. Was he doomed to be a failure all his life, he wondered? He had tried helping his father on their small farm and had hated it. Then he had taken a job as a waiter in a restaurant, but was irked by the long hours and hard work there. Next he got a job as an office boy in a bank, but then suddenly the bank had gone bankrupt

Utterly frustrated, one day he came across a notice on a telegraph pole, advertising a special meeting. Having nothing else to do, Hiroji decided to attend to see what it was all about. It turned out to be a Christian meeting and the preacher spoke about a wise man, who built his house on a rock and even when the winds beat against it, it did not collapse. He then went on to tell about another man who built his house on sand and when the rains came, it was washed away.

As he listened to the preacher apply the message, Hiroji realized that his life was just like the house built on sand and there and then, without hesitation, he asked the preacher to show him how to build his house on solid rock. From that day on, Hiroji's outlook on life completely changed. At last he had a purpose in life – to mean something for God!

He then entered a course at college, which qualified him as a teacher and was overjoyed when, just before his graduation, a marriage was arranged for him with a keen Christian girl. But just at that time war was looming on the horizon and Hiroji was conscripted into the army. He was sent to fight against the Chinese and later taken a prisoner for two and a half years.

In spite of the fact that his Bible was taken from him, with God's help, Hiroji battled through starvation, bitter cold, sickness, brain-washing and torture. Many of his companions succumbed, but in Hiroji's heart there was always a consciousness that his life was built

on the Rock and that God would take him back home alive and well. Hiroji's faith was rewarded and the wonderful day dawned when he was reunited with his family.

On retiring from school teaching, after thirty-nine years, Hiroji felt called to help a Christian organization with their ministry of hospital evangelism, where he was often heard to testify that if he had not built his life on the Rock when he was a young man, he would never have tasted the sweet satisfaction of witnessing to others.

Not only should we ask the Lord to help us to build our "house" on the Rock but to help others do so also!

February 11

NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE

1. *"Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross That raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be, Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer my God to Thee, Nearer to Thee!"*
2. *"Though like the wanderer, The sun gone down,
Darkness be over me, My rest a stone;
Yet in my dreams I'd be Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer my God to Thee, Nearer to Thee!"*
3. *"There let the way appear, Steps unto heaven:
All that Thou sendest me, In mercy given:
Angels to beckon me Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer my God to Thee, Nearer to Thee!"*
4. *"Then, with my waking thoughts Bright with Thy praise,
Out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise;
So by my woes to be Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer my God to Thee, Nearer to Thee!"*
5. *"Or if on joyful wing, Cleaving the sky,
Sun, moon, and stars forgot, Upwards I fly,
Still all my song shall be, Nearer, my God, to Thee,
Nearer, my God to Thee, Nearer to Thee!"*

(Sarah Flower Adams – 1805-1848)

This hymn, often thought to be the greatest one ever written by a woman, was written in 1840 by Sarah Adams, who was said to be beautiful and very fond of acting. Poor health, however, compelled her to give up her acting career.

In 1834 she married a civil engineer, John Brydges Adams and they made their home in London. Her weak constitution was caused by tuberculosis, which she and her sister inherited from their mother.

This hymn gained popularity in 1856 when it was published in America and set to the beautiful tune, Bethany, which Lowell Mason wrote for it.

February 12

GOD IS IN CONTROL OF EVERY CIRCUMSTANCE

"Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron." (Psalm 77: 19-20)

The Word tells us that God even leads His children 'in the sea' – certainly not a place where we would expect Him to be. He certainly sometimes leads his children in unexpected ways, but the wonderful truth is that He can make a path anywhere. He knows the way and He knows the destination. But we must always remember that, if we just follow Him, although we do not know the way, it is that very uncertainty that it will prepare us for deeper discipline. It is the unexpected stormy seas that make us strong. He knows the haven and also, without a doubt, that we will arrive safely, if we only trust Him.

Remember Joseph, who was falsely accused of committing a serious crime against Potiphar's wife. He was a good, honest, God-fearing man, but he was thrown into prison. Why? The Word tells us that *"The Lord was with Joseph"* (Genesis 39:21). God was working out His Plan, but for a while it necessitated Joseph being in prison. Although Joseph did not know it at the time, what seemed to be bad was actually good, because it was part of God's perfect plan.

When things seemingly go wrong, we just need to stand back and watch God work out His perfect plan in our lives! The wonderful thing is that even although we may not understand what God is doing, He knows the end from the beginning. If there were no uncertainties in life, no stormy seas, we would never learn to trust Him during the difficult circumstances that will inevitably come our way.

Let's make sure to put our trust in Him at all times, knowing that He never allows anything to happen to us that will not be for our good, no matter how difficult it may seem to us to be at the time.

How well an anonymous writer has expressed this truth in the following words:-

*“When circumstances threaten
To rob me of my peace,
He draws me close unto His breast
Where all my strivings cease.
“I’m looking past my circumstances
To heaven’s throne above.
My prayers have reached the heart of God
And I’m resting in His Love!”*

February 13

THE BROKENHEARTED

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)

Bernice Lenarcik was born in Canada and raised in a Catholic family. She went to church regularly with them, but did not experience a personal relationship with Jesus. She read the Bible, but often felt uneasy when she thought about what would happen to her after she died.

When she was in university, Bernice met a Japanese man who was studying in Canada. They became good friends and before long

were engaged. But things did not work out well and eventually they separated, leaving Bernice brokenhearted and depressed.

A few months later, some friends, who were working in Japan, contacted her and asked her if she would consider going there to teach English. Anxious to get away from her circumstances, Bernice agreed to do so for one year. After the year ended, however, the people who were employing her, said that they had nobody to replace her and would be so glad if she would stay on longer.

Deeply desiring to return to Canada, Bernice asked to see the minister's wife of the church that she had been attending while in Japan. During that conversation, the lady, sensing her need, suggested to Bernice that she should take Jesus as her Savior. She went on to tell that, if she did so, He would solve all her problems for her. There and then, Bernice opened her broken heart to Him and the very next day He did indeed start to solve her problems for her. Her employers said that she could go back to Canada for a holiday, so long as she came back for another year.

Bernice rejoiced, knowing that her Savior had answered her prayers and also healed her broken heart. Seven years later, she went back to Japan again as an English teacher and rejoiced that she had the opportunity of leading others to the Lord.

If you have a broken heart or know someone who does - Jesus is the answer! He has promised to heal the broken-hearted and He never fails to do so for those who open their hearts to Him.

February 14

OBEDIENCE

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1)

The greatest example of faith in the Bible is likely that of Abraham, of whom we read in the book of Genesis. He was a rich, prosperous farmer with a beautiful wife and many possessions. Then, at the age of some 75 years, God told him to go to a faraway country of which he knew nothing.

Can we imagine how he felt? No one else had heard the Words that he said God had spoken to him – not even his wife, Sarah. How many questions there must have been in his mind! Most of his possessions would have to be left behind! How would they survive on the journey? Would they ever reach their destination safely?

What a challenge! How would we have reacted in such circumstances? Abram obeyed God and gave over to God his right to choose his future himself and, as a result, God abundantly blessed him.

Maybe God has been speaking to you and showing you something that He wants you to do. Maybe He has and you don't want to obey Him. Just remember that if you don't obey, you and maybe many others will lose much blessing, because God never asks us to do anything that is not for our and others' ultimate good.

How well an anonymous author has expressed our need of obedience to God in the following words:-

*“Will you follow me? The Savior asked.
The road looked bright and fair
And filled with youthful hope and zeal
I answered, ‘Anywhere’”.*

*“Will you follow me? I almost blanched,
For the road was rough and new,
But I felt the grip of His steady Hand,
And it thrilled me through and through.*

*“Will you still follow me? It was a tender tone,
And it thrilled my inmost heart.
I answered not, but He drew me close,
And I knew we would never part.”*

February 15

THE CRAZY MATHEMATICS TEACHER

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Galatians 6:9)

Kazuko was convinced that her mathematics teacher at the school she attended was crazy. At every possible opportunity, he talked to them about his God. His religion seemed to be more important than

mathematics or anything else, she thought!

Kazuko eventually moved on to high school and the mathematics teacher was still on her trail. After several years of resisting his efforts, she decided one day to attend his church. Maybe there the minister there could help her solve some of the problems that she faced, she vaguely hoped. But the sermon was so long and the church so hot that Kazuko fell asleep.

Shortly afterwards, she graduated and started a job in a telephone exchange. The mathematics teacher had not given up on her, however, and invited her to a meeting that he had started in his home. She decided to go and it proved to be somewhat different from what she had expected. There Kazuko was conscious that God was speaking to her and from then on the Bible started to shed light on her problems.

It took another two years, however, before Kazuko was able to commit everything to God and to give her life unconditionally into His Hands. She certainly had not found the solution to all her problems, but she was conscious that she had become “a new creature in Christ Jesus”.

Then, one day, the minister suggested that she should pray for a ‘yoshi’ (a husband who would be willing to be adopted into her family and take responsibility for all its members. At the same time, he told her that there was a young man, called Isamu, who was a member of a neighboring church, whom he had in mind, and Kazuko just could not believe her ears.

On being approached, the young man prayed about the matter and felt that it was God’s will for him to marry Kazuko. All went well and, in due course, they became the proud parents of a son and two daughters. On looking back on her life, Kazuko could not help but be full of praise for the schoolteacher, who had once seemed to her so crazy!

If the Lord lays someone on your heart, don’t give up. God will work in His time, in His own wonderful way!

February 16

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

(John 14:15-17)

When Jesus was about to leave the disciples, He told them that He would not leave them alone, but that He would send the Holy Spirit to care for them, guide them and be with them forever.

The Holy Spirit is a member of the Trinity. When Jesus was baptized, the Spirit of God descended like a dove on Jesus and the voice from heaven proclaimed the Father’s approval of Jesus as His divine Son.

The world at large cannot relate to the Holy Spirit, but, if Jesus is our Savior, He lives with us and He teaches us and reminds us of Jesus’ words. He also convicts us of sin, reveals to us God’s righteousness and tells us of God’s judgment on evil. He also guides us into truth, gives us spiritual insight and brings glory to Christ through us.

The Holy Spirit has been active since the beginning of time, but at Pentecost, of which we read in Acts chapter 2, He came to live in all who have taken Jesus as their Savior. He helps us understand the Bible and gives us deep and lasting peace in our hearts, so that we have no need to fear the present or the future.

He also empowers believers in an extraordinary way for special tasks or in times of hardship. We should therefore seek His help as we face daily problems, as well as major challenges. He is there to help us every moment of the day. The fact too that He is a spirit means that He can be present anywhere and at any time.

We are told to *“live in the Spirit”* and to *“walk in the Spirit”* (Galatians 5:25), to *“be filled with the Spirit”* (Ephesians 5:18).

If we trust God, He will help us to avail ourselves of the sublime blessing that the Holy Spirit can bring into our lives as we rely on Him moment by moment. It is He who enables us to intercede for the salvation of precious souls.

February 17

A BELIEVING MOTHER

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’” (Hebrews 13:5)

‘I’m not going to Sunday School today!’ Michael stubbornly told his mother one Sunday morning. ‘We’re not going either,’ declared his two brothers! Mrs. Bretton, who was a Christian, was very upset, but did not pursue the conversation any further on that day.

When Michael was only two years old, her husband had left her for another woman. It had been a most painful experience, but, as a result, she had found Jesus as her Savior and firmly believed in God’s Word, which said that He would be a *“father of the fatherless”* (Psalm 68:5).

On the day that they refused to go with her, however, she went to church alone with a very heavy heart and could hardly believe her ears when the minister preached that morning on Rachel, who wept for her children. “If you are weeping for your children, don’t worry. They will be alright!” he said, and, from that moment on, Mrs. Bretton never worried again about them.

To her great joy, when Michael was ten years of age, he first testified in public that he had trusted Jesus to take away his sins and from then on his life radically changed, even at school. When asked to prepare an essay on evolution, he wrote that some people believe in evolution, but that he believed in a Creator God, who by his Power and Word made all things! Michael also testified openly to his friends about Jesus and his best friend, Greg, also found the Savior.

On leaving school, Michael worked for a finance company for some time, but was always conscious that God had a greater plan for his life. Then, one day, he happened to read an article about the need for young people who were willing to dedicate two years of their lives to teach English in churches in Japan. It said that through such an outreach, many more Japanese would start going to church, than if all the services were in the Japanese language. Michael applied and was accepted.

Michael's two brothers also found Christ as their Savior and the mother, who had wept for her three sons, had the joy of seeing them all saved and even one of them serving her Savior in faraway Japan.

Are you are praying for unsaved loved-ones? Take courage and cling in faith to the promises of God. Also encourage other Christians, who are in similar circumstances, to hold on to His Promises for their salvation.

February 18

I LOVE TO TELL THE STORY

1. *"I love tell the story Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, Of Jesus and His love,
I love to tell the story, Because I know 'tis true;
It satisfied my longings As nothing else would do.*

(Chorus)

*"I love to tell the story! 'Twill be my theme in glory
To tell the old, old story Of Jesus and his love.*

2. *"I love to tell the story; More wonderful it seems
Than all the golden fancies Of all our golden dreams.
I love to tell the story, It did so much for me;
And that is just the reason I tell it now to thee.*

3. *"I love to tell the story; 'Tis pleasant to repeat
What seems each time I tell it More wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story; For some have never heard
The message of salvation From God's own Holy Word.*

4. *"I love to tell the story; For those who know it best
Seem hungering and thirsting To hear it like the rest.
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,
'Twill be the old, old story That I have loved so long."*

(Katherine Hankey - 1834-1910)

When Katherine Hankey was 30 years of age, she was overtaken by a very serious illness and while she was recovering, she wrote a poem based on the life of her Savior. Her great desire was that others would somehow experience the same peace and joy she had known since giving her life to Christ.

The poem was in two parts and apparently had some 50 verses, which later became the basis for this hymn and for another very well known hymn, 'Tell me the old, old Story'.

February 19

HOW TO HANDLE CIRCUMSANCES

"Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him." (2 Chronicles 32:7)

In the above passage we read of the time when Hezekiah was facing the prospect of an Assyrian invasion, we see that he did everything he could to deal with the situation, but trusted God for the outcome.

When we are faced with difficult situations, we need to do just the same. We should do our best to solve the problem, but commit the situation to God, trusting Him for the solution.

But we also need to remember that difficult circumstances can also be God's way of training us. If we turn to the New Testament, we see that James assumes that we will have trials and that we will profit from them. In fact, he tells us to *"... count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."* (James 1:2-3)

In other words, we are told to endure trials and to turn them into opportunities to grow spiritually. As a result, such difficult times will teach us to persevere, no matter what perverse circumstances may come our way, knowing that God will not leave us alone with our problems.

How well the anonymous writer has expressed this truth in the following lines:-

*"My God knows all that's happening;
Beginning to the end;
His presence is my comfort,
He is my dearest Friend."*

February 20

IN PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

"I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:12-13)

Susan Scarino was brought up in a Catholic home and always considered herself to be a Christian. But her family showed no love to one another. Her father was manic-depressive and on psychotic medication most of his life. From the time she was five years old, he was in and out of mental hospitals. Every three or four years during his entire life, he was literally dragged out of their home and taken to a mental institution. When he was home, in between his times of hospitalization, he was sometimes physically and mentally abusive towards the family members.

Then, during the last six months of his life, a wonderful thing happened, he found Jesus as his Savior and asked them to forgive him. Those last months, until he went to heaven, were so different in their home. Susan had always hated her father, blaming him for her own unhappiness, but at last she found it in her heart to love him.

She had always looked for love, security and happiness in her life. When she graduated from teacher-training college, she married a fellow-teacher, thinking that in that way her desires would be fulfilled. But, being a perfectionist, she was never satisfied. When her husband became abusive towards her, she could not take it and their marriage ended in divorce and the loneliness that she then experienced was overwhelming.

She just did not know what to do and felt frozen with fear, not wanting to accept her circumstances. As a result, she lapsed into deep depression and was angry with God for putting her into a situation that she could not handle. She felt that she just had no reason to live any longer and cried to God to let her die. When death did not come, in desperation, she pled with Him for forgiveness, and finally surrendered herself to the Lord and accepted her circumstances, asking Him to reveal to her His will for her life.

As a result, Susan joined an evangelical church, began to study the Bible, trusted in Jesus and became a changed person. From

then on her prayer was that God would take complete control of her future and guide her step by step. She had never known true happiness, but at last she could trust Him for her future and He led her to share her joy and happiness with needy souls in the heathen darkness of Japan.

Do you know someone who is longing for love and happiness today? Reach out to them with the Gospel and a deep joy may well fill their hearts and yours too.

February 21

HIS GIFTS TO US

“... earnestly desire the best gifts.” (1 Corinthians 12:31)

God has given special gifts and tasks to everyone in his church. No one has been called just to sit around and do nothing. The work of the church will not get done unless we all do what God has called us to do. It is our responsibility to discern what our God-given gift is and to use it for the extension of His kingdom.

We can learn so much from the honey-bees. They have a most highly developed social structure. A hive can house as many as 80,000 bees. The queen is the centre of the hive, but each bee has a specialized duty to fulfill.

The forager bees venture outside the hive to collect food. The guardian bees protect the hive from any intruders. The undertakers are responsible for removing dead bodies from the hive. The water collectors bring in moisture to regulate the humidity. The plasterers repair the hive with their cement. The fanners are stationed at the entrance and fan the particular scent of their hive outward to help lost bees find their home. Isn't it incredible to think that there is so much planning just for such insignificant insects as bees!

We need to remember that God expects us to use the gifts that He has given us. We have all been given special gifts to help build God's kingdom. Jesus expects us to use those talents so that they will help His kingdom to grow. He expects us to account for what we do with the gifts that He has given us.

Just as the bees know their allocated task, may we realize the task that the Lord has given us and fulfill it, so that His Kingdom may be

advanced in this needy world. But above all, we need to remember that He has given us the most wonderful gift of rest, as is written in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 11, verse 28, "*Come to Me, all you labor and who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*"

It has been well said that the richest gifts that God can give us are those that we never welcome – they are pain and sorrow! There just seems nothing good about them, but the gifts that God gives with them are surely the richest that the human spirit can experience. They can be the means of bringing us into heart to heart contact with our heavenly Father. When repeated strokes of adversity have robbed us of health, friends, money and favorable circumstances, God really becomes the center of our life. We then come to love Him for who He is and not for the gifts He gives us.

Let's realize that everything that He allows to come across our pathway in life has first passed through His loving, nail-pierced Hands and is only intended to be for our benefit.

February 22

THE GIRL WHO DIDN'T BELIEVE IN MIRACLES!

"For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

(Romans 10:13)

When Ishigane San first heard that she had contracted tuberculosis, she was sure that she would be in and out of the hospital in no time. Complications had soon set in, however, and instead of getting better, as she had so much hoped, her condition had gradually deteriorated.

As a result, frequent clashes with the medical staff and sharp words aimed at her fellow-patients robbed her of friends and left her emotionally drained. Then, after a lung hemorrhage she was convinced that before long she would die. Until then, she had often sneered at patients who were religious, but now she began to long for some kind of religion in which she could put her trust. She just wondered how she could ever find the peace that they seemed to have in their hearts.

Ishigane San was, however, most undecided as to where to look for help. But when a Bible-woman happened to be visiting the patient in the next bed one day, she pretended not to be interested, but in fact listened carefully to all that was being said. She was deeply touched when she heard the Bible being read. She had never heard such wonderful words before and plucked up the courage to ask the Bible-woman to get her a copy.

The Bible-woman gladly did so and, from that time on, Ishigane San looked forward to her weekly visits. She very much wanted to believe in the God that she read of in the Bible, but somehow found it most difficult to accept the miracles that were also told of there.

Then, one day the Bible-woman, sensing her problem, explained to her that Jesus was not just a mere human being, but the God of the universe. As a result, before long, Ishigane San was able to realize that Jesus was indeed God and took Him as her own personal Savior.

But physically, she became weaker and weaker and did not even have the strength to lift up the Bible to read it. The Bible-woman then wrote Scripture verses on pieces of paper each time that she visited the hospital and put them beside her pillow. One morning, however, when the Bible-woman went to give her a new verse, she found the bed was empty. She asked to see the nurse on duty only to be told that Ishigane San had died.

Maybe you know someone who is lying on a hospital bed and really needs the Savior, even although they may be unconscious of that need. What a challenge it is to think that just a verse of Scripture that you could give that person to read might make all the difference as to where he or she spends Eternity.

February 23

OUR GOAL IN LIFE

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

What is our goal in life? Paul's goal was that *"... Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death."* (Philippians 1:20) He knew what lay ahead of him in Jerusalem, but he said, *"... none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."* (Acts 20:24)

Paul's aim in life was, above all, to finish the task that God had given him. It did not matter what the cost was. He was willing even to be put into prison or to die, if that would further the cause. He knew that the Lord would appoint others to carry on the task of proclaiming the Gospel after he was gone.

What we need to remember is that God does not always work in the way that seems best to us. If we think back on the way in which He guided the Israelites to the promised land, He took them by a seemingly round-about route to avoid having to fight with the Philistines, who might have killed many of them.

So it may well be with us. If God does not lead us along the shortest path to our goal, we should not complain. He can see the end from the beginning, which we cannot. He always knows the best and safest way.

May the Lord help us to be so focused on the task which He has given us, that we can accept even the most difficult circumstances in which we find ourselves as part of His Plan for our ministry. Let's invest our time in something that will outlast us, no matter what the cost may be.

Paul said that his goal was to know Christ, to be like Him and to fulfill His purpose for his life and that goal absorbed all of Paul's time and energy. This should also be our goal and may we be willing to put aside anything that would distract us from being effective in God's service.

February 24

TERRIFIED BY THE PRIESTS

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Little Masaru Tokutani always listened spellbound when the Buddhist priest visited their home and told them stories. One day the priest said that his tongue might be pulled out if he told lies. So, as a result, deep down in his heart, Masaru was terrified of him.

After he graduated from high school, he was apprenticed to a printer and lived in the firm’s dormitory. At last he was on his own and felt that he could think for himself. Worshipping at the Buddhist altar was behind him, he reckoned.

During the next ten years or so, Masaru experienced all that the world had to offer – gambling, drink and women and he married when he was twenty-eight. Before long, however, his wife, Machiko, desperately concerned about her husband’s drinking habits, sought help.

Not knowing where to turn, she came across a church in their neighborhood and for the next four years, unbeknown to Masaru, attended the services on Sundays when he was at work. Then, one evening, the minister unexpectedly visited their home and Masaru was livid. “We are agnostics”, he told the minister in no uncertain terms, and speedily closed the door.

But Machiko’s faith blossomed through all the hardships of her married life. She loved the Lord and desperately wanted to be baptized. The only reason she kept putting it off was because the minister told her that she should first consult her husband. After much prayer, she ventured to tell Masaru and, to her utter amazement, he agreed and also attended her baptismal service.

Two months later, the church held special meetings. Masaru attended and yielded his life to the Lord. From then on, his faith progressed by leaps and bounds and, longing to serve his Savior, he joined a Christian printing press and helped to get the message of salvation out to many who knew nothing of his Savior.

No one is too hard for us to reach with the Gospel. Let’s trust Him, as never before, for the salvation of those with whom we come into contact.

February 25

THERE IS A FOUNTAIN FILLED WITH
BLOOD

1. *"There is a fountain fill'd with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains: (x3)
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.*
2. *"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away: (x3)
And there may I, Though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.*
3. *"Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its pow'r,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more: (x3)
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.*
4. *"E'er since, by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die: (x3)
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.*
5. *Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing thy pow'r to save,
When this poor lisp-ing stamm'ring tongue
Lies silent in the grave: (x3)
When this poor lisp-ing, stamm'ring tongue
Lies silent in the grave.*

William Cowper (1731-1800)

William Cowper suffered from deep depression most of his life and in 1764 he found himself within the walls of an institution for the mentally ill. There in the asylum, he found Christ through reading the Bible. He produced poems at an amazing rate and is renowned in literary circles as one of England's greatest poets.

This hymn is said to have been written in the year 1770 and to have been based on Zechariah 13:1, "*In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.*"

February 26

THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

"... I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content."

(Philippians 4:11)

How easy it is sometimes to want to change difficult circumstances that come across our path. It is only the Lord Himself who can teach us the secret of contentment in all circumstances, even in ill-health or in the loss of a loved-one, who we feel that we can never live without.

Paul speaks to us in no uncertain terms when he says in 2 Corinthians 12:10, "*... I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*"

It has been so well said that we should accept the circumstances that we cannot change, ask for the courage to change the things that we can change and the wisdom to know the difference.

We need to remember too that contentment grows out of devotion to Christ. Jesus says that we can only have one master. We live in a materialistic society where people seem to spend all their lives collecting and storing money, only to die and leave it behind. Their desire for money and what it can buy far outweighs their commitment to God and spiritual issues. In fact the Bible tells us in 1 Timothy, chapter 6, verse 10, "*the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*".

When we feel discontentment creeping into our hearts, we need to believe His Word, which says, "*... be content with such things*

as you have. For He Himself has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6)

How well too the anonymous writer has expressed what our attitude should be in these words:-

*"O Lord, give me the grace to be
Content with what You give to me!
No! More than that - let me rejoice
Because it is Your choice!"*

February 27

SO MANY GODS!

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live'." (John 11:25)

Toichi Asoo was lying on his hospital bed one day, when the doctor entered his room and told him that he needed to cut out seven of his ribs and his left lung. There was just no other way to guarantee a good recovery, he said.

After battling tuberculosis for the past fourteen years, Toichi was desperate and ready to try anything. He felt that he would rather be dead than continue to lie there year after year! If only he could be a boy again and escape from the grim reality of life, he often thought. Those days had been such happy ones, playing carefree with his four brothers and sisters. He had so much enjoyed going to school too. Then, at the age of eighteen, the bottom had fallen out of his world when he was diagnosed as having tuberculosis.

Lying flat on his back, day after day, he had sometimes contemplated committing suicide, but just did not know how effectively to carry it out. His mother had taught him to be open to all the gods, but the more he read about the various religions, the more confused he had become. Toichi reckoned that even if he worshipped a different one every day, he might still miss worshipping the right one!

His troubled thoughts were interrupted one day when an unknown young man entered his room. He introduced himself as the

hospital evangelist and said, "I understand that you are to undergo an operation tomorrow. May I pray with you?" To Toichi, he seemed like an angel sent down from heaven and he gladly assented to his request. The evangelist went on to explain the way of salvation and Toichi listened most eagerly. That night he slept well and was relatively calm as the time for the operation drew near. Somehow, what the evangelist had said had brought peace into his heart.

Three days after the operation, as he lay in pain on his bed, wondering if he would live or die, it was as if he suddenly felt the presence of the Living God and he knew without a shadow of doubt that Jesus had died for him on the Cross and risen from the dead, so that he might be saved.

The surgery proved to be a complete success and the following year a marriage was arranged for him with a fellow-believer in the church where he had become an active member.

Maybe there is someone you know who is sick and just waiting for a word of encouragement that will result in them finding the Savior. May we always be available to reach out to needy souls.

February 28

FLOURISHING IN OLD AGE

"Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him."

(Psalm 92: 13-15)

Much thought and emphasis is placed these days on how it is possible to live longer and this becomes an interesting topic, especially the older one gets. But, no matter how hard we try, we eventually have to come to the conclusion that there is no way to avoid growing old.

As we grow older, we can dwell on the hardships and failures of our past or we can rather think about God's faithfulness to us down the years and look forward to what He has in store for us.

Maybe what we really need to realize is that the glory of old age is when all the props gradually vanish out of our lives. The love and companionship on which we have leaned gradually disappear. When we start to think about it, we may well ultimately come to the conclusion that we will only be left with the One who never leaves us, never disappoints us and always understands us.

It is so easy to lose heart as we age and health deteriorates, physical strength grows weaker and even memory grows cloudy. But we need to remember that there is still a vital ministry for us, even when we are old!

God allowed Sarah to wait until she was 90 years old before she gave birth to Isaac. Moses was 80 years old when God appeared to him in the burning bush and gave him the vision of delivering Israel out of the hands of the Egyptians.

We just do not know what God has in store for us, but may we keep on looking to Him to use us until the day He sees fit to take us to Himself.

How well the anonymous writer has expressed it in the following words:-

*“O God, don’t let my heart grow cold
As time flies by and I grow old.
For souls are dying, lost in sin;
Someone in love must bring them in!”*

February 29

THE BEST MEDICINE

“A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.” (Proverbs 17:22)

Yukitoku Watanabe was hospitalized with a lung problem and became very depressed. He was a pharmacist and had worked very hard to get his business going, but now, all of his efforts seemed to have been in vain. Then one day a friend sent him a Bible. He did not know where to begin reading it, so he started with the Psalms. They looked sort of easy to understand.

When he reached Psalm 6, it so vividly described his own problems – especially the Words, *“Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I*

am weak" in verse 2, that he started to think about spiritual things. He suddenly saw the frailty of man and began to realize that a person who did not deal with his sin problem was unstable – just like a house built on sand – and he yielded his heart to the Lord!

Before long, Yukitoku was able to leave the hospital. Back in his business, he began to realize how inconsistent it was to prescribe medicine, without taking into account a person's spiritual, as well as their physical needs, and, from that time on, he made a point of talking personally to his customers.

For instance, when people go into his shop to buy sleeping pills, he questions them as to why they could not sleep. He then often read a verse from the Bible to them, for example, *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God"* (Philippians 4:6). Then he would explain to them what it means to be a Christian.

Yukitoku realized that the health of the mind and that of the body are very closely related and holds a Bible study at his home for any interested customers. He then boldly testifies that being hospitalized was a blessing in disguise for him, for it was there that he first learned of the Savior. Among others, a 57-year-old gentleman, who was suffering from insomnia and heart palpitations, became an earnest seeker. He accepted Christ and, after doing so, his health was completely restored.

May we be like Yukitoku, who could boldly testify of his Savior to those with whom he came into contact daily.

March 1

PERFECTION, OUR GOAL

"... you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

(Matthew 5:48)

Perfection is a goal toward which we are to aim. But how can we become perfect is the question! We need to realize, however, that the word "perfect" really means mature or complete, not necessarily flawless.

When Paul wrote his epistle to the Colossian church, he encouraged them to become mature spiritually and to be constantly

telling others about our Savior. *“Him we preach, Warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”* (Colossians 1:28) To attain this, we must work wholeheartedly, like athletes do, to attain their goals.

But we should not strive in our own strength alone. We always need to remember that we have the wonderful Power of the Holy Spirit abiding in us. We can learn and grow daily, knowing that God gives us the energy to become more mature and more usable in His service.

There is no doubt that in this life we will never be flawless, but the Bible encourages us to be as much like Christ in our character as we can. In other words, we are to separate ourselves from the world’s sinful values and aim to be like Him in holiness.

We cannot achieve a Christlike character and holy living all at once, but we need to grow toward maturity, just as we expect children to develop as they grow older. We must grow toward maturity in love, doing our best to love others as God loves us. By doing so, we will be able to carry His love and mercy into the world.

Alongside of that, as far as we are concerned, we need to realize that perfection will only be completed in us when we see Christ face to face, because we read in 1 John chapter 3 verse 2 that when Christ appears, we will be given a new body and we shall be like Him.

His unfailing Word has told us in the epistle of Jude, verses 24-25-*“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.”*

How amazing will be the day when we come into Christ’s presence!

March 2

DRIVEN BY WEAKNESS

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10)

Twelve-year-old Yoko Hiratsuka arrived back from school one day, she slid open the front door, with a typical Japanese greeting, “Tadaima” (“I’m home!”), kicked off her shoes and ran into the kitchen. The scene, which met her gaze, caused Yoko to realize that something very serious must have happened. Although little was said to her at the time, Yoko later discovered that her father had run over a man with his car and killed him. In an attempt to make atonement, he had immediately handed in his resignation as a school teacher!

The days that followed were very hard ones for the whole family. Although his resignation had not been accepted, it was six months before Mr. Hiratsuka could bring himself to start teaching again. Yoko was also having a hard time, because the nearest grade school to her home was run by Catholic nuns and her father was an avowed agnostic. “When I die, you can throw my ashes into the sea”, he occasionally remarked to one or other of the family members who happened to be listening. To him that seemed the most convenient solution!

Convenience had also decided his daughter’s school, but he little realized the mental conflict it imposed on her. It was a good school, but there Yoko learnt about the Christians’ God, said the Lord’s Prayer once a day and made the sign of the Cross. As a result, her brother and his friends would not leave her in peace, constantly teasing her about the “Jesus” school” that she attended. Eventually, Yoko came to the conclusion that religion was just for the weak and often cried herself to sleep.

After her school days were over, Yoko studied in a nursing college for four years, but again felt inadequate and desperately wanted someone or something to lean on. During those days, however, she shared a room with a Christian girl, called Mitsuko, with whom she occasionally went to church. She was also invited to go to a youth camp and, having nothing else to do, agreed to go and there handed her life over to Jesus.

God then gave Yoko a desire to learn more about her Savior and she broke away from her nursing course to spend a year at a Bible college. Shortly afterwards, a marriage was arranged for her with Evangelist Tamada and at last she found in the Lord's service the satisfaction she had long sought in life.

March 3

TAKE MY LIFE, AND LET IT BE

1. *"Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my hands, and let the move
At the impulse of Thy love. (x2)*

2. *"Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee;
Take my voice, and let me sing,
Always, only for my King. (x2)*

3. *"Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise. (x2)*

4. *"Take my will, and make it Thine!
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart, it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne." (x2)*

(Frances Havergal)

These words were written by Frances Havergal in 1874, but they were not put into print until 1878. It is told that when she read the words over, she suddenly thought of the jewelry, which her family members and friends had given her, and joyfully donated most of it to her church missionary society.

Just to make sure that she gave everything, she included a check to cover the monetary value of the few jewels that she had chosen to keep. "I don't think I need to tell you that I have never packed a box with such pleasure", she later said! She was determined, no matter what the cost, to hold nothing back from the Lord.

March 4

SERVING OTHERS

“But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.” (Matthew 20:25-26)

It comes across most clearly in the Scriptures that if we go out of our way to serve others, we are turning the values of the world upside down. But we always need to remember that serving others is the hall-mark of a true Christian.

The other disciples were upset with James and John for trying to grab the top positions, when James and John went to Jesus and said, *“... Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory.”* Jesus answer was, *“You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?”* They said to Him, *“We are able.”* So Jesus said to them, *“You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared”.* (Mark 10:37-40)

In this way, Jesus showed them that the greatest person in God’s kingdom is the servant of all. In other words, authority among Christians is not given because of ambition, respect or self-importance, but for usefulness in God’s service.

Jesus presented leadership from a new perspective. He showed us that instead of expecting people to serve us, we should serve them. If we look at Jesus’ life and ministry, we see that He spent his whole life serving others and gave it away, so that others would be blessed. By serving others, His children can also turn the world’s values upside down. In actual fact it is only by serving others that we show real Christian leadership.

If we want to live for Him, we must be ready to say and do what may well seem strange to those who don’t know Him. We must be willing to give when others take and to love when others hate. By

giving up our own rights in order to serve others, we will be a real testimony for Him and used for the salvation of precious souls. Also, in doing so, we will reveal our love of God to others. We read also in Galatians, chapter 5, verse 14 that all the law is fulfilled in the Words, *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

It has been said that serving others is the Christian's best way of becoming more like Christ Himself.

March 5

A RACE IN THE SNOW

"Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth, and His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'" (John 9:1-2)

As a child, there seemed to be just nothing that the doctors could do for Kazutoshi. But his mother, hoping against hope, often took him to the nearby temple and there poured out the burden of her heart in prayer. While she did so, Kazutoshi looked longingly at the boys who happily played in the temple grounds and bemoaned the bitter fate that had left him a helpless cripple.

But one day something wonderful happened. A friend lifted him into his little cart and got him to church by towing him behind his bicycle. That day was a wonderful day for Kazutoshi. The minister spoke from John, chapter 9 and the Words, *"... Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."*(v.3) There and then Kazutoshi opened his heart to the Savior, knowing that his deformed body was indwelt by the Living God. His next prayer was a prayer that he hardly dared to pray, "Dear Lord, if it is your will, please lead me to a good wife, who can take me around so that I can testify to others for you."

God heard and answered his prayer. Yukiko, a student nurse, was a member of the church which Kazutoshi attended. She had watched him drag his poor useless body into the church and her heart had been filled with compassion. "Lord, give him a good wife whose legs can walk for him and whose hands can minister to his needs", she silently prayed. As soon as she had done so, she was conscious that the Lord was saying to her, "What about you?"

Yukiko's family was vehemently opposed to the marriage, but she followed His guidance and became Mrs. Mitsuhashi.

For a while they lived in an unused garage and their only means of transport was a bicycle and a rear-car. But the winter snow made traveling hazardous, as they sought to minister to the spiritual needs of those around them. One day the rear-car suddenly overturned and Kazutoshi was hurt. There and then Yukiko fell down on her knees beside him and prayed, "Dear Lord, it does not matter how old it is, but please give us a car". God answered her prayer and they received a gift, which enabled them to buy a secondhand car.

But whether towed in a rear-car behind an old bicycle or driven around in a car, the Mitsuhashis are abundantly conscious of the love of God in every circumstance of their lives. Their great desire is to run with patience that race that is set before them in the land of snow.

We should seek, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be, to press on and be a testimony for Him to those with whom we come in contact.

March 6

HOW TO TREAT OTHERS

"You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

(Matthew 5:43-44)

It is often said that there are two types of people in the world – those who come into a room and say, "Here I am!" and those who say, "Oh, there you are!" In other words, those who regard themselves as most important and those who are more concerned about others!

Even beyond loving our acquaintances, Jesus commands us also to love our enemies. He tells us not to retaliate to those who are seemingly against us, but rather to love and pray for them. In that way we will overcome evil with good.

If we love our enemies and treat them well, we will really show that Jesus is Lord of our lives. But this is only possible for us to do, if we have given ourselves fully to Him, because only He can deliver us from natural selfishness. We must trust Him to help us even to show love to those for whom we do not naturally feel any love at all.

There will always be some people that we do not like as well as we do others, but we must be careful that we do not have an attitude, which causes us to despise or ignore those that we may find it hard to like. Christian love is not a feeling, but a choice. We should always treat others with respect, whether or not we feel affection toward them.

If we have a problem with a friend, we need to resolve it as soon as possible. We must always remember that our attitude towards others, which may well result in a broken relationship, reflects on our relationship with God.

In other words, if we choose to love others, God will help us show that love to them in whatever way may be necessary. It is a deliberate choice we make despite our feelings or emotions.

An anonymous writer has expressed this vital need in the following lines:-

*“Lord, teach us the secret of loving,
The love You are asking today;
Then help us to love one another
For this we most earnestly pray.”*

March 7

THE BOUNCER

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Hideo Obata could never seem to get rid of the dull ache that he had in his heart. He could not help but constantly compare his two mothers. His real mother had always been so kind and loving, but his father's second wife was so unkind and severe. He was sure that she hated him.

One morning he set off on an errand, after having speedily eaten a bowl of tasteless cold rice gruel. Then, having forgotten something, he went back into the house to find his step-mother enjoying a delicious breakfast of steaming hot rice, a raw egg and some soup. Hideo said nothing, but deep down in his heart he was hurt. Alongside of that, he discovered that she had told stories of his alleged bad conduct to his father, who had kicked and beat him as a result.

One day, the eleven-year-old Hideo could stand it no longer and, collecting a few essentials in a little bag, ran away from home. He had enough money to buy a railway ticket to where his uncle lived in the city of Wakayama. But there he found that he was far from welcome and, six months later, he ran away again and managed to find work in a cardboard-box factory, spending most of his spare time with some hoodlum friends. His next step was to get a job in a bar as a bouncer, from which unruly drunks needed to be evicted from time to time.

Then a sudden lung hemorrhage completely changed the course of Hideo's life and he found himself lying on a hospital bed. He was completely downcast and discouraged until a fellow-patient started to tell him about a Living God who could meet his every need. Hideo then started reading the New Testament that the patient had given him and, the more he read, the more he came to realize that he desperately needed the salvation that this God had to offer. One day, unable to stand the conviction of sin that he felt in his heart any longer, Hideo ran out into the grounds of the hospital, fell down on his knees and gave his heart to God, confessing his sins and asking God to forgive him.

The change in his life and conduct was so radical that those around him simply could not believe their eyes and ears. The one time bouncer had become a bold witness for his Savior.

Let's use every opportunity that we can to testify to others about our Savior, no matter how impossible a change in their life may seem to us to be.

March 8

THE POWER OF PRAYER

"Then Samson called to the Lord, saying, 'O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once. O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!'" (Judges 16:28)

When we read about the life of Samson, we perhaps wonder that, in spite of his past, God still answered his prayers and destroyed the pagan temple and the worshippers that were there and went on to use him. God loved him even to the end.

One of the effects of sin in our life is often to keep us from feeling like praying. But we do not have to be perfect in our conduct as a condition of God hearing our prayer. We should, however, be careful not to let feelings of guilt over past sin keep us from the only means of restoring our relationship with the Lord, if we feel that He is not near us any more.

It does not matter how long we have been away from God, He is always ready to hear our prayers and restore a right relationship with us. If God could still work in Samson's most difficult situation, He can certainly undertake for us, no matter what our problems may be.

Maybe there is someone you know who feels that he or she has failed the Lord so badly that there is no way back to Him. If so, tell them about Samson and the wonderful way in which God used him right until the very last day of his life, in spite of all that he had done during his life to disappoint the Lord.

When we pray for others, we become partners with God in His wonderful work of salvation. When we ask God to work on behalf of someone in need, we are asking God to provide for that person something that we ourselves cannot possibly provide. We are acting as a go-between, trusting God to direct His wonderful Power in their direction.

How well it has been said, "Prayer is not a weapon in our spiritual warfare, but the battle-ground itself."

The devil will always tempt us to shorten our time of prayer, or even to postpone it or omit it altogether! May we never listen to his voice, but always rejoice that the Holy Spirit Himself has been given to us to enable us to be effective in our fellowship with the Lord and in our outreach for Him.

March 9

A DAREDEVIL TAMED

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

(Romans 6: 12-14)

When he was three years of age, Satoshi Matsumoto learned to pray to the children’s god, but by the time he was nine years old he had forgotten all about that and was so good at shoplifting that he had little difficulty in acquiring anything he wanted. Then, one day, he was caught red-handed and taken to the police station,

But a kind officer, after speaking to him about “acquiring” things that did not belong to him, let him go!

At fourteen, Satoshi started to smoke, drink and joined a gang of delinquents. Before long, rock music became the passion of his life and he started a rock group, which performed so well that they won one contest after the other. That same year, however, a little Light touched his life when a friend invited him to join him at some church activities. Although he did not continue to go, some of the Christians there started to pray for him.

Two years later, Satoshi joined an outlawed speeding club and enjoyed racing at top speed through populated areas on his motorbike, without a muffler, in the dead of night! By the time the police arrived, he would be terrorizing another area!

At seventeen, Satoshi dyed his hair, gambled, intimidated people for money and became infatuated with sex. A motorbike accident, however, called a halt to his activities and Satoshi found himself in hospital. Concussion resulted from the accident, but the Christians were still following him with their prayers and visits.

As a result, almost the first thing that Satoshi did on recovering was to visit the church and thank them for their love and prayers. There again God spoke to him through His Word in Romans, chapter 6, “... *do not let sin reign in your mortal body ...*” Promptly, Satoshi

yielded his whole being to God and prayed that He would show him how he could serve Him. Soon he realized that he must put his gifts at God's disposal, took his electric guitar to church and played it there on every possible opportunity. At eighteen years of age, Satoshi was baptized and, from then on, never looked back. Two years later, he joined the Film Department of the Japan Mission and spent a great deal of his time helping churches to set up acoustic systems.

Is there someone you know who looks almost impossible to reach for the Lord? If so, maybe that person is like Satoshi and just needs someone to pray them into the kingdom of God.

March 10

I'LL PRAISE HIM!

- 1. "I'll praise My Maker while I've breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers;
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
Or immortality endures.*
- 2. "Happy the man whose hopes rely
On Israel's God: He made the sky,
And earth, and seas, with all their train:
His truth forever stands secure;
He saves the oppressed, He feeds the poor,
And none shall find His promise vain.*
- 3. "The Lord has eyes to give the blind;
The Lord supports the sinking mind:
He sends the laboring conscience peace;
He helps the stranger in distress,
The widow and the fatherless,
And grants the prisoner sweet release.*
- 4. "I'll praise Him while He lends me breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler powers;*

*My days of praise shall ne'er be past
While life, and thought and being last,
Or immortality endures."*

(Isaac Watts – 1674-1748)

A statue of Isaac Watts stands in Westminster Abbey in London. Not far away, another famous writer of hymns, John Wesley, is also honored. It is said that as John Wesley lay dying, he surprised the friends, who were gathered around his bedside, by singing in a clear voice this hymn by Isaac Watts, *"I'll praise My Maker while I've breath, and when my voice is lost in death, praise shall employ my nobler powers."* The next day he tried to sing the hymn again, but could not get further than the words, *"I'll praise"*. Then, with those words on his lips, he went into the presence of his Savior.

March 11

HUMILITY

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."

(Philippians 2:5-8)

Jesus said of Himself, *"... the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."* (John 5:19).

Jesus liked to be nothing - nobody. Do we like to be something - somebody?

Jesus said of Himself, *"I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."* (John 5:30)

Jesus voluntarily chose a back seat. Do we always like to be in the driver's seat?

Jesus said of Himself, *"My doctrine is not mine, but His who sent Me."* (John 7:16)

Jesus was utterly dependant on His Father for every word that He uttered.

How dependant are we on Him for the words we utter every day?

Jesus said of Himself, *“The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.”* (John 14:10)

Jesus had no pride in his own background or his own achievements, even though He was the Son of God. Maybe we need to ask ourselves how proud we are of our background and of our achievements.

Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve. Therefore He calls His followers to imitate Him in humbly serving others.

We must therefore ask ourselves if we too have a servant’s heart. Are we willing to do anything for anyone, even if it is far from easy for us to do.

If the mind of Christ, our Savior, dwells in us every day of our lives, we will be a real testimony to those around us.

March 12

LAME BUT SERVING HER SAVIOR

“ ... I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go.” (Jeremiah 45:5)

As Eiko Goto lay on her hospital bed, her mind was troubled. She had been hospitalized as a result of a persistent pain in her left leg and very much wanted to know the cause. When she asked the nurse, the reply was always very vague. Then one day, she noticed that the doctor’s chart had been left on the table alongside her bed. As she glanced at it, one word stood out like a beacon and sent a chill through her whole body - *“amputation”!* When her mother walked into her room later that afternoon, Eiko bitterly asked her how she could have withheld the truth from her!

The operation was in the course of time performed and not too long afterwards, Eiko was able to leave the hospital. Subsequent periodical check-ups were necessary, however, and one day, while

she was waiting to see the doctor, she got into conversation with a foreign lady, who spoke Japanese and who soon began to tell her about the One who meant a great deal to her – Jesus Christ.

It was the first time in her life that Eiko heard the message of salvation, but deep down in her heart she had always thought that there must be a god who rules the universe and the affairs of men. Now she knew that this Jesus, who had suffered as none other to be a Savior to all those who believed in Him, was the true God.

As the missionary continued to contact her, she eagerly opened up her heart to the One who said, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”* (Revelation 3:20)

From then on, life took on a completely new meaning for Eiko. When she was out of the hospital, in spite of having to walk on one leg, with the aid of crutches, she helped in the Christian bookstore not far from her home. Even the heavy snow, which lay on the ground throughout the winter, did not deter her from serving God in any way she could. Then, Eiko heard of the possibility of reaching out to the sick patients in some local hospitals, through the ministry of the Japan Mission. This she did for over a year and many were influenced by her bright smile and word of testimony.

Encouraged by the way in which God was pleased to use her, Eiko then entered Bible College, so that she could become further equipped for a spiritual ministry to the sick. Now and then further hospitalization was necessary, but Eiko pressed on, knowing that the Lord would undertake for her. She never really knew how long she could continue ministering, but she knew that she was in His Hands.

March 13

SUFFERING

"... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

(Philippians 3:10)

If we would really become acquainted with Him, we should never be surprised if suffering in some way comes into our lives, because He was *"a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief."* (Isaiah 53:3)

When we look at those lives which have counted much for God, they so often had to make a great renunciation. This may have been something dear to them which had to be put on the altar, but which resulted in great blessing.

How wonderful it is to come to the realization that God never lets us go through suffering, without intending to bring out of it some great blessing, which we otherwise would never have experienced.

While we are passing through the suffering, we may rarely understand His purpose in it all, because He is teaching us to trust Him, even when we don't understand why we are suffering. We should always remember that He has said, *"What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."* (John 13:7)

We should never indulge our grief. Sorrows are only incidents in life and sitting down to brood over them will result in our strength changing into weakness. If we can simply turn away from them and take up the tasks, which He calls us to do, we will grow stronger and again be able to be of use to our blessed Savior.

There are times when He needs to take us into the dark to draw us closer to Himself, to deepen us spiritually. But we need to remember that the day will come when suffering will have nothing left behind it but a memory and, because we experienced it, we will be more like our Lord.

We will never really know the depth of our character until we see how we react under pressure. It is easy to be kind to others when everything is going well, but can we still be kind to them when we sense that we are being treated unfairly? Let's ask the Lord to help us accept trials and difficulties, realizing that they can be used by Him for His glory.

March 14

TWO BECOME ONE

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.”

(John 15:16)

In May, 1958 a premature baby boy, Hajime, was born into the Kato family. Mingled with joy, there was a certain amount of concern, because he was somewhat smaller than average size. The anxiety of the Katos scarcely lessened when he grew older, because he was decidedly accident-prone. It was by no means uncommon for him to fall down the stairs or out of a window and land on his head.

Three years later, a delicate baby girl, Kimiko, was born to a family in the city of Osaka. In her case too there was some concern lest there should be something wrong with her. Her face was exceptionally pale and her hair was brown, instead of black which was normal for a Japanese person. Their anxiety proved to be unfounded, however, and Kimiko grew up to be a healthy, energetic youngster, full of life. The only thing that somewhat amused her was the fact that she was sometimes taken for a foreigner!

To return to Kozo, he became a handsome young man and while attending university, gained self-confidence and stability. On graduating, he obtained a good post as an assistant professor in an establishment for higher education.

Kimiko also went to university. During that time, however, her mother died, but she more than proved her ability, by effectively taking over the household duties for her father and older brother, as well as keeping up with her classes.

Then one day a friend invited Kimiko to go with her to a Christmas meeting at her church and, glad of a diversion, Kimiko agreed. She had thought that church meetings would be dull and was amazed at the joyous atmosphere she found there.

Her busy schedule precluded Kimiko from regularly attending church, but she decided to join the English classes held in the church. There Kimiko came into contact with Kozo!

Some six months latter, Kimiko heard God's Voice, telling her, "I have chosen you" and that day she decided not to play church any longer and to give her heart to the Lord.

Kozo, who was then a keen Christian, often looked at Kimiko and thought how attractive she was. One day, in a somewhat non-Japanese fashion, he approached Kimiko directly, and to her delight, made known his intentions. As a result Kimiko became Mrs. Kato!

March 15

AFFLICTION

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." (1 Peter 4:12-13)

It may be natural for us to say after something tragic has happened, "Isn't it strange!" But God says, "Don't think it strange"! He has allowed it to happen to strengthen our faith.

How are pearls made? The oysters are taken out of their bed, a sharp knife thrust into them, making a wound and then they are cast back to where they came from. But in the very place where the wound was, a beautiful pearl grows to cover the scar.

So it is that the Lord comes and heals our every wound by filling us with Himself. The wound does not leave a scar, but in our case, it leaves the image of Christ.

The Psalmist could say, *"This is my comfort in my affliction, for your Word has given me life. The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from your law. I remembered Your judgments of old, O Lord, and have comforted myself."* (Psalm 119:50-52)

And again in Psalm 119:71 *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes."*

And still again, *"I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me."* (Psalm 119:75)

We are told in Isaiah, chapter 54, verse 2 also to *"Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your*

dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes." We always need to remember that there is just no other way to drive a stake, except by striking it, and, the harder the blow, the more firmly it will be fixed in its place.

May the Lord help us to take every affliction out of His loving, nail-pierced Hands and rejoice in it, firmly believing that in due time we will have cause to thank Him for it, realizing that He had a wonderful purpose in each one of them.

March 16

BORN TO BE A SOLDIER!

"No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."

(2 Timothy 2:4)

"I will never read the Bible again!" Akiko declared to the empty air in the quiet of her little room, after returning from church one day! "I was born to be a lawyer, not a soldier! Who wants to be a soldier, at everybody's beck and call!

Akiko had enjoyed going to church when she was younger. The church camp that she had attended had made a strong impression on her, but that was all a thing of the past. She was not going to be put in a straitjacket. She would make a new start and concentrate only on studying law, she determined. But after four years of study, Akiko lost her motivation. To become a lawyer did not seem to be so important anymore. She was more interested in having a good time and for that she needed money.

Akiko managed to find a well-paying job as an assistant in a business firm and kept at it for nearly two years. Then she arrived at the end of the road of trying to seek fulfillment and found that absolutely nothing really satisfied her. When she thought seriously about life, she realized that she had never been happy since the moment that she had closed the Bible and said, "No!" to God. If she was to obtain real satisfaction in life, she realized that she would have to be willing to be a soldier in God's army! But Akiko just could not bring herself to go back to church and, as a result, frustration and unhappiness resulted.

Then, one day, when she picked up the daily newspaper, a leaflet fell out, with an invitation to join English classes at the local church. Akiko knew that she could not say, "No", to God again. The English classes led to her attending the church services again and Akiko picked up where she had left off some three years ago, but with a difference. This time she meant business with God.

She had always borne resentment against her parents, because she had lost the sight in one eye when she was small and had reckoned that it had been due to their neglect. So she confessed her sins to God, as best she could, but did not receive His Peace in her heart until a relationship of perfect love was restored between her and her parents.

During the next two years, Akiko found happiness and freedom in serving God. Then He laid a burden on her heart to go to Bible College, especially for the purpose of learning how she could reach out to those with a seeing disability.

From then on, she studied to prepare herself for that ministry and praised God that He gave her a second chance to be a soldier in His army!

March 17

JUST AS I AM

1. *"Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!*

2. *"Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot;
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

3. *"Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

4. *"Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind:
Sight, riches, healing of the mind;
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

5. *"Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come."*

6. *"Just as I am, Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down;
Now, to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come."*

(Charlotte Elliott - 1789-1871)

Soon after Charlotte Elliott was born, her health started to fail and by the time she was thirteen, she had become a bedridden invalid.

A few years later, an evangelist from Switzerland visited the Elliot home and brought the Gospel to her. He told her that she should come, just as she was, a sinner, to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The downhearted Charlotte did just that and found Christ as her own, personal Savior. She never forgot the words of the one who led her to the Lord and she wrote this hymn in 1836.

March 18

LET'S KEEP ON PRAISING!

"From the rising of the sun to its going down the Lord's name is to be praised." (Psalm 113:3)

It is not difficult to praise the Lord when things go well with us, but how easy it is to cease to praise and even to complain when things don't go the way we wish them to go. But we always need to remember what is expressed so well in Psalm 22, verses 3-4 *"... You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted and You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You and were delivered; they trusted in You and were not ashamed."* (Psalm 22:3-5).

According to Martin Luther, however, there is an alternative. He said that when our troubles become too great for prayer even, then it is time to sing!

How many times we see the wonderful results of praise in the Bible. In Jericho, they praised before deliverance and the archeologists found that the walls of that city fell outward, not inward. The Hand of the Lord worked supernaturally as a result of their praises.

King David so wonderfully expressed praise in Psalm 103:2-5, *“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”*

How often we want to see and then believe, but God’s order is that we should believe and then we will see!

When we feel that we are in the midst of trouble, longing for God to deliver us, then it is time to praise Him and He will bring His joy into our hearts and His solution to all our problems.

Let us remember that He has challenged us to praise Him from the *“rising of the sun to its going down”* - in other words, **ALWAYS!**

The following verse sums it up very well:

*“Yesterday He helped me,
Today I’ll praise His name,
Because I know tomorrow
He’ll help me just the same!”*

Let’s keep on praising no matter what happens!

MARCH 19

SAVED FROM A CURSE

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

(John 5:24)

Chizuko's father worked on a tanker and every day, when he was away from home, she would ask her mother when he would be back. Then, one day, something took her mind off her usual enquiry. Her favorite aunt unexpectedly visited them and invited Chizuko to go to church with her. Chizuko was only nine years old, but she did so and very much enjoyed the Sunday school, with the result that, from then on, she attended every week.

When her father's ship came back one day, it was a happy occasion for them all and they went out to eat in a restaurant. On the way back home, however, a car crashed into them from behind and, although the rest of the family had few injuries, Mr. Sanno had to be taken to hospital.

His injuries were such that he needed treatment for three years and, in order to help defray hospital expenses, Chizuko's mother had to get a job. As a result Chizuko could no longer go to church, the reason being that all their relatives, except her favorite aunt, said that they were under a curse, due to the fact that someone in the family was worshipping the Christian's God!

Chizuko, however, had many friends in high school and, one day while they were talking together, one of the girls suddenly asked them all a question, "If you were going to die tomorrow, what would you do?" One, jokingly replied, "I would eat all I could". Another said, "There is someone I hate and I would quickly go and kill him!" Still another said, "I would quit studying, and read nothing but comic books!" Then the girl who had asked the question gave them some information, which eventually would change the course of Chizuko's life. She told them that in Christian countries young people open their Bibles and seek God.

Rather than seek God for herself, she became utterly frustrated, and did not know how she could face life any more and decided

to cut her wrists. She was on the point of doing so, when she came across a book on the life of Jesus lying on her brother's desk and began to read it. As she did so, all the things that she had been taught at Sunday school came flooding back into her mind. She knew for sure at last that she was a sinner and that Christ had died that she might be forgiven. She immediately phoned her favorite aunt, saying that she would like to go to church with her again.

Before long, God spoke to her through His Word and Chizuko yielded her heart to Him. She later joined the staff of a Christian organization, praising God that she had been saved from the curse that her relatives had said she was under and could joyfully serve Him.

March 20

DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES

"I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." (Psalm 16:8)

Even when we become Christians, we must realize that we are not exempt from the day-to-day circumstances of life. Believers and unbelievers alike will experience pain, trouble, and sometimes failure.

Unbelievers, however, feel that there is no real purpose in life and often sense confusion over their reason for being on the earth. But those of us who keep our eyes on the Lord can move ahead confidently, looking to Him to guide us every step of the way, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.

We need to remember too, that difficult circumstances may well be God's way of training us. How well this was expressed in the Epistle of James, chapter 1, verses 2-3, *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."*

In this passage James does not say "if" we have trials, but "when" you have trials. He assumes that we will have trials and that we can profit from them. In other words, we don't need to be happy when we face pain, but we need to have a positive outlook, knowing that

trials can be beneficial in our lives. We need to remember that tough times can teach us perseverance and that God wants to make us mature Christians.

So, instead of complaining about our troubles, we should see them as opportunities for growth. Then we can be patient and thank God that He will never leave us alone, but will be with us at all times.

It is told of Adoniram Judson, a missionary to Burma, that when he was being taken to prison, a man spat on him and sneeringly said to him, "How bright are the prospects of your mission now?" Judson's reply was, "As bright as the promises of God, my friend!"

We read in the 2 Chronicles, chapter 32, verse 7, "***Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him.***" These words were spoken when Hezekiah was faced with the frightening prospect of an Assyrian invasion. He made two important decisions. He did everything that he could to deal with the situation and trusted God for the outcome.

We should always look to the Lord and praise Him, no matter how difficult our present circumstances may seem to be!

March 21

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT?

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Shizue was busy going about her nursing duties, while one of the patients in the ward, Kunikichi Asada, was packing up his belongings to leave the hospital. While he was doing so, he suddenly asked her if she would give him her address. She was somewhat taken aback, but reluctantly did so.

Shizue was in fact not too interested in furthering contact with him because she sensed that he was a Christian. She herself had read parts of the Bible and even considered Christianity while at school, but in no way regarded herself as a Christian. She had,

in fact, been brought up as a strict Buddhist and could not easily discard that religion. She also knew that her mother would very much disapprove, as she always insisted on family worship at the shrine.

Not long after Asada San left the hospital, however, Shizue received a letter from a Christian doctor, asking her to assist him in setting up a new practice in the city of Ozu. This would mean going to the island of Shikoku, which was far from home, but the confidence Dr. Okamoto showed in her was certainly a challenge, so she decided to do so.

On arrival in Ozu, Shizue was very surprised to find that the Okamotos knew Kunikichi very well and were, in fact, members of the same church. Feeling lonely in her new surroundings, Shizue decided to accompany them to the Sunday morning meetings. She sensed that Kunikichi was delighted to renew his acquaintance with her and soon found herself thinking about him more and more.

In fact, living with the doctor and his family also made her long for a home of her own, like theirs, that was Christ-centered, and she desperately wanted to know God as they did. Then, before long, when special meetings were held in the church, the truth of God's salvation dawned on her and she was saved. From that time on, the Bible began to speak to her personally and prayer became a joy.

Kunikichi was overjoyed at her conversion and his thoughts often went back to the time when she was his nurse in the hospital. Even then, he had made up his mind that one day he would marry her, but how impossible it had seemed when he left the hospital. Now they were one in Christ and before long he asked Shizue to become his wife. She acquiesced and a joyful wedding was soon arranged.

After they were married, they went to live in Osaka City and both became involved in reaching out with the Gospel to young people who were into trouble with the law and rejoiced at the opportunities God gave them to be a witness for Him.

March 22

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT HAPPINESS?

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

(Matthew 5:11-12)

Happiness is much more than a feeling. Each one of the Beatitudes that we read of in Matthew, chapter 5 tells how we can be blessed. But we need to remember that being blessed means much more than just being happy. The Beatitudes, which we can find in Matthew chapter 5, from verse 3 onwards, a part of which is quoted above, don't promise earthly prosperity, but they show us that to be blessed means that we can experience hope and joy in our lives, quite independent of outward circumstances. To experience hope and joy, which are the deepest form of happiness, we need to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost may be to us.

Another verse of Scripture that throws a great deal of light on this subject is to be found in 1 Timothy, chapter 6, verse 6-8, *"Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."* This statement reveals to us the secret of spiritual growth and personal fulfillment. We need to honor God, center our desires on Him and be content with what He is doing in our lives.

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, most people believe that money inevitably brings happiness. But how can we really be kept away from the love of money? If we don't have it, we are always thinking of the things we would like to buy if we had more. Paul tells us of himself, *"...I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4: 11-13)

True happiness has been expressed by an anonymous writer in the following words:-

*“Not what we have, but what we give,
Not what we see, but how we live!
These are the things that build and bless,
That lead to human happiness.”*

May the Lord Help us always to take everything out of His Nail-pierced Hands and then we will inevitably experience true happiness and not constantly yearn for things that are out of our reach!

March 23

THE CASE OF THE FRACTURED BONE

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

From when Kumiko Nakagawa was very young, there had been fear in her heart. She had always had it rubbed into her that the four things to be feared were earthquakes, thunder, fire and father! She well knew that the seismograph registers an average of three earthquakes a day, that it thunders about four times a year, that fires occur daily in the flimsy wooden houses, but what she feared most of all was father!

Mr. Nakagawa was a worker in a stone quarry, drank a lot with his friends, and Kimiko was dead scared on the days when he came home drunk. She would hide for hours, until he was asleep or left the house. But she loved her mother and it was likely the way that her father treated them both that made such a close bond between them. It was a sad day for them both, when Kumiko had to leave home for college.

Kumiko had her first contact with Christianity when a college friend invited her to a camp in her vacation time. She really only went because she liked the idea of a few days in the mountains. But when she was back at college, Kumiko felt that she would like to know more about Christianity and the next Sunday went to church with her friend. There she was amazed to hear the minister speak on the theme of a loving heavenly Father. This impressed her a great

deal, because all her life she had longed for the love of a father. When the minister invited all those with questions to stay behind, Kumiko decided to do so and there and then took Christ as her Savior.

Before long, Kumiko, who, on graduating from school, became a kindergarten teacher, became acquainted with a young man, who also attended the church activities. His name was Tsutomu Aoki and he had started going to church, after recovering from being hit by a car when he was riding his bicycle and a fractured bone had resulted.

Kumiko had a flicker of hope in her heart that maybe God had something in store for them unitedly in the days that lay ahead and was concerned when she did not see him in church for a while. On enquiry, she discovered that he had suddenly gone to Osaka to take up some Christian work.

Unbeknown to Kumiko, Tsutomu was also thinking a lot about her and a few months later the pastor called Kumiko into his study to tell her that Tsutomu had written to him, asking if he could arrange a marriage for him with her. Kumiko's joy knew no bounds and they were duly joined in matrimony.

"I'm so glad that God allowed me to have that accident or I might never have met Kumiko! The workings of God are truly marvelous!" Tsutomu often said.

March 24

SWEET BY-AND-BY

1. *"There's a land that is fairer than day
And by faith we can see it afar;
For the Father waits over the way,
To prepare us a dwelling-place there.*

(Chorus)

*"In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore;
In the sweet by and by,
We shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

2. *"We shall sing on that beautiful shore
The melodious songs of the blest,
And our spirits shall sorrow no more,
Not a sigh for the blessing of rest.*

3. *"To our bountiful Father above,
We will offer our tribute of praise,
For the glorious gift of His love,
And the blessings that hallow our days."*

(Joseph T. Webster)

The author of this hymn was a gifted Christian musician, but he often had deep feelings of depression. On one such occasion, he was visited by his friend, Fillmore Bennett.

During the course of conversation, Webster told Bennett of his problems, adding, "It will doubtless be all right by and by". That remark caused Bennett to reply, "That's true. Trials do generate great glory for us in the sweet by and by!"

Inspired by that thought, Webster sat down and wrote the above poetic verses on the subject. Bennett then took up his violin and played a melody to fit the words. So it was that within half an hour this beautiful hymn was born.

May the Lord help us never to sink under depression, but to look up to Him in faith, no matter how we may feel!

March 25

THE REASON FOR DEPRESSION

"But he himself (Elijah) went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kings 19:4)

When Elijah reached a resting place in the wilderness, he was emotionally and physically exhausted and fell asleep. Then an angel woke him up with a very simple message, *"Arise and eat"*.

Reading this passage helps us to realize that all depression may not be spiritual. Sometimes there are other causes. There may be a

physical reason, which we need to deal with. In other words, first of all we must find the cause of our depression. Understanding that, and dealing with it, can be a big step towards bringing us out of any depression we may be in.

In the case of Elijah, he experienced great fatigue and discouragement just after two great spiritual victories – the defeat of the prophets of Baal and the answered prayer for rain. Discouragement can well set in after a great spiritual experience, especially if it has required much physical effort or involved great emotion. To lead Elijah out of depression, God first let him rest and eat. Then God revealed to him that his work was not finished. He had to return to give the Lord's message to Israel.

There is good news in this, because it causes us to realize that depression often goes away by itself. Also, there are often things that we can do ourselves to lift the load. We should not jump to the conclusion that depression is always spiritual. Sometimes there are other causes. So, it is important to find the cause of the depression.

Maybe we are physically tired or have had losses about which we are grieving. Still we need to remember there are also times when depression seems to hit us out of the blue with no detectable cause. In such times, it is likely only prayer that can lift the gloom and enable us to go forward, rejoicing.

The next time that depression arrives unannounced, we should admit to God and to ourselves that we are feeling depressed and it will most likely go away, as suddenly as it came, or else God will show us the cause and help us to deal with it.

Depression is sometimes a very complicated matter to deal with. It may be caused because we are not exercising our body enough or eating properly. Even the Bible recognizes the necessity of exercise. We are told in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 8 that *“bodily exercise profits a little”*. In other words, regular exercise raises and maintains energy levels and increases our capacity to concentrate. We need to remember that our bodies are the “temple of the Holy Spirit” and that we must treat them as such.

MARCH 26

ABANDONED!

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

As Reiko Matsuzaka lay in utter helplessness and confusion on her hospital bed, she began thinking back over her life. Both her parents were school teachers and she had been especially influenced by her father’s love of music. As a result, she had begun taking piano lessons when she was five-years-old and later chose music as her career. The year following her graduation from Niigata University, she had married a Shinto priest.

From all outward appearances, their marriage was a happy one, but underneath there was much tension. Her husband was cold and indifferent towards her and kept her extremely busy at the shrine. There were many worshippers and some of them stayed there overnight. On one occasion, because of nervous exhaustion, Reiko was unable to sleep for ten days. Then, one day at the shrine, she suddenly became dizzy and lost all ability to reason. In panic, she ran out, as if she was being chased. When she got near her parents’ home, her whole body went into convulsions and she lost consciousness. On coming to, she found herself locked up in the psychiatric ward of a hospital, where she remained for two months.

Because of the dreadful experience she had undergone, the fear of another such attack was constantly lurking in her mind. Three more attacks did occur a few months later and on the day that she was to be discharged from hospital, she discovered that her husband was suing her for divorce. Reiko could hardly believe that it was true, because she had always thought that, of all people, she could rely on him and his Shinto beliefs. Now, within six months, she had lost her job, her husband, her home and her religion and her heart cried out for help.

Being a musician, she was asked one day to go to a church to take the place of the regular organist. On that occasion, during the message, God spoke to her through His Word and Reiko realized that He loved her and would not let her down, even though her husband had left her. That night, she firmly decided that she would follow God and would also dedicate her gift of music to Him.

MARCH 27

CONTROLLED ANGER

“And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.” (Mark 3:5)

In this passage we see that anger can be a holy response to sin. Jesus was angry about the Pharisees’ uncaring attitudes. This reveals to us the fact that anger itself is not always wrong. It depends on what makes us angry and what we do with our anger. If we are not careful, we tend to express our anger in selfish and harmful ways. But here we see that Jesus expressed His anger by correcting a problem. He healed the man’s hand.

In other words, anger does not have to lead to sin. There is a place for righteous indignation. If we are Christians, it is not wrong to be upset about sin and injustice, when we come into contact with them, and to stand against them. We just need to make sure that our anger is directed towards the right issues.

If we are angry, however, we need to remember that it can be a danger signal. We need to carefully examine the motive in our hearts for that anger. Anger is a dangerous emotion that can easily get out of control, leading to violence, emotional hurt and spiritual damage.

How do we that God’s anger is revealed? It is directed at sin. We see this clearly in His Word, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.”* (Romans 1:18)

We always need to remember that unresolved anger, arising out of the past can affect present relationships. It is even said that hostility can weaken the immune system and cause sickness.

God cannot tolerate sin, because His nature is morally perfect, but we should remember that He always wants to remove the sin and restore the sinner. His anger only erupts against those who persist in sinning. May the Lord help us to walk so closely with Him that any anger we may feel in our hearts is completely under His control.

If we are conscious of unjustified anger in our hearts, how should we handle it so that it will not affect our service for the Lord? First, we need to acknowledge it, and then confess it before the Lord, repent, change our way of thinking and remember “... *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*”. (Galatians 5:22-4)

March 28

TOUCHED BY ONE WHO CARED

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

One day when Eiko Goto was lying on her hospital bed, hoping against hope that she would soon be on the way to recovery, she happened to notice that the nurse had accidentally left her progress chart on the table beside her bed. She curiously picked it up and started to read it.

The first part was somewhat technical and of little interest. But then she came across two words that sent a chill through her whole body - “Possible amputation”! She instinctively closed her eyes, seeking to blot out the awful picture that those dread words conjured up in her mind, but in vain. The chart also revealed that the persistent pain in her left leg had been caused by bone cancer.

When her mother had visited her recently, Eiko had told her that as soon as she left the hospital she wanted to take her driving test. Her mother’s lack of response had somewhat puzzled her, but the frightful possibility of losing a leg at eighteen years of age had never entered her mind. Fortunately, however, Eiko did not have long to think about the operation. It was set for the following day! The operation was declared a success, but only time would tell if the cancer had affected other parts of her body. In fact, four months later, it was discovered that it had spread to her lungs.

A friend that she made in hospital during her time there was a young man, called Takeda San, who was also a victim of bone cancer. Their hearts became knit together as they shared their secret

thoughts and fears. When his brave battle for life ended, Eiko too longed with all her heart to die and be joined with him in death. God, however, had another purpose for her young life.

One day when she went to receive treatment as an outpatient of the hospital, a foreign lady, who could speak Japanese, started up a conversation with her. Eiko discovered that she was a missionary and she was most interested in what she had to say. Deep down in her heart, she had always felt that somewhere there must be a God who rules the universe and the affairs of men. Now she heard about His Son, Jesus, who had suffered and died for her sins.

The warmth and Christian love, which the missionary revealed when she visited her, opened up Eiko's lonely heart and before long she yielded herself to the Savior. At last she had found somewhere that she could lay down her burdens and be at rest. On hearing from some friends that there was a Christian organization, very much involved in hospital evangelism, she joined the staff. As well as helping in the office, sometimes, she also bravely struggled on her crutches, visiting folk in the hospitals, telling them of her Savior.

Just a few words of testimony can so often be instrumental in bringing a needy soul to the Savior.

March 29

CONTENT IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." (Philippians 4:11-12)

What are our reactions when things don't go the way we expect them to or want them to? Are we frustrated, blaming others, blaming circumstances, even blaming God?

When Adoniram Judson, a missionary in Burma, was being taken to prison, as he was led along, a man spat on him out of the darkness and sneeringly said, "How bright are the prospect of your mission now?" Judson replied, "As bright as the promises of God, my friend".

We read in 2 Chronicles, chapter 32, verse 7 that when King Hezekiah was confronted with the terrifying prospect of an invasion from Syria, he trusted God for the outcome and told those that were with him also to do so in the words, *“Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him, for there are more with us than with him.”* Difficult circumstances reveal to us our need to trust the Lord at all times.

This truth has been penned so wonderfully in the following words:

*“My God knows all that’s happening;
Beginning to the end;
His Presence is my comfort;
He is my dearest Friend.
“When circumstances threaten
To rob me of my peace;
He draws me close unto His breast,
Where all my strivings cease.
“I’m looking past all my circumstances,
To Heaven’s throne above;
My prayers have reached the Heart of God.
I’m resting in His love.”*

When our confidence is in God, we will be able to rise above all circumstances!

March 30

EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT NOW!

*“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.
Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”*
(2 Timothy 4:2)

Tadano Araki could not remember his parents. For years he had lived with his uncle and, when he was old enough to work, he had obtained a job in the printing department of the Asahi newspaper in Tokyo.

All went well, until a periodic X-ray for tuberculosis, which was compulsory in his firm, revealed that he had contracted a mild case

of the disease and that hospitalization was necessary. However, Tadano did not feel really unwell and liked to wander around the various wards, talking to people.

Sometimes, he visited the women's wards and there got into conversation with Masayo Sakuma, who was in a room with seven other women. He was most impressed with the tidy way in which she kept her little corner of the room and with the fact that, when he looked in there, he always found her singing a hymn or writing a letter.

On one occasion when he visited her, she offered him a New Testament and asked him to read it. Tadano refused, because he did not desire to read a book in which he was sure he would not have the slightest interest. But when Sakuma San said, "*Well, take it even if you don't read it*", it was difficult for him to say, "No!"

In fact, Tadano could not seem to get away from the Christian message. The evangelist, who went around the wards, distributing a small Christian leaflet each month, never failed to hand him one. Tadano gradually became interested in the testimonies of those he read about in the leaflet and even ended up reading the New Testament that Sakuma San had given him.

Before long, he also began to attend the weekly Christian meeting, and, when he was fit enough to leave the hospital, he started attending the church near his home to which the evangelist had introduced him. There the Light of the Gospel penetrated his heart and Tadano found Jesus as his Savior.

When he recovered and returned to his job in the newspaper office, his boss asked him if he thought he had benefited from his long stay in the hospital. "*Everything is different now*", was his courageous reply, "*God changed my heart while I was there and now I have a real purpose in life.*"

Just a little perseverance and prayer resulted in the salvation of a precious soul. May the Lord help us keep on "*sowing the seed*", no matter how uninterested a person may seem.

March 31

GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY

1. *"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*
2. *"Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*
3. *"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*
4. *"His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.*
5. *"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain:
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."*

(William Cowper-1731-1800)

At the age of 32, William Cowper, in a fit of depression, tried to end his life by taking poison. He then soon hired a horse-drawn cab and told the driver to take him to the river Thames in London. His intention was to commit suicide there, but the fog was so dense that, after an hour of searching, the driver gave up. So he went back home, still determined to kill himself. The next morning, he tried to stab himself with a knife, but the blade broke. He then tried to hang himself, but was cut down, still alive!

Utterly frustrated, a few days later he picked up his Bible and God spoke to him so forcibly that in those moments William Cowper trusted God for forgiveness and rejoiced in his newfound Savior.

Some time later, he wrote the above hymn as his testimony to the wonderful deliverance that God had wrought in his life.

April 1

HOW IMPORTANT IS HOSPITALITY?

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.” (Hebrews 13:2)

We always need to remember that showing hospitality is a most practical way to serve God. We are told, however, that hospitality should always flow out of an earnest desire to serve Him. We see the wonderful example of this in the ministry of Mary and Martha, when Jesus entered a certain village and Martha welcomed Him into her house.

We read in Luke 10, verses 39-40 what real hospitality should be like. *“And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me’.”*

Jesus’ reply to that question is most revealing and shows us the real meaning of hospitality. He said in verses 41 & 42, *“Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”*

In actual fact, they were both serving Him, but Martha thought that Mary’s style of serving was inferior to hers. She did not realize that in her desire to serve, she was actually neglecting her guest. Maybe we too need to be careful that we are not spending so much time doing things for Him that we neglect to spend time with Him, which is the great desire of His heart and our greatest need.

It has been well said that Christian hospitality is different from social entertaining. Entertaining focuses on the host, who must appear relaxed and good-natured. The home must be spotless, the food must be well prepared and abundant. Hospitality focuses on the guests. Their needs are the primary concern, whether it is to provide them with nourishing food, a listening ear or even a place to stay.

We also see a beautiful illustration of hospitality in the life of Abraham, when some strangers passed his way. He said to them, *“... My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on*

by Your servant. Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. And I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts.” (Genesis 18:3-5)

We should never hesitate to offer hospitality just because we feel that we are too tired or too busy to do so. The Lord will undertake for us and make us a blessing to others, as we look to Him to be in our midst and help us.

April 2

FULFILLING HIS MOTHER’S DREAMS

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14)

Seiichiro Nishimoto was the fourth of nine children of the family of a very poor farmer. When he was ten years old, his father and his youngest brother died from smallpox, but there were still so many mouths to feed that his mother had to work day and night to provide for their needs. Often there was not enough to eat and Seiichiro could vividly remember the time when he had no shoes to wear and, when it rained, the rain had beaten down on him through his ragged umbrella.

The only bright moments in those days were when his mother told him that he should not be ashamed before others and that some day things would be better. But Seiichiro, nevertheless, developed an inferiority complex and so much dreaded his graduation from junior high school that, two days before it was due to take place, he ran off to the big city of Osaka with the faint hope of realizing his mother’s dreams. There, he soon did so, but unfortunately, wasted what money he earned on tobacco, drink and girls. Through it all, however, he could not forget his mother’s pleading voice, *“Press on and you will succeed!”* Then he would try to get his priorities right once more.

One day, a book that he happened to pick up in a second-hand store, stressed how important it is to believe in some sort of religion in order to succeed in life. This sounded a good idea to Seiichiro,

but he just wondered what religion would help him best. Buddhism seemed to be only for old people. He had heard of Christianity and wondered about it, because it was the religion of prosperous America. So, he decided to attend the local church. In fact, he became so interested that he often stayed behind after the service to ask questions. On one never to be forgotten day, he said to the leader of the young peoples' group, *"I want Christ for my Savior and I want my sins forgiven!"* From that day on his life completely changed.

Some time later, Seiichiro gave up his job and started a small business of his own, making and selling games. After work was over, he would go to the nearby cemetery to pray. There he reckoned that he could talk to God without interruption.

His business prospered and he also grew in grace, but there was still a lack in his life – he needed a wife! God answered his prayers and he was introduced to a Christian girl, Narako, who had been a professional cyclist, but who was several years older than him. Seiichiro, not wanting to make a mistake, prayed about the matter for six months and then felt clearly led to ask the minister to arrange the wedding. They are now the happy parents of three fine sons. Seiichiro often thinks of his mother and how happy she would be, if she could see how God has transformed his life and also given him such a happy home.

April 3

WHY DO WE WORRY?

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

We need to realize that if we start worrying, it means that we are choosing not to trust God. When we dwell on our problems, we will so often become anxious and frustrated. If we concentrate on God and His goodness, however, there will always be peace in our hearts.

Instead of worrying about what we cannot do, we should rather focus on what God can do through us, if we look to Him to meet our every need. If He is really first in our lives, we will always first turn to Him for help when we sense that we are beginning to worry about something.

Apart from affecting our ability to trust in God, worry can also damage our health and affect the way that we treat others. Worry immobilizes us, but looking to God to solve our problems, moves us into action.

We must therefore, without hesitation, first turn to God for help so that we can fill our thoughts with His will for us and fulfill His will in our lives. We should always remember this in planning for the future. Planning for the future is good, but worrying about the future is a waste of time and energy. It is most important that we don't let worrying about what will happen, tomorrow affect our relationship with God today.

Worry is a burden that God never meant us to bear and we lose the joy of living in the present when we worry about the future.

When we think about it, we will realize that worrying is choosing not to trust in God. It reveals that we are not really looking to Him at all times, believing that He is in control of our lives. When we dwell on our problems, we only become anxious, but if we concentrate on God and His goodness, there will always be peace in our hearts, no matter what may happen to us.

The folly of worry has been summed up by the following verse:

*"Why worry? Are tomorrow's skies more blue,
If on our beds we restless roll and toss
With burning, sleepless eyes until the morn,
Just building bridges we may never cross?"*

April 4

THE BOSS WITH THE BROOM

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Life for Katsuyoshi Hayashi changed immediately after he became a Christian. He was no longer a money-grabber, as he had been before. In fact, he found that material things did not have the same value for him. He rather worked diligently to please his employer and to show him that being a Christian made a difference.

But his boss adamantly refused to allow his employees to attend any Christian meetings and, because they all lived on the premises, the strong relationship between employer and employee ensured compliance with every demand.

At first, Katsuyoshi did not mind too much. He had purchased a Bible and could spend hours in the evenings reading it. But he often longed for fellowship with other Christians and just wondered what he should do. It was not easy to find employment, so he could not afford to risk losing his present job. Then he hit on a plan! He thought that he could escape, unnoticed, through the bathroom window at least to attend the Sunday night meetings and return the same way. The boss would just think that he had been in his room all the evening!

The first time Katsuyoshi put this plan into operation, he felt a bit guilty, but after several successful attempts, he didn't give it another thought. On the contrary, he felt pleased with himself for having thought of such a simple solution.

For several weeks, life went on smoothly. But then disaster struck! Getting back in the window one evening, his foot slipped, with the result that the boxes on which he had been precariously standing, tumbled to the ground. He followed suit, almost certain that the resulting noise would wake up everybody. As he had feared, his boss soon appeared, clutching a broom, and when he discovered that Katsuyoshi was the cause of all the commotion, he was furious and wanted an explanation!

Katsuyoshi timidly explained that he had been to church and his boss nearly exploded. *“Did you go to church to learn how to be a*

burglar?" he stormed. "Any more of this church nonsense and you will be out on your ear!" he screamed!

Until then, it had not crossed Katsuyoshi's mind that what he was doing was deceitful, but he then realized that he would have to be straight with his boss, even if, as a result, he was fired – which he duly was!

Katsuyoshi learned from that experience that it paid to do right. The Lord honored his stand and he got an apprenticeship as a carpenter. Later with a prosperous business of his own, Katsuyoshi looks back with a smile on the night when the boss met him with a broom and regards it as one of the turning points in his life.

April 5

HOPE COMES FROM TRUSTING GOD

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Romans 5:1-2)

Maybe more than anything else, hope comes from remembering all that God has done for us. Our relationship with God begins with our trusting Him that we are delivered from our past sins, because Christ died for us. Hope also grows as we come to realize all that God has in store for us. He gives us such wonderful promises for the future as we learn to lean on Him. As a result, His love fills our lives and also gives us the ability to effectively reach out to others.

Hope grows too, as we depend on God in the difficult times that inevitably come into our lives. As we see in the Bible, for the first century Christians suffering was almost the norm. Although there may not be as much outward persecution for us today, we should remember that when difficulties do come our way, His Grace is sufficient and will be there for us at all times.

How well the Psalmist expressed it when he said to himself, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance." (Psalm 42:5)

Also, it is said of Abraham – *“who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations”*. (Romans 4:18)

Hope grows as we remember the promise of the resurrection. Because Jesus came back to life, so will all believers. Therefore we need not despair when loved-ones die or world events take a tragic turn. God will turn our tragedies into triumphs, our poverty into riches, our pain into glory and our defeats into victories. In fact, all believers throughout history will stand reunited in God’s presence, safe and secure.

Indeed, we can rejoice in suffering, not because we enjoy it, but because we know that God is using life’s difficulties to make us more effective in His service. The problems that we run into will develop our perseverance and, as a result, our character and our trust in God will be strengthened and that will give us greater confidence for the future.

Our hope may go, but if we really believe, faith will always hold on, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.

Let’s always remember the wonderfully encouraging words in Psalm 42, verse 11, *“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.”*

April 6

CHOSEN IN THE FURNACE!

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.”

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

“Hashizume, you are a good truck driver and I appreciate your work, but I am not going to give you your wages today. You will just squander the money on drink. I am going to send it to your mother, eh!”

Shunichi was lost for words. What could he say? He just mumbled a virtually inaudible, *“Yes, Sir”* and slumped out of the

office. He desperately needed the money, but there was absolutely nothing he could do about it.

Much as he hated to admit it to himself, what his boss had said was true. Looking down at his threadbare clothes, Shunichi felt ashamed. His philosophy in life was that he could do what he liked until he was forty. He would then change and start thinking about what he really needed to do. Maybe he had been wrong after all! He had certainly not made a very good impression on his boss, that was sure!

That night, having no money for drink, he could not join his friends, so, he went home to his meagerly furnished room. There he swallowed his last glass of beer, wondering when he would get any more. What a mess he had made of his life. He had had good cause to think about that the other day when he had come across an old school friend who was happily married, had children and was buying his own home. How he envied him! Now without money, there was nothing else to do but to visit his mother, like a little boy, and beg her to give him some.

On his way to her house, Shunichi's attention was drawn to a bright poster in front of a building, advertising some meetings. He lingered outside, listening to the hearty singing. Those people sounded just as happy as his drinking friends when they were really enjoying themselves, he thought. Admission was free, so Shunichi walked in, sat down on a chair at the back of the hall and self-consciously looked around him. He noticed the friendly smiles on the faces of those sitting near him. They certainly looked a lot different from his dissipated friends at the bar!

As he listened to the preacher, he heard about a God who could so transform a person's heart and life that they would be quite different. He knew that this was just what he needed and he plucked up the courage to confide his problems to the minister and eagerly drunk in every word, as the way of salvation was explained to him.

Shunichi knew that he had found what he needed and that day yielded his heart to the Living God. From then on, he found that one by one all his sinful habits were dealt with and that he was indeed a "*new creation*" in Christ, his Savior.

April 7

BLESSED ASSURANCE, JESUS IS MINE!

1. *"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.*

Chorus

*This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.*

2. *"Perfect submission, perfect delight!
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.*

3. *"Perfect submission, all is at rest.
I in my Savior am happy and blessed;
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love."*

(Fanny Jane Crosby-1820-1915)

Fanny Crosby was blinded by an illness when she was only six weeks old. In spite of that, she entered the New York Institute at the age of fifteen and afterwards taught English and history there from 1847 until 1858. As a pupil and a teacher, Fanny spent 35 years at the institute.

Her first book of poems was published in 1844 and was called, "The Blind Girl and Other Poems". During her lifetime, she wrote more than nine thousand hymns. She is said to have written three new hymns each week during much of her adult life. The fact that she was blind did not diminish her productivity. She formulated a song in her mind and then dictated it to a friend.

Phoebe Palmer Knapp composed a tune in 1873 and showed it to Fanny Crosby. She played it on the organ and asked her what the tune said to her. She looked around and found Fanny on her knees in prayer. Phoebe played it several times over and Fanny Crosby told her that it said, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine"!

April 8

RECEIVING GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION

"And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then one said to Him, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" And he said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able." (Luke 13:22-24)

God's gift of salvation is not to be lightly or casually received. There is also no way that we can work ourselves into God's favor. We must just take the wonderful salvation, which He offers us, by faith and, from then on, diligently strive to follow Him, whatever the cost may be. If we are not prepared to do so before we die, it will not only be our eternal loss, but also the loss of many loved-ones and friends, whom we could have influenced, if we had just accepted Him as our Savior.

When Jesus was on this earth, many people were eager to know who would be in God's kingdom. Jesus explained to them that, although many people might know something about God, only a few had acknowledged their sins and accepted His forgiveness and pointed out that receiving His salvation should not be put off until later.

One thing that we always have to remember is that we cannot accomplish salvation on our own. No matter how good we may think that we are, we can never eliminate the sinful nature, which is present in all of us. It is only Jesus who can do that. Jesus came to earth to be our Savior, not to help us help ourselves!

It is vital to remember that salvation is available only because of what Jesus did for us and it is a matter of receiving or rejecting Him. It is not something that we can earn by our good works. Nevertheless, out of gratitude for this wonderful free gift which He has bestowed on us, we should seek to reach out to others with the message of salvation.

The story is told of how Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom asked the court chaplain if it were possible to be sure of salvation. He is reported to have said that he did not think so, but an account of their conversation appeared in the Church Gazette and came into

the hands of Rev. John Townsend. He wrote to the queen, quoting the wonderful Words from John's Gospel, chapter 3, verse 16, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*" and also, from the 1st Epistle of John, chapter 1, verse 9 "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

Rev. Townsend later received a letter from Queen Victoria saying that she believed God's promises. How wonderful to think that the promises of God apply to the very least and also to the very greatest of His children.

April 9

BEING HUNCHBACKED NO LONGER A PROBLEM!

"... the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

(1 Samuel 16:7)

"Kazue, why don't you pull your shoulders back? You are becoming quite hunch-backed, you know", said Mrs. Sasaki to her 10-year-old daughter one day, while they were walking home from shopping. "I'm standing as straight as I can, Mother," Kazue replied.

Mrs. Sasaki did not say any more, but from then on started to watch her daughter carefully. There was no doubt that Kazue was getting more and more hunch-backed and her mother was deeply concerned. When she mentioned the matter to her husband, he suggested that she should consult a doctor. Mrs. Sasaki followed his advice and took Kazue for a physical check-up at the local hospital.

The only suggestion that they made was that she might have injured her back when she was younger and asked her if she could remember such an incident. Kazue then reminded her mother that she had fallen while doing exercises in the school gym a couple of years ago and that for a few days her hands and legs had become numb.

In fact, Kazue's hunch-backed condition was causing a deeper problem than her mother realized. Kazue was so self-conscious that she did not want to go to school and a growing resentment and hatred was building up in her heart towards those who teased her. But her mother just could not think of any way in which she could help her.

Then one day, while she was listlessly paging through the daily newspaper, she happened to see an advertisement, offering a free copy of the New Testament and spiritual help to any one who applied for it. She talked her daughter into writing and Kazue was delighted to receive a packet addressed to her personally a few days later.

As Kazue began to read the New Testament, her self-consciousness started to leave her and she was willing to return to school, no matter how her peers might treat her. In a wonderful way, Kazue found the answer to her problem in Jesus and delighted to attend the local church. From then on, she knew without a shadow of doubt that Jesus was on her side and nothing that anyone else said or did could hurt her!

Kazue also had the urge to attend a school for the handicapped, which was run by the government and for which there was no charge. There she learned to type and to operate a simple printing press. Although far from strong physically, Kazue praises God that she can now freely testify to those around her about her wonderful Savior.

April 10

DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

"For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

(Matthew 7:2)

If our words concerning others are not motivated by love, we are likely being critical of them. If we are not careful, it is easy to stop looking for the good in others and see only their faults. Destructive criticism reveals a lack of love.

As a result, the unity of believers will inevitably be broken. If we are talking behind someone's back or focusing on another's

shortcomings, instead of their strengths, we need to remind ourselves of Jesus' command to love others as you love yourself. ***"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*** (Matthew 22:39)

Jesus tells us to examine our motives and conduct, instead of judging others. The traits that bother us in others are very often the habits we dislike in ourselves. If we are about to criticize someone, maybe we should check to see if we don't deserve the same criticism. In other words, we need to judge ourselves first and then lovingly forgive and seek to help the one we are on the point of criticizing.

As we grow older, we sometimes become very set in our ways and unwilling to admit when we are wrong. As a result we become critical of others and seek to discredit their views.

Destructive criticism indicates a lack of love. When we are not motivated by love, we become critical of others. We stop looking for good in them and see only their faults. In this way the unity of believers is inevitably broken.

Let's remember that kind 'criticism' can only come from a heart full of love for the one criticized and doubtless result in blessing. May the Lord help us to take heed of His Words, ***"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."*** (Colossians 4:6) Our words are most important and should always reveal that we take all things out of His loving Hands and are not dissatisfied, no matter what happens to us!

The following poem sums up this truth so well:

*"It was only a brief little note,
Or a word that was prayerfully spoken,
Yet not in vain, for it soothed the pain
Of a heart that was nearly broken."*

April 11

THE FORGOTTEN MEAL

“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3)

Aiko Mugasa toiled at her desk at “The Society for the Establishment of Righteousness and Friendly Relationships”, but she felt far from righteousness and had little desire to create friendly relationships! To tell the truth, she was sick and tired of sitting in guidance sessions with the shaven-headed priest, who tried to solve the problems of the many middle-aged women who attended.

She was just fed up with the Society’s emphasis on public service. She had had enough of going out with the women to clean dirty public places. As far as she could judge, all their good works were getting them nowhere!

When her office duties were over for the day, Aiko walked home, her feelings in a turmoil. When she got there, it was time to make supper and she speedily set to work to make it, knowing that her husband expected his meal on the table the moment he set his foot in the house.

While she waited for the rice to cook, Aiko went outside to see if there was any mail. The only item she found in the box was a small magazine, called “Fountain of Joy”. Reckoning that there was not much joy in her life, Aiko decided to look through it and found the contents most gripping. It had apparently been put in the mail-box by the local Christian church.

In fact, Aiko became so intrigued with what she read that she forgot all about the meal she was supposed to be cooking until she saw her husband approaching their house. Only then did she realize with a start that his meal was far from ready and she speedily returned to the preparations.

At her first possible opportunity, Aiko went to the church that had so kindly sent her the leaflet. Her heart was hungry to hear more of the way of salvation and she reveled in the loving kindness lavished on her by those she met there.

In addition to this, Aiko became very conscious of a lack of love in her heart towards her husband, his mother and unmarried sister who lived with them and whom she, as the wife of the house, had

to serve. She had always blamed them for not treating her properly, but now she realized that she was the guilty one. God spoke to her through His word and Aiko confessed her sins to Him and obtained the pardon, which He so freely offered. From that moment on, her great desire was that she would be able to share the Bread of Life with her family and with any other needy souls that God sent across her pathway.

May the Lord help us to search our hearts to see why we are not reaching more of the needy souls around us.

April 12

WE SHOULD REMEMBER!

“And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.” (Deuteronomy 8:2)

The above words were written to the Israelites, because they failed to notice and to thank God for the fact that miraculously, during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness, their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not cause them pain.

They also may well have wondered why they could not get on more quickly conquering the land which lay ahead of them, but God did not want them to go into that difficult task unprepared. So, they were told to build a memorial from twelve stones drawn from the river by twelve men, one from each tribe. This we read of in Joshua, chapter 4, verses 4-7. The purpose was that they should focus on God and remember that He was guiding them every step of the way.

We should remember to seek God every day of our lives. A life centered around God will always be fulfilling and even make the difficult days bearable, because there will always be the hope of eternal life to look forward to.

He also says to us in His precious Word, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”* (Romans 12:15) We need to remember God’s great blessings to us in the past and carry

out what He tells us concerning our need to always seek to be a blessing to those with whom we come into contact.

We should also remember God's constant care of us. How easy it is for us to take for granted His daily protection and, in fact, everything that He does for us moment by moment. How we need to remember to thank Him for His goodness to us in so many ways.

Furthermore, we should remember to see God in the every day circumstances of our lives. Have we ever considered what a life without God would be like, especially in our old-age? It would be lonely, bitter and hopeless. Days of trouble will inevitably come, when there may well be sickness, handicaps or disabilities that will make life difficult for us. How important it is then to be completely committed to Him when we are young, so that in the days to come we may be able to graciously receive whatever He has for us, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.

We need to constantly remember Him and the fact that we depend on His wonderful guidance moment by moment.

April 13

HIS FIRST 60 SECONDS IN JAPAN

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling." (Psalm 46:1-3)

On looking out the window of the airplane, when he was just about to land at Osaka airport, Sam could hardly believe his eyes. He had never seen such a big city before in his life and said to himself, "What am I doing in a place like this!"

When the plane had landed, he was the last person to get off and had not even stepped onto Japanese soil when a Japanese man collapsed in front of him! He managed to help get the man back into the plane and stayed with him until a doctor arrived. It was as if the Lord was saying to him, "Just see how I can use you in Japan, even in your first sixty minutes!"

Sam could not help feeling, however, that Japan was a very long way from the city of Belfast in Northern Ireland, where he had grown up! When he was quite young, he had asked Jesus into his heart and, as he grew older, he had learnt more and more about God. When he was ten years old, his mother had bought him a T-shirt with the name "*Osaka*" printed on it! They did not have a clue what it meant, but from then on Sam's nickname was "*Osaka*"!

When he was eighteen years old, he went to Australia and traveled 10,000 miles by hitch-hiking! During that time, he lost 20 kilograms in weight, became very depressed and wanted to die. He discovered that he was suffering from anorexia! By then, Sam was so desperate that he cried to God. "*Please have mercy on me!*" To make things worse, one night someone left a candle alight at the bottom of his bed and his sleeping-bag caught fire! In haste, he tried to put the fire out with his hand and badly burnt it!

Before Sam went to sleep, he again prayed to God to heal his hand and when he awoke the next morning there was no sign of the burn! By then, he knew that there was a Living God, who answers prayer! As a result there was a deep peace and joy in his heart and he was convinced that God would always be with him and never leave him in the lurch, no matter what happened.

As if to confirm that truth, one day on his travels in Australia, he stopped to tie up his shoe-lace and missed a possible lift into the town where he needed to go. Later, on the way, he came across that very car. It had crashed and the occupants were injured. Sam then knew again, without a shadow of doubt, that God wanted him to go to Japan to work for Him and would undertake for him every step of the way!

April 14

SOME DAY THE SILVER CORD WILL BREAK

1. *"Some day the silver cord will break,
And I no more as now shall sing;
But oh, the joy when I shall wake
Within the palace of the King!*

(Chorus)

*"And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story - saved by grace;
And I shall see Him face to face,
And tell the story - saved by grace.*

2. *"Some day my earthly house will fall,
I cannot tell how soon 'twill be,
But this I know - my All in All
Has now a place in Heaven for me.*

3. *"Some say, when fades the golden sun
Beneath the rosy tinted west,
My blessed Lord will say, "Well done!"
And I shall enter into rest.*

4. *"Some day: 'till then I'll watch and wait,
My lamp all trimmed and burning bright,
That when my Savior ope's the gate,
My soul to Him may take its flight."*

(Fanny Jane Crosby - 1820-1915)

Although blinded by an illness when she was an infant, Fanny Crosby never became bitter. Of the many hymns that she wrote in her lifetime, the above hymn was so personal that she kept it to herself for many years.

Then, one day, at a Bible conference, D. L. Moody asked her to give a personal testimony. She hesitated and then quietly rose and said, "There is one hymn I have written which has never been published. I call it my soul's poem. Sometimes when I am troubled, I repeat it to myself, for it brings comfort to my heart." She then recited it, while many wept.

It is said to be based on Ecclesiastes 12:6 and Revelation 22:4-5 and was later put to music by George Stebbins.

April 15

HIS PRESENCE

“The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”

(Psalm 34:18-19)

How often we wish that we could escape troubles in this life. It may be the pain of grief, of loss, of sorrow or even failure. Sometimes even the small daily frustrations that we encounter may wear us down. But isn't it wonderful to know that God's promises are there for us in all circumstances, even when our hearts are near breaking-point!

We must always remember when some trouble strikes us, not to get frustrated, but to turn to Him. He has promised to be our source of wisdom, courage and power and to help us through all our problems, no matter how difficult they may be.

How well an unknown author has expressed it, “One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was only one.

“This bothered me because I noted that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints, so I said to the Lord, ‘You promised me, Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always, but I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has been only one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I have needed you most, have you not been there for me?’”

“The Lord replied, ‘The times when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you.’”

What more is there to say? The Psalmist points us so vividly to the only thing we can do as believers, ***“Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?”*** (Psalm 56:3-4)

We always need to remember that God's Presence is always experienced by those who truly desire it. This we can so clearly see

when we read Psalm 27:4-5. *“One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple. For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion; in the secret place of His tabernacle He shall hide me; He shall set me high upon a rock.”*

April 16

DELIVERED FROM DARKNESS!

“I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.” (Isaiah 42:16)

When Hideko was very young, she became sick with measles and the disease left her completely blind. Everyone was kind to her, but they could not really understand her problems. Hideko sometimes ventured to ask others why she could not see, but no one could give her a satisfactory reply. Some ventured to suggest that her blindness was a punishment from the gods, but she could not understand why she should be punished. She therefore grew up alone in a dark world, with just one joy – she loved to sing.

One day, when Hideko went out for a walk, guided by her stick, she suddenly heard joyful singing coming from a building. She ventured inside and discovered that it was a Christian church. She was heartily invited to join in their services and there she discovered for the first time in her life that her blindness was not a punishment from some god or other and she joyfully opened her heart to the Savior.

That was the beginning of a new life for fifteen-year-old Hideko. Her feelings of shame and frustration went and, in their place, she had the glorious knowledge that her blindness was for a purpose. At last she had a reason for living and she joyously dedicated her life to God.

During the next six years, Hideko studied music, taking every opportunity to sing for her Savior. As she prayed about her future, God also gave her the faith to trust Him to give her a husband to

share her life. One day, as she was singing in the choir at church, she heard a male voice singing behind her and believed that God had answered her prayer. She discovered that his name was Tetsuo Domen and that he was a keen Christian. He had come to know the Lord when he was in his teens.

After graduating from university, Tetsuo had found employment in a firm dealing in business machines. God was the center of Tetsuo's life and he loved to sing in the choir at church. He often prayed that God would lead him to the wife of His choice. He had come into contact with Hideko at church, but had never seriously thought of her as a potential bride. However, when she became the choir leader, it was his task to help her, because she was blind. Then God showed him that she was His choice for him and a marriage was duly arranged for them. Now, both Tetsuo and Hideko praise the Lord that they have been delivered from the blindness of heathen religions.

May the Lord help us to reach out to those who are still blind to the wonderful truths of the Gospel.

April 17

STEP BY STEP

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand." (Psalm 37:23-4)

When we think about it, life is made up of taking just one step at a time in order to reach our destination. But sometimes the way looks so difficult, especially when going up what seems to be a mountain. If we look ahead, it can look so tough that we wonder if we will ever make it to the top. But if we reflect for a moment and realize that all we have to do is simply to take one step at a time in the right direction in order to reach the summit, how much easier it will seem.

It is also true that when our way in life seems undesirable, so lonely and full of sorrow that all we can see is a great mountain of difficulty ahead of us, we may long to be at the end of the road and wonder if we will ever reach it. During times like this we need to

remember that, if we are seeking to please the Lord, and are walking in His way, He will order our steps. Not only that, His Word tells us that *"He delights"* in our way.

So, all we really need to do is to make sure that we are walking in His way and take one step at a time, then the road ahead will be full of His presence and He will help us every step of the way to reach His goal for our lives.

The following verses, written by an unknown author, sum it up very well:

*"I don't know how to say it, but somehow it seems to me
That maybe we are stationed, where God wants us to be.
That little place we're filling is the reason for our birth,
And just to do the work we do, He sent us down to earth.
"If God had wanted otherwise, I reckon He'd have made
Each one of us a little different, of a worse or better grade:
And since God knows and understands
all things on land and sea,
I fancy that He placed us here, just where He wanted us to be.
"Sometimes we get to thinking, as our labors we review,
That we would like a higher place with greater things to do;
But we come to the conclusion, when the envying is stilled,
That the post to which God sent us is the post He wanted filled.
And there isn't any service we can really scorn
For maybe it's the very reason God allowed us to be born!"*

So let's remember that we need to depend on God's guidance both now and in the future too. We read in the book of Numbers that the Israelites depended on God's guidance by means of a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. So let's do likewise and follow Him every moment of every day and every night!

April 18

BLESSED BY A BORROWED BIBLE

“Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you.” (Matthew 9:2)

The first thing that Yukio Takahara remembered hearing about Jesus Christ was that He was the central figure in world history, living exactly between B.C. & A.D. He was somehow curious to know more, but hesitated to spend his precious money on purchasing a Bible.

Yukio left school after completing junior high school and managed to get a job in an electrical firm. But, being ambitious, he joined local evening classes, in order to graduate from senior high school. Due to overwork and bad eating habits, however, he became sick with tuberculosis and was hospitalized.

The young man in the next bed in the hospital was a friendly school teacher, who loaned Yukio his Bible. Yukio paid particular attention to the portions that had been underlined and learnt a great deal about the Gospel. He also wasted a lot of time playing games with other patients, however!

Yukio would never have admitted it to anyone, but he was deeply concerned about his inner conflicts and, at the invitation of his teacher friend, started to attend the Christian meetings held in the hospital. All went well until Yukio heard that to become a Christian you had to ask forgiveness for your sins. He just did not know how he could humiliate himself by apologizing to man or to God.

One day, however, he became so miserable that he just could not bear himself any longer. So, in order to get away from his fellow-patients, he went out into the grounds of the hospital. There, with tears, he poured out his heart to God, confessing his sins. Assurance that his prayer had been heard resulted and he and his teacher friend both gave thanks to God for the miracle of salvation that had taken place in Yukio's heart.

Six months later, Yukio was well enough to leave the hospital and for the next ten years continued working as an electrician, eventually becoming the firm's manager. During that time, he faithfully attended his nearest church, but his deep desire was to go into full-time Christian service. His need to look after his elderly, widowed

father, however, held him back. Then, one day, God gave him a vision of a vast ocean, which represented great opportunities to work for Him. He then, in faith, entered the Kansai Bible College for the next four years and subsequently joined a Christian organization where he could use his talents for his Savior.

Maybe there is someone you know to whom you could lend a Bible that might change the course of his or her life. May the Lord make us always conscious of the needs of those around us.

April 19

WALKING IN HIS LIGHT

“Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life’.” (John 8:12)

How often we feel the need of guidance in life, but many times we don't know where to turn to get it.

If we have committed our life to the Lord, however, we must always remember that His Holy Spirit dwells within us continually. There is just no one else but He, who knows what decision we should make and in which direction we should go. By overlooking this wonderful truth, and making decisions without seeking the Spirit's direction, we can so easily be lead in the wrong direction.

What a wonderful Promise we have in Psalm 18:30, “As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him.”

His way is perfect and all the Words in the Bible have been proved true many times over. What more do we want? Here we have faultless guidance without a shadow of a doubt! However, we must first completely distrust ourselves and then fully trust Him.

We don't know what the future holds, but He does. We don't know what will happen to our loved-ones, but He does! We don't even know if we will be alive tomorrow, but He does! So, if we commit everything into His loving hands, our hearts will be completely at rest and we will also be a blessing to those around us.

When the pilot is on board a ship, even the captain can be at rest. May the Lord help us also to joyfully leave all of the future to our Savior.

This truth has been wonderfully expressed by an anonymous writer in the following words:

*"My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me,
I cannot choose the colors; He worketh steadily.
Oft' times He weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper and I, the underside.*

*"Not 'till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned."*

April 20

THE VOICE OF JOY

"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world." (1 John 4:14)

After a hard day in the factory, Shizuko Shindo had to go home, make the supper, clean the house and do the family washing. She often wondered why she did not have a mother, like other girls of her age. She just could not understand why fate had placed her in such wretched circumstances.

Her mother had died when she was only nine years old and Shizuko's strongest recollection of her was of the way in which she had worked, almost day and night, to help support the family. Her father's job as a repairman was not very lucrative and so her mother had to work in a factory. Smoking was the one pleasure she allowed herself, and, doubtless as a result, she died after contracting lung cancer at 48 years of age!

Usually, when Shizuko was attending to the household needs, she switched on the radio, hoping to find some soothing music to sooth her ruffled nerves. One day, a man spoke about a Savior who could deal with the deepest needs of the human heart. Shizuko was sorry when he had finished and resolved to try to listen to the same

broadcast again the following evening. She discovered that she had tuned in to a program called, *'Voice of Joy'*.

The broadcast became a highlight in her day and she soon wrote to the address that they mentioned, asking for a New Testament and also for a copy of the correspondence course that was offered. In this way, she was introduced to the message of salvation. Then, one day, she discovered there were special Christian meetings in the village and decided to attend. The speaker was the famous ex-fighter pilot, Mitsuo Fuchida, and she sat spellbound as she listened to his experiences.

From then on, Shizuko attended the church regularly and at their next youth camp took Jesus as her Savior. The housework that she had so hated was then joyfully done, because Christ had given her a new purpose in life. Even her father, who was by no means interested in Christianity, commented on how she had changed.

But Shizuko's desire was above all to serve the Lord and on hearing that there was a need for clerical help in the *'Voice of Joy'* broadcast office, she applied, was accepted and faithfully journeyed on her scooter every day to serve the Lord.

May the Lord help us to reach out to our friends and neighbors with the Gospel. Many of them may have a deep need in their hearts, which they may well never express, unless we befriend them and, as opportunity arises, tell them of our Savior.

April 21

MORE ABOUT JESUS!

1. *"More about Jesus would I know,
More of His grace to others show;
More of His saving fullness see,
More of His love who died for me.*

(Chorus)

*"More, more about Jesus,
More, more about Jesus;
More of His saving fullness see,
More of His love who died for me!"*

2. *"More about Jesus let me learn,
More of His holy will discern;
Spirit of God, my teacher be,
Showing the things of Christ to me.*

3. *"More about Jesus; in His Word,
Holding communion with my Lord;
Hearing His voice in every line,
Making each faithful saying mine.*

4. *"More about Jesus on His throne,
Riches in glory all His own;
More of His kingdom's sure increase;
More of His coming, Prince of Peace."*

(Eliza Hewitt - 1851-1921)

Eliza Hewitt was a school teacher and, when she wrote this hymn, she was recovering from a severe spinal injury, having been struck with a heavy slate by one of her students. At that time, she was especially studying the promises of God and, the more she studied, the more she rejoiced as she saw the Scriptures fulfilling every aspect of Christ's Life.

Although she was never again able to teach at school, she continued to be involved with Sunday school and, in that way, could combine the two great loves of her life - Jesus and children!

April 22

DO WE NEED TO FORGIVE?

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." (Matthew 6:14)

Maybe sometimes we think that we just cannot forgive a person who has wronged us, because we were hurt so badly. Maybe the hurt is still too real and has gone too deep. But we need to remember that nobody has ever forgiven anyone without hurt being involved. Alongside of that, it is also true that until we forgive the person in question, the hurt will remain, because we are hanging on to the past, not realizing that forgiveness is the only way to deal with it.

True forgiveness does not keep track of offences. In the Scriptures we see how Peter, thinking that he was being generous, asked Jesus if seven times was enough times to forgive someone. Jesus' answer no doubt astounded him when he was told, *"I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."* (Matthew 18:22) This reply was doubtless intended to convey the meaning that we should not count the number of times that we forgive someone. There is just no limit.

How wonderful it is to know that if we forgive others, our heavenly Father will forgive us and how we need forgiveness for the many times when we fail Him, and also other people in one way or another.

So, today, let's bring any problems that may be remaining in our heart to Jesus and leave them at His Feet, trusting Him to help us to forgive anyone that we may feel has wronged us, no matter how difficult it may seem for us to do at present.

May we always remember that the Lord has said in His Word, *"I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."* (Hebrews 8:12)

An unknown author has expressed this truth in the following lines:

*"When on the fragrant sandal tree,
The woodman's ax descends,
And she who bloomed so beautifully
Beneath the keen stroke bends,
E'en on the edge that brought her death,
Dying, she breathes her sweetest breath,
As if to token in the fall
"Peace to my foes, and love to all!"*

April 23

HOME AT LAST!

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

One day, little Kenji Ogaki, who, wanting to boost his status as the leader of the local gang, swam out to sea as far as he could possibly go, swallowed a lot of water and almost drowned! But somehow he managed to get back to shore safely and was most gratified by the admiring glances that he received from his friends, who had been watching him from the shore.

“When I’m grown up, I am going to be a sailor!” he declared and he did just that! But before he went to sea, a very important event took place in his life. He saw an advertisement of some Christian children’s meetings being held locally and rounded up his friends, thinking it would be fun to go.

Kenji got to like the friendly minister and the singing, so he continued to attend the church meetings for a few months. But when the opportunity to fulfill his ambition to become a sailor materialized, he went off and soon forgot about his contact with Christianity.

By the time that Kenji had visited forty different countries, he was completely disillusioned. He had imagined that the world outside Japan would be wonderful and the people very prosperous. Instead, in so many places he had encountered squalor, hunger and poverty. If God was the Creator, why did He allow such unhappiness, he often wondered.

Then, when he was twenty-five, Kenji injured his hip and had to return to Japan. He went to his parents’ home, but his drinking and gambling habits were more than they could stand and they soon asked him to find somewhere else to stay.

With his health broken, Kenji was at his wit’s end. There was nothing in life worth living for. Then, one day, he happened to pass by a church and heard a hymn being sung. Memories of the past suddenly flooded back into his mind and he plucked up courage to go into the church and seek spiritual help. He had no doubt that he was a sinner in need of a Savior and there and then yielded his heart to God.

Shortly afterwards, Kenji traveled some considerable distance to visit the minister who had been so friendly to him as a child and said to him, "When I was a boy, I always wanted to get to the end of the sea, but God showed me that I would never find real peace until I got to the end of myself and handed my life over to Him. Now I know that I am a real Christian and "home" at last!"

Let us, like Kenji, rest in Him moment by moment, no matter how difficult our journey through life may seem to be.

April 24

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT HEAVEN?

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3)

Isn't it wonderful to realize that heaven is open to all of those who believe in Jesus. His Words show us that the way to eternal life, though unseen, is secure, as we just put our trust in Him.

Not only that, but Jesus is preparing a place for each one of us who do trust in Him. So we can look forward to eternal life, because Jesus has promised it to all who believe in Him. The details of eternity may be unknown, but we need not fear because Jesus is there and we will spend eternity with Him.

As we focus our minds on heavenly things, earthly things are put into focus. Our home, as Christians, is where Christ lives and this realization gives us a different perspective on material things, when we see them from His point of view. We must make sure not to become too attached to what is only temporary, but to see things from a heavenly viewpoint and to seek what He desires for us, because He knows what is best for us.

It is most important that our ideas about heaven are based on the Bible. We should concentrate on our relationship with God, rather than being concerned with what heaven will be like. Eventually we will certainly find out and, in any case, it will without a doubt be

far beyond our present expectations.

It is not what, but who is in heaven that matters. We need to remember that God is on the throne and is in charge of all that goes on there. Revelation chapter 4, verse 1 gives us a glimpse of what it will be like there. *“After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’ Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne.”*

This wonderful truth has been expressed so well in the following words:-

*“Some day the Lord Himself shall come
I cannot tell how soon ‘twill be;
But this I know – in heaven my home –
He has a place prepared for me!”*

April 25

YEARNING FOR A NEW RELIGION

“Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring. The rain also covers it with pools.”

(Psalm 84:5-6)

Kazuko’s father was very harsh and just could not tolerate his orders not being carried out to the letter! Even if he was away from home on business, without fail, on the 1st and 15th of every month, the whole family had to worship the dead!

One day, unable to stand the strain any longer, Mrs. Nishijima packed a suitcase and left the house, taking her daughter Kazuko with her. But she soon felt so sorry for her son, who she had left behind, that she reluctantly went back home.

Apart from rice three times a day, they had very little else to eat and, at the age of fifteen, Kazuko left school and managed to earn a little money doing odd jobs for the villagers. Two years later, however, she left home and got a job in a factory.

There she became acquainted with Teruo Azuma and a marriage was arranged for them. He was a very kind man and they truly loved each other, but six months after they married, he became sick with tuberculosis and was hospitalized. Before long, he came into contact with the hospital evangelist, started to attend the Christian meetings in the hospital and found Christ as his Savior.

For years Kazuko had yearned for a religion with a real significance and followed her husband's example, attending the nearest church. She could not understand the Bible very well, but enjoyed the warm fellowship there.

Teruo, in the meantime, did not improve physically. There was nothing more that could be done for him in the hospital and before long he died. Kazuko was devastated and cried every day. But the Christians kept in contact with her and she came to realize that there was a well of Living Water, from which she could constantly draw and find satisfaction for her needy soul.

Some time after her husband went to be with the Lord, one of her legs became sore and the doctor's prognosis was that she might not eventually be able to walk. But the Lord gave her a promise from Psalm 121:8, "*The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.*"

Although Kazuko remained crippled, she was able to bring up her children to the honor of the Lord and when they got big enough not to need her attention all the time, she daily helped a Christian organization in any way she could and delighted to testify that God not only gave her a different religion, but the daily presence of His Holy Spirit in her heart.

April 26

JOYFUL IN SPITE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

(Philippians 4:4)

How wonderful it is to think that we can be joyful in spite of our circumstances. In Philippians, we read of a man, Paul, who was in prison and who constantly told the Christians to rejoice. He knew that, no matter what happened, Christ was with him. Several times in his letter to them, Paul urged the Philippians to be joyful, probably because they desperately needed that message. How easy it is to soon get discouraged when we are faced with unpleasant circumstances.

Paul's attitude teaches us the important lesson that our outward circumstances never need to affect our inner attitudes. He was so full of joy because he knew that no matter what happened to him, Jesus was with him. How easy it is to get discouraged by unpleasant circumstances. But circumstances can never get the better of us, if we just remember that real joy comes when we experience Christ dwelling within us and working through us.

Whatever may seem to cause us to worry may well bring stress and even fear into our lives, but it cannot keep God from working in our lives. No matter what happens, we must remember that He is in control and that we can leave everything in His Hands.

What a blessing it is to realize that joy comes from being in God's presence. This was true of David, when he said, *"I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved"* (Psalm 16:8).

Again in Habakkuk, chapter 3, verses 17-19, we read these wonderful Words, *"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls – yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills."*

The famous Dr R.A. Torrey put it so well when he said, *“God is the source of all joy, and if we come into contact with Him, His infinite joy comes into our lives.”*

What more do we need? May the Lord help us to be joyful, no matter what our circumstances may be, knowing that He is always with us and will meet our every need.

Let us remember that so often the greatest joy is the reward of intercession, when we experience God answering our prayers.

April 27

LOVE IN ACTION

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”

(2 Timothy 4:2)

After Dr. Nishimoto came through the operation for the removal of part of his lung, he rejoiced to hear that it had been successful, as he had expected - thanks to science! It had been kind of the man who belonged to the Christian group in the hospital to offer to pray for him, but he was glad that he had not been weak enough to accept the offer. He just hoped that the man would realize now what he had meant, when he had told him that “science” would see him through!

As the days and weeks passed by, Dr. Nishimoto made good progress and, on every possible occasion, he would tell any members of the Christian group that he came across, what a wonderful success his operation had been – thanks to “science”!!

During his time of recuperation, however, as he was looking out of the window one morning, he saw the solitary figure of a man entering the hospital. It was raining heavily and the man was bent forward, clutching something under his arm, obviously trying to protect it from the rain with his body. As he peered closer, Dr. Nishimoto recognized that it was the foreign missionary, connected with the Christian group and he could also see that what he was carrying under his arm was a book.

Morning after morning, no matter what the weather was like, he saw the missionary arriving at the same time and disappearing into the hospital. The question, which loomed larger and larger in the doctor's mind was, "Why does that missionary come to minister to those poor, pathetic tuberculosis patients every day and risk the chance of catching the disease himself?" He just could not understand it. It had not the faintest connection with science. It was something warm and living. It seemed to him to be "love in action" and he just could not get it out of his mind.

So it was that the skeptical, atheistic medical doctor, who until then had not had the slightest consciousness of a need of God, started to attend the Christian meetings and before long found Christ as his own personal Savior.

As a result, when he was discharged from the hospital, he continued to reach out to the physical needs of those who came to him. But, more than that, he also had a message to meet the need of the hearts of his patients, because he had learnt that science does not contain the answer to everything and that man's spiritual need can only be met by a loving Savior.

May the Lord help us to realize that, although we may not know it, there are those around us who are watching closely what we do day by day and who likely have a great spiritual need in their hearts.

April 28

ALL HAIL THE POWER OF JESUS' NAME

- 1. "All hail the pow'r of Jesus' name,
Let angels prostrate fall:
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all,
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all.*
- 2. "Ye chosen seed of Israel's race,
Ye ransomed from the fall,
Hail Him who saves you by His grace,
And crown Him Lord of all.*

*Hail Him who saves you by His grace
And crown Him Lord of all!*

3. *"Let every kindred, every tribe
On this terrestrial ball,
To Him all majesty ascribe,
And crown Him Lord of all,
To Him all majesty ascribe,
And crown Him Lord of all!*
4. *"Oh, that with yonder sacred throng
We at His feet may fall!
We'll join the everlasting song,
And crown Him Lord of all!
We'll join the everlasting song,
And crown Him Lord of all!*
- (Edward Perronet -1726-1792)*

Edward Perronet was descended from French Protestants and his father was an English clergyman who joined the Wesleys in carrying on their great revival of religion. His son, Edward, also became a clergyman, and for a time labored with the Wesleys. John Wesley wanted to hear Perronet preach, but for some reason he felt that he could not do so before Wesley. One day Wesley, seeing Perronet in the congregation, announced that he would preach the next morning.

Perronet had no option but to do so. But he did not preach a sermon himself. He just stood up and read the Sermon on the Mount, without one comment!

April 29

ENDURANCE

"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:22)

We may sometimes wonder why endurance is so necessary in our walk with the Lord. When the way gets difficult, we might like to give up, not wanting to go on to the end.

But as we study the Scriptures, we see that Jesus told the disciples that, when they were arrested for preaching the Gospel, they should

not worry about what to say in their defense, because God's Spirit would speak through them.

Some of us mistakenly think this means that we don't have to take time to prepare to present the Gospel, because God will speak through us. But the Bible teaches us, *"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."* (Colossians 4:6) and we can only do that by studying His precious Word.

We need to remember that endurance in our Christian walk grows out of a commitment to Jesus. He predicted that his followers would be severely persecuted by those who hated what He stood for. But then He exhorted them to stand firm and to continue to witness for Him, no matter how difficult the way might be.

Endurance is the way to have joy in the Christian life. Because Christ lives in us as believers, we can remain full of hope until the end. Without this endurance, we could easily be waylaid by the temptation of false teaching or persecution.

There is no doubt, however, the quality of our relationship with Him is directly linked with our willingness to endure hardship for Him. The secrets of enduring are trust and obedience. We need to trust God to give us the patience to endure even the smallest trials that we face day by day and to obey Him, even when obedience seems to go against the deepest desires of our heart.

Endurance is also the means of maintaining joy in Jesus. Because Christ lives in us as believers, we can remain hopeful and courageous until the end. We are not saved by being firm and steadfast in our faith, but our courage and hope reveal that our faith is real.

Let's remember that it is those who endure until the end who will be saved, but we are also told in 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 3, that, on the way, *"You must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."*

April 30

HOW GOD ANSWERED HER PRAYER!

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." (Jeremiah 33:3)

As Okazaki San lay in bed late one night, just before going to sleep, her prayer was, *"Oh God, do please work in my circumstances, so that I can go to church with other Christians on Sundays."* But even as she prayed, it seemed to be almost an impossible request. As a hairdresser's apprentice, there was just no such a thing as being off on Sundays. Monday was the day when all the hairdressers closed.

It would not have mattered at all to Okazaki San to be off on Sundays until recently, when she had listened to the Christian broadcast, *'Voice of Joy'*, and, as a result, found Jesus as her Savior. From then on, she had longed for fellowship with other Christians, having no longer any desire for the company of the frivolous girls, who were her fellow-apprentices in the hairdressers shop where she worked.

With these thoughts in her mind, Okazaki San fell asleep, thoroughly tired after another hard day's work. But God was at work while she slept and, a considerable distance away, in the north of Japan, Ukita San, the owner of one of the few Christian hairdressers in the country, was reading his Bible at the back of the shop, while waiting for the next customer to turn up. As he did so, one of his young apprentices approached him, saying, *"I'm sorry to trouble you, Sir, but my brother is ill and they want me to return home to look after the farm."*

"I quite understand. Of course you must go", Ukita San replied, at the same time wondering in his heart wherever he was going to find a replacement, knowing that Christian hairdressers were hard to find. When the young man had left him, he instinctively closed his eyes and asked the Lord to guide him. When he opened his eyes again, he noticed a copy of the *'Gospel for the Missions'* magazine, lying on the table. Maybe he should put an advertisement in that magazine, he thought.

A few weeks later, back in Osaka, Okazaki San, who was waiting for the next customer, started to read a copy of the “*Gospel for the Missions*” magazine, which the ‘*Voice of Joy*’ office had sent her. As she tuned over the pages, her attention was riveted on an advertisement, which read, “*Wanted, a Christian assistant hairdresser for the Lydia Hairdressing Saloon. Rest day on Sundays.*”

Okazaki San just could not believe her eyes! Here was surely the answer to her prayer and she hastily contacted the address given, praying, “*Oh God, do let them accept me, if it would please you*”.

Ukita San responded immediately and, before long, Okazaki San set out for the Lydia Hairdressing Saloon, praising God that again He had answered her prayers!

May 1

REAL ASSURANCE

“And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall do the signs.” (Exodus 4:17)

We see from this passage in Exodus, chapter 4 that real assurance is always dependent on God’s promises. Moses tightly clung to the shepherd’s staff, when he left Egypt to face a great challenge. Not then having the precious Word of God, as we have, the staff was his assurance of God’s presence and power.

When feeling uncertain, we sometimes need something to stabilize us and reassure us. For this purpose God has given us many precious promises in His Word that we can cling to and also examples of great heroes of faith, such as Moses, that we can follow.

It is also important to realize that false assurance leads us away from dependence on God. When we think of this, we remember the ruler, who we read about in Luke chapter 18, verse 18 and onwards. He went to Jesus and asked Him how he could obtain eternal life. When he heard the conditions, however, he was not willing to obey Jesus and went away very sorrowful. His possessions were more important to him than anything else. Relying on what we possess will never help us.

Just as the Hebrews looked to the pillar of fire to guide them, so we have His wonderful Word which is with us day and night to assure us that we are not alone on life's journey. Jesus warned His followers that persecution would be coming, during which they would even be betrayed by those that they thought loved them and whom they could trust. He wants us to know that even when we feel completely abandoned by others, the Holy Spirit is always with us.

Assurance is also based on Christ's resurrection. Because of His death and resurrection, his followers need never fear death. Assurance is also based on God's care for us. Jesus warned His disciples of coming persecution in which they would be betrayed by friends and even family members. But no matter what happens, He will comfort us, protect us, and guide us, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.

When we are tempted to doubt, may we remember the wonderful Words that Paul spoke in 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 12, *"...I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."*

How wonderful it is to know, however, that even if we find it difficult to believe, His precious Word says, *"If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself."* 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 13. What a wonderful Savior we have!

May 2

THE COUGH IN THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR

"... the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things." (John 14:26)

At first it was just a cough in the house next door, especially audible in the night that aroused the attention of the Christian neighbor. The cough, however, soon became a challenge for prayer.

When access to the house became a possibility, the "cough" turned out to be an elderly lady, whose name was Mrs. Yoneda. She was crippled with arthritis, suffering from asthma and was confined to a very small room at the back of the house and was

delighted to receive our visit. It emerged that her family regarded her as a nuisance and that she had often contemplated suicide. She had a vague faith in Buddha, but it did not seem to have been of any help to her.

As we told her of God's love for her, it did not take long for her to place her trust in Jesus as her own personal Savior. As a result, her face just beamed with joy and satisfaction. Her eyes are so bad that she could not read the Bible, but we sensed that the Holy Spirit Himself was her teacher. So often, when we went into her room, we came away greatly blessed, because of some truth that she had shared with us.

Even her son and daughter-in-law told us how changed she was and how one day they said to her, *"Mother, you never listen to the radio or watch the television any more. Why not? Aren't you sometimes lonely?"* They were astonished by her reply, when she said, *"No, my children, I am no longer lonely, because Jesus is with me every day. He talks to me and I talk to Him! I have never known such sweet companionship all my life!"*

A few months later, one morning early, Mrs. Yoneda apparently called her daughter-in-law into her room and said, *"I'm so sorry to trouble you, but I need to go on a journey today and I would be so grateful if you would help me to get into my best kimono"*, she requested and no matter how her daughter-in-law tried to reason with her, it did not help.

By 6.30 a.m., Mrs. Yoneda was lying on her bed, dressed in her best clothes, her hair neatly combed and by the side of her pillow lay her treasured possession – her Bible. She asked that the whole family would come into her room and she told them, *"I will not be with you much longer, but do not cry when I am gone. Today I am going to God's new world. Just say "Banzai" (Three cheers!), because I will be with Jesus. I would just like to thank you for all you have done for me."*

With those words on her lips, her voice became fainter and fainter and the tired, yet smiling eyes closed. She had gone to be with her Savior.

May 3

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life."

(1 Timothy 6:12)

Sometimes it seems so hard to hold on to our faith, when the way gets rough and things get tough. It is then difficult to remember that God knows all about our problems, our desires and our endeavors. Even when God has given us a Word of promise, that very Word tries us and tests us. It reveals whether His Word by itself fully satisfies us or not. We know we should believe that every promise will ultimately be fulfilled, but, until the fulfillment comes, are we so satisfied with the promise itself, that its fulfillment adds nothing to our joy?

In actual fact, the secret of the life of faith is to be cast moment by moment on the Lord in spiritual bankruptcy, which is only possible if we are moment by moment utterly depending on God in every circumstance of our lives. To be effective, faith must rest on what Christ has done for us. As Paul tells us so clearly in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13 verse 13, ***"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*** Our very relationship with God begins with faith, which involves our believing that we are delivered from our past sins by Christ's death and leads on to all that lies ahead in the Christian walk.

While, however, our faith often grows under pressure, we don't usually think of suffering as good for us, maybe not realizing that it will definitely build our character and increase our patience. During times of difficulty, there is no doubt that we will feel His Presence as at no other time. When we remember that one day we will go to be with Him or before that day comes, He may first return to put an end to all pain, it helps us grow in faith and in our relationship with Him.

It is likely true of most of us that when we enter the Christian faith, we find it difficult to believe anything is true, unless we have favorable emotions. But then, as faith progresses, we will be able to believe, even when we have no feelings, as Paul did when he was caught in a storm at sea that we read of in Acts 27: 20 ***"Now***

when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up."

But we read later in the same chapter, verses 22-25, that he said to those with him these words of encouragement, " ... *I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you'. Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.*"

What wonderful faith Paul revealed by those words in those most difficult moments! May the Lord help us to trust Him, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.

May 4

THE POWER OF TESTIMONY

"The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning, He awakens my ear to hear as the learned." (Isaiah 50:4)

In the year 1855, Mr. Kimball, a Sunday school teacher, led a Boston shoe clerk to give his life to Christ. That shoe maker was Dwight L. Moody, who later became a famous evangelist.

In England in 1879, Dwight L. Moody, during his ministry, was a great blessing to the pastor of a small church, Frederick B. Meyer.

One day, when preaching on an American college campus, Frederick B. Meyer led a student, J. Wilbur Chapman, to the Lord.

J. Wilbur Chapman became engaged in YMCA work and employed a former baseball player, Billy Sunday, to help him in his evangelistic outreach.

When Billy Sunday held some revival meetings in Charlotte, N.C., a group of local men were so enthusiastic that they planned another evangelistic campaign, bringing Mordecai Hamm to town to preach.

During Mordecai Hamm's revival, a young man, named Billy Graham, heard the Gospel and yielded his life to Christ.

Only Eternity will reveal the tremendous impact that Mr. Kimball, indirectly had on the lives of others! What a blessing a simple testimony can mean for the Lord's work?

We should never forget that He has said, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:19-20)

It is our responsibility to witness, though we can never determine who will respond. If we simply proclaim what we know about God, we may be surprised at how many people will listen.

How well the anonymous writer put this truth in the following words:-

*"For me 'twas not the truth you taught,
To you so clear, to me so dim,
But when you came to me, you brought
A deeper sense of Him."*

May 5

WHAT A FRIEND WE HAVE IN JESUS

- 1. "What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*
- 2. "Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful*

*Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness,
Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

*3. "Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge –
Take it to the Lord in prayer
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
In his arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there."*

(Joseph Scriven)

Joseph Scriven was born in Ireland in 1819. He was the son of a captain of the British Royal Marines and received a university degree from Trinity College in London. He was a man of great faith and determination. He became a teacher, fell in love and made plans to settle in his hometown.

Then tragedy struck. The day before his wedding, his fiancée accidentally drowned. Overcome with grief, he left Ireland to start a new life in Canada. It was there that he met and fell in love with Eliza Rice. Just weeks before they were to be married, she suddenly became sick and died. Even though the best doctors had been called, there was nothing they could do for her.

Ten years later, his mother became very ill, but he did not have the money to go to England to be with her when she died. It was then that the Lord gave him the words of this hymn. He said that the Lord and he wrote these words together! It was later put to music by Charles Converse and some time later was found by the American evangelist, Dwight L. Moody and much used in his evangelistic meetings and much used by the Lord.

May 6

HEALING PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL SICKNESS

"Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you. And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, 'This man blasphemes!' But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you', or to say, 'Arise and walk?'" (Matthew 9:2-5)

It would seem from this passage that the Lord was trying to emphasize the fact that spiritual healing, rather than physical healing was to be regarded as the most important part of His ministry.

But Jesus did not only go about preaching the Gospel, although that was the main emphasis of His ministry. His teaching revealed His concern that those to whom He ministered should understand what He was saying. His preaching showed His concern that they would commit themselves to the requirements of the Gospel. Thirdly, His miracles of healing established the authority of His ministry, proving that He was truly sent by God.

Jesus preached the Gospel to everyone who wanted to hear it, seeking to tell them that God is always with us and really cares for us, not wanting just to heal us of physical sickness, but of spiritual sickness too. No doubt most people were primarily concerned about their physical problems, but Jesus wanted to emphasize that there is also no sin or problem too small or too great for Him to handle.

When Jesus was here on earth, the people recognized Him as a great healer, but how many understood who He really was? They went to Jesus for physical healing, but did they go for spiritual healing? They rather went to Him to prolong their lives on earth, but very few went to Him because they sought for eternal blessing and wanted to make sure they were going to heaven after they died.

We read in the passage above about the paralytic man, who was brought to Jesus and He told him that his sins were forgiven. The religious leaders of that day, hearing this, thought that He was blaspheming. Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to them,

“Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you’, or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’” The leaders did not know how to answer Him. Then Jesus added, *“Arise and walk”* and the paralytic man was healed physically too.

It is important that we remember to tell others, who may just be seeking healing from Jesus, that they are missing the whole message of the Gospel if they are not first of all seeking healing for their souls and will end up in a lost Eternity.

May 7

THE USELESSNESS OF SHRINES!

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31)

Shrines had always been an important part of Miki Toshiyaki's existence. The first shrine that he remembered was the little red one in their home. His parents had always bowed their heads before it, although it was just a shelf attached to the wall on which they put some religious emblems, as well as the ashes of their grandparents.

Then one day, the paper pasted above the shrine, with clouds drawn on it, fell down and there was pandemonium in the house. Miki just could not understand what all the fuss was about, until his mother told him that there must never be anything above a god. So, in order for the god to think that there was nothing above him, like a ceiling, they had clouds specially drawn on paper and pasted above his abode! Due to age, the glue had dried up and the paper had ended up on the floor! They were therefore afraid that some calamity would strike their home. That was why everyone had dropped what they were doing in order to get the clouds back in place!

As a result of his upbringing, Miki always thought that their shrine had miraculous protective powers, until his mother died of tuberculosis. Then he was suddenly completely disillusioned. Before long, his father took a second wife, who was much younger than him, and Miki did not like her at all. So he was glad when his father bought a hotel, where he could roam around and do as he liked. There, in fact, he became utterly spoilt, helping himself freely

to the nicest rice balls, topped with raw fish and to his favorite bean-paste cakes.

After his mother's death, Miki lost all interest in shrines, but his father built a very elaborate one on the flat roof of the hotel. Mike often saw staff members go up there and ring the bell to wake the gods. When his father had problems, he also would bow before the shrine. Although not really convinced of its value, Miki too started to worship there. Then the hotel burnt down and Miki was again disillusioned!

After graduating from high school, Miki started working and before long met and married Ota San. She was a professing Christian, but during her first pregnancy she stopped going to church. A suspected cancerous lump in her breast however, drove her back and the church members earnestly prayed for her healing. When the doctor examined her, he declared her well, and Miki started to go to church too and found the Lord as his Savior. Their son, Katsunori, also became a keen Christian.

Katsunori, however, became very sick while studying at university but, believing that he faced death, testified that he had no fear in his heart. If he died, he knew that he would go to heaven. But he recovered, lives with his parents and found work in a firm handling electronic equipment. Their home is always open to others and many are being saved through attending their weekly meetings.

May 8

DEALING WITH SIN

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-4)

Although it may not be easy for us to do so, it is so important that we are open with God regarding our sins. David asked God to search his heart and point out to him anything that was not pleasing to Him. It is sometimes difficult for us to recognize sin, unless God clearly points it out to us. Even then, when God reveals it to us, we may be tempted to cover it up. That is just what we must not do,

but rather immediately repent. If we do so, how wonderful it is to know that He will instantly forgive us.

We may be amazed when we think about God's standard for us. His Word says in Matthew chapter 5, verse 48, "**... you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.**" These Words may cause us to wonder how we can ever be perfect. In this life, we certainly cannot be flawless, but we can aspire to be as much like Christ as possible. Alongside of that, we need to separate ourselves from the world's sinful values. We are to be dedicated to follow God's desires, rather than our own.

We will not achieve holy living and Christlike character all at once, but we can do our best to grow towards it. Just as we expect different behavior from a baby, a child, a teenager and an adult, so God expects different behavior from us, depending on our stage of spiritual development.

If we are downcast and troubled today that we are not coming up to God's standard in our spiritual lives, let's take courage afresh by resting on His wonderful promises. How wonderful it is that He has said, "**A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench**" (Isaiah 42:3).

Let's look to Him for His undertaking in all that lies ahead of us, while we are seeking to walk with Him in this sinful world.

How wonderful it is too to remember what we read in Romans, chapter 5, verse 8 "**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" He will always be there to deal with any sin in our lives, if we are only willing to open our hearts to Him.

May we never be happy, if we are conscious that there is still some sin in our lives that has not been dealt with through His precious Blood.

May 9

THE USELESSNESS OF RELIGION

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." (Jeremiah 33:3)

When Hideko was in high school, she and a friend decided to visit a temple in the mountains, where they could pay to draw a "sacred lot" which would map out their futures for them. If they did not like the first one they got, they could pay more money and draw another lot. They took as much money with them as they could and kept on drawing lots, until they drew the best possible one for their future. They returned from the mountain elated that their futures had been favorably arranged.

By the time she was twenty-five, however, Hideko had expected that she would be married. Many of her friends were and finally, in desperation, she asked her parents to hurry up and arrange a marriage for her. They did so and for the next four years Hideko was happy. But one day, when she came home from shopping, she found her husband dead! He had had a sudden heart attack.

In despair again, Hideko often visited the Shinto shrine and was utterly disillusioned one day when she went round to the back of the temple and saw two of the priests, who were supposed to be praying, just busy counting money and enjoying themselves. Whatever had been the point of the "sacred lots" that she and her friend had drawn out of the box on the mountain, she bitterly wondered!

Realizing how useless religion was to help her in her hour of need, Hideko phoned a Crisis Line and told them about her problems. They invited her to a meeting of those in similar straights. Hideko cried all the time when she was there and vowed never to go back again. But at that meeting she met a missionary, who befriended her and gave her a copy of the Bible.

Hideko soon joined the missionary's Bible class and for the first time in her life found peace and joy in praying the sinner's prayer and handing her life over to God. She felt that He had a special plan for her and He revealed it to her when she was offered a job as a dormitory housemother for ninety schoolgirls. How wonderful it was to be able to tell them too of her Savior.

Then, some years later, Hideko unexpectedly received an offer of marriage from a minister who had lost his wife and she prayed, *“Lord, if you want me to move in this direction, please supply someone to take my place at the school.”* Before long, God supplied a substitute and Hideko knew that she was free to marry. In this way, God not only gave her human companionship, but opened up a new way for her to serve Him.

“How stupid it was of me to have paid for those sacred lots to change my future, when I just need Christ to guide my life”, Hideko often testifies!

May 10

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR WORDS

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”

(Psalm 19:14)

This verse is a great challenge to us to remember that the words that pass over our lips need to be pleasing to God. If we realized that every word that we utter is being examined by Him, maybe it would change the way we speak.

How true it is that we have not really mastered self-control if we do not control what we say. Words can cut and destroy others. We see that James got across this vital truth, when he said, *“... the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire by hell.”* (James 3:6).

How well this truth has been expressed in the following Words, *“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each other.”* (Colossians 4:6)

We need to carefully examine the kind of words that come out of our mouth, because they are an indication of the condition of our heart. However, if we are conscious that we do have a problem, we cannot solve it by simply trying to improve our speech. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to fill us with a new attitude. Then our speech will be changed at its source, in our hearts.

If we think about it, our words are really very important, because if we call ourselves Christians, we are representatives of the Lord Jesus. When we tell others about Him or even when we are speaking to them about others, we should always be gracious in what we say and how we say it, realizing that we are speaking on His behalf. Maybe we should consider that our words are so powerful that silence is sometimes the best option.

This truth has been wonderfully expressed in the following words:

*“A gracious word may smooth the way;
A joyous word may light the day;
A peaceful word will lessen stress;
A loving word will heal and bless.”*

May 11

HE THOUGHT HE KNEW BETTER THAN GOD!

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

(Isaiah 40:3)

As far back as he could remember, Hajime Kato had always felt that Christianity was a good thing. In the neighborhood where he had lived as a boy, he could still remember that when the man next door was sick with tuberculosis, everyone tried to avoid him, except the people from the local church. They were always kind to him and Hajime could see that Christians loved everybody and admired them for it.

Hajime had been born into a typical Buddhist home and had a younger sister and brother. Although the family was poor, his father had a good job, working as a carpenter. But he was so busy that he left for work when the children were still sleeping and came back long after they were already in bed. He only had one day off a month and the children had so much enjoyed playing with him then.

When Hajime was ten years old, however, disaster struck. His father was riding on the back of a lorry, piled high with lumber,

when it lurched sideways, throwing him to the ground. His head hit a stone and he died. Mrs. Kato then had to earn money to try to support the family and took a cleaning job at a hotel.

Some time later, they moved to another part of Tokyo and it was there that Hajime heard the Gospel for the first time. A new-found friend invited him to Sunday school, where he discovered to his surprise that not only were the people friendly, but that they had the wonderful Good News of a Savior, who had come to this earth to die for them and for him too. But Hajime was not quite ready to give himself over to this new religion.

In fact, his mother's meager income forced Hajime to leave school as soon as possible. He found work in a foundry and proved to be so hard-working that, within five years, he was promoted to be the foreman. Also spiritually, he was keen to know more and attended any special meetings held at his local church. On one occasion, the visiting speaker asked him if he was saved and Hajime said he was not sure. The minister then immediately opened his Bible and led him to the Lord.

But when Hajime was eighteen years old, he began to think that he did not really need God and no longer read the Bible or spent time in prayer. He got into bad company and joined them in search of pleasure. But the Words of the Bible just would not leave him and he knew that he must heed God's voice.

So it was that Hajime returned to God and entered Bible College, to equip himself for the ministry. How grateful he was that the day had dawned when he again had come to the realization that he did not know better than God!

May 12

ANGELS, FROM THE REALMS OF GLORY

1. *"Angels, from the realms of glory;
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye, who sang creation's story,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth:*

(Chorus)

*"Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the newborn King.*

2. *"Shepherds, in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with man is now residing,
Yonder shines the Infant Light;*

3. *"Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations,
Ye have seen His natal star.*

4. *"Saints, before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly the Lord, descending,
In His temple shall appear."*

(James Montgomery - 1771-1854)

James Montgomery was a newspaperman in London, who had been imprisoned twice for his controversial editorials. Then on Christmas Eve, 1816, he ran the words of the above poem in his newspaper!

Amazing as it may seem, other than Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley, no writer has contributed more to the development of Christian hymns than this journalist, who championed the cause of the poor and downtrodden, as well as foreign missions.

The music was composed by Henry Smart, a blind organist, who was the designer and builder of some of England's finest organs.

James Montgomery wrote over 400 hymns before his death in 1854 at the age of 83.

May 13

GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION

"And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for he will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21)

The word, "*Jesus*" means "*Savior*" and we always need to remember that Jesus came to earth to save us, because we cannot save ourselves from sin and its consequences, no matter how good we may be. The reason is that there is a sinful nature in all of us, which we cannot eliminate. Only Jesus can do that and how we need to pass on to others this undeniable truth.

Jesus' purpose in coming to this sinful world was to be our Savior and to save us from the power and also the penalty of sin. All we have to do is to be conscious of our need of Him, confess our sins, repent of them and ask Him to take control of our lives. From that moment on, a miracle takes place within us and we are completely changed. The Bible tells us that the moment we believe, we become "*a new creation*" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Believing in Jesus is the only way to heaven and we read in Matthew 7:14 that

"... narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." This does not mean, however, that it is difficult to become a Christian, but that there is only one way to be able to become one. The reason is that Jesus alone died for our sins and made us right before God. Although His way may not be popular with everyone who hears of it, how we need to thank God that there is a way, which only He has made possible.

We need to realize that salvation is a gift to be profoundly appreciated. A gift is not something for which we have to work. If someone offers us a gift, we don't have to ask how much we should pay for it, we just say, "*Thank you!*"

It is the same with God's gift of salvation. We just have to accept it and say, "*Thank you!*" A problem arises when a person feels that he or she has to try to work their way to God and to heaven. We only need to realize that a wonderful free gift has been given, accept it and trust Him to lead us in all our future days. Joy and praise will inevitably result.

How well the anonymous writer put it in the following words:-

*“Repentance is to leave the sin
That we had loved before,
And showing we are grieved by it
By doing it no more.”*

May 14

ONE IN THE LORD!

“And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” (Ephesians 5:2)

As a little boy, his parents had always told Hiroo to pray at the Buddhist altar. But when he was five years old, a great upheaval took place which radically changed the lives of the members of the Akai family. Mr. Akai's rope business went bankrupt! He eventually found employment in a firm making plastic bowls, but his wages were meagre and they found it difficult to make ends meet.

In order to help out financially, Mrs. Akai also took a job as an assistant to a dressmaker and her employer turned out to be a very nice lady. In fact, she had never met anyone like her before. She was a Christian and, before long, Mrs. Akai became a Christian too.

From that time on, Hiroo and his sister always went to Sunday school and to church with their mother. But Mr. Akai stood somewhat aloof, though, in fact, he was watching his wife's life very closely. Some six years later, not being able to withstand her consistent witness, Mr. Akai too took Christ as his Savior.

In the meantime, Hiroo, having graduated from high school, went to Tokyo for further study. He later obtained employment and remained there for some eleven years. But, in the far country, he ceased to attend church, seldom read his Bible and got involved in worldly activities. But eventually, like the prodigal son, he became tired of the emptiness of the things of this world and returned to his home and to God!

On the 11th April, 1982, Hiroo was baptized into the Christian faith. His sister too subsequently found Christ and the Akai family became one in the Lord. The next hurdle for Hiroo was to find a suitable bride. He was already 32 years old and getting beyond the normal marrying age in oriental eyes.

In the meantime, Toshiko Ito, a keen Christian girl, was praying that God would lead her to the one of His choice as a partner in life. She too was over 30 years of age and knew that, humanly-speaking, it would not be very easy to find a husband.

Toshiko, wanting to serve the Lord, had previously given up a lucrative job and joined the office staff of the Japan Mission. After two years of dedicated service, the possibility of a marriage being arranged with Hiroo Akai was suggested to her. Toshiko sought the Lord's mind on the matter and believed that this suggestion was from Him.

The wedding was a most happy occasion, as both bride and groom praised God that He had led them every step of the way and that they were one in Him.

May 15

THE GREAT NEED OF REPENTANCE

"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'" (Matthew 3:1-2)

We see in the above words that the very center of John the Baptist's message was that those to whom he spoke should repent. Why is repentance so important? Because it opens up the way for a relationship with God, which otherwise would be impossible!

It's important to remember that there are two sides to true repentance. One is the need to turn away from sin and the other is turning toward God. We cannot just say that we believe and then live any way we choose. Neither can we simply live a morally correct life without a personal relationship with God. In other words, confession of sins and a changed life are inseparable.

As we see in the Scriptures, "*... faith without works is dead*" (James 2:26). In fact, if we read the rest of that chapter, we will see

that Jesus' harshest words were to the religious leaders of His day. They wanted to be known as religious leaders, but did not want to change their ways.

Repentance breaks our bondage to sin, but the chief priests' blindness and hardness of heart caused them to sin even more. They not only rejected Jesus, but planned to kill Him and murder Lazarus as well. There is no doubt that one sin leads to another and sin can only be dealt with by repentance and the power of the Holy Spirit entering our life to radically change our behavior.

Repentance makes inward change an outward reality. The challenge is as to whether or not others can see the change in our lives when we turn to the Savior. If this is not so, we need to examine our hearts. To 'repent' means to 'turn', implying a change in behavior.

May the Lord help us, not only to make sure of our own repentance before God, but to be so yielded to Him that others will see the difference that He is making in our lives and also in all our actions.

We need to admit our sin and then to make sure that we quit it too! How well the anonymous writer expressed it in the following words:-

*"It's not enough to say to God,
"I'm sorry, I repent,"
And then go on from day to day
The way I always went."*

May 16

OFTEN IN THE JAWS OF DEATH

"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"

(1 Corinthians 15:55)

Tomio Nakai could well have lost his life when he was just a boy. In fact, during the very year that he graduated from grade school in 1923, the great earthquake occurred that devastated the metropolis of Tokyo, killing 106,000 people and injuring some 60,000 others - Tomio was one of the lucky ones, "favored by the gods", as his parents put it, and the family came to no harm.

Tomio's next brush with death was when he was the leader of an entertainment troupe, which toured Japan and also traveled overseas to territories that were then occupied by Japan, such as Korea, Manchuria and Sakhalin Island. Tomio's forte was reciting exciting stories and he very much enjoyed his work.

When they were traveling by boat one day, a typhoon suddenly struck and it did not take long for the ship to sink with its seventy or so passengers and crew members. It all happened so suddenly that there was just no time to get the lifeboats operable. For ten long hours they battled the relentless sea, hanging on to anything that they could get hold of. The awful screams of his fellow-passengers, as they drowned one after the other, lived long in Tomio's memory. Just he and one other man were ultimately rescued!

Then there was the day many years later when he was on the verge of dying of a heart attack. With sirens sounding and red lights flashing, the ambulance speedily transported him to the hospital. But then again the "gods" protected him, he reckoned, and in spite of the gloomy prognosis of the doctor, he did not die!

But, as Tomio lay on his hospital bed, a battle was going on in his heart. He had admittedly survived the heart attack, but in reality how far was he from death, he wondered. He had cheated death many times, but he was sure that one day it would catch up with him and deep down in his heart he was scared to die.

Tomio was pondering the possible existence of some beneficent god when the hospital evangelist walked into his room. Glad to have a friendly visitor, Tomio attentively listened to what he had to say and it did not take long for him to tell the evangelist the thoughts that were going on in his mind. He was overjoyed to hear of the True God who has conquered death for everyone through His Son, Jesus.

That very day, Tomio gained perfect peace in his heart at last and from then on could echo the words of King David, when he said, "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*" (Psalm 23:4)

May 17

THE NEED OF REST

“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Genesis 2:2-3)

As we see from the above verses, God rested on the seventh day, now regarded as Sunday. If God Himself rested from His work, then it is pretty obvious that we should rest from our work too. We live in an action-oriented world. There always seems to be something to do and little time to do it. But God demonstrated that rest is appropriate and right for each one of us no matter what we may be doing.

As Christians, in a work-oriented world, by observing a regular time of rest and worship on Sundays in particular, we demonstrate how important God is to us, apart from the fact that our spirit is also refreshed as a result. Indeed, He has said in His Word, **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”** (Exodus 20:8)

There is no doubt that God rested on the seventh day, not because He was tired, but to indicate the completion of His work of creation. The world was perfect and God was well satisfied with it. Our complete rest in Christ begins when we trust Him to complete His good and perfect work in us.

We must always remember that rest is a gift from God. He wants us to enter into and dwell in His rest, which is peace with Him right now and eternal life hereafter. For those of us who know the Lord, how wonderful it is to have peace with Him now and eternal life in the world to come. May we be so much at rest in our hearts that others will see His rest in us and long to be partakers of it also.

If we know the Lord as our Savior, what a wonderful promise we have in Proverbs 3:24. **“When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.”**

This has been so wonderfully summarised in the following words:

*"Sometimes I ask the question,
My Lord, is this your will?"
It's then I hear you answer me,
'My precious child ... be still!'
Sometimes I feel frustrated,
'Cause I think I know what's best.
It's then I hear you say to me,
'My busy child ... just rest!"*

May 18

DENIED CHRIST FOR NINE YEARS!

"So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten." (Joel 2:25)

Yasuko Imai had had enough of the True Light Society. In the beginning she had thought it was a wonderful religion, but she had changed her mind. She had come to the conclusion that it was a lot of rubbish to think that the spirit of someone who did not want to die had taken up residence in her body. She just could not believe it! As Yasuko thought back over her past, she deeply regretted not having gone through with the religion that had once meant so much to her – Christianity!

When she had lain on a hospital bed, stricken with tuberculosis at the age of nineteen, it had been the teacher from the Japan Mission who had explained to her the way of salvation and helped her to face life again. She had confessed her sins then and trusted God with her future. It had also been the Christians among the patients in the hospital, who had been so kind to her and helped her in any way they could, in spite of their own frail bodies. She knew that Christianity was a religion that practiced sacrificial love.

Even when she had left the hospital, the Japan Mission had taken the trouble to introduce her to her nearest church and there she had been baptized into the Christian faith. It had been a wonderful experience and one which she would never forget. But always at the back of her mind she could not help remembering what her grandmother had said to her, *"Yasuko, if you become a Christian, you will never get a husband!"*

That was something that Yasuko just could not face and so, after a great deal of thought, she decided that she should follow her grandmother's advice. In fact, her rejection of the Gospel seemed to pay off, because very soon afterwards a marriage was arranged for her with Hisashi Imai.

But now, as she looked back, Yasuko realized that for nine years she had been walking in utter darkness. She had lost her direction in life and, in a vain search for consolation, she had turned from one religion to another.

So it was, after nine, long years of separation from the Savior, Yasuko found her way back to Him. She had finished with playing at religion and resolved to do all she could to make up for the lost years. God honored her determination and Yasuko subsequently had the joy of seeing her husband and many of her relatives turn to her Savior.

Her one burning desire now is to lead others away from false religions and into a vital knowledge of Jesus.

May 19

I ONCE WAS LOST

*"I once was lost and far, far away from God,
Weary and full of care
But He drew me back with His own mighty heart of love,
And gave me a thirst for the things of heaven above.
So I said to Him, I will trust you, Lord.
Just cleanse my evil heart from all its sin I pray.
So, I came to Him.
Yes, I came to Him,
And He's Lord of my life today.*

*"I once had sunk so deeply in sin and shame,
Guilty and full of fear,
But He sent His Son to the bitter cross to die for me,
From guilt and from fear to forever set me free.
So, I said to Him, I will trust you, Lord.
Just cleanse my evil heart from all its sin I pray.*

So, I came to Him.
Yes, I came to Him,
Yes, I came and He's Lord of my life today.
*"I once sought my joy in this vain world of pomp and pride,
Where life's just an empty show.
But He offered me His great salvation here below,
His joy that this world can never, never know.
So, I said to Him, I will trust you, Lord.
Just cleanse my evil heart from all its sin, I pray.
So, I came to Him.
Yes, I came to Him,
Won't you make Him Lord of your life today?"*
(Peggy Verwey)

May 20

THE SECRET OF TRUE GREATNESS

"... whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:44-45)

Many people in the world have a deep longing to be considered a great person. But the conception of what constitutes greatness varies considerably from person to person. However, basically it is the desire to have much influence with others, to have a position in life that those around us will admire and to have a lot of money and power. But the Bible teaches us that true greatness will only result if we are approved and blessed by God.

We see in 1 Peter, chapter 5 that James and John so much wanted the highest places in Jesus' kingdom, but Jesus told them that true greatness only comes in serving others.

In the world greatness is measured by high personal achievement, but for the Christian the only way to greatness is to seek to minister to others.

If we read further into Psalm 112, we will also see that true greatness comes to the man or woman who fears God, delights in reading His Word and is also upright, gracious and compassionate in dealing with others.

We see too that such a person will be generous and even lend to others, if there is a need, and also have a steadfast trust in the Lord in all circumstances. They will not be afraid even if difficult times come across their pathway, because their confidence is always in Him.

So we see that true greatness does not result from those around us acclaiming us. It is also not attained by having a lot of money or being famous in the eyes of others. It results from having a consciousness of God in our hearts and from obeying Him, no matter what our circumstances may be. In other words, godliness is true greatness.

May the Lord help us to follow in His Footsteps and be a shining light for Him. Then we will truly be a blessed person and also a blessing to those with whom we come into contact.

How well this truth has been expressed also in Psalm 112:1-3, *“Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on the earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.”*

May 21

“THERE IS A WAY”

“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the plank that is in your own eye?” (Luke 6:41)

Toshiko Ito was brought up in a nominally Buddhist home. The god-shelf, situated high in the corner of the sitting room, was the center of their activities. Mrs. Ito always sacrificed the first helping of the steaming hot rice to Buddha each day, while her husband clapped his hands in prayer, especially when his business deals were worrying him!

During her school days, Toshiko had been a hardworking student, but, on graduating, she being plunged into the cold reality of the business world and often became most frustrated. By nature a perfectionist, she could not stand being part of some of the shady business deals in which her firm was involved. Her desire to give her very best to her employer was therefore often dampened. Toshiko was sure that there must be a better way.

Then, one day she came across a book called, *"There is a Way"*. It was the testimony of a tuberculosis patient, who had come to know Christ as her Savior. For many months, a fellow-patient had tried to persuade her to become a Christian, but she had resisted. He became so frustrated at her unwillingness to take Christ as her Savior that he picked up a sharp stone and hit his foot with it until the blood flowed.

As the patient saw the blood flowing from his self-inflicted wound, she suddenly realized how deep his concern for her was and, with tears in her eyes, opened her heart to the Savior of whom he had told her.

Toshiko just could not get that story out of her mind. It was as if she herself was that tuberculosis patient. She seemed to see the wounds of Christ and the Blood flowing and realized her great need of salvation. From then on, Toshiko started to listen to a Christian broadcast and wrote to their office, asking for more information. She soon received a New Testament and spiritual help.

One day, Toshiko was invited to attend a special evangelistic meeting. She did so and did not hesitate to respond when an appeal was made for those who wanted to take Christ as their Savior to go forward. During that meeting too, she realized how critical she had been of others and, there and then, asked the Lord to forgive her and to help her grow more like Him.

The next day, Toshiko told those with whom she worked about the One who had changed her life and asked them to forgive her for her critical spirit.

Toshiko could never forget the little book, which had been her first contact with Christianity and had shown her that there was a way to obtain eternal life.

May 22

FAITH

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." (Job 13:15)

Sometimes we are most concerned because we feel that our faith is just too weak. But it is possible by taking hold of divine power to become strong through and through, like Job. God does not blame us if we do not do more for Him, but rather if we do not believe Him more.

In the beginning we are more likely to believe God when we have favorable emotions, than when there is no feeling. But we need to get to the place spiritually when we believe God and His Word when circumstances, emotions and everything else urges us to the contrary. Then, we will be able to testify to those we come into contact with, like Paul did when he was facing most difficult circumstances, “... *I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.*” (Acts 27:25)

If God has a task to be performed, it will not be our skill or our talents that will qualify us for the job. It will only be our faith, because then it will be God who is at work and not we ourselves.

When it comes down to it, what is faith? It is a total dependence on God and above all a willingness to do His will. It is not something that we use to put on a show for others. It is complete obedience to Him and a readiness to do whatever He shows us to do and a consciousness that we have put our faith in a God who is all-powerful.

Also, we need to realize that showing faith may well often be a battle. This is clearly revealed in the following exhortation that Paul gave to Timothy in the following verses, “*Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*” (1 Tim. 6:12)

We are told that ineffective faith results in an unchanged life. Just as a tree is expected to bear fruit, God calls us to be active in our obedience. We read in Matthew chapter 3, verse 8, that we are to “*bear fruits worthy of repentance*”. The Bible teaches us that faith does not end just in trusting Christ for our salvation. Faith must grow. It will certainly be weak at first, but it will become stronger as we study His holy Word, go to church and have fellowship with others.

Most of us are well practiced in faith. We sit down on chairs, put keys in locks, put the oven on and expect it to work, no doubt largely because they have all worked in the past. So, it should be with God, but somehow we don't always show such trust in Him. But Jesus has said, “... *if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*” (Matthew 17:20)

May 23

THE FORGOTTEN MEAL

“And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” (Matthew 7:3)

Aiko Mugasa toiled at her desk every day at *“The Society for the Establishment of Righteousness and Friendly Relationships”*, but she felt far from righteous and had little desire to create friendly relationships! To tell the truth, she was sick and tired of sitting in at guidance sessions with the shaven-headed priest, who tried to solve the problems of the many middle-aged women who attended. She was also fed up with the society’s emphasis on public service. She had had enough of going out with the women to clean dirty public places. As far as she could judge, all their good works were getting them nowhere!

When her office duties were over for the day, Aiko walked home, her feelings in turmoil. When she got there, it was time to make supper and she speedily set to work to do so, knowing that her husband expected his meal on the table the moment he set foot in the house.

While she waited for the rice to cook, Aiko went outside to see if there was any mail. The only item she found in the box was a small magazine, called *“Fountain of Joy”*. Reckoning that there was not much joy in her life, Aiko decided to look through it and found the contents very helpful. It had apparently been put in the mailbox by the local Christian church.

In fact, Aiko became so intrigued with what she read that she forgot all about the meal she was supposed to be cooking, until she saw her husband approaching their house. Only then did she realize with a start that it was far from ready and she speedily returned to the preparations.

At her first possible opportunity, Aiko went to the church that had sent her the leaflet. Her heart was hungry to hear more of the way of salvation and she reveled in the loving kindness lavished on her by those she met there.

Aiko soon became very conscious of a lack of love in her heart towards her husband, his mother and unmarried sister, with whom she lived, and who she, as the wife of the house, had to serve. She

had always blamed them for not treating her properly, but now she realized that she was the guilty one. God spoke to her through His word and Aiko confessed her sins to Him and obtained assurance that she had the pardon, which He so freely offered. From that moment on, her great desire was to share the Bread of Life with her family and with any others of her acquaintance.

Let's search our hearts to see if maybe we have an attitude problem and that is the reason why we are not reaching more of the needy souls around us for our Savior.

May 24

LOVE CHASES OUT FEAR

"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18)

When we trust God's perfect love for us, we no longer have to fear circumstances, because we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. When we trust God's love, we no longer even have to fear death and the devil, because we are confident that by His death, He freed us from the bondage of fearing death and destroyed the power of the devil.

When we trust God's Love, we no longer need to fear others, because we can believe what it says in Psalm 118:6, *"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"* and then in verses 8-9, *"It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes."*

The phrase *"do not fear"* is said to appear 366 times in the Bible – once for every day of the year, even in a leap year! We should always remember that there is nothing to be afraid of but doubting God.

But even fearing God does not mean being terrified of Him. God was never trying to scare people. He was only showing his mighty power so that the Israelites would know that He was the true God and would therefore obey Him. If they would do so, He would always make His mighty Power available to them. God always wants us to follow Him out of love and not out of fear. If we really love Him, we will understand what He means when he tells us in 1 John 4:18 that *"perfect love casts out fear"*.

Maybe more than anything we have to be careful not to leave God out of our thinking in anything we may have to face. If we look at the book of Joshua, we see that Joshua's had the task of leading more than 2,000,000 people into a strange land, providing for them, and conquering it at the same time! What a challenge that must have been even for someone of Joshua's caliber!

Even in our case, we often tend to be afraid when we have to face a new situation! But how wonderful it is to know that God will be with each one of us at all times, just as He was with Joshua. He will be with us day by day to face any new challenge that may come our way. All we have to do is to look to Him to direct us. So let's count on His Love and praise His Name moment by moment, looking up to Him even in the darkest hour!

How well this matter is expressed in Deuteronomy 10:12-13, *"And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul."*

May 25

SOMEONE LOVED HIM!

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Masahiro Inoue wondered if he would every get over the fact that, in his fury, he had hurled a screwdriver at his mother's face, just because she said something he did not like. He could so easily have blinded her! Even as it was, he knew that the scar of the 3 inch deep cut, which had resulted at the side of her eye, would haunt him all his life. Then there was the time when he had nearly killed his brother, when he had hurled the kitchen chopping board at his head. Why had he always been so brutal?

As Masahiro pondered over these things, he had no doubt in his mind that the tuberculosis from which he was now suffering was his punishment for his evil temper. Just to think that at the age of seventeen, when all his friends were enjoying life, he was lying on a hospital bed, with nothing to do but reflect on his evil past!

As a result of his mental attitude, Masahiro made few friends in the hospital, but one day, a patient in the same ward, invited him to attend a meeting of the Christian group which met there. Masahiro had absolutely no interest in any sort of religion, but, needing a change of scenery, accepted the invitation.

At that meeting, however, he heard something that he had never heard in his life before - that someone loved him! But he just found it too hard to believe and was sure that if that person knew what he was really like, he could not possibly do so! But during the days that followed, Masahiro began to read the New Testament, which had been given to him and found out more about the wonderful Love of God. As he did so, he could not help but think back on the love of his mother. How loving and patient she had been with him, always trying to steer him in the right direction.

By the time he was due to leave the hospital two years later, Masahiro was a keen Christian and the evangelist introduced him to his nearest church. He treasured the fellowship that he experienced and was deeply blessed by the spiritual ministry there. Then, one day, the pastor approached him and asked him if he did not think that the time had come for him to marry.

Masahiro was delighted and a few weeks later when he was introduced to his prospective bride, Taeko. When he saw her, he knew that she was God's choice for him. All the negotiations went through smoothly and they were duly married. Masahiro knew without a shadow of doubt that this was just another token of God's wonderful Love.

There are so many around us who know nothing of God's Love for them. May the Lord help us to tell them and pray them into His Kingdom.

May 26

IN HEAVENLY LOVE ABIDING!

1. *"In heavenly love abiding,
No change my heart shall fear;
And safe in such confiding,
For nothing changes here.
The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid,
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?"*

2. *"Wherever He may guide me,
No want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh,
His sight is never dim;
He knows the way He taketh,
And I will walk with Him.*

3. *"Green pastures are before me,
Which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me,
Where the dark clouds have been.
My hope I cannot measure;
My path to life is free;
My Savior has my treasure,
And He will walk with me."*

(Anna Waring - 1823-1910)

Anna Waring was a shy, retiring woman, who lived in South Wales. But, she had a great burden to be used by the Lord and even taught herself Hebrew, so that she could read the Old Testament in the original language.

In spite of her retiring disposition, she spent much of her time, in her latter years, visiting prisons, but always sought to avoid publicity. Some of the words that she wrote in another hymn well reveal to us her innermost feelings, "So I ask Thee for the daily strength, to none that ask denied, and a mind to blend with outward life, while keeping at Thy side, content to fill a little space, if Thou be glorified."

May 27

THE WORD OF LIFE

“... holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”

(Philippians 2:16)

In the year 1484, a baby was born in Gloucestershire, England, whose name was William Tyndale. No one could have imagined just how much he would influence the world in the days that lay ahead.

At that time, England had had the Gospel message for nearly a thousand years, but was still a dark land. Most villages had a priest and a church, but the services were in Latin, with the result that even those conducting the services did not always know what they were conveying to the people.

William Tyndale studied Greek and realized that many things taught in the churches were not in accordance with the Bible. His great desire was that people would be able to read the Bible for themselves in their own language. But he met with great resistance from church leaders and eventually went to Germany to find a printer who would be willing to take on the task of printing the Bible in English. There the New Testament was eventually printed and copies smuggled into England.

When William Tyndale was fifty years old, his enemies caught up with him and he was arrested and later executed. His dying prayer was said to have been, “Lord, open the eyes of the king of England”. His prayer was answered and soon a copy of the Scriptures was placed in every church.

What a price he paid! May the Lord help us to value the precious Word of God that Tyndale helped make available to us. May we set aside a regular time every day to study it. If we don't do so, we will not grow spiritually. We should also ask God to help us understand it. Then, carefully think about what we are reading. The treasures of the Bible do not always lie like pebbles on a beach. To mine gold, you have to dig for it. Don't get discouraged if some parts of the Bible seem difficult to understand when first read. If we press on, what we have read will eventually revolutionize our lives.

The great man of God, A.B. Simpson said, *“Let us believe it implicitly; let us believe it without compromise or questioning. Let us not try to eliminate the supernatural and bring it down to the place of our own reason and knowledge; but let us bow submissively before the throne of Him who speaks from heaven and say with every fiber of our being, ‘It means just what it says!’”*

May we be able to say with the Psalmist at all times - *“This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life”* (Psalm 119:50).

May 28

PEACE IN THE SAVIOR

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

Having lots of spare time, Yasuko joined the local tennis club and played almost every day. In fact, there were few things in life that she enjoyed more than tennis. One day, however, she just could not concentrate on her game and her friend asked her if anything was troubling her. Yasuko would like to have brushed off the question with a casual remark, but could not restrain the tears which sprung into her eyes and decided to share her problem with her friend.

“Niki, I’m so ashamed that I can hardly talk about it, but maybe you can help me. I think my husband is having an affair! Last night, when I faced him with the matter, he admitted that he was friendly with a colleague in the office! He told me that he finds her very good company and that she understands him much better than I do! What can I do? I could not sleep last night. Jealousy and hatred are consuming me!” she sobbed. *“I must find a way out or commit suicide.”*

Niki did her very best to pacify her distraught friend, but she knew that Yasuko belonged to the Zen-Buddhism sect, which believes that true faith is self-negation. In other words, it is a state in which the self is merged with the cosmos and therefore we should have resignation about every problem, which Yasuko certainly did not have in the present circumstances. So, being a Christian, she tentatively asked Yasuko to go to church with her on Sunday and, to her surprise, Yasuko agreed.

The preacher's theme was *"A life of mutual forgiveness"*, stressing the need for us to forgive others, because Christ has forgiven us, and, as Yasuko listened to the sermon, she could not help but wonder if her friend had not phoned the evangelist and told him all about her problem! When the service was over, she did not hesitate to go forward for counselling and prayer.

Yasuko rose from her knees that day a different person. Her circumstances had not changed, but she now knew that she had Someone with her who, day by day, would strengthen her and give her the courage and grace to overcome the circumstances which had come into her life.

From then on, Yasuyoshi still sometimes came home late at night, but Yasuko could greet him with a friendly smile, believing that the day will come when her husband will see the error of his ways and find Christ as his Savior.

There may well be those around us who are carrying some heavy burden, which is difficult to share with others. May the Lord help us to be sensitive to their needs, whatever they may be and tell them of the One who can solve every problem.

May 29

OUR UNFAILING GUIDE

"For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death." (Psalm 48:14)

At times of difficulty and uncertainty it is often so hard to trust the Lord, but He has promised to be our guide for ever and ever, even until we die. Can we really believe that?

What can ensure that we will not fail to trust Him to guide us through our lives, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be? Maybe, more than anything else, we need to trust in His Promises. Has He not said, *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."* (Proverbs 3:5-6)

What a wonderful promise! But if we are to appropriate it, we need to completely distrust ourselves and our own inclinations and

trust Him fully. We need to realize that we don't have a clue what lies in the future for us, but He does and therefore knows what is best for us every step of the way.

We need to give up our right to make decisions for ourselves, but rather to trust the One who loves us and wants the very best for us moment by moment.

Maybe the words of the ANONYMOUS CONFEDERATE SOLDIER will encourage us to trust Him, no matter what He allows to come across our pathway day by day.

*"I asked God for strength, that I might achieve
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among all men, most richly blessed!"*

God does not always work in the way that seems best to us, but looking back on the way that He has guided us in the past will undoubtedly give us faith for today and the days that lie ahead.

May 30

THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE!

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you." (John 15:16)

Isamu was only fourteen when his parents arranged for him to leave school and work in a dried-food factory in the city of Kashiwara and live in the firm's dormitory. They were poor and for them there was no other way. But for Isamu, it was a long way from home, though he bravely tried to adjust to his new life.

Ten uneventful years followed, during which Isamu learnt a lot about the dried food trade and became an efficient member of the staff. Then, one summer's day, when he was taking a breath of fresh air outside during his lunch break, a helicopter passed overhead, announcing some meetings. Isamu only half took in what was being said, but when he got back to the dormitory, he found a leaflet bearing the same information, offering free coffee and an interesting talk on how to solve life's problems. He was only vaguely interested, but the free coffee would be welcome!

The very last thing that Isamu had anticipated was that it would be a religious meeting. He had never had time for religion, regarding it as only necessary for the weak. His parents were keen Buddhists, but it had done nothing for them, as far as he could see!

The film that was shown was interesting, however, and the message somehow intrigued Isamu. The speaker told them that there was a great God in charge of everyone's life. As he listened to the message, although he did not realize it at the time, God started to work in Isamu's heart. He had little intention of accepting the evangelist's invitation to attend church on the following Sunday, but when Sunday came, he just did not seem to be able to stay away.

Isamu had always associated religion with idol worship and the fact that the Christian's God was said to be the Creator of the universe sounded impressive. Their god must be great if he was a Creator, he reckoned. But it took many weeks for Isamu to accept God as the Creator of everything and it disturbed him to think that in the sight of this Creator he was a sinner. He had always regarded himself as a pretty good fellow. He did not even drink or smoke!

But the next Sunday, the minister delivered a most thought-provoking message on sin and repentance and Isamu began squirming in his seat. He became deeply conscious of pride and anger in his heart and had to admit that he must be a sinner in the sight of a holy God. In fact, Isamu could resist the message no longer and so it was that on that day a repentant sinner found the Savior!

A year or so later, the minister arranged a marriage for him with Kazuko Nishio. She was the only child in her family, so he was adopted as their son and took the family name. He and Kazuko now have much joy in serving the Lord together.

May 31

HIS STRENGTH IN TIMES OF WEAKNESS

"The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness." (Psalm 41:3)

How easy it is when we are physically unwell to feel discouraged and to forget that even at such times the Lord is in complete control of our lives.

If then we look to Him and place our trust in Him, He will become more precious than ever to us. We will then also learn that whatever makes Christ more precious to us is allowed by God. But sometimes the sickness goes on so long and we become weary, forgetting that very often the lengthening of a trial shows us the weakness of our faith.

It is said that all reliable carving tools are constructed of crucible steel. In order to produce such durable metal, the raw material is apparently placed in a crucible where it is subjected to intense heat.

Once it is glowing with molten brightness, the white-hot metal is maintained at precisely the right temperature until it becomes crucible steel. When it cools, it is neither so soft that it won't make a sharp edge, nor so hard that it is brittle.

God knows exactly how much we can stand and how much we need to be molded to be a blessing to others. May we be willing to endure what is involved, so that we may be usable in His service.

When we are conscious of our weakness, and allow God to fill us with His strength, then we are stronger than we could ever have been on our own. When we feel weak, we must just depend on Him. Only His power will help us to accomplish anything of lasting value and make us effective in His service.

C. T. Studd, the famous missionary, often testified about his bodily weakness. He had acute asthma, with which he battled both day and night. But God enabled him to carry on. In fact, all his life was a rough discipline, but it prepared him for the tough ministry, which lay ahead.

The following words aptly sum up these truths:

*"God watches us with patient eye,
With love that's strong and sure.
His gold endures the fervent heat
Required to make it pure."*

June 1

A LOSER BECOMES A WINNER!

“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” (Jeremiah 33:3)

When his manager called Koichiro Takemori into his office one day and told him that he could no longer employ him, because the firm was declaring itself bankrupt, Koichiro left the office in a daze. He just could not believe what he had heard. Why was he always a loser, he wondered dejectedly! Even when he was small, he had been the recognized leader of the trouble-makers in the neighborhood and had always been the one who was caught by the police! He had hated school too and had managed to get out of it when he was fifteen.

Wanting to earn some money, he had found a job making car parts, but soon got fired. Next, he had found a job breeding Holstein cows! That had been fun for a while, especially the drinking and gambling part, but he had often sat in his little room, thinking that his life had no purpose. He had then tried working in the fashion business and thought that at last he had found his niche, but that job soon went too.

The next job that had turned up was that of making doors. Going on the same train to work each day, he got into conversation with a young lady on her way to university. One day she plucked up courage to ask him if he would like to go to church with her and Koichiro accepted her invitation. The friendliness of the minister broke down any resistance in his heart. He already knew that he was a sinner and a loser and gladly accepted the peace that the message of Jesus Christ offered. How wonderful it was not to be a loser any more and to have the joy of salvation, he thought.

The minister, deeply conscious of Koichiro's need of a Christian wife, approached him as soon as he had a suitable bride in mind. Koichiro was delighted. He so much longed for the mutual love and caring that he had seen in some Christian homes. But his faith was to be tested, because the minister had the painful duty of telling him that the lady in question had turned him down after reading his resumé. Koichiro could not restrain his tears! Was he still a loser even with Jesus in his heart, he wondered!

Shortly afterwards, however, the minister broke the glad news to him that the young lady, who he had first approached, had had no peace in her heart since she had turned him down and now knew that their union was God's will! So, their marriage took place one bright autumn day in October and they both now serve the Lord faithfully in the church. Koichiro cannot help but rejoice that he became a winner through his faith in the Savior!

Let's always remember that no matter what our failures or problems may be, God is able to solve them for us, if we just look to Him!

June 2

LEAD KINDLY LIGHT

*“Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on;
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.
“I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on:
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on.
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!
“So long Thy pow’r hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on
O’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.”*

(John Henry Newman -1801-1890)

John Henry Newman was born in London, England. He was converted at the age of fifteen and soon became filled with a sense of the nearness of God.

He graduated from Trinity College in Oxford and a few years later became a clergyman of the Church of England. During his life he also became a famous hymn writer.

During his thirties, he began to suffer from ill health and took a journey overseas by ship. On the way, feeling distressed, he wrote this hymn, which has been a blessing to many.

June 3

UNDERGOING SUFFERING

"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls."

(Luke 21: 17-19)

Jesus did not promise that his followers would not suffer. In fact most of his disciples were martyred. But He did say that none of his followers would suffer spiritual or eternal loss. All must die on earth, but everyone who believes in Him will gain eternal life.

Therefore, for Christians there is always hope and joy beyond any suffering that may come into the life. So it is that when His followers experience even persecutions and natural disasters, they are actually nearer to Him than ever before.

God does not expect us to enjoy suffering, but as Jesus' followers He expects us to be willing to suffer, if, by doing so, we can help build His heavenly kingdom. In fact, shortly after Jesus told the disciples to pray that they might escape persecution, even Jesus himself asked God to spare him the agonies of the cross, if it was His will.

How much we can learn by Job's attitude when he said, *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him"*. (Job 13:15)

It would seem that unless God allows times of difficulty and hardship to come into our lives, we will never experience a close walk with Him. He has said to us, however, in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 11, verse 6, *"... blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."*

He has promised, *"... lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* (Matthew 28:20)

The story is told of a Frenchman who painted a picture of universal genius. Within the painting there were orators, philosophers and

martyrs, all of who achieved preeminence in some sphere of life. But the remarkable fact about the picture was that every man who was preeminent for his ability in some sphere was first preeminent for suffering.

In the foreground stands the figure of the man who was denied entrance to the “promised land” – Moses. Beside him, feeling his way is blind Homer. Milton is also there, blind and heart-broken. Next comes the form of One who towered above them all – that of Jesus!

How well it has been said that we would never see the stars if the sun did not go down and we would never know the wonder of God’s comfort, if we had never experienced sorrow.

June 4

SAVED OUT OF THE ATOM BOMBING

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not you be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

On August 6th 1945, Koko Tanimoto was eight-months old and being held in mother’s arms, when the atom bomb exploded over Hiroshima. Their house, which was less than a mile from the place where the bomb fell, collapsed on top of them.

It was Koko’s cries that brought her mother back to consciousness and frantic efforts ensued to dig them out, before the flames consumed the wreckage of their home. Her father, who was a minister, was out of town, helping a friend move furniture at the time of the blast.

As she grew up, Koko bitterly hated the pilot of the plane that dropped the atom bomb, as she looked at the scars that had then been inflicted on some of her school friends. But her father preached love, healing and forgiveness, so she could not tell anyone how she felt.

When she was ten years old, however, the family was requested to go to the U.S.A. to appear on a television broadcast, called, *“This is your Life”*. There, she met the co-pilot of the plane that had

dropped the bomb and she hated him too. But, when his turn came to speak, he told of how, when he flew over the city for the second time and saw all the destruction, he cried out, *“Oh, God what have we done!”* He was overcome with emotion as he spoke and Koko too was moved to tears.

When Koko grew up, she was about to be married to a man, who she very much loved, when he suddenly thought of the possibility that she may have been affected physically by the blast of the atom bomb and left her.

After that, Koko was no longer interested in Christianity and decided to go to Tokyo and look for a rich husband. There she found a documentary filmmaker and got married to him. But, before long, his work became scarce and she persuaded him to return with her to Hiroshima. Once there, God started to answer her father’s prayers and both she and her husband found the Savior. Eventually he too began studying for the ministry and became a pastor.

Koko says that she is now ready to do whatever the Lord wants her to do, because she knows as she walks with Him, He will give her His wonderful peace in her heart, no matter what happens.

May the Lord help us to follow in her footsteps and trust our Precious Lord day by day.

June 5

ARE WE WILLING FOR THE COST?

“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

(Revelation 2:10)

Knowing that Jesus was no ordinary man, when the people saw His miracles, they followed him wherever He went. But He was not satisfied that they should just follow him, He wanted them to have a closer relationship with him than that – one that would bring them blessing. He longed that they would become his disciples, not just his followers.

But He told them very clearly that unless they loved him more than even those nearest and dearest to him, they could not become his disciples.

It is sometimes good to ponder what it has cost others to be faithful to the Lord and what it could cost us to follow Him.

It cost **ABRAHAM** the yielding up of his only son.

It cost **DANIEL** being cast into the den of lions.

It cost **ESTHER** the risk of her life.

It cost **PETER** a martyr's death.

It cost **SHADRACK, MESHACK and ABEDNEGO** being put into a fiery furnace.

It cost **STEPHEN** death by stoning.

It cost **JESUS** his very life!

What is it costing us?

May the Lord help us to be willing, no matter what the cost might be, to follow Him every step of the way!

May we never forget the significance of the solemn Words that we find in Luke chapter 14, verse 26, *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple."*

June 6

DELIVERED FROM USELESS PRAYERS

"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

(James 5:16)

No matter how she tried, Akiko could not visualize her mother, who had died when she was just two years old. She so wished that she could just remember her face. But she would never forget her father, that was sure! He was an adherent of the Jodo sect of Buddhism and believed that any mortal could be born into the *"pure land of paradise"* just by calling on the sacred name, Amida, and saying a Buddhist prayer!

Having nothing else in which she could believe, Akiko had mumbled a Buddhist prayer to Amida, when she was hospitalized

with tuberculosis at ten years of age, hoping that somehow it might help.

She would also never forget what her father had told her before he died, when she was fourteen. He had said that she would likely have a life of suffering, but that she should always remember that there would be “enlightenment” for her, as a Jodo Buddhist believer, even after she died!

When she was thirty-eight years old, Akiko had a severe lung hemorrhage and became a patient in Kinki Chuo Hospital. But, by then, she had despaired of her Buddhist prayers and welcomed the visits of the hospital evangelist and of the Christian fellow-patients, with whom she became acquainted there. In fact, she was more interested in their singing than their praying. She had had enough of praying!

Before long, however, she needed an operation and greatly appreciated the visits and encouragement of the evangelist and the Christian friends she had made. But for a long time Akiko could not commit herself to a new religion.

When she had recovered enough to leave the hospital, however, she made a point of going to a church near her home, of which the hospital evangelist had told her. Akiko greatly appreciated the warm atmosphere there. One day, the minister asked her, “*Do you believe that God loves you and died for your sins?*”, Akiko immediately answered that she did, with tears streaming down her face. In those moments, Akiko gave her heart to the Lord, because she had at last found a religion that worked.

Akiko later married Yasunori Okemoto, who had also suffered from tuberculosis and found the Saviour. They constantly praise God that He has delivered them from the Buddhist prayers that had no meaning and given them the knowledge of One to whom they can pray from the heart and be sure that He answers prayers.

May the Lord help us to always remember that the “*effectual, fervent prayer*” of each one of us, who knows the Lord, will always be heard and answered.

June 7

ACCEPTING GOD

"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (1 John 1: 10-13)

When Jesus came into this world, although the world was made by Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to those He had created, but they did not accept Him, even although the entire Old Testament pointed to His coming. He experienced widespread rejection. Some wanted to accept Him as someone other than He was. So he said to them, *"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? So they answered, 'John the Baptist; but some say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.'" (Mark 8:27-28).*

It seems that those who were the closest to Jesus had the most difficulty accepting Him for who He really was. He was not even accepted as a prophet in His hometown. Therefore it was a seemingly impossible task for those who were chosen by God to prepare the rest of the world to accept the Messiah.

Some tried to accept Him as someone other than who He was. Many thought He must be someone who had come back to life from the dead. Some even suggested that He was Elijah, the great prophet who did not die, but was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. (2 Kings 2:11.) Therefore, we should not be too surprised if our Christian faith is not easily understood or accepted even by those who know us well.

But how wonderful it is that all who do welcome Him as Lord of their lives, receive a new life from God through the new birth. In the same way that being born physically places us in our parents' family, so being born spiritually puts us into God's family.

But we must always remember and clearly tell others that anyone's acceptance of Christ as Savior must be personal. It is not enough to know what others think about Jesus, each person must accept Him for themselves.

May the Lord help us to clearly get this truth across to others. There are so many around us who do not know Him and desperately need the truth that God in His mercy has revealed to us.

JUNE 8

“LITTLE WEST” PROVES HER GOD!

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)

As a child, Konishi San, whose name means “Little West”, had been more privileged than most children in Japan, because she had attended a Sunday school for quite a while and heard about the Living God. But school days had been very busy and she had given little real thought to spiritual things. So it was that loss and suffering came into her life before she had accepted Jesus as her personal Savior.

The first blow came when, within a year or so of each other, both her father and mother died. As a result, their hitherto happy home was irreparably broken and “Little West” started work in an office, wrapped in misery and loneliness. But circumstances had another short-lived joy in store for her there, when she met a young man, who seemed just the right one for her. Happy plans were being made for marriage, when another blow struck her – she was diagnosed as having tuberculosis!

It had just started with a high temperature, but her condition gradually grew worse, until it was necessary for her to be hospitalized and a cavity was diagnosed in one of her lungs. Furthermore, the prognosis was that there would be little likelihood of its healing within ten years, unless she underwent a major operation.

It was just about at that time, by God’s grace, that she became friendly with “Little Fountain”, a patient in the same ward, who knew the Lord Jesus as her Savior. Her testimony sunk deep into “Little West’s” heart and on the 3rd of November, 1955, she found peace and joy in the Savior.

About a month passed by until her first major test came. Suddenly her whole body began to shiver and she had a terrible pain in her head. She cried out in agony and the doctor was speedily summoned. The diagnosis was meningitis and she was immediately sent to a local brain hospital for treatment. Although it seemed as if all hell was attacking this babe in Christ, “Little West” had an anchor now, and oh, what a difference an anchor makes in a storm! During that

time, she remembered a promise she had read in the Bible, “... *by His stripes we are healed*” (Isaiah 53:5) and she pleaded those Words before the Throne of Grace.

On the day appointed for the operation, to the utter confusion of the doctors, the desperately acute condition had completely and miraculously cleared up and “Little West” again rejoiced in Her Savior!

Let’s always remember that no matter what happens to us, nothing is too hard for the Lord!

June 9

WHEN MORNING GILDS THE SKIES

1. *“When morning gilds the skies,
My heart awaking cries
May Jesus Christ be praised:
Alike at work and prayer
To Jesus I repair;
May Jesus Christ be praised!*
2. *Does sadness fill my mind?
A solace here I find,
May Jesus Christ be praised!
Or fades my earthly bliss?
My comfort still is this,
May Jesus Christ be praised!*
3. *Ye nations of mankind,
In this your concord find,
May Jesus Christ be praised:
Let all the earth around
Ring joyous with the sound,
May Jesus Christ be praised!*
4. *Be this, while life is mine,
My canticle divine,
May Jesus Christ be praised:
Be this the eternal song,
Through all the ages long,
May Jesus Christ be praised!”*

(Edward Caswall – 1814-1878)

This beautiful hymn was freely translated from the German language by Edward Caswall, an English clergyman. He translated many other hymns too and had a great burden for the poor, the sick and small children.

June 10

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY

"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:11)

Jesus often sought to tell those with whom He came into contact to always be a servant of others. But how difficult it sometimes is for us to put into practice! Most of us are so much striving to improve our own situation. Instead of seeking for a place where we can serve, we rather aim for prestige for ourselves.

Jesus was our model of humility and only as we compare ourselves with Him will we realize our own inadequacy and understand our limitations. At the same time, even when we are made conscious of our gifts and strengths, we need to realize that they must be used in the way that Christ wants them to be used and in a way that will bring glory to Him.

Humility is a realization of our unworthiness and yet how wonderful it is to remember that God considers us so worthy that He said, ***"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness"*** (Genesis 1:26). In His sight we are worthy, so we should never feel ourselves to be unworthy. Yet we must always be conscious that without Him, we are nothing. Humility also keeps us from always depending on our own strength. Too often we think that our own skills and strength are good enough, especially when the task before us seems relatively easy. We go to God only when the obstacles seem too great for us to overcome alone. But God is the only One who knows what lies ahead.

Humility challenges our pride. If we look at 2 Kings, chapter 5, we will see a good example of this truth. Naaman, who was a great hero in his day and used to getting respect, suddenly contracted leprosy and was told by God's prophet, Elisha, that if he washed seven times in the river Jordan, his leprosy would be cured. He had

expected to get some royal treatment! The Jordan was a small and dirty river and he felt it was far beneath his position and dignity to do so. But Naaman had to humble himself and obey Elisha's command to be healed. There was no other way!

Consulting God, even when all seems to be going well, may save us from making grave mistakes or misjudgments. God may want to teach us some important lesson, deal with pride in our lives or point out to us our need to be humble enough to consult others, before He will work through us. We must never depend on our own strength, but to realize our need to be dependant on Him at all times.

Obedience to God begins with humility. We must believe that His way is better than our own. We may not always understand His ways of working, but by humbly obeying, we will receive His blessings. We must remember that God's ways are always best and that He wants our obedience more than anything else.

June 11

A BIT TOO FAR!

"And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction." (Mark 5:34)

Hatsumi's home religion had always been nominal Buddhism, but for some reason, which she found difficult to fathom, her parents had sent her to a Christian school! The very next month after school commenced, she was invited to attend a camp gathering and gladly went. But when she got there, she was puzzled when they were all told that they were sinners. Hatsumi did not think that she was a sinner! She had never broken the law, as far as she could recollect!

On return from the camp, Hatsumi agreed to attend a daily Bible study group, but when she was pressed to go to church regularly, she decided that that was going 'a bit too far' and only went at Easter and Christmas.

On leaving school, Hatsumi got a job as a cashier in the Hilton Hotel in Bahrain. She liked English and had wanted to go overseas. However, the job proved to be somewhat stressful and she was on the point of quitting, when she became acquainted with a young man, also from Japan, who was working in the same hotel.

Contact between the sexes was taboo in Bahrain - a Muslim country, so they could not be seen in public together. They managed to communicate on the job, however, and a friendship soon developed between them. But six months later, the young man was transferred back to a Hilton Hotel in Japan. Before long, Hatsumi quit her job there too and returned home. Four months later they were married and, within a year, Hatsumi had an extra-uterine pregnancy and lost the baby.

After they had been married for six years, a medical examination revealed that Hatsumi had an advanced case of uterine cancer and the diagnosis was that she would not live more than year. Seeking to do his very best for her, her husband suggested that it might help if they went to live in a less polluted neighborhood.

A short time after they had moved, Hatsumi was invited by a neighbor to go to a meeting in the local church. Being lonely, she agreed and there heard many of the hymns that she had sung as a child. Then, one day, when she was challenged to trust God for salvation, she did so and peace and joy filled her heart.

Before long, she believed that she should also trust the Lord to heal her body. He did just that and now, some many years later, Hatsumi is healthy, active in the church and so glad that in the end she went 'a bit too far'!

Let's seek to reach out in any way we can to those around us!

June 12

THE BENEFITS OF WEAKNESS

"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

We need to be aware of where our faith is strong and where it is weak. There is no doubt that we are all weak in some areas and strong in others. If we can survive contact with those who do not know the Lord, without falling into their sinful patterns in life, it may well be an indication of our spiritual strength. But if we are conscious that we must avoid certain activities, people or places in

order to protect our spiritual condition, it is an indication of our weaknesses.

When we feel weak, it should be a reminder to us of how utterly dependant we need to be on God. But the wonderful truth is that, no matter what happens, He is always there to fill us with His power, if we will just let Him. Then we will be so much stronger than we could ever be in our own strength. That is why the apostle Paul could say, as is quoted above, that he could boast about his weaknesses, because he knew that those very weaknesses would result in the power of God being in his life.

Weaknesses should always be a reminder of our dependence on God. When we feel strong in our own abilities or resources, we are inclined to try to do God's work in our own strength. The result of such effort can make us feel proud of ourselves, but be of little use to Him.

When we can, we should go out and serve God. Maybe we will meet some hindrances at such times, but when such seeming setbacks come our way, we need to realize that we must depend on God. Only His power will make us effective and help us to be a blessing to those around us. In reality, God is looking for people who are weak enough to have to depend on His Strength!

When we regard ourselves as strong in abilities or resources, we are tempted to do God's work in our own strength and that can so easily lead to pride and pride lures us into living independently of God.

How beautifully the anonymous writer has expressed what happens to all of us when we experience weakness in the following words:

*"When my heart melts within me,
And weakness takes control,
He gathers me into His arms,
And soothes my heart and soul!"*

June 13

A BUILDING IN HEAVEN

"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1)

When Tatsuko was a young girl, one day she met Mrs. Karasawa, a keen Christian, who had been put in prison in Japan for her faith during World War II and was still on parole. Mrs. Karasawa encouraged her to read the Bible and go to church. She did so and there she found the Savior and also a little more than she had expected. She was introduced to Mrs. Karasawa's son, Yutaka, and a marriage was eventually arranged for them!

Two children, a boy and a girl, were born into their happy home and they were always most conscious that God had His Hand on them as a family. This was especially emphasized one cold evening when Tatsuko and the children had all suddenly dozed off to sleep, largely due to the deadly fumes omitted from their unventilated charcoal heater. They were suddenly aroused when the phone rang them awake and it was reckoned that they were almost certainly saved from death by suffocation.

The years went by and the children grew up and excelled scholastically, both becoming lecturers at universities. Then one day Tatsuko, who had been sick for some time, was diagnosed as being terminally ill.

Yutaka chose to take care of his wife at home and they unitedly agreed that there was a time to trust God for healing, but also a time to know that God was not going to heal. In fact, they were both looking forward to better things than healing, when their time came, knowing that God had a heavenly home for them, much better than their earthly one.

They were both conscious, however, that their precious time together might be running out, but also that God would be with them every step of the way. When Tatsuko felt sure that her end was immanent, she told Yutaka to arrange for her to go into a hospice, so that he would not have to look after her at the very end. Both of them had God's perfect peace about His plan for their lives and

two weeks later she went to be with the Lord and into her heavenly home in triumph.

Maybe you know someone who is ill and does not yet know the Lord. May He help each one of us to be on the lookout for any needy souls to whom we can bring the message of salvation and comfort in the Savior.

June 14

OUR NEED TO TRUST

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

When we have an important decision to make, we must remember that God knows what is best for us and knows even better than we do what we really need. So, it is vital to trust Him completely in every decision we have to make.

Of course, we need to think carefully about a matter first, because God has given us the ability to reason, but we should not trust our own ideas to the exclusion of all others. We should be willing to listen to what wise counselors have to say and especially to what God’s Word has to say about the matter.

Trust often requires courage. In Exodus, chapter 14, we read of what happened to the Israelites. When they saw the Egyptian army approaching them far in the distance, they were terribly frightened, thinking that their end had come, and cried to the Lord to help them. He had undertaken for them so many times before that we might wonder where their faith was. But this is just an example of how weak we, as Christians, can be, even when He has helped us so many times in the past, as He had them.

Alongside of that, if we wish to receive guidance, we need to place all our future plans in God’s Hands. The Bible says that we must acknowledge Him *“in all our ways”*. This means turning our whole life over to Him.

In many areas of our lives we may have acknowledged God, but maybe there are areas where we have preferred to ignore His influence, knowing that would cause us seeming difficulty or grief.

But we must make Him a vital part of everything we do. Only then can He really guide us, because we will be working to accomplish His purposes.

To trust Him completely is to wholeheartedly believe in His promises, to place all our confidence in Him to empower us to live the way that He has taught us to do in His precious Word. How wonderful it is to know that, if we belong to Him, His Promises are ours, no matter what our past behavior may have been!

Trusting means putting our confidence in Christ to forgive us our sins, to make us right with God, and to empower us to live the way He taught us.

Do we really believe what His Word says in Psalm 118:8-9 – *“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.”*

June 15

THREE SALARIES FOR A BLESSING?

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

As Yuusaku Kumai walked up the steep road to the temple of the Mountain Jewel on Ikoma Mountain, his mind was in turmoil. He really did not know why he was going there, but he hoped against hope that the three months’ salary that he had in his pocket would be enough for the gods to shower some blessing on him.

He desperately needed help. His life had been so hard and he would never forget the terrible time when a bomb had demolished their home in Taiwan and his mother and father had been killed. He had ended up in an orphanage and, at the end of the war, he and some other orphans had been sent to Japan.

When he was 17, he had left the orphanage and worked his way through university, by finding employment at night. But life had been empty and he had come to realize that studying and making money were not everything. He vaguely had a desire for some religious experience and had studied Shintoism and Buddhism in his spare time.

When Yuusaku reached the Temple of the Mountain Jewel, he placed his offering in the box, vaguely hoping for a miracle, but he was only politely handed an “*ofuda*” (an honorable charm) by the priest and he disconsolately made his way down the mountain.

Then, a short time afterwards, the Gideons visited the university at which he was studying and gave out bi-lingual New Testaments to the students. Yuusaku looked through his copy with some interest, but was not really convinced that one little book could change his life.

However, he decided to read a portion every day and started at the beginning and soon came to the Words, “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” Through those Words, the Holy Spirit spoke to his hungry heart and Yuusaku cried out, “Oh God! I don’t know anything! But if you are the true God, please take my burdens away and change my life to one of good fortune.”

Immediately, a deep peace filled his heart and from then on he started attending church and never looked back. Before long, the minister reckoned that it was time that he arranged a wedding for Yuusaku. God gave him a very spiritual wife, Jinko, and together they studied to become missionaries, praising the Lord for the wonderful way in which He had led them.

May the Lord give us eyes to see those who may even be wandering around the streets, with an empty heart, desperately seeking a spiritual experience.

June 16

THROW OUT THE LIFE-LINE

1. "Throw out the Life-Line across the dark wave,
There is a brother whom someone should save;
Somebody's brother! O who then, will dare
To throw out the Life-Line, his peril to share?

Chorus

*"Throw out the Life-Line!
Throw out the Life-Line!
Someone is drifting away;
Someone is sinking today."*

2. "Throw out the Life-Line with hand quick and strong:
Why do you tarry, why linger so long?
See! He is sinking; oh, hasten today
And go out with the life-boat! away, then, away!
3. "Throw out the Life-Line to danger-fraught men
Sinking in anguish where you've never been:
Winds of temptation and billows of woe
Will soon hurl them out where the dark waters flow.
4. "Soon will the season of rescue be o'er;
Soon will they drift to eternity's shore;
Haste, then, my brother, no time for delay,
But throw out the life-line and save them today."

(Edward Smith Ufford – born in 1851)

The writing of this hymn was prompted when Rev. Ufford witnessed the life-saving process when a ship had been wrecked near where he lived. The sight of the life-line thrown out far into the water and the speedy action of the life-saving crew made a deep impression on his mind. He not only wrote the words, but composed the tune also.

Among many other outreaches, this hymn was often sung with great effect by Mr. Sankey during evangelistic campaigns, resulting in moving many Christians to a greater dedication to reach out with the Gospel for the Master.

June 17

GOD'S PEACE IN OUR HEARTS

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27)

To know real peace in our hearts, we have to rest in the sovereignty of God. Worldly peace is usually thought to be the absence of conflict, but God's peace is a confident assurance in our hearts, no matter what our circumstances may be. If we have stress in our lives, we need to trust the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with God's peace. If we have His peace in our hearts, we will have no need to fear for anything that may happen to us.

At times, such hostile forces as sin, fear, doubt and uncertainty will seek to war within us. But if the peace of God controls our life, such forces will be restrained.

Jesus promises to give us His peace, if we will just accept it from Him. The question is whether we do so at the times when we sense that conflict is seeking to take control of our hearts.

Peace is the calming of internal conflict and forces such as those mentioned earlier. The peace of God moves into our heart and life to restrain these hostile forces and offer comfort in place of conflict.

Peace is the bi-product of dependence on God. The assurance of answered prayer always brings peace. It is easier to sleep well when we have full assurance that God is in complete control of all our circumstances.

If we are lying awake at night, worrying about what will happen the next day, we need to confess our lack of faith to Him and trust Him that He is control of every area of our lives. Then there is no doubt that sleep will come!

Let's remember that if we trust Him, Jesus will bring peace to our hearts:

- (1) **concerning the past** – knowing that our sins are forgiven!
- (2) **concerning the present** – knowing that He will undertake in all our circumstances!
- (3) **concerning the future** – knowing that no matter what may happen, He will always be with us to the very end of our lives.

May the Lord help us to apply these truths to our own circumstances and also to pass them on to others, who may well have a need of His wonderful peace.

June 18

A LITTLE GIRL IN NEED

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” (1 Timothy 1:15)

Taeko just couldn't imagine why her grandfather was so late in getting home. For a ten-year-old little girl every minute seemed like an age. She had been left in charge of preparing the evening meal and, in her estimation, it was all done. In fact, she had rearranged the chopsticks on the table many times already, when the front door opened and a strange man's voice called her name! Taeko was frightened, but she was more frightened when she saw that it was a policeman, who stood there. *“Your grandfather has had an accident and is in hospital. But don't worry. I have arranged for the lady next door to look after you”*, he said.

Taeko tried to put on a brave face, but it was impossible to suppress the tears, which came into her eyes. For the past eight years, her mother had been in hospital with tuberculosis and her grandfather had always taken care of her.

As soon as the news was conveyed to Taeko's mother, who had found Jesus as her Savior while she was in hospital, she arranged for her daughter to go into a Christian orphanage. Taeko did not like it at all to begin with. Everything was so different from what she was used to. The discipline was irksome and twice every day they read out of a book, called the Bible, and they told her that it was God's Book.

Then, one day when she was twelve years old, God spoke to her in a very special way in the morning devotions. The Words, *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief”*, sunk deep into her heard and all day long they went over and over in her mind. When she thought how selfish she was, she certainly felt like a real sinner. She always grabbed the nicest food on the table and never shared her toys with anyone. She suddenly felt so glad that Jesus had come into the world to save her.

Taeko stayed in the orphanage until she was fifteen years old. Her mother was then able to leave the hospital and rent an apartment for

them to live in. While Taeko continued her education, her mother took classes at a Bible College, in order to equip herself to serve God and eventually became the assistant minister of her church.

Taeko followed in her mother's footsteps and a few years later was married to Evangelist Shimizu of the Japan Mission. They both served God, primarily ministering to tuberculosis patients in various hospitals.

May the Lord help us to keep our eyes open for those around us who may be facing circumstances, which are just more than they can cope with, like little Taeko, and help us to show them the way to the Savior who can meet their every need.

June 19

OUR MISSION AMONG UNBELIEVERS

"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."

(John 17: 17-18)

As Christians, we have a vital ministry to perform to those around us. Jesus did not ask to be taken out of the difficult world in which He was placed, nor for God to take those of us who have believed in Him out of this far from easy world in which we live.

In fact, all through His ministry, we can see that He ministered to unbelievers and taught His disciples to minister to them too. But alongside of that, He impressed on them the need to keep separate in the sense that they should be concerned about unbelievers and seek to help them, but by no means be imitators of them.

He always encouraged them to go out of their way, if necessary to befriend sinners and to seek to lead them into the way of salvation. But at the same time to be wary of those who are basically evil or opposed to all that Christianity stands for. Such people are more likely to influence us for evil than we are likely to influence them for good.

In other words, we should avoid situations that could force us to compromise. There should always be a significant difference between our lives and those of unbelievers. God certainly does

not want us in any way to be imitators of those who don't believe in Him. But Paul too stressed the truth that we should not isolate ourselves from unbelievers unless it is absolutely necessary and even encouraged Christians to stay with their unbelieving spouses.

We should never think of ourselves as being inadequate to speak to others in order to try to be a blessing to them. *"Then Moses said to the Lord, 'O, my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.' So the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.'" (Exodus 4:10-12)*

Unbelief looks at circumstances before it looks at God, whereas faith first looks up to God to interpret its circumstances and sees them through His Eyes. Unbelief is not humility. It is more often pride, refusing to believe God, because it does not find in itself a reason to believe.

May the Lord help us moment by moment to follow His example in our dealings with those with whom we come into contact day by day.

June 20

THE CELESTIAL SHIP

"He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps."

(Psalm 40:2)

"The enlightened one and the faithless are as different as two ships passing each other going in opposite directions. The celestial ship has a fixed course and is bound for heaven, but the ship of the faithless is floundering in mud. If you realize that you are on board that ship, the only thing for you to do is to transfer to the heaven-bound ship. It is not easy, but it is possible", said the Shinto priest one day.

As Michiyo Takashima listened to what the priest had to say, she was impressed. She knew that she was on the "floundering ship" and

needed to transfer to the “celestial ship”. “Please tell me how I can save myself from the mess I have made of my life,” she had asked him on more than one occasion. But somehow he never seemed to make it clear to her just how she could do so!

Michiyo, however, liked reading and decided to join a Book Club. At the club’s weekly meetings, she often came into contact with one of the Japan Mission’s evangelists, who also attended and who always seemed to be mentioning how superior the Bible was to other books. One day, she had said, “The Bible is not just a book. It is a gift from the Creator of the universe”. Those words caused Michiyo to listen with deep interest and to go to a church service with the evangelist in order to hear more about this wonderful Creator.

There, God spoke to her through His Word in Matthew, chapter 11, verse 28 ***“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*** Michiyo did just that on that day and at last found herself bound for heaven. She was convinced that that would be the end of all her personal problems, but she was to find out that she was somewhat mistaken.

When she got home, she regarded it as her most important task to get her husband on the “right road” too. But instead, when she spoke to him about the matter, much to her dismay, he showed no interest and the more she mentioned the matter, the more he became definitely antagonistic.

As she considered the matter, Michiyo realized that her attitude to her husband had been far from Christlike and she apologized to him. As a result, his whole attitude changed and their marriage, which had almost seemed to have been on the rocks, was salvaged.

Michiyo continues to pray for her husband’s salvation, however, convinced that one day he too will find her Savior. In the meantime, she goes on to testify to others about the Lord Jesus.

June 21

STRENGTH RENEWED

“ ... those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah. 40:31)

How often we feel weak and inadequate for the task that is laid upon us. How often we feel as though our strength has gone and long for a renewal of the strength we once experienced. If we are feeling like that today, it is cause for rejoicing, not for sadness, because the Lord has shown us the way to renew our strength. He tells us that we just have to *“wait on the Lord”*. If we do so, we will *“mount up with wings like eagles”*.

When we wait on the Lord, we too can catch the wind of God and will be borne aloft into His very Presence. When we are there, we will know what it is to *“run and not be weary”* and *“walk and not faint”*.

There are some wonderful references in the Bible, likening the way in which God deals with us to the way that eagles deal with their young. For example He says to us in Exodus 19:4, *“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.”*

Then again, in Deuteronomy 32: 11-12, *“As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him and there was no foreign god with him.”*

Eagles are said to usually construct their nests on the face of a cliff, never at the top, lest the little eaglets are attacked by some other big birds. The nest is made of intertwined branches, large and very strong and is lined with feathers and grass to make it soft.

As time passes, however, the mother eagle is said to teach her little ones to fly by making their nest as uncomfortable as possible, so that they are forced to leave it and commit themselves to the unknown world of air outside. God also often allows trials to come into our lives, so that we too will leave our nests and be willing to reach out to be a blessing to others.

Eagles seem to have an instinct to discern air currents. They apparently lock their wings and wait for the right breeze. Then, they let go and ride the wind. May the Lord help us to live so close to Him that we too will sense every time that He seeks to speak to us and lead us in His way, so that He can use us to be a blessing to those around us.

June 22

JOY IN THE SAVIOR

"My peace I leave give to you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27)

As a young child, Teroko rarely saw her mother, who worked long hours in a factory. The only person that she really knew was the woman who she was told to call, 'Grandma'. But how Teroko hated it when she was left alone for long periods of time and sometimes even locked in a cupboard, with her hands tied together! The only one she felt any love for was her 8-year-old stepbrother.

They lived in a shack, with a leaking roof and when it rained, they had to hold an umbrella up to keep themselves dry. It was good to go to school, but even there, Teroko could not make friends easily. She had an inferiority complex, which resulted from being so ashamed of her circumstances. She frequently wondered what the purpose of living was. She enjoyed studying, however, and secretly longed to become a school teacher. But she knew that there would be no money available for the necessary education. So, as soon as she could leave school, Teroko got a job in an office.

Then, at the age of 22, a marriage was arranged for her. Surely life would be better from then on, she reckoned, and much looked forward to having children. But her first two pregnancies resulted in miscarriages and the next baby died at birth. Teroko was still deeply unhappy with her circumstances, but suddenly her conscience started to bother her. She had never been kind to her mother, she felt, and was convinced that the gods were punishing her. Then she got pregnant again and gave birth to a boy and called him Takeshi, meaning 'Precious'. All seemed to go well for a while, until her husband announced that he was going to divorce her.

For the next fifteen years, Teroko was utterly despondent as she thought back over the past. She did her best to bring up her son and was even able to put him through university, by working as a seamstress to make ends meet. But when she considered how the years were passing and she had never found relief for her burdened conscience, she read as many books on Buddhism and any other religion as she could. But nothing seemed to help her burdened heart.

Then, one day, in God's providence, she happened to turn on the radio when the Japan Mission's 'Voice of Joy' broadcast was being aired. Teroko immediately got in touch with them and started doing a Bible correspondence course. She was soon introduced to her nearest church and there Teroko at last found a peace in her heart, that she had never known before, by trusting in the Savior.

May the Lord help each one of us to be on the lookout for needy souls and have the joy, by some means or other, of pointing them to Him.

June 23

ABIDE WITH ME

1. *"Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide:
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O, abide with me!"*
2. *"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see:
O Thou who changest not, abide with me!"*
3. *"I need Thy presence every passing hour:
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Oh, abide with me!"*
4. *"Hold Thou Thy word before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies:
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!"*

(Rev. H F. Lyle)

Rev. Lyle, who pastored a church in a coastal town in England, frequented by sailors, in addition to the local villagers, became ill and his doctor advised him to go to sunny southern Europe to regain his health. Hard as it was to leave his congregation, he did so.

On the last Sunday before leaving, however, although he did not have the strength to stand up, he preached his last sermon to his weeping congregation.

That same evening, he wrote the words of this much used hymn.

Rev. Lyle later went abroad and died within a year!

June 24

HE BEARS OUR GRIEFS & SORROWS

"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

(Isaiah 53:4)

How amazing it is to realize that *"He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows"*. There are so many things in life that cause us grief and sorrow, but we don't have to bear them ourselves, because He has already borne them for us! If we try to bear them ourselves, they will blind us and cut us off from those around us. If we succumb to our grief, it will result in our being useless in God's service and we will never be a blessing to anyone.

We just have to see our grief from God's point of view and commit it to Him. If we do so, He will help us to take our mind off our grief and to pursue the tasks that He has given us to do. If we get on with our duty and seek to minister to others, we will not only be healed ourselves, but will be a blessing to those around us, especially when they see the trial that we are going through ourselves and how God is undertaking for us in that very trial.

Expressing grief is an important part of healing. We read of David's grief in 2 Samuel 1:11-12 *"... David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and Jonathan his son, for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword."*

As we read this passage, we see that they were in no way ashamed to express their sorrow. Some people consider expressing emotion a sign of weakness. But revealing our grief can very often help us deal with some great sorrow that may come into our lives, especially when we lose a loved-one.

We see in Nehemiah, chapter 1, how Nehemiah was deeply grieved about the condition of Jerusalem, but he did not just brood about it. He prayed, pouring out his heart to God and looked for way to improve the situation. He put all his knowledge, experience and organizing skills into determining what should be done.

We should remember that when God permits a trial, He always provides some special blessing and comfort to accompany it.

How wonderfully the anonymous poet expressed this truth in the following lines:

*"I have been through the valley of weeping,
The valley of sorrow and pain;
But the God of all comfort was with me,
At hand to uphold and sustain.
"Looking back, it seems to me
All the grief, which had to be
Left me when the pain was o'er
Richer than I'd been before."*

June 25

SIX MONTHS OF HAPPINESS

"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." (Romans 8:37)

When Akiko opened up her husband's diary, while gathering his few personal things together, she read the words, "Thank you, God! Thank you, God", which he had written just a week prior to his death! She just could not suppress her emotion and the tears flowed, as she read those wonderful words.

The last few weeks had been so difficult for them. Yoshihiro had been in constant pain and, though they had often talked of healing, deep down they both realized that there was little hope of his recovery.

Akiko had been so worried when her husband first became ill, partly because he seemed to be so opposed to Christianity. In fact, their marriage had been strained ever since her conversion ten years previously. It had been difficult for her to talk to him about her Savior, but then she firmly believed that God would work in his heart in answer to her prayers.

First of all, their little niece, of whom he was very fond, was fatally injured on her way to school. Then, his mother, who was a Christian, was killed in a car accident. Somehow these catastrophes seemed to have made Yoshihiro even more antagonistic towards Christianity.

Soon after he became ill with a large growth in his stomach, and the following four years were spent in and out of hospital. When one growth was removed, another grew in its place and frequent blood transfusions and injections failed to arrest the spread of the cancer.

During that time, life was far from easy for Akiko. She had to do her best to maintain her husband's business herself. This involved managing the shop, driving a truck to deliver goods, as well as looking after their two small children. But it was doubtless his wife's cheerfulness and undaunted courage in spite of her difficult circumstances that finally convinced Yoshihiro that there really must be something in her faith.

Just six months before his death, Yoshihiro was wonderfully saved and one day said to Akiko, "You know, in spite of insurmountable trials, these past six months have been the happiest days of our married life" and Akiko could not help but agree with him!

May the Lord help us, no matter how impossible a situation might look, to continue to trust Him for the salvation of our loved-ones!

June 26

OUR HELP IN TIMES OF TROUBLE

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.” (Psalm 46:1-3)

How often in life we have to face some sort of trouble. We may wonder where we should turn, forgetting that the Lord has said, *“They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits’ end. Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brings them out of their distresses.”* (Psalm 107:27-8)

We may find it difficult to realize that God does not regard our troubles as difficulties, but as opportunities. They are always intended to educate us. All we have to do is to cry to the Lord and He will deliver us in His own time and in His own way, which will be the very best for us, although we may not immediately realize it.

We just have to accept things that we cannot understand. If we patiently wait, He will reveal to us the treasures that are sometimes to be found in the darkness. We should never be afraid to enter the cloud that settles on our life. God is in it and the other side is radiant with His glory.

We should remember that the very nature of a storm is that it is transient. The norm is the calm. Trouble will pass and, if we lean on Him in the trouble, we will emerge stronger spiritually and have cause to praise Him for allowing us to go through it.

No trouble seems pleasant at the time we experience it, but, in God’s economy, it is trouble that brings forth new faith. How often we hear people say that they thank God for some hard time, saying that it was the best thing that ever happened to them.

All that we really have to remember is that trust involves complete confidence in God. When we have an important decision to make, we sometimes feel that we can’t trust anyone – not even God. However, God always knows what is best for us and He knows, even better than we do what we really need. So we must trust Him completely in every choice that we have to make.

How well the anonymous writer put it in the following words:

*“Always remember to forget
The troubles that passed your way.
But never forget to remember
The blessings that come each day!”*

June 27

THE COMIC THAT CHANGED A LIFE

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)

Kozo Muto sat on the wharf with his feet dangling in the water. He was lonely and miserable and had no one to talk to about his inner feelings. His mind was far away, when his father, who was a stevedore and had been loading a ship, told him that it was time for supper and they needed to go home.

When school days were over, Kozo was glad. He had never liked school and was longing to get away from home. He was therefore delighted when he managed to find employment as a farmhand.

From early in the morning till late at night, he was busy, but he enjoyed the work. Eventually, however, a deep loneliness gripped him and nothing seemed to satisfy him any more. As a result, he started to drink. Then, one day, he read an advert in a comic book that changed the entire course of his life. It offered a New Testament, free of charge, and a correspondence course with which to study it.

Kozo eagerly wrote in and soon received them, plus a letter from the missionary organization, offering any spiritual help he needed. As he studied the material, Kozo soon found truths that he never knew existed and his spiritual eyes were opened to understand the good news of the Gospel.

The owner of the farm was not very pleased when he heard that of Kozo's desire to become a Christian and told him that he was running away from reality. But that drove Kozo to his knees and he was determined in his heart to be wholly dedicated to God's plan for his life. He soon located the nearest church and, when he discussed his problems with the minister, he was introduced to a Christian farmer, who sympathized with him and offered to employ him.

So it was that Kozo changed employers and was delighted to be able to attend church with the farmer's family. He soon became the leader of the youth group there and later went to Bible College.

Kozo is now a minister, praising God for the small advertisement in a comic book that was the stepping-stone to his finding the Savior.

May the Lord help us to remember that He often uses small things to work in the hearts of those who need of Him. May we look to our Savior to help us be a blessing in any way that we can to those with whom we come into contact day by day.

June 28

A HEART SET ON HIM

"And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things."

(1 John 3:19-20)

During the times when we feel guilty, conscious that we are not doing enough to show real love to the Lord, we always need to remember that our heart needs to be subject to God's Word.

How then do we escape the gnawing accusations of our consciences? It will not help to ignore them. We should rather set our hearts on His unfailing love and remember that if we are in Christ, He will not condemn us. Let us remember that He said in Romans 8:1, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."*

Sometimes we may feel so inadequate when we seek to pray, but then we need to remember that a heart focused on God will experience great power in prayer. If our conscience is clear, we can come to God without fear, confident that our requests will be heard.

Ultimately, we should remember that our commitment to God must be wholehearted. We read in the Scriptures in Matthew 22:37-40, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great*

commandment and the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." We always need to guard against our efforts to obey God's commands being half-hearted.

If perchance our heart is unclean and in need of cleansing by the precious Blood, then it will not be open to obey His every command and will not be pleasing to Him. We always have to remember that God's primary concern is with our heart.

Should we be conscious of the need for a new work to be done in our hearts, maybe we need to cry to the Lord in the Words of the Psalmist that we find in Psalm 51:10, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*

May we also always remember to apply the words of an anonymous writer to our hearts:

*"Be still, my heart, for faithful is your Lord,
And pure and true and tried His holy Word,
Through stormy flood that rages as the sea,
His promises your steppingstones shall be."*

June 29

A NAME TO BE REMEMBERED

"...your faith has made you well." (Matthew 9:22)

"The secret of happiness is to make a lot of money, to get personal glory and to leave behind a name to be remembered," Mr. Inuzuka often told his son, Naoki, adding, that if he needed some good guiding principles, he should study Bushido.

On investigation, however, Naoki discovered that Bushido – the code of the samurai (the warrior class of the twelfth century) – strongly stressed the need to discipline the mind in order to face any calamities or adversities that might come, with patience and a pure conscience.

But when it came to it, Naoki was deeply conscious that he just did not have what it took. He definitely lacked discipline and most certainly did not have a pure conscience. He was even reminded of the fruit he had stolen from the neighbor's orchard and the unkind way in which he had so often treated his brothers and sisters.

Then, one day, sitting alone in his meagre lodging-place while at university, Naoki turned on the radio and happened to tune in to the 'Voice of Joy' Christian radio broadcast. The speaker spoke of the blood of Christ that can wash away one's sins and Naoki wondered if that was not the way to obtain a pure conscience. A free copy of the New Testament and a correspondence course were offered and Naoki immediately wrote in to request them.

On receiving them, Naoki did his best to study them, but found it difficult to grasp the way of salvation. Then a friend loaned him a book, called 'Shiokari Pass', depicting the true story of a Christian young man who saw a train careering down a steep incline. On realizing that, if it crashed, everyone would be killed, if the train's speed was not diminished, he deliberately threw himself in front of the train in an attempt to slow it down and, as a result, lost his life, but the lives of all the passengers were all saved.

Naoki could hardly comprehend such sacrifice, but it reminded him of Jesus' death on the Cross and, as a result, he yielded his heart and life to God, clinging on in faith to the Words, "*...your faith has made you well.*" After graduating from university, Naoki entered seminary and, on graduating, went to the city of Hiroshima to tell others about His Savior. His father's desire had been that he would make a name for himself, but he now testifies that his one desire is to be used by God to make His wonderful Name known in that needy city.

Maybe there is someone you know who could be vitally influenced for God by even just lending them a Christian book. May He help us to be available to be used by Him in whatever way He may see fit.

June 30

SAFE IN THE ARMS OF JESUS

1. *"Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast,
There, by His love o'ershaded,
Sweetly my soul shall rest.
Hark! 'tis the voice of angels,
Borne in a song to me,
Over the fields of glory,
Over the jasper sea.*

Chorus

*"Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe on His gentle breast,
There, by His love o'ershaded,
Sweetly my soul shall rest.*

2. *"Safe in the arms of Jesus,
Safe from corroding care,
Safe from the world's temptations,
Sin cannot harm me there.
Free from the blight of sorrow,
Free from my doubts and fears;
Only a few more trials,
Only a few more tears!*

3. *"Jesus, my heart's dear refuge,
Jesus has died for me;
Firm on the Rock of Ages,
Ever my trust shall be.
Here let me wait with patience,
Wait 'till the night is o'er;
Wait 'till I see the morning
Break on the golden shore."*

(Fanny Jane Crosby - 1820-1915)

Fanny Crosby was blinded by an illness at the age of six weeks, but during her lifetime became a famous hymn writer. She entered the New York Institution for the Blind at the age of fifteen and afterwards taught English and history there. As a pupil and a teacher, she spent 35 years in that institution.

July 1

THE SOURCE OF CONTENTMENT

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain."

(1 Timothy 6:6)

There is no doubt that contentment grows out of humility and trust in God. When we overvalue ourselves and undervalue others, we often become dissatisfied with what we have and keep looking around to see what others have that we don't have and what they are doing that we would rather like to do.

But if we are really humble of heart, we will put others first and be content with God's leading in our lives. Then we will also be contented and no longer have to keep proving ourselves to others.

Most of us do our share of complaining, but maybe we just do not see it for what it is. We may well condemn it as a sin when we hear others complaining about something, but we regard our own murmuring as nothing more than a negative attitude. It never occurs to us that it grieves the heart of God and that it is actually a sin in His eyes.

We have to learn to be content with the circumstances we face and the things we have. If we are discontented because we don't have what we want, we need to rely on God's power and His promises. Once we do this, we can trust Him to supply all our needs at all times, in a way that He knows is best for us.

Paul was able to say that he was content, because he could see life from God's point of view. He had his priorities straight and focused on what he knew he was supposed to do, rather than on what he himself wanted to do. He had learned to concentrate on eternal values and to detach himself from non-essentials.

The secret of real contentment is found in Christ. It is a matter of accepting what God has given us and making the most of it. True contentment comes from Him alone. If we are conscious of His presence and His love moment by moment, we will always be satisfied with Him and what He has given us.

May the Lord help us to do just that, so that we can know the real meaning of contentment and therefore also be a blessing to others

when they see satisfaction in our life.

How well it has been said that those who are satisfied with what God has given them are rich, because God always gives His best to those who leave the choice to Him!

July 2

SURFS THE INTERNET TO TELL OF JESUS

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)

One day, a friend said to Masahiro Mizuguchi San, "I believe in the presence of God!" But, with his Buddhist background, Masahiro just could not figure out how the presence of God could in any way be related to human affairs.

As a result of those words, however, Mizuguchi San watched his friend closely and noticed that his values were very different from his own. He wanted to question him more about his beliefs, but was hesitant to do so. Instead, he decided to turn to his computer and surf the Internet for information about Christianity, reckoning that he could find anything there! Through that medium, he managed to exchange opinions with some Christians and came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to look for a church in his neighborhood.

He eventually located Saga Church, but on reaching the entrance, his courage failed him and he speedily returned home! This happened several times, until, one Saturday evening, he happened to notice a poster outside the building, telling of English classes being held there. At that moment, the pastor of the church came out to water some plants in the front garden and Mizuguchi San plucked up the courage to speak to him and the pastor invited him to attend the worship service to be held the next day.

As a result, he not only attended the service, but also joined the English teaching program. There he came across something else that he just could not fathom. The teacher of the English program was a Mr. Albert Greeff who, he discovered, had left a good job in South Africa and come all the way to Japan, with his family, to serve in a little remote place like Saga Church. If such an action could be attributed to "faith", Mizuguchi San knew that he certainly did not

have it and decided to obtain a Bible to try to find the answer.

Then, one day during a series of special meetings in the church, he was deeply moved and broken before the Lord and accepted Christ as his Savior. A few days later, he also e-mailed his Internet friends, saying, "Jesus has come into my heart!" and many e-mailed him back, rejoicing with him and wanting to know more about the Savior.

His father is very much against his faith and fears that Masahiro, as the eldest son, will not take care of the spirits of their ancestors. So he is now earnestly praying for the salvation of his father and other family members, believing that God will fulfill His Promise that not only he, but that also "his household" will be saved.

Maybe you still have unsaved relatives. May the Lord give you the faith to trust Him for your "household", because He has promised to save them also.

July 3

HOW TO DEAL WITH PRESSURE

"... Jacob said, 'Sell me your birthright as of this day.' And Esau said, 'Look I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?'"

(Genesis 25: 31-2)

When we read this passage in Genesis, we see that Esau traded what would have been the lasting benefits of his birthright for his hunger for food. In other words, he acted on impulse just to satisfy his immediate desires, without considering the consequences of what he was about to do.

It is so easy for us too to fall into the same temptation when we see something we very much want. Our first impulse is to do all we can to get it. As soon as we have done so, we may be satisfied with what we got, but when we consider what we have lost in the process of getting it, we may realize that we had completely forgotten the price we would have to pay for it in the future.

At times, circumstances and people seem to be pushing us beyond what we can bear. However, the Lord knows our limitations and never allows any difficulties to enter our lives that exceed our strength or ability to endure.

We need to consider how we can resist the pressure to do what is out of the will of God, when such temptations come our way. At such times of pressure, we must seek God's help. There is just no other way.

So, when trials and temptations press down on us, we need to take courage, remembering that our heavenly Father knows the limits of our ability to stand up under life's pressures and will give us the strength to be victorious, if we just seek Him at such times of need.

How well our need to deal with pressure has been expressed by an anonymous writer in the following words:

*“Pressed out of measure and pressed to all length
Pressed so intensely, it seems beyond strength
Pressure by foes, and pressure from friends
Pressure on pressure, ‘till life nearly ends.
Pressed into knowing no helper but God
Pressed into loving the staff and the rod
Pressed into faith for impossible things
Pressed into living a life for the Lord.
Pressed into living a Christ-life outpoured.”*

May the Lord help us at all times of pressure to pray for His Strength and, if necessary, to seek the support of others whom we can trust, that we may be victorious.

July 4

A WORTHWHILE LOVE

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

(1 John 3:16)

Misao Watanabe grew up in the difficult days of the war in Japan. As much as her mother tried to eke out their meager allowance, the last ten days of every month were always dreaded. She and her mother often had to go into the country to forage for food. School studies were also often hampered, but Misao was a keen student and when a friend asked her if she would like to learn English from

a foreigner, she jumped at the suggestion. The English classes were held in a church near her home and the missionary soon invited her to attend Sunday school.

The family deity was the goddess of the sun, Amaterasu Omikami, who was allegedly born from the left eye of the god, Izanagi, and received the country of Japan as her legacy. Her parents had always told her that the judgments of the god would be on her if she stepped out of line and, for example, did not do her homework!

Misao had heard of many other gods too, but they were all harsh and insensitive and she feared to get near them. Now, for the first time in her life, she was hearing of a God of love and she wanted to learn more about Him. To Misao's utter amazement, however, she discovered that the love of this God went so far that He sent His only son to die for the wayward human race. The Sunday school teacher told her in fact that Jesus, God's Son, died for them all. She had never heard of such love in Buddhism, Shintoism or any other religion in Japan and she reckoned that it was well worth pursuing. So, Misao started to read the Bible.

Before long, she felt the urge to talk about this loving God to everyone she came into contact with, but her mother was worried about her sudden zeal for the God of the church in the neighborhood. "We will never be able to find you a husband if you become a Christian. You will disgrace the whole family," her mother told her in no uncertain terms. But Misao was most encouraged when her younger brother also found the Lord, having seen such a great change in her life, he said.

When Misao decided to enroll as a student at a Bible college, her mother was up in arms and warned her that she would be an "old maid" all her life. Misao then said to her, "Mother, to me Christ is more important than the most wonderful wedding you can arrange for me!"

After three years of Bible study, Misao spent the next six years assisting a missionary to spread the Gospel in some needy, country parts of Japan. Then, much to her mother's surprise, a marriage was arranged for her with Isamu Fukunaga of the Japan Mission. He was a handsome young man and her mother heartily approved of him!

May the Lord help us, no matter what the cost may seem to be, to reach out to those who as yet have no knowledge of our wonderful, loving Savior.

July 5

APPROPRIATE FEAR

“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Deuteronomy 10:12)

When Moses wrote the above words, he was seeking to distinguish the true God from all the local, heathen gods, which were worshipped in the land in those days. Then Moses went on further to call Him *“mighty and awesome”* in verse 17 of the same chapter. In other words, God has such awesome power that no one can stand before Him, without His mercy, but how wonderful it is to realize that His mercy towards us is unlimited.

It is only when we begin to realize this fact that we see what true love is and how much He really loves us. Our fear of what He might do to us then changes into reverence. We also know that although our sins deserve severe judgment, God has chosen to show love and mercy to all who seek Him. Real fellowship with God is, however, reserved for those who reverence Him and hold Him in highest honor. What relationship could ever compare to having one like that?

Alongside of that, fearing God leads to knowing him more fully and realizing how wonderful He is. It does not mean being fearful of Him. Often in the Bible we find the words, *“Do not be afraid.”* When He spoke those words, God was not trying to scare the people. He was just showing them His mighty power, so that the Israelites, and we too, should know that He was and is the true God, who will always be with them and us and that He should always be obeyed. We should never leave God out of our thinking. Without a consciousness that He will be with us every step of the way, life would be terrifying.

You may know someone who is holding back from trusting the Lord for salvation because of fear that he or she might have sinned too much. If that is so, may the Lord help us to reveal to them something of the wonderful understanding and love of our Savior.

July 6

THE ELUSIVE PATIENT

*“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.
Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”*

(2 Timothy 4:2)

One of the patients in a hospital where Evangelist Sato of the Japan Mission ministered weekly had the habit of entering the meetings slightly late and of disappearing just before the end.

The evangelist had a great desire to talk to him personally and was so glad when one day, just as he was about to enter the elevator after the service, the man came up behind him and handed him a name-card. But he then speedily moved off, leaving an amazed evangelist behind the closed door of the elevator! As Mr. Sato studied the card, he discovered that the elusive patient was the owner of a large sound-system business and that his name was Takeshi Godai.

On his next visit to the hospital, the evangelist sought to find out which ward the man was in, only to be told that he had already left the hospital. Mr. Sato then came to the conclusion that he would likely have no further contact with the elusive patient, when, to his amazement, he received a letter from Mr. Godai, saying that he was improving physically every day and often thought back on the messages from the Bible that he had heard in the hospital.

From then on, Mr. Sato did his best to communicate the message of salvation to him, but he was by no means an easy person to contact. Then, one day, some two months later, he received an urgent message from Mr. Godai's daughter, saying that her father suddenly had to be hospitalized again and very much wanted to see him, if it was at all possible.

When he reached the hospital, Mr. Sato discovered that Mr. Godai was very sick and could only breathe with the help of oxygen. He could not even speak, but communicated with the evangelist by writing down his thoughts. Apparently he had a very weak heart and had contracted pneumonia. The doctor only gave him two or three days to live.

Mr. Godai wrote that his great desire was to get right with God and Mr. Sato had the wonderful opportunity of explaining the way

of salvation to him. Mr. Godai was overjoyed and wrote in clear Japanese characters that he had real peace in his heart. Shortly afterwards, he went to be with the Savior that he had so recently found.

May the Lord help us always to be on the lookout for the seeking souls around us. Their need may not always be obvious in the beginning, as in Mr. Godai's case, but many may be hiding their deep need to get right with God before they die and are just waiting for us to bring them the message of salvation.

July 7

OH, FOR A THOUSAND TONGUES!

1. "Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace.
2. "My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread thro' all the earth abroad,
The honors of Thy name.
3. "Jesus! the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace.
4. "He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean;
His blood availed for me.
5. "Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb,
Your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Savior come;
And leap, ye lame, for joy."

(Charles Wesley - 1707-1788)

Charles Wesley wrote this hymn on the eleventh anniversary of his own conversion. He had known from childhood that Jesus had

died on the cross to pay the penalty for sin, but on May 21st, 1738, he accepted the Lord as his Savior and could say from his heart, "His blood availed for me".

Before he was converted, Charles and his brother, John, had been dubbed 'Methodists', because of the methods of spirituality they had introduced into their club at Oxford University, called 'The Holy Club'. But later they met the German Moravians, who loved to sing, were very missions-minded and emphasized a personal conversion experience.

One of the Moravian leaders, Peter Bohler, once said, "Had I a thousand tongues, I would praise Christ Jesus with all of them". So Charles Wesley built a hymn round those words to celebrate the date of his conversion.

July 8

DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

"O my God, my soul is cast down within me; therefore I will remember You from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Hill Mizar." (Psalm 42:6)

It is sometimes most difficult to define depression, because it tends to be elusive. Sometimes grieving is confused with depression. Grieving and depression do share some similarities, but they are not one and the same. Depression often results from the grieving process.

When we grieve, it is usually connected with some loss in our lives. But if we become depressed, somehow the sorrow of loss is numbed. Both may lead to sleepless nights or even a loss of appetite, but the end results are quite different. Grieving leads to a renewal of hope and a longing for heaven. Depression can create an additional set of problems that lock our souls into a state of gloom.

Depression is a very common emotional problem and can be relieved by meditating on God's goodness to His children down the ages and His promises to those who love Him, as the Psalmist did. By doing so, we will also take our mind off any difficult situation we may be in and it will give us hope that things will improve.

Depression can also be relieved by patience. Later in Psalm 42, the writer also tells himself to *“hope in God”*. Later in the psalm too we read, *“Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God”* (verse 11). In other words, depression can be relieved by expecting God to act on our behalf.

Depression can be helped by being careful of what we eat and also making sure that we get enough exercise. We also need to be careful not to overextend ourselves and to give our bodies time to recover from some trauma or great loss that may have come into our life.

Our bodies and souls are so intertwined that we may also notice an effect on our soul when some sort of physical illness afflicts our body. If that is so, a medical check-up is probably necessary.

Deferred hope can also be a cause of depression. When we long for a solution to some problem and it does not come, the unsettling pain of deferred hope may set in. The Bible also points to this. We read in Proverbs, chapter 13, verse 12, *“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.”*

May the Lord help us not only to be able to trust Him when depression comes into our hearts, but also to help others who may have the same problem and come across our pathway.

July 9

SOLDIERS IN A FARAWAY LAND

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

One of Kazuo Ozaki’s earliest recollections was that of the inside of his parents’ shop. He had always been fascinated with everything that was sold there. There had been so many toys to play with and cakes to eat. Many children had also come into the shop to buy things and he had been able to make friends with them.

When he was not in the shop, Kazuo and his three brothers played outside with their friends and loved to swim in the river and play hide & seek. At other times, he also listened to his records or buried himself in a story-book!

But life suddenly changed for Kazuo when war broke out. His town was bombed and his house was badly damaged. They escaped injury, but all they had left were the clothes they had on and they had to live in the open, just under a zinc roof.

During that difficult time too his father had died. Kazuo graduated from high school, but jobs were at a premium during the war. He enlisted in the Self Defense Force and was assigned to their northern headquarters office in Hokkaido. There, Kazuo had a lot of contact with foreigners and became fairly proficient in English.

Then, one day, he was invited to the home of an American Air Force officer and there met a missionary couple that had recently come to Japan and did not understand the language. Kazuo was asked to act as interpreter at a meeting they were due to hold on the next Sunday. He was not really interested in religion, but found it difficult to refuse.

From that time on, although he was still unsaved, Kazuo was often asked to act as an interpreter at their meetings and gradually he began to realize his need of God's gift of salvation. So it was that when he was 25 years old, Kazuo found the Savior.

From then on, he had a great desire to serve the Lord. So, he left the army and went to Bible College. There he met his wife-to-be, Hisako and, after training, they felt called to serve the Lord in Ecuador on the staff of a Christian radio station.

Both of them now praise the Lord for the wonderful way in which he brought them out of darkness into His wonderful Light and gave them the opportunity of joining the Lord's Army in a faraway land!

Let's seek to make use of every opportunity that may come across our pathway to introduce some needy soul to the Lord.

July 10

SURRENDERING ALL TO GOD

“Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said”: ‘By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you obeyed My voice.’”

(Genesis 22:15-18)

As we can clearly see from the above passage, when we surrender up to God that thing which, more than anything else, is dear to our hearts, we will receive so much more than we gave to Him. Abraham gave up his precious, only son at God’s command and God gave him a family that could not be numbered!

If we accept poverty, He will give us wealth. If we give up some precious field of service at His command, He will give us a richer one in His good time.

If we die to self, He will give us abundant life and overflowing joy! In other words, surrendering all to God is the secret of a blessed life that will be a blessing to us and to others also!

We must always remember that God has to be in complete charge of our lives, if we are to experience life at its best. We should never go to God with our options and expect Him to choose from our preferences. If we go to God with empty hands, no secret agendas, nothing hidden behind our backs, He will give us the very best, if we leave the choice and the last word to Him.

If we surrender our will to God, we will experience what Paul so well expressed in Hebrews chapter, 13, verses 20-21. *“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.”*

In Deuteronomy chapter 30, verses 1-3, we see a wonderful example of how God blesses and undertakes for those who obey

Him, no matter how difficult the situation may seem to be – *“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.”*

July 11

A FRIEND FOREVER

“For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

One morning little five-year-old Isamu Fukunaga saw a big Buddhist altar being carried into their house and he was terrified, because his mother had previously told him that they did not need such an altar in their home until someone in the family died. When Isamu plucked up the courage to ask her who had died, she stopped her work and looked into Isamu’s earnest little eyes and said, *“No one has died, Isamu, but it’s good to be prepared. It took a long time to save enough money to buy it”*.

A year later his mother did die and Isamu was inconsolable. Neither was his loss made easier by the appearance of the second Mrs. Fukunaga. Isamu did not like her, nor the well made-up ‘geisha’ who constantly came to visit her and deep down in his heart there was always a great loneliness – a void which just could not be filled.

When Isamu was sixteen, a missionary visited his school and gave each of the children a copy of John’s Gospel and sang to them, ‘What a friend we have in Jesus’. For Isamu it was an unforgettable day. The words of the hymn sunk deep into his heart and he hummed the tune and sang about someone, called Jesus, who was his Friend

at all times, even in the darkness, in the middle of the night. For the next ten years, Isamu wondered just how he could become a real friend of this Jesus, but there was just no one to tell him.

On leaving high school, he obtained a job in a printing press, but the work was hard and the hours were long. Then, one day he had a lung hemorrhage and was taken to Habikino Hospital. He thought he would die of loneliness there and his only consolation was to slip out into the grounds in the middle of the night and gaze up into the sky and marvel at the twinkling stars.

Then, one day, he discovered that there was a Christian meeting in the hospital. He attended and to his surprise they sang the very hymn that he loved so much. It jolted his memory and again he started to long for a true friend. But soon he was to leave the hospital and was still not in contact with Jesus. The Japan Mission hospital evangelist, however, speedily introduced him to his nearest church, where Isamu found the 'Friend' he had sought so long.

Some time later, he joined the Japan Mission staff himself and became a valued worker, in charge of their outreach in the Japanese language.

May the Lord help us to be on the alert for those around us who are inwardly seeking the Savior, who means so much to us.

July 12

IN WEAKNESS MADE A BLESSING

"... God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty, and the base things of the world and things which are despised God has chosen, and things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Corinthians 1: 27-29)

Sometimes we feel so frustrated by the limitations, which our circumstances seem to be placing on us. Maybe we have a difficult child to deal with or an uncooperative spouse. Maybe our age is a problem and we are ill and bedridden and feel that there is nothing we can do for the Lord.

If we are in some such circumstances, we always need to realize that God has allowed them to happen to cause us to grow spiritually. We don't need to worry about how people around us respond to what has happened to us. Our restrictions are part of God's plan to mature us and He is only watching how we react in our hearts and rewards us accordingly.

In fact, God can only demonstrate the marvel of His Strength in us when the extremity of weakness is revealed. It would almost seem as if God needs man's weakness to reveal His wonderful strength.

The great man of God, C.T. Studd, often testified about his weakness. He suffered with asthma night and day and it was only leaning on the Lord that enabled him to carry on and to become such a wonderful blessing to others in so many ways during his life.

How true it is that only God can bring spiritual victory out of physical distress. In fact, we read in Hebrews chapter 11, verse 34-36 about the wonderful men and women of faith, who "*... out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.*"

God hears every private, anguished prayer and rewards every unseen act of sacrifice and devotion. He will strengthen us no matter how difficult our circumstances may be, if we just cast ourselves on Him and trust Him.

We always need to remember that the things that we do for Him are the things that really matter and will receive a lasting reward. So may we take our eyes off of others and rest them upon Him in our daily walk, no matter how difficult it may seem to be at the time.

July 13

FLED FROM TWO CHURCHES IN ONE DAY!

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

The bottom dropped out of Takayasu Sakurai’s life on the day that he was diagnosed as having contracted tuberculosis. He was only eighteen years old and bent on pleasure, but he knew that his lifestyle had now caught up with him and he was likely doomed to years of meaningless existence in a hospital.

Takayasu just hated to be alone, so, during the daytime, he played games with other patients in the hospital, but after the lights went out, he was alone and desperately lonely.

A ray of light came into his life one day, however, when he became slightly acquainted with a very pleasant female patient. He spent as many of his waking hours as possible with her, but was disappointed that she seemed to show very little interest in him.

On the day that she left the hospital, he accompanied her to the railway station, but, as the train carried her further and further away out of his life, Takayasu was heartbroken.

As a child, he had gone to Christian open-air meetings and had always thought that maybe one day, when he was in real trouble, he might again make contact with the nice people who taught him to sing – *“Glory to His Name! Glory to His Name! There to my heart was the Blood applied. Glory to His name!”*

He did not really know what it all meant, but as Takayasu disconsolately left the railway station, he wandered in the direction of a church building that he had noticed, not very far from the hospital. But when he got there, he saw that there was a wedding in progress and he speedily fled away.

He then recalled another church building, not too far away, and started off in that direction, only to find that the door was locked. Takayasu then wandered back to the hospital in despair. But God saw the need of his heart and sent a Japan Mission hospital evangelist to his bedside. It did not take long for Takayasu to be persuaded that he needed the Savior and he soon committed his life to Jesus.

On leaving the hospital, Takayasu went to Bible College and is now a minister of the Gospel himself, telling others of his wonderful Savior.

May the Lord help us always to be on the lookout for those around us who are lonely, and who do not know the One who can meet the deepest needs of their heart.

July 14

SWEET HOUR OF PRAYER

1. *"Sweet Hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known,
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare,
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!"*
2. *"Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
Thy wings shall my petition bear,
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless;
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His word, and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my every care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer."*
3. *"Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
May I thy consolation share,
Till, from Mount Pisgah's lofty height,
I view my home, and take my flight:
This robe of flesh I'll drop, and rise
To seize the everlasting prize;
And shout, while passing thro' the air,
Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer!"*

(William W. Walford)

The words of this famous hymn were written by a blind English clergyman during the year 1842. He recited them to another minister, Rev. Thomas Salmon, who wrote them down and took them with him to New York. There the hymn was published in The New York Observer. There is no doubt that Mr. Walford's life was full of troubles, but his religion lifted him above them all.

May the Lord help us to realize that no matter what our limitations may be, He allowed them for a special purpose and, if we let Him, will use them that we may be a blessing to many others in need.

July 15

DO WE REALLY TRUST HIM?

"Do you believe that I am able to do this?" (Matthew 9:28)

1. That He is ABLE to come to your rescue when you are tempted?

"For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted." (Hebrews 2:18)

2. That He is ABLE to save you to the uttermost when you come to Him?

"... He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:25)

3. That He is ABLE to keep you from stumbling?

"Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy". (Jude 24)

4. That He is ABLE to make all grace abound toward you that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have abundance for every good work?

"... God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." (2 Corinthians 9:8)

5. That he is ABLE to do more than we can ever imagine?

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.” (Ephesians 3:20-1)

May we be ABLE to say - *“... I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that Day.”* (2 Timothy. 1:12)

No matter how difficult circumstances may seem in any given situation, may we never forget that He has said, *“According to your faith let it be to you”* (Matthew 9:29)

If we trust Him at all times, we will be blessed and others too, as they see what our blessed Lord is capable of doing, no matter how hard the circumstances may be.

July 16

OBSSESSED!

“O Death, where is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55)

As Kikue ran home from school one day, the tears were streaming down her face. She just could not hold them back and she did not care if anyone saw her. She was so heartbroken that she just wanted to escape as quickly as possible. She could not get out of her mind the nickname that the children in her class had given her, ‘Korean!’ Was she so ugly that they had to regard her as one of the despised Korean foreigners in the neighborhood, even though she was Japanese and not Korean.

In the days that followed, when her mind was a little more composed, Kikue tried to figure out some of life’s mysteries. Why were some people born beautiful and others ugly? Why were some people rich and others poor? What was the real purpose of life? Where did you go when you die? For hours she would ponder these questions, until it became an obsession, but she could never come up with satisfactory answers.

Then, one day, Kikue decided to ask her older brother what he thought happened after death. “We disappear like the morning

dew – that is all”, was his brief reply! Still utterly bewildered, Kikue entered junior high school. However, not being able to get into the school of her choice, she became a student at a Christian school. Up until then she had thought that Konkonkyo was the true religion, not that it had meant anything to her personally. But every morning at 5 a.m. her mother had always assembled her and her nine brothers and sisters together and marched them off to the local shrine to worship.

Now, at school, Kikue was confronted with Christianity, and, just as religiously as she had gone to the Konkonkyo shrine, she attended the church services. But her problem of what happens after death remained unsolved and she never had the courage to ask the minister to explain it to her.

Then, one day, her attention was drawn to some tent meetings being held in the village and she decided to attend. But the simple message of the evangelist seemed to her to be too easy to be true. She plucked up courage to speak to him personally, however, and he assured her that she just needed to believe. There and then, at last, Kikue knew that she had found the answer to her many problems and took Jesus as her Savior.

The following year the minister arranged a marriage for Kikue with a keen young Christian school-teacher and a fruitful married life began, during which Kikue raised five children and valiantly stood by her husband in their united walk with the Lord.

May the Lord help us never to doubt the effectiveness of what Christ did for us on the Cross and may we look to Him to help us faithfully convey this truth to those around us, who are on the way to a lost eternity.

July 17

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

(Hebrews 4:15-16)

How wonderful it is to realize that prayer is an awesome privilege, but also that we do not necessarily have to come into the presence of our Loving Heavenly Father with heads hung low, afraid to ask Him to meet our needs, no matter what our requests may be. We do not need to feel that we always have to approach Him in prayer, with fear and trembling, because, as we see from the verses quoted above, we are told to come boldly into His Presence, knowing that He will answer our prayers in His own wonderful way.

Alongside of that, because He is a God of all-wisdom, His answers to our prayers will be wiser than we could ever imagine and that He will answer then in a way that we could never have dreamt of. He is not only our King, but he is also our Friend and Counselor and He is always vitally concerned about us. We also need to realize that by going into His Presence, we can bring our will into line with His Plan for our lives. Not only that, but it is an opportunity to demonstrate our implicit trust in Him. What a wonderful privilege to be able to speak with God Himself. Sometimes we may think that God will not hear us, because we have fallen short of His high standard for holy living, but, if we have trusted Him for our salvation, we need never doubt that He has forgiven us and will listen to every word we have to say.

Not only that, but we see from the Scriptures that prayer can even restore a broken relationship with Him, no matter how much we may feel that we have failed Him in the past. We read in Judges chapter 16, verse 28 that Samson, feeling that he had so often failed the Lord, wondered if he could ever be trusted again again, still prayed to the Lord, saying, *“O Lord God, remember me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!”* God did so and used Samson’s prayer, even in his death, to kill more of the enemy than he had done ever

done during his whole life.

May prayer not be a last resort to us in the many circumstances that we face day by day, but rather it should be our first reaction in every situation. If we bring our needs with confidence to Him, He will not only hear and answer our requests, but will direct us moment by moment in His own wonderful way.

But one thing that we must always remember is to pray with humility and sincerity. We read in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 6, verse 6, "*... when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*" What a wonderful Promise that is!

July 18

USEFUL TOOLS IN HIS HANDS

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

When she was told that a marriage was being arranged for her with Katsuyoshi, Kimiko had very mixed feelings. For one thing, he was an ardent believer in some American god and she was not at all sure that she could keep pace with his religious fervor! There was little she could do about it, however, and tried to appear as enthusiastic as possible.

Katsuyoshi had started a small business producing tools for bag-making and, as a result, managed to provide for the material needs of the family. Shortly after the birth of their first child, however, the 2nd world war broke out and he was conscripted into the army.

Those were most difficult days for Kimiko, as night after night the bombs rained down on the busy city of Osaka and she thought that any moment their little factory, over which they lived, would be destroyed and that that would be the end of them too! A bag containing bare essentials for her and the baby was constantly by her side should they suddenly need to flee from their home, and for some reason that she could not really define, she had also put into the bag the book of daily readings from the Bible that she and her husband had always read together.

A letter from Katsuyoshi eventually caught up with her, telling how concerned he was for her and praying for her that in everything she should give thanks to God. As Kimiko read and reread his letter, with tears in her eyes, she began to realize that Katsuyoshi's God might well be able to help her too. So, there and then, she ran out into the paddy fields that surrounded their home and gave her heart to Jesus. As she rose from her knees, there was a song of victory in her heart.

As a result of the bombing, nothing but rubble eventually remained of the Hayashi's little factory, but they were all safe. When Katsuyoshi came home, they started all over again and, from then on, one in the Lord, they started Christian meetings in their home and were bright testimonies for Him in their neighborhood.

The Hayashi family now produce tools for bag-making and realize that they too are tools in the Master's Hands to be used as He sees fit.

May the Lord help us too to take all things out of His nail-pierced Hands, knowing that, as we do so, He will bless us abundantly and make us a blessing to those around us.

July 19

WE ARE NEVER ALONE!

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." (John 16:7)

I guess that there are not many of us who have never felt loneliness in our hearts and wondered what we should do. Something that we have to beware of at such times is not to sink into self-pity, for that will never help us.

In the Bible we read of Elijah, who thought that he was the only person left who was still true to God. He had seen the king's court and priesthood become corrupt and, after experiencing a great victory on Mount Carmel, he had to run for his life. Lonely and discouraged, he forgot that there were also other followers of the Lord, who had remained faithful to Him.

When we are tempted to think that we are the only one who is faithful to God, we should never feel sorry for ourselves. Self-pity will destroy what we are seeking to do for the Lord. We need to remain assured that, even if we don't know who they are, there are many others who are faithfully obeying God and fulfilling the task that He has given them to do.

In these times, we need to realize that God is building a worldwide kingdom and that He has followers in every part of the world. He uses our faith, joined with that of others, to accomplish great things for His Kingdom.

We must also remember, as Christians, that we are never really alone, because the Holy Spirit is always with us and is there to be our Guide, Comforter and Friend at all times.

In His last moments with His disciples, when Jesus told them what would happen to Him, he warned them that they would experience persecution, but assured them that they would never be left alone, because the Holy Spirit would come to be with them.

He did not want the disciples' faith shaken. God wanted them and us to know that we will never be alone and that the Holy Spirit will always be with us to comfort, guide and help us.

There are so many lonely people in this world. May the Lord help us not only to learn the secret of overcoming loneliness in our own lives, but to be able to share it with others also.

July 20

AN ACHING HEART FINDS SOLACE

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you."

(John 15:16)

"They have even taken our rice cooker!" Mrs. Kazu Taniguchi said to her daughters, as their possessions one by one were carried out of the house. How cruel the creditors were, she bitterly thought.

But what bothered her more than the disappearance of her earthly goods, was the disappearance of her husband. How could he have left her alone with their three children and her mother, for whom

she also needed to care. It seemed that she was destined always to be lonely and to have to stand on her own two feet, with no one on whom she could depend.

In her childhood Kazu had also experienced much loneliness. Her father had taken no responsibility for the family, with the result that her mother had needed to take a job and leave the children to fend for themselves. In those days, Kazu's only source of comfort had been her beloved dolls.

Then, one day, soon after all her precious belongings had been taken out of the house, a friend invited her go with her to a Christian service. She accepted, being desperate to go somewhere, rather than sit in a virtually empty house.

The words "*I chose you*" that the minister used in his text brought a strange strength into her heart that day, something which she had never experienced before. He also spoke of a loving, heavenly Father, who could meet the deepest needs of the human heart. How badly she needed Someone just like that, she thought.

As Kazu left the church that day, she knew that she had at last come into contact with the Truth that she had unconsciously sought for so long and soon returned there, to ask the minister how she could give herself completely over to her heavenly Father.

Before long her two daughters also took the Lord Jesus as their own personal Savior and Kazu still trusts the Lord that He will work in the hearts of her husband and son, Hiroshi.

Maybe there is someone you know, who also has a lonely, aching heart. Just a word of encouragement or an invitation to a Gospel meeting might meet their deepest need and be the means of them also finding the Savior.

July 21

I NEED THEE EVERY HOUR

1. *"I need Thee every hour,
Most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like Thine
Can peace afford.*

Chorus

*"I need Thee, oh I need Thee;
Every hour I need Thee;
O, bless me now, my Savior,
I come to Thee!*

2. *"I need Thee every hour,
Stay Thou near by;
Temptations lose their power
When Thou art nigh.*

3. *"I need Thee every hour,
In joy or pain;
Come quickly and abide,
Or life is vain.*

4. *"I need Thee every hour,
Most Holy One;
O, make me Thine indeed,
Thou blessèd Son."*

(Annie Sherwood Hawks - 1875)

The words of this hymn were written by Annie Hawks one day while she was busy with her normal household duties. Suddenly, she became deeply conscious of the presence of her Savior. She was 37 years of age, a wife and a mother. After writing the lyrics, she gave the words over to her pastor, Robert Lowry, who added the tune and refrain.

Some years later, after the death of her husband, she could more fully than ever appreciate the comforting power of the words, which had been given to her at a time of sweet serenity and peace.

July 22

THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER

“Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. And Abraham came near and said, “Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it?” (Genesis 18:22-24)

I think we can see from the above passage that prayer helps us to better understand the mind of God. Abraham was not able to change God’s mind, but we can see from this passage that God was able to change Abraham’s mind, so that he was able to see things from God’s point of view. Abraham knew that God is just and punishes sin, but possibly he was trying to find out how merciful He was. In other words, our prayers will not change God’s mind, but they may well change our mind and help us to better understand the mind of God.

Furthermore, prayer is an opportunity to show our trust in Him. Abraham knew that God had to punish sin, but he also knew that God was merciful to sinners. God knew that there were not ten righteous people in the city, but he was merciful enough to let Abraham intercede so that He could convince him of the real position there. He also helped Lot, Abraham’s nephew, get out of Sodom before it was too late.

When we pray, maybe we should tell God that we are quite willing for Him to take our feeble prayers and answer them according to His perfect will. Maybe our prayers are often not answered as we would like them to be, because we ask *“amiss”*, as we read in James, chapter 4, verse 3, *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”*

How well the anonymous writer expressed it too in the following words:-

*“I prayed, the answer long deferred
Brought not the thing I sought.
God answered better than my plea –
Yes, better than my thought!”*

May the Lord help us to be willing at all times to bring our will into line with His plan for our lives and to help others too, who are seeking to follow Him, to understand Him better.

Many Christians don't seem to realize that prayer reflects our dependence on God. He wants to grant our requests, but He wants us to ask Him. He also wants us to realize that He may decide to withhold His answer for a while, in order to deepen our insight into what we really need and sometimes to allow us to mature so that we can use His gifts more wisely.

July 23

GOD'S CHOICE FOR SEIJI!

"... the Lord does not see as man sees, for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

(1 Samuel 16:7)

As Seiji Shima was delivering milk one morning, he grumbled to himself, 'I thought this would be an easy job, but it really wears me out!'

The more Seiji thought about it, the more he realized that he had made a great mistake. He should never have left home and gone to Tokyo. The job he had in his brother-in-law's shop was not really so bad after all.

So it was that Seiji, after further deliberation, quit his job in Tokyo and went back home. But not long after he got there, a medical check-up revealed that he had contracted tuberculosis and hospitalization resulted.

One day, a young man, who shared Seiji's ward, invited him to go with him to the Christian meeting that was held in the hospital each week. Having nothing better to do, Seiji decided to go. Evangelist Sato, who spoke at the meeting that day, talked about sin in the heart being like dust in a room that cannot be seen unless the sunlight shines on it.

From that day on, Seiji was conscious of God's working in his heart and it did not take long for him to take Jesus as his Savior. He then found that he was no longer gloomy or depressed and he also eagerly attended the early morning prayer meetings that were held in the hospital, as well as the weekly meetings.

When Seiji left the hospital, he found work in the police force in his hometown and began to think of marriage. He wanted to marry a Christian, but did not quite know how to go about it.

Then one day, the pastor of the church he was attending, asked those who attended the prayer meeting to pray that he would have guidance about arranging a marriage for Akiko Oshiki, who played the organ and taught a Sunday school class in the church. She was at that time considering a proposal of marriage from a young man in another prefecture and he was reluctant to lose her from his church.

In those minutes, God spoke to Seiji. Up until then, he had not taken much interest in her, because she was far from beautiful. But that did not matter any more. Seiji now knew that she was God's choice for him.

May the Lord help us, like Seiji, to remember that no matter what decisions we may have to make in life that above all "*... the Lord looks at the heart*".

July 24

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

(Galatians 5:22-23)

Let's just think about one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit today - that of Joy. Joy comes from having Him in our hearts and only when the Spirit is in our hearts will we really know true joy. We can never obtain it by trying to get it without His help. If we want the fruit of the Spirit to grow in us, we must dwell in Him.

Hard as it is sometimes to imagine it, we can be joyful in spite of our circumstances. When we consider that it was in prison that Paul wrote these words that we read in the book of Galatians, telling a church to rejoice, it reveals to us the fact that our inner attitudes do not need to reflect our outward circumstances. Paul could experience joy even in prison, because he knew that no matter what happened to him, Jesus was with him.

Paul vividly taught us a lesson that we should never forget – not to get discouraged when we face unpleasant circumstances. Joy is not dependent on circumstances. What happens to us may well affect our happiness, but we need to remember that happiness is not a Biblical word. It is derived from ‘*happen*’ and real joy is not affected by good or bad happenings!

Maybe we have never thought about it, but there is a sense in which we can choose joy. In other words, we can choose our response to the difficulties or difficult circumstances that may come our way. Sometimes we may have to battle through to joy, but ultimate joy comes from Christ dwelling within us.

May the Lord help us to “*fight the good fight of faith*”, that we read of in 1 Timothy 6:12 and choose to please Him no matter how difficult our circumstances may be.

How beautifully this truth is also expressed in the Words of the prophet:-

*“Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls –
Yet will I rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.”*

(Habakkuk 3: 17-18)

July 25

THROUGH AFFLICTION TO FRUITFULNESS

*“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, yes, I will help you
with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)*

Hana, the second daughter of a family of five children, was born in Hokkaido, the most northern island of Japan.

As a young child, she constantly stole money from her parents to buy things that she wanted and then hid it from the rest of the

family. Her mother tried to help her overcome this weakness and often talked with her about her problem. But somehow Hana could not free herself from the desire to take what was not her own.

Her older sister began to attend church, however, and Hana, seeing a great change take place in her sister's life, wished that she could be different too.

Then, one night in August 1932, Hana, who usually did her utmost to avoid going out in the dark, hurried through the dark streets, so filled with peace and joy in her heart that she had no thought of fear. The reason was that that night she had been to church and, for the first time in her life, come under conviction of sin. Not only that, she had yielded her heart to the Lord and found forgiveness for her sins! From that time on, she had no more urge to take anything that did not belong to her!

Hana grew so much spiritually that a few years later she entered Bible College and subsequently a marriage was arranged for her with a fellow student and on the 20th May, 1941 they became one. For four years after graduating, they worked as evangelists, but when the war broke out, he had to enlist. Their small son, Ichiro, was then not even a year old.

When the war was over, her husband returned home, but was broken in health and weak from malnutrition. Two weeks after his return, he died and Hana was heartbroken, a widow with a fatherless son. She was deeply conscious that she had no one else to lean on, except the Lord and He wonderfully strengthened her through His Promises. Then, the way opened up for her to become an evangelist with the Japan Evangelistic Band and she served as such for nine years.

She subsequently joined the staff of the Japan Mission, where she ministered to the sick in tuberculosis hospitals, until she retired. Her son, Ichiro, became a keen Christian, also serving the Lord, and obtained a doctorate in his field of study.

If we belong to the Lord, may we always remember that no matter what happens to us in the future, we have nothing to fear, because He is in complete control of our lives, no matter what our circumstances may be.

July 26

SACRIFICE

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1)

We see from the Scriptures that God is pleased with sacrificial living, because it shows gratitude for all He has done for us and also obedience to His Will for our lives.

In the Old Testament, the sacrificing of an animal according to God’s law was regarded as important. But now, in God’s sight, obedience from the heart is what He seeks from those who have become His followers.

God now wants us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice. In other words, He wants us to daily lay aside our own desires and to follow Him, putting all our energy and resources at His disposal and trusting Him to guide us. We should be willing to do this out of gratitude to Him that our sins have been forgiven.

We must always remember that God only wants what is best for us. His plans for His children are good, pleasing and perfect. He wants us to be transformed people with renewed minds, living to honor and obey Him.

God is always pleased with a sacrifice that costs us something. We read in 1 Chronicles chapter 21 that when King David wanted to buy land from Ornan to built an altar to God. Ornan did not want to take payment for its purchase. But David said to him in verse 24, “No, but I will surely buy it for the full price, for I will not take what is yours for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings with that which costs me nothing.”

God is pleased with a sacrificial attitude that at all times puts everything we have at His disposal. This does not mean that we should sell everything that we possess all of a sudden. We always have to remember that we are responsible for our own need and for that of our families, so that we will not be a burden on others. We should, however, be willing to give up anything, if God asks us to do so. If we do, nothing can ever come between us and God and it also keeps us from using our God-given wealth selfishly.

Above all, there is no doubt that God is also pleased with a sacrificial attitude in life in general, because it shows that there is real love in our hearts for Him and for others and is also a testimony to those with whom we come into contact, no matter whether they know Him or not.

May the Lord help us to please God and also to encourage others to yield their hearts and lives to Him. At the same time, we need to show them that they need to pay the price to follow Him, no matter what the cost may be.

July 27

BACK IN CIRCULATION

"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:7)

Toyoko Yabe was ten years old when her troubles began. She fell out of a window, hit her heel and could not stand up. Within a month, her leg was terribly swollen. The family doctor did his best to help her, but told her that she had osteomyelitis and that the only way to relieve the pain was to amputate the lower half of her leg. Toyoko cried bitterly and hoped against hope that in time her leg would heal. But, in fact, it got worse and she could neither stand, nor walk, nor sit and just had to lie down all the time.

Her parents were desperately poor, but had a great desire to see their daughter get well. They even went without necessary food for two years, virtually living on watered-down rice, to enable her to go to hospital for treatment. Toyoko was nineteen years old then and elated, thinking of the prospect that after an operation, she would be able to walk again. In actual fact, she went through the suffering of three major operations, but all in vain. The doctor then frankly told them that there was nothing more he could do for her.

That evening, lying on her hospital bed, Tokoko covered her head and wept bitterly, thinking that the best thing for her to do would be to commit suicide. Just as she was wondering how she could do so, a foreigner entered her room by mistake, apparently looking for another patient. But seeing how sad and lonely she looked, he

offered to sing a hymn for her. After doing so, he then went on to tell her about the love of God. Tokoko was feeling so miserable that somehow the words he spoke met her heart's need.

After that, the foreigner often went to visit her and, before long, had the wonderful opportunity of leading her to the Lord. When she left the hospital, not too long afterwards, Tokoko continued to read the Bible, which he had given her. She knew that she was a sinner, who had been saved by the grace of God. Before long, the minister of the local church started visiting her. She could not walk, but was sure that God had a purpose for her life.

When she was twenty-nine years of age, God showed Tokoko that she could start a Sunday School in her little room. She was the only believer in their village, but, before long, regular meetings were started in her home and, with the help of the minister of a church not too far away, many others found the Lord.

Tokoko had little education, little physical strength and little money, but constantly rejoices that Jesus found her and that she could reach out to others with the precious Gospel, which means so much to her.

July 28

I AM THINE, O LORD

1. *"I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice,
And it told Thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith,
And be closer drawn to Thee.*

Chorus

- "Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
To the cross where Thou hast died;
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
To Thy precious bleeding side.*

2. *"Consecrate me now to Thy service, Lord,
By the pow'r of grace divine;
Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope,
And my will be lost in Thine.*

3. *"Oh, the pure delight of a single hour
That before Thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with
Thee, my God, I commune as friend with friend!*

4. *"There are depths of love that I cannot know
Till I cross the narrow sea;
There are heights of joy that I may not reach,
Till I rest in peace with Thee."*

(Fanny Jane Crosby - 1820-1915)

Although the faulty treatment of an eye infection resulted in lifelong blindness, at the age of 8, Fanny Crosby wrote of her determination to overcome her handicap:-

*"Oh, what a happy soul am I!
Although I cannot see,
I am resolved that in this world
Contented I shall be.
How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't.
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot and I won't!"*

Fanny Crosby dedicated her blindness to God and was considered by many to be the greatest hymn writer ever in the U.S.A. She wrote 9,000 hymns in her lifetime.

July 29

HIS STRENGTH IS FOR OUR WEAKNESS

"He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength." (Isaiah 40:29)

How important it is for us to realize that we can depend on God as our source of strength in all circumstances. Even the strongest people sometimes get tired, but how wonderful it is to know that God's strength never diminishes. He is never too tired or too busy to listen to us and to help us.

When we feel at the end of our tether and that we cannot go a step further, we must remember that we can call on Him to renew

our strength. There is no other way but to rely on His precious promises.

He has said, *“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”* (Isaiah 40:30-31)

Trusting in the Lord, especially when we feel weak, will help us to rise above all life’s difficulties, every moment of every day.

In fact, we always need to remember that our strengths are actually a point of spiritual vulnerability. When we trust in our own strength, in fact, we often feel little need of God and, as a result, can easily become proud and self-reliant. We always need to remember that all our strengths are gifts from Him and that we need to dedicate them to His service.

In other words, our strengths often get in the way of trusting God. If we are strong in our own strength or talented or physically attractive, we often find it easier to trust in ourselves than in God who gave us those gifts. We must always remember to thank God for what we are and have, so that our trust does not get misplaced.

God wants us to appreciate strength without becoming self-sufficient. The problem is that self-sufficiency becomes an enemy. when it causes us to believe that we can always do what needs to be done in our own strength.

This truth has been very nicely summed up in the following words:-

*“The great I AM is with me
My life is in His hand,
The Son of the Lord is my hope,
It’s in His strength I stand.”*

July 30

THE BEST UMBRELLA

"For You have been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat."

(Isaiah 25:4)

"If I even had one of Grandpa's paper umbrellas to protect me, I would not feel so ashamed," murmured Masaki one day as he ran through the pelting rain to school. He had somehow always been fascinated with the colorful umbrellas that his grandfather made. He had also made beautiful paper boats, which also caused Masaki to dream of traveling far away over the wide ocean to fascinating, unknown foreign countries.

But the hardships of his early days had in a very real sense shaped Masaki Matsumoto's life. How ashamed he had often been because they were so poor. There had not even been enough money to buy the necessary textbooks for school, let alone an umbrella for rainy days. Masaki was so glad when, at the age of fifteen, his school days were over. Surely the future must be brighter than the past, he hopefully thought.

He soon got a job in a steel foundry doing manual labor. It was hard work, but he put all he had into it. Also, determined to better his education, he did a correspondence course in the evenings, which eventually enabled him to graduate from high school. His mother had died when he was three years old, and during his days in the foundry, his father had died of cancer of the liver, doubtless brought on by his dissipated life of drinking and gambling. Then, one night when Masaki was twenty years old, he woke up in a terrible sweat, a cough soon developed and he lost his appetite. A visit to the hospital revealed that he had contracted tuberculosis!

After spending months on a hospital bed, he realized that his only hope of a speedy recovery was to undergo an operation and for this purpose he had to go to another hospital. There, Masaki soon became friendly with a young man in the same ward, who, he discovered later, belonged to a group in the hospital, called the 'Love God Society' and he started attending their meetings.

Before long, he realized that he was a sinner in need of a Savior and gladly opened his lonely heart to God. Masaki then also

remembered that his attitude towards his previous employer had not been right and, when he was released from hospital, an apology resulted in his being reinstated. In fact, when Masaki found Christ, many things fell into place and before long he became a vital member of his local church.

For the next five months, Masaki lived with his zealous Buddhist brother. That was a time of real testing, but then a marriage was arranged for him with a keen Christian girl. Masaki loves to testify that, when he was a boy, he loved umbrellas, but he is so glad that he was able to find shelter under the marvelous umbrella of God!

July 31

BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR HUMAN LOVE

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging symbol.”

(1 Corinthians 13:1)

In this chapter of first Corinthians we find biblical guidelines for human love. We also learn that love is more important than any other spiritual gift. In fact, it teaches us that love is more important than all the spiritual gifts exercised in the church combined. It points out too that great faith, acts of dedication or sacrifice and even the working of miracles mean very little, without love. The gifts which individuals possess vary, but love should be the foundation of them all for every one of us.

Furthermore, it is a commandment that we should love others, not only in the New Testament, but also in the Old Testament. For instance, we read in Leviticus 19:18, *“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”*

The society in which we now live does not really understand the true meaning of love. God’s kind of love is directed towards others, not toward ourselves. It is unselfish and usually goes against our natural inclinations. In fact, it is virtually impossible to practice unselfish love, unless we look to God to help us set aside our own personal desires so that we can give love to others, without expecting something in return.

We should also remember that God's love is forgiving. It may be easy for us to understand the love of a God who would forgive sinners, who come to Him for mercy. But how well would we understand the love of a God who tenderly searches for sinners and then joyfully forgives them? But that is the very kind of love that prompted Jesus to come to this sinful earth to search for lost people and save them!

Let's remember this extraordinary love that Jesus has for you and me. Maybe you feel far away from God at this moment. Don't despair, He is searching for you right now! All you have to do is to reach out to Him in faith – He will hear your cry for mercy. Then, you will want tell others too about this wonderful Savior, who loves them and is just waiting for them to reach out to Him too.

The following words, written by an anonymous writer, sum up this wonderful truth:-

*“Love demands your loving deeds;
Look upon your brother's needs
Tell them that you love them true,
Prove it by the deeds you do.”*

May the Lord help us to do just that every time we have an opportunity!

August 1

THE BIG WHITE SHIP

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

“Why was I born a pastor's daughter? Why do I have to live in a church building of all places?” Misao Kawaguchi often thought to herself, resenting her parents and God! They lived in a small town where everybody knew everything about each other and Misao just hated to be different from the other children. She could not stand anyone mentioning the fact that her father was a pastor and was determined that, no matter what happened, she would certainly never marry one.

When she was eighteen years old, Misao had to study hard to pass the entrance examination to enter a Christian college, however, and asked her father to help her study the Bible, just in case she was asked some questions about it. She failed the entrance examination and, when her father saw how downhearted she was, he gently suggested that she should in any case continue reading the Bible. Misao agreed and before long her eyes were opened to the wonderful blessings God has in store for those who walk with Him and, in spite of all her previous resolutions, she accepted Jesus as her Savior.

Misao was later accepted by another college and, as a result, had to move from the peaceful countryside where they lived to the big city of Osaka. Although she went to church every week, she made a point of escaping as soon as she could after the service was over. She was more interested in the bright lights and amusements of the city! As a result, Misao invariably forgot about God during the week and hung out at one of the nightclubs. However, she felt empty inside, but didn't have any real Christian friends and no one in whom she could confide.

On one of her days off, Misao was invited to visit a ship, called "Doulos", which goes around the world, bringing the message of salvation at every port where it stops. It had just arrived at the local port. She did not know enough English to communicate very well with the crew members, but was amazed to see them reach out and their friendly attitude to everyone.

After visiting the ship, Misao stopped going to nightclubs and suddenly became conscious of a desire in her heart to serve God in a similar way to those on the ship. Then, perhaps more as a way of escape than for any other reason, Misao applied for a job on the ship and, to her amazement, was accepted. There, watching the crew in action, she realized that not only faith, but also good works were essential in the life of a true Christian. Before long, she was able to testify that she was most grateful that God had not only caused her to be a pastor's daughter, but had also sent the right people into her life to guide her in her walk with Him.

August 2

THE WONDER OF SALVATION

“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8)

Salvation is a work done in our lives by the Holy Spirit, but we always need to remember that He often works in ways that we cannot predict or understand. We also need to remember that salvation is available only because of Jesus.

After many of His followers had deserted Him, He asked the twelve disciples if they were also going to leave him. Peter replied, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”* (John 6:68)

In his straightforward way, Peter answered that there was no other way. We too have no other valid answer to that question. Even after we have examined all the other possibilities, there is just no other way. Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. We have to realize this truth not only for ourselves, but also for others to whom we are seeking to be a blessing.

Salvation is the assurance of God’s presence with us at all times. In Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14, we see this very plainly set forth, *“... the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”* (The word ‘Immanuel’ literally means ‘God with us’).

Receiving salvation is simple, yet many still refuse to recognize it. Skill and wisdom do not get a person into God’s kingdom – only simple faith does! No one can boast that his or her achievements have helped secure eternal life. Salvation is totally the work of God through Jesus’ death on the cross.

It is important to remember that salvation is a gift to be profoundly appreciated. Yet sometimes Christians, who know this truth of God’s gift of salvation, feel that after they are saved that they must try to work their way to God. That is by no means so, but we certainly need to respond with gratitude, praise and joy. How wonderful it is to remember and thank Him that we became a Christian because of God’s unmerited grace, not as the result of any effort, ability, intelligent choice or act of service on our part.

But salvation is not to be received casually. It involves a deep and total commitment. In Jesus' day, the people were eager to know who would be in God's kingdom. Jesus explained that although some people know something about God, only a few have acknowledged their sins and accepted His forgiveness. Just listening to Jesus' Words or admiring His miracles is not enough – we must turn from sin and put our trust in Him alone to save us.

August 3

A TWO-FACED LIFE

“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26)

Kazue Endo had no reason to be a hypocrite. Her parents were keen Christians and from early childhood had told her Bible stories and taught her to pray. Her father was a skilled Christian moviemaker and her mother a professional basketball player, before she was married. They brought their professionalism into their home and figured that only the best was good enough for their children.

Kazue watched them more closely than they realized and their constant love for God and His cause made a deep impression on her. When she grew up, however, she wanted to have some fun in life. So at university she chose friends who could teach her the ways of the world.

She knew that her parents did not know how far she had gone astray spiritually and she did not want to disappoint them, so she regularly went to church, but invariably arrived late and left as soon as possible after the service was over. It was just not much fun being around religious people for long.

When she was at home, Kazue pretended to be a good Christian and put her Bible next to her bed, so that it would appear that she was reading it regularly. But then, one day at church, someone asked her, “Are you a Christian?” and, without batting an eyelid, she answered, “Yes!” But, when the next question came, “Are you really following God?” Kazue was at a loss to know what to say in reply.

All that day, however, she was not able to wipe that conversation from her mind, and when she opened her Bible that night she was faced with the Words, “... *a tree is known by its fruit.*” (Matthew 12:33). In those moments, Kazue realized that she could not claim to be a Christian and still follow after the worldly pleasures of her unsaved friends. She simply had to make a choice one way or the other! She had been leading a two-faced life and had to do something about the matter. That day she made her choice – for God!

On a short mission outreach to Africa, Kazue saw the misery of the poor for the first time in her life. She then thought back on her world of gadgets in Japan, where, every morning, her alarm clock spoke soothingly to her until she was awake and at night she went to sleep serenaded by soft music. The emptiness of her life suddenly struck her and she desperately desired to be used by God.

Kazue’s next step was to enter Bible College to prepare herself for a spiritual ministry. She is now the minister of a church and gladly testifies, “I am so glad that God saved a hypocrite like me and mercifully called me into His Service!”

August 4

AMAZING GRACE!

1. *“Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*
2. *“’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!*
3. *“Thro’ many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
’Tis grace hath bro’t me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

4. *"When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun."*

(John Newton - 1725-1807)

Rev. John Newton, who at the age of eleven became a sailor, later became a hardened slave trader. His early life was one of debauchery, but one day a violent storm at sea brought him to his senses and to God.

He then looked back over his life with much regret, but rejoiced in having found a Savior, who had forgiven him and radically changed his life. As a result, he became a preacher and spent his time telling others of the "amazing grace" that had "saved a wretch" like him.

The words on his tomb, which he composed himself, best tell his story: "John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned and appointed to preach the faith he had so long labored to destroy".

Throughout Newton's years of ministry, God's amazing grace remained central to his thinking. When it was suggested that he retire at the age of eighty-two, due to poor health and a failing memory, he responded, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior!"

August 5

ENDURANCE

"... I have tested you in the furnace of affliction." (Isaiah 48:10)

The testimony is told of a young girl whose leg had to be amputated after a serious car accident, in which the young man, to whom she was engaged, lost his life. They had just left a young people's meeting, of which he was the leader.

In that meeting he had told those who were present that it is only as we ourselves suffer that we can begin to realize what it meant for Christ to suffer in our stead, illustrating the thought with the

following text from Isaiah 40:29. ***“He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might he increases strength.”***

Broken as she was at her fiancé’s “home-call”, the young girl showed no sign of self-pity when she later testified that she was so grateful that his last message to the young people had been so clear and full of warning.

It is by no means easy to immediately look up to Him, when we are stunned by unexpected circumstances. But how important it is to do so!

As he neared the end of his life, Paul could confidently say that he had been faithful to his calling. In fact, he faced death calmly, knowing that no matter what happened, he was in the Hands of a loving heavenly Father. Can we too share Paul’s confident expectation of meeting the Savior no matter what happens in this life?

There is no doubt that endurance requires preparation. Jesus told His disciples that when they were arrested for preaching the Gospel, they should not worry about what to say in their defense, because His Spirit would speak through them. This fact was abundantly fulfilled, as we will see if we read Acts chapter 4, verses 8-14. But the truth that is being brought across to us is not that we should stop preparing, but that we should stop worrying.

The wonderful thing is that such an experience is not only for giants in faith, like Paul. To encourage his helper, Timothy, he said to him, ***“... be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*** (2 Timothy 4:5) These Words were not only given to Timothy, but also to encourage us to press on, no matter how difficult our circumstances may seem to be.

Endurance is never easy and will only be possible if we have an out and out commitment to Jesus. He predicted that His followers would be severely persecuted by those who hated what He stood for and encouraged them, even in the midst of persecution, to cling on to their faith, knowing that, no matter what happened, salvation was theirs.

May the Lord help us to take everything from His loving hands and to endure whatever He sends our way, no matter how difficult it may be, knowing that, if He has sent it, it will ultimately be for our eternal profit!

August 6

AN ESSAY AT SCHOOL RESULTS IN BLESSING

*“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.
Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”*

(2 Timothy 4:2)

When Mr. Doi, the teacher, asked his class to write an essay on any subject they liked, he was not surprised when he heard the groans which escaped the lips of some of the boys scattered here and there in the large class-room. He too as a boy had always hated writing essays, he thought to himself. But on this occasion, he had no idea what the result of one essay would be.

On receiving the assignment, Hidemi walked out of the school gate and wended his way through the busy shopping arcade and along the side of the paddy fields to his home. Uppermost in his mind during that time was the thought that he did not have the faintest idea about what he could write. He had always hated writing essays. Nothing ever happened in their home about which he could write.

As Mr. Doi ploughed through the numerous essays that resulted from his assignment, he came across the one written by Hidemi. Most of the other essays had been most uninteresting, but as he read his one, it seemed as if he was looking into the soul of the writer. All the misery of a divided home, the impact it was making on the mind of the boy and the wretchedness of it all caused him to realize that Hidemi had a deep need in his heart.

As a Christian, with a deep desire to reach his students with the message of salvation, Mr. Doi could see that Hidemi might well be a seeking soul and before long he had the joy of leading him to a knowledge of the Savior. But what Mr. Doi did not realize at that time was that it would not be the end of the story.

Hidemi, having found Christ as his Savior, had a great desire to see his sister, Chizuko, also saved. But it was not to happen for a long time, in fact, not until he had left home, was 26 years old and employed as a taxi driver.

Then, one day, Chizuko, whose husband had left her for another woman, and who was living in the small apartment, with her three children, happened to tune in to the "Voice of Joy" Christian broadcast on the radio. She was most interested and wrote in, asking to participate in the Bible correspondence course, which they offered. As a result, she found Christ as her Savior!

How little did Mr. Doi know on that day so long ago that a simple project which he gave to his students would result in such blessing!

May the Lord help us always to go on sowing the Seed, realizing that God longs to work in the hearts of the needy souls around us.

August 7

AFFLICTION

"In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old."

(Isaiah 63:9)

The story is told of a sheep which was always carried around by the shepherd. One day the shepherd's friend asked him why it could not run around like the other sheep. The shepherd replied that it had a broken leg. He went on to say that, in actual fact, he had had to break the sheep's leg himself, because it was so wayward and that had been the only way to control it.

He went on to say that doing so had nearly broken his heart, because he loved that sheep, but it was the only way to save its life. Otherwise, it would have inevitably fallen over a precipice and died! As his friend watched the relationship between that sheep and the shepherd, he realized that that it seemed to love the shepherd much more than the other sheep did, no doubt because it was always with him and he fed and loved and cared for it day after day.

We sometimes wonder why the Lord sometimes allows so many afflictions to come our way and it often takes some considerable time for us to understand the reason. But eventually we learn that the only way to get through them is to do so with humility and faith, as the Israelites did when they passed through the Red Sea.

If we do so, in faith, the lessons that we learn through those afflictions will far outweigh the pain that we experience while we go through them. So, the only thing for us to do is to press on in faith, looking for the hidden blessing that sorrow inevitably brings to those who experience it.

How wonderful it is to realize that the more afflictions that the Lord allows in our lives, the nearer will be His Presence. For He has said, *"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you"* (John 14:18) All that God allows to happen to us in this world is to bring us to the place where we will perfectly believe Him.

If we do so, gladness will enter our hearts. We may be crushed and yet also soaring as on eagles' wings, conscious that the day will come when affliction and pain and even death will only be a memory. The Hand behind the cloud always gives only just the amount of sorrow that we can bear and will ultimately be for our good!

May the Lord help us to realize that any affliction that may come into our lives is not always a result of sin. Alongside of that, no affliction can come into our lives that He does not permit and does not allow for our blessing. Also, we cannot imagine all that God has in store for us, both in this life and also in eternity.

August 8

WHY WAS I BORN?

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty, and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence."

(1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

Until Hiroyuki Ishikawa was fifteen, he had had to change school every year, because his parents moved from place to place. When he was six years old, his parents divorced. That year too his father died and his only remembrance of him is that he was constantly fighting with his mother.

After his father died, she married twice more, so Hiroyuki ended up with three fathers! His recollection of his next two fathers is that they were often drunk and never showed him any love. So it was that, at sixteen years of age, Hiroyuki wondered why he had been born. He had been brought up as a nominal Buddhist-cum-Shintoist, but on the occasions when, in desperation, he had called on those gods, no answer had ever come. There was only silence!

When he was eighteen, Hiroyuki started to attend a yoga school, but soon realized that that was a move in the wrong direction, because he then started hearing voices in his head and was afraid to go to bed at night. Nightmares were frequent and he repeatedly dreamt of being locked in a coffin and suffocating. At other times, he seemed to be floating in total darkness and falling into a bottomless pit.

At nineteen, he joined the Silva Mind Control School where they taught New Age techniques, magic and astral projection. Then dead people started to speak to him and at night it seemed that he left his body. But in all of this, Hiroyuki could not get an answer to his question as to why he was alive.

He then thought that maybe he should go abroad. But every new place that he went to only brought disappointment, driving him even to the point of contemplating suicide. Then one day, when he arrived in England, he was invited to attend a church service. There, while the hymns were being sung, a peace suddenly entered his heart.

From then on, Hiroyuki felt that God wanted him to serve Him and go into the ministry and, before long, the Lord confirmed His calling by reminding him of the words found in 2 Timothy 4:5, “*... be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*”. After adequate Bible College training, Hiroyuki went to Africa as an evangelist, rejoicing that through his ministry others could also have the joy of finding his Savior.

August 9

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

“Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested and have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10)

These Words were written by one of Jesus’ disciples, John, in the beautiful city of Smyrna, which was the center of emperor worship. The Christians refused to worship the emperor, holding that Christ alone was to be honored as God. As a result, many were imprisoned. Some lost all their possessions and some, even their lives.

When asked the secret of his life of service, George Muller said that there was a day when he died to his opinions, preferences, tastes, will - died to the world, its approval or censure – died to the approval or blame even of his friends - and only studied how to be approved by God.

General Booth, when asked a similar question at the age of 80, replied that, from the moment he got the poor of London on his heart, he made up his mind that God would have all that there was of William Booth. The result was the formation of the Salvation Army, which has resulted in the salvation of so many.

We read in 1 Kings, chapter 19, verse 10 that Elijah said to the Lord, *“I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets, with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life.”*

Elijah thought that he was the only one left who would be faithful to God. He succumbed to self-pity! If we also sometimes are conscious of self-pity in our hearts, it will dilute the good we are doing. We need to take courage and press on it spite of difficulties, realizing that there will always be others, who are also faithfully obeying and fulfilling His wishes, in spite of difficulties. It has been well said that the greatness of a man’s power is the measure of his surrender! Are we really surrendered to Him so that He can use us in any way He desires?

This thought has been summed up in the following words:

*“You would not cling to His guiding Hand
If the way was always bright,
And you would not care to walk by faith,
If you could always walk by sight.”*

August 10

GRANDFATHER'S TEARS

"Jesus said to him, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'." (John 5:8)

Mika could somehow never forget all that her grandmother, who was a zealous believer of the Messiah religion (a mixture of Christianity and Buddhism) had said to her so many times. She had even worn the special charms around her neck that were supposed to bring good-luck and healing. Mika's father and mother were Buddhists and also had a special talisman that they used on various occasions.

From her early years, however, amidst all the religious confusion in her home, Mika was secretly drawn to her grandfather, who was a Christian. He was loving and kind and had sought to teach her about the True God, who sent His Son into the world to die on the cross to save human beings from their sins. Mika loved him very much, but could not quite understand what he was getting at.

When she was six years old, her school days began and Mika was scared. Her deeply introspective nature caused the other children to laugh at her, rather than include her in their fun and games. As a result, Mika drew more and more into herself and became convinced that everyone hated her. She cried a lot and longed to share her fears with her mother, but she always seemed to be too busy to listen. As a result, Mika often resorted to grandpa's willing ear and took her concerns to him.

At that time, religion did not have much place in Mika's life, until one day, she came across a leaflet inviting her to attend some special Christian meetings. When she told her grandfather, he was elated and encouraged her to go. He also gave her a copy of the Bible, which she read from time to time.

Then her beloved grandfather became ill and in his weakness beckoned Mika to his side, and said, with tears in his eyes, "Mika, my prayer for you is that you will find Jesus Christ as your Savior". Those were his last words and she could not get them out of her mind. The tears in his eyes were a constant reminder of his love for her and she knew that she would never rest until his last wish was fulfilled.

As she read the Bible, Mika realized that she needed to make a break with her old life and start anew. From then on, she decided

to follow Jesus and gave Him control of her life. Up until then, she had always felt that everyone hated her. How wonderful it was to know that if God loved her, nothing else mattered!

After graduating from school, Mika went to a Bible college to prepare herself for God's service and later joined the ranks of a Christian organization, so that she could reach out to others with the precious Gospel.

May the Lord help us never to give up in our pursuit of seeking souls.

August 11

GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU

1. *"Be not dismayed what-e'er betide,
God will take care of you;
Beneath His wings of love abide,
God will take care of you.*

Chorus

- "God will take care of you.
Thru every day,
O'er all the way;
He will take care of you.
God will take care of you ... take care of you.*

2. *"Thru' days of toil when heart doth fail,
God will take care of you;
When dangers fierce your path assail,
God will take care of you.*

3. *"All you may need He will provide
God will take care of you;
Nothing you ask will be denied,
God will take care of you.*

4. *"No matter what may be the test,
God will take care of you;
Lean, weary one, upon His breast,
God will take care of you."*

(Mrs. C. D. Martin)

This poem was written by Mrs. Martin, who was a pastor's wife. One day she was very ill in bed, but her husband had to go to a meeting. He was very reluctant to leave her, but before he left she said to him, "Don't worry, God will take care of me."

While he was away, she kept thinking of what she had said and the words of this hymn were born in her mind and later written down. Her husband later composed the music to it.

August 12

DEATH

"... I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." (Revelation 14:13)

We may sometimes wonder why we are all born into Adam's physical body and therefore have to die – in other words, we all belong to a family line that leads to certain death, because all of us have reaped the results of Adam's sin. We have inherited his sinful nature and the resulting punishment that God had to inflict upon it.

However, because of what God did for us through Jesus on the cross, we can exchange judgment for forgiveness. God offers us the opportunity to be born into His spiritual family – a family line that leads to eternal life. If we come to God by faith, we receive life through Christ. It is just a matter of which family line we belong to.

The story is told of a lady, who woke one morning to find her husband dead at her side. Before she did anything else, she knelt down and said, "Thank you, Lord. My dear one was ready to go. He is now safe at Home and he was taken without suffering."

As the days passed too, she proved Him to be "*a very present help*" and the meaning of the promise, "*... your Maker is your husband*" (Isaiah 54:5) When a loved-one passes on, it is so easy to wonder how it is possible to face the future alone. But we always need to remember that today's burden will have been lifted before tomorrow's comes. God's grace is sufficient no matter what our circumstances may be!

For those who knew the Lord, but have gone on before us, we need to remember that death is not sunset, it is sunrise! Alongside of that, we who love the Lord and have not yet experienced death, are immortal until our work on earth is done.

Combined with these facts, we need to remember that we also have eternal work to do. How encouraging too are the dying words of the much used man of God, Dwight L. Moody - "This is glorious! Earth recedes, heaven is opening; God is calling me!"

Nothing on earth will ever compare to being with our beloved Savior in heaven! The Good News of the Gospel still sounds foolish to many. Our society worships power, influence and wealth. Jesus came as a humble, poor servant, and He offers His kingdom to those who have faith, not works.

This thought has been summed up beautifully in the following words:

*"Home from the earthly journey,
Safe for eternity;
All that the Savior promised
That is what heaven will be."*

August 13

THE RELIGION THAT WORKS

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

When visiting a patient in one of the wards of a tuberculosis hospital, the evangelist also offered a tract to a man in the same room. He refused to take it and told the evangelist, in no uncertain terms, that he had been a Buddhist for fifty-two years and did not intend to change his religion from that of the great Buddha to any foreign god!

The evangelist, although somewhat taken aback at the very straight way in which his offer was rejected, regarded it as a challenge for prayer and, sometime later, when in the same room, offered him a copy of the New Testament, with the words, "I do

not urge you to change your religion, but as you probably find it monotonous in the hospital, I have brought you something to read." Mr. Kawamoto received it and after a while began read it.

When the evangelist visited him again, he was amazed to see how Mr. Kawamoto's attitude had changed. In fact, he told the evangelist that he too wanted to become a Christian! The way of salvation was clearly explained to him and Mr. Kawamoto took Jesus as his Savior. He told the evangelist, however, that he still had a great problem – he was in bondage to cigarettes. He had smoked since he was six years old, but it somehow bothered him since becoming a Christian. He did not know how he was going to give the habit up! The evangelist was so glad and again cried to the Lord to help him.

Soon after, when Mr. Kawamoto was out for a walk, he went up the hill behind the hospital and there plead with God for deliverance. His prayer was answered and he rejoiced to be able to tell the evangelist what a miracle God had done in his life.

His lungs, which had been literally riddled with tuberculosis, started to improve so quickly that the doctors expressed their amazement. Mr. Kawamoto had not been able to take the normally effective drugs for his disease, because of their peculiar reaction in his case. Now, every time the doctors took an X-ray, they could see the four cavities in his lungs gradually shrinking and came to the conclusion that no operation was necessary.

Soon afterwards, Mr. Kawamoto was back on his farm and spent a great deal of his time going from house to house in his village, telling others about "*the religion that works*"!

May the Lord help us to do the same to the needy ones with whom we come into contact day by day.

August 14

PURITY

"He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness." (Malachi 3:3)

True purity in our lives only comes from a radical commitment to God. He wants us to be pure so that He can use us as His instruments

to reach out to others we know who are in great spiritual need. We must never let the desire for personal gain distract us from our spiritual purpose.

One day a lady read this verse and so much wanted to know what it really meant, so she went to visit a silversmith to find out. After he had fully described the process to her, she asked him if he really sat beside it while the work of refining was going on.

He told her that he had to do so and actually needed to keep his eyes fixed on the furnace throughout the whole process, because if the time of refining were exceeded in the slightest degree, the silver would be injured. She then asked him how he knew when the process was complete. He told her that it was only completed when he could see his own image in the silver. Then, without a shadow of doubt, he knew that the process had been a success.

The lady went home, meditating on what she had seen. She suddenly realized that when God feels that it is necessary to purify His children, He sometimes puts them through most difficult circumstances. But she then also realized for the first time in her life that He is watching the process every moment and His Love and Wisdom are involved in it all.

If we diligently follow the Word of God, we can be sure of being on the right path. How clearly this is taught in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 12. *“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”*

As a child of God we have already received forgiveness by believing in what Jesus did for us on the cross, but daily application of His Word has a purifying effect on our minds and hearts. The Scriptures not only show us our sin, but also guide us back to the right path. May the Lord help us to be so closely in touch with Him day by day, that He may use us in the salvation of precious souls.

August 15

SAVED FROM SUICIDE

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

(John 15:5)

There was just no other way, Masako reluctantly reasoned, as she slowly made her way to the bathroom. Suicide was the only answer! Standing in front of the door she had opened of the medicine chest, she intently inspected the bottles of pills there.

Desperately seeking a purpose for living, Masako could nowhere find a clear-cut reason for being alive. Maybe she needed a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, she had thought. But a budding friendship with a young man had ended in bitter disappointment and a broken heart. In any case, as she reflected on her parents' relationship down the years, she was dead scared of marriage.

Just as she was examining one bottle after the other with uncertainty, Masako was startled to hear the front door open and, leaving the bottles all over the place, she carefully closed the bathroom door and made her way to the front door.

She was utterly bewildered on coming face to face with her father in the hall. He had unexpectedly got off early from work, he explained, adding, "Why do you look so pale? Is something wrong?" Muttering an inaudible reply, Masako quickly went back to the bathroom and speedily tidied the bottles of pills away.

The next day was Sunday and, to Masako's surprise, her father asked her if she would like to go to church with them. Not knowing what to say, she reluctantly agreed. As she sat in the church, however, the message that the minister gave went completely over her head, but the words of the hymn that was afterwards sung deeply moved her heart and brought tears to her eyes. "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains."

When the minister greeted her at the door, as they left, Masako falteringly said to him in a determined little voice, "If there is really salvation here, I want it!" But the minister thought it best to let her

go home to ponder the cost of becoming a Christian.

Right through the week, Masako did just that and the words of the hymn haunted her every waking moment. If ever there was a sinner, Masako knew that she was one and, after the next Sunday service, at her request, the minister explained to her the way of salvation. There and then she took Jesus as her Savior, praising Him that he had saved her from suicide and a lost eternity.

August 16

BURDENS

"I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name Lord I was not known to them. I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: "I am the Lord; I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments."

(Exodus 6:3-6)

When the Israelites were in great bondage to the Egyptians, the Lord delivered them in miraculous ways. He will also do the same for us, when we are assailed with problems, if we only trust Him. He will lighten our loads by putting Himself underneath them, as we rest in Him.

The Hebrew word for 'burden' really signifies that which is given to us, or that which we are appointed to carry. But burdens can also be likened to the wings of a bird. At first, they seem to be a weight that must be carried, but then they find that they are the very means by which they can soar upwards.

So, we need to realize (a) that the burdens did not happen by chance, (b) that they were given to us for our profit, (c) that good will inevitably come out of them, if we just accept them as part of God's will for us.

Henry Moorhouse, the 19th century English evangelist, was feeling loaded down with the burdens of his ministry one day,

when the Lord gave him a tender reminder of His care. His young daughter, Minnie, whose legs were paralyzed and who was in a wheelchair, saw her father about to carry a packet upstairs to his wife. She asked her father if she could not take it up for him and he said to her, "Minnie dear, how can you possibly carry this packet? It is even heavy for me to carry! She replied, "I know, Father, but if you give me the packet, I can hold it, while you carry me!"

In those moments the Lord showed her father that he was trying to carry his own burdens, instead of leaving them to the Lord to carry!

We also have those wonderful verses in Matthew, chapter 11:28-30 *"Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

The Greek word for 'light' (elaphiros) used in the original New Testament text can be translated to mean either of the following words – 'useful', 'profitable', 'good' or 'agreeable'. The rest that Jesus promises to us is love, healing and peace as we rest in Him, not the end of all labor. A relationship with Him changes meaningless toil into spiritual productivity.

August 17

A TREASURE IN DISGUISE

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him." (John 9:3)

Kiyo Okamoto thought her heart would break when she listened to the doctor's verdict on her son's physical condition. "I'm very sorry to have to tell you, but your son is Mongoloid!" Their precious baby, Mongoloid! Kiyo just could not believe her ears.

Life had always seemed to go so well for her. She had been born into a well-to-do family, had had a good education and an ideal marriage had been arranged for her. When she discovered that she was pregnant, her joy had known no bounds. How wonderful it would be to have a child of their very own, she had thought. Now,

the thought of a retarded child in their well-educated family was more than Kiyō could bear.

Yasuhiro had seemed so healthy until he was nearly a year old. Only then did she have a lurking suspicion that something was wrong, when she noticed his somewhat flattened forehead and slightly slanting eyes. Now she knew the awful truth and could not help but wonder how she could have had such a child!

When Yasuhiro was enrolled in the first grade at school, Kiyō looked around at the other healthy, normal children and could not help but wonder why only her child was so ugly and so unintelligent. Her deep distress drove her to seek help and she decided to drop in at the Christian church around the corner from their home.

The minister was delighted to counsel her and surprised her by telling her that God's plan for her family was not that they should all be intellectual geniuses. He went on to say that he believed God had given them an afflicted child so that through sorrow they would find the true purpose of life.

As the minister continued to talk to her about the meaning of the Cross, Kiyō fell down on her knees there and then, committing her burdens to the Lord, she asked Him to deal with her proud heart.

From that time on, Yasuhiro became their treasure and the Okamotos became a happy family, united in Christ. Yasuhiro, as well as the other five children, have found the Savior and find pleasure in telling their friends interesting stories from the Bible.

Yasuhiro's favorite day is Sunday and, although he cannot read, his Bible and his hymnbook are his prized possessions. When the people sing, he claps his hands and sways his body in time with the music – his way of singing without words!

May the Lord help us never to look down on those who are physically or mentally handicapped, but to pray for them and encourage them, so that they too can find the Savior.

August 18

IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST I GLORY

1. *In the cross of Christ I glory
Tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.*
2. *When the woes of life o'ertake me,
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me:
Lo! it glows with peace and joy.*
3. *When the sun of bliss is beaming
Light and love upon my way,
From the cross the radiance streaming
Adds more luster to the day.*
4. *Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
By the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure,
Joys that thro' all time abide.*
(John Bowring)

The words of this hymn were written by Sir John Bowring, who was a noted naturalist, linguist and statesman and also, at one time, the governor of Hong Kong.

It was also he who invented the "florin", a two-shilling piece, greatly used in England. He could write in thirteen different languages and dialects, but his abilities did not deter Him from worshipping the Lord.

One day when he was in the Orient, he was gazing at a tract of land, which had been devastated by an earthquake and noticed the tower of a church building standing up among the ruins and, on the top of the tower, a cross!

He loved the Lord and the sight of the cross prompted him to write the words of this hymn.

August 19

FAITH

"He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." (Romans 4:20-21)

God is always looking for the Christian who will not waiver at His promises. He wants us to take every promise in His Word and make it our own and also to expect power from the promise to enable us to do whatever it tells us to do. When God gives us faith for something, He will always try our faith in proportion to the importance of the task and the blessing that will result. He wants us to regard Him as the miracle-working God, who gives us a faith that knows no obstacles.

Instead of dwelling on what the devil can do, we need to trust God for what He can do. God may sometimes take us near a precipice to test our faith. But however near we may be, we must never snatch the reins out of His hands. We must not fail to remember that the beginning of anxiety is the end of faith and the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.

Faith is the cable that links earth to heaven. If that cable breaks, how can we obtain the promises? This truth comes across so clearly in the Words, *"... it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."* (Romans 4:16)

Faith is the assurance that everything that God says in His Word is true, and that God will, without fail, always act according to what He has said. If we regard Him as the miracle-working God, He will give us a faith that knows no obstacles. But we always have to remember that faith is a gift from God. We cannot store up faith like money in a bank. Growing in faith is a constant process of daily renewing our trust in the Lord.

Weak faith tends to lack endurance and if we focus on the waves of difficulty, without looking to God for help, we too may despair and sink. To maintain our faith, we need to keep our eyes on Him, rather than on our own inadequacies. Ineffective faith is marked by

a lack of trust in God. But by focusing on God's faithfulness in the past, we can face any crisis with confidence, rather than with fear and complaining. When we ask God for something, however, we may simply have to wait for. At such times there is always the temptation to take things into our own hands and, by so doing, interfere with God's plans for us, which would have been so much better!

August 20

DANGER AHEAD

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

As Sai San's motorbike careened down the mountain, he felt as though he did not have a care in the world. What fun it was to speed around curve after curve on the mountain road. Then suddenly his eyes tried to focus on some large red letters ahead of him, seeking to understand the message they conveyed. But his mind was somewhat befuddled by the many drinks that he had taken that evening and, by the time that he had fathomed that the message was "DANGER AHEAD", written on a large stone, it was too late to do anything about it!

Had it not been for a taxi driver, who chanced to be on the same road and took him to the nearest hospital, Sai San would have died. He was speedily transported to the emergency ward and, when he regained consciousness, he felt so weak that he could not move. But he had absolutely no recollection of what had happened to him. Drifting in and out of consciousness, his mind only focused on his past. He dwelt on the time when his wife had suddenly become a Christian. He had always scoffed at her religion, because he wanted to enjoy life, to drink and smoke and do what he liked. In actual fact, he knew that that was wrong, but he did not want to admit it!

His reverie came to an end, however, when a man in a white jacket entered the room and spoke to him, "Mr. Sai, we have given you a thorough examination. You have no broken bones, but your blood pressure is very low. We need to transfer you to a larger hospital for

further tests.” The words brought back the hair-raising experience of the previous night and he was dead scared. The next day, he was duly taken to the other hospital and the verdict was that his liver had been ruptured and they needed to operate on him immediately. Sai San was terrified.

The next thing that Sai San remembered, however, was lying on the hospital bed, swathed in bandages. He felt numb with pain and bitterness. He just could not fathom why such a thing could happen to him. Where had he gone wrong, he wondered over and over again. While these thoughts were going through his mind, a friendly man walked into the room. He introduced himself as the hospital evangelist and went on to tell him about the Living God. To Sai San it felt as if he just could not get away from his wife’s religion. Here it was again! Could it possibly be that this was the Truth, he then tentatively wondered.

Conscious that he had encountered a needy soul, the evangelist visited him regularly and before long Sai San realized that Jesus was indeed the true God, the only One who could save him from his sins and give him peace in his heart. Before he left the hospital, Sai San was utterly transformed. He knew then that he was a “new creature” in Jesus and that he could commit all his future ways to Him.

August 21

REJOICING

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understand, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:4-7)

There are many places in the Scriptures where we are encouraged to rejoice, no matter what our circumstances may be!

For example, the apostle Luke records the words of the Saviour which remind us to rejoice in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10, verse 20, when He says to the disciples “... *rejoice because your names are written in heaven*”.

Again, we are told to rejoice in the 1 Peter 1:6-9. *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold which perishes, though it be tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.”*

Circumstances should never determine whether we rejoice in the Lord or not. There is never a time when we are not to rejoice in Him. If we are too taken up with circumstances, it reveals the fact that we are not occupied with the Lord.

But maybe more strongly than ever we are encouraged to rejoice in the wonderful Words found in Habakkuk, chapter 3, verses 17 & 18, *“Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls – yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”*

In other words, no matter what difficulties may come across our pathway, we need to look up to Him for undertaking and strength in all situations and keep rejoicing! There should never be a time when we do not rejoice in the Lord, no matter how difficult our circumstances may be!

If we know Jesus as our Savior, we always have reason to rejoice! He is always there to help us and meet our every need, no matter how impossible it may seem to us to be.

August 22

THE LICENCE THAT MATTERS

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

As Dr. Sudo drove home one day, his mind was hazy, but happy. It had been one of those great days in life. He had just been invested as the new head of the hospital. Even his car seemed to reflect his

light-hearted mood, as it zigzagged through the heavy traffic on the dark, night road. Then, a sudden bump brought Dr. Sudo back to reality. Not noticing that anything special had happened, however, he proceeded on his way, just reflecting that having had a few drinks, he had better drive carefully.

Before he had been home more than a few minutes, however, he heard a siren and the screeching brakes of a police car coming to a halt outside his door. Another emergency for him to deal with, he reflected, just when he was only interested in relaxing! Reluctantly opening the front door, Dr. Sudo was surprised when he was confronted by a not too friendly-looking policeman, who reported that a man on a bicycle had been hit by a car and injured. The car involved in the accident was believed to be his and he was required to be at the police station for questioning. On hearing those words, Dr. Sudo suddenly remembered the bump. He must have hit the man and not noticed it, he reckoned. How could such a dreadful thing have happened to him on a day like this! Suppose the man died! Whatever would then happen to his reputation?

It emerged, however, that the man was only slightly injured, but Dr. Sudo's self-confidence was shaken, and, in that frame of mind, he picked up the Bible, which his mother had given him. He knew that she worshipped the God of the Christians, but he had considered that religion was just for the weak.

He took the Bible with him to the hospital the next day and decided to read it when he had some spare time. As he did so, he began to realize that deep down in his heart there was sin and a fierce battle followed for the next two days, which only came to an end when he confessed his sins and took Christ as his Savior. Tears of joy flowed between them, when he told his mother and his wife what God had done for him and they united in prayer for the first time in their lives.

Three months later Dr. Sudo was called before the District Prosecutor and was told in no uncertain terms that he had broken the law. He deeply apologized and said that that God had also spoken to him as a result of the accident. The prosecutor attitude immediately changed and he told Dr. Sudo that he too was a Christian. As a result, however, his driving licence was suspended, but from then on Dr. Sudo testified that it had all been worthwhile, because now he has a licence that really mattered - one to enter heaven!

May the Lord help us to put our priorities straight, no matter what it may cost us!

August 23

BURDENS

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

(Matthew 11:28-30)

He will allow burdens to come into our lives, but He has promised always to sustain us. In other words, God’s desire is that we should roll back on Him the burdens, which He has permitted and claim His all-sufficiency in bearing them. If we do so, the load which He has laid on us will not be too much for us, because His strength, not ours, will carry it, as long as we trust Him that He is bearing it and not we ourselves.

The word which was used in the original Greek version of the New Testament for the word “burden” (elaphiros) is a very interesting word. It has several meanings, including “useful”, “profitable”, “good” and even “agreeable”. How wonderful it is to think that the burdens the Lord gives us to carry would come under such categories.

Are we currently being weighed down by burdens that we were never intended to carry ourselves? Or have we really cast them down at the foot of the Cross? Only then, will they be light and we will be light-hearted, not weighed down by a burden we should not be carrying.

We see in the Bible how the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. But we read, “... *the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.*” (Exodus 1:12)

If we take our burdens out of the Lord’s Hands, instead of trying to carry them ourselves and hand them back to Him to carry for us, there is no burden which will not become a blessing to us. Has He not said, “*Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.*” (Psalm 55:22) What more can we ask Him to do than sustain us, no matter how difficult life may seem to be.

We see also in Psalm 145, verse 14 how King David expressed this wonderful truth, “*The Lord upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down.*” As we read on into that psalm, we

see how King David himself stood at a cross-road, wondering how he could go on, but he knew that God's greatness is unfathomable, that He does mighty acts across many generations, that He is full of splendor and majesty; patient and loving, that He rules over an everlasting kingdom and that He is the source of all our daily needs and is near to those who call on His Name.

He hears our every cry and is there to rescue us. He is there to lift us up and bear all our burdens! Above all, let's always remember that He has said in 1 Corinthians, chapter 7, verse 32, "*I would have you without carefulness*".

August 24

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH A GOLF BALL!

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

One day in the fishing village of Oarai in Japan a fourth baby was born into the Taira family. They named her Yayoko. Mr. Taira, a keen Buddhist, was employed in an ice-making factory and Mrs. Taira ran a beauty salon to boost the family income.

The first major crisis in Yayoko's young life happened when she was sixteen years old and about to graduate from Junior High School. She was a diligent student, who had set her heart on further study, but it was decided for her that she must help her mother in the beauty salon! Yayoko could do nothing but obey the family dictum, but a great battle of resentment waged in her young heart.

One day, however, she picked up a Christian book and was gripped by the quotations from the Bible that she found there. The words, "*If God be for us, who can be against us*" especially spoke to her heart. She so much needed someone strong to be on her side to help her fight against her inferiority complex. Maybe, in this God she would find the answer to her problems, she thought. She immediately started looking for a church to attend in her area, but could find none.

Yayoko had almost come to the conclusion that there were no Christian churches anywhere to be found, when she happened to turn on the radio while she was cleaning up at the beauty salon.

They were telling of a God who could meet the deepest needs of the human heart.

From then on Yayoko did not miss one of the daily broadcasts on and could hardly believe her ears when it was announced that tent meetings were to be held in her village that very week. No matter how her family derided this American God, Yayoko could not be kept away and, on the last night of the gatherings, she took the Lord Jesus as her own personal Saviour. From then on, to her delight, a cottage meeting was started in Oarai village.

Then, one day, Yayoko slipped on a golf ball and broke her Achilles' tendon and, "Why Lord?" was the cry of her heart. During those days, however, Yayoko, not being able to go to work, had time to listen to the Lord's Voice and He revealed to her that He wanted her in full-time service. Delighted, she arranged to enter a Bible College for a three-year course.

There He gave her a burden for hospital evangelism and she subsequently joined the staff of a Christian organization with a similar vision, so that she could share with others the joy of her salvation.

Who knows how God will guide the soul that is open to His Leading!

August 25

LET THE LOWER LIGHTS BE BURNING

1. *"Brightly beams our Father's mercy
From His lighthouse evermore,
But to us He gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.*

Chorus

- "Let the lower lights be burning!
Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor fainting, struggling seaman
You may rescue, you may save.*
2. *Dark the night of sin has settled,
Loud the angry billows roar;*

*Eager eyes are watching, longing,
For the lights along the shore.*

*3. Trim your feeble lamp, my brother,
Some poor sailor tempest tossed,
Trying now to make the harbor,
In the darkness may be lost.*

(Philip Paul Bliss)

One day, when Philip Bliss was directing the singing for some services being conducted by Dwight L. Moody, the speaker told the story of the captain of a ship who was trying to bring his boat into Cleveland Harbor on a stormy night.

He spoke of how the waves rolled and of how there was not a star to be seen in the sky. In desperation, the captain, who was looking for some signal light by which he could guide his vessel to safely, turned to the pilot and asked him where the lower lights were. The pilot told him that they had gone out. With no lights to guide it, the boat crashed into the rocks and was wrecked.

Then Rev. Moody exhorted the Christians to remember that the Lord would take care of the lighthouse, but that they must keep the "lower lights" burning. In those moments, the words of this hymn were then born in Philip Bliss's heart and this hymn resulted.

August 26

FEARFULLY & WONDERFULLY MADE

"I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

(Psalm 139:14)

One day I was asked if I had ever wondered why a golf ball had so many holes in its surface. I had not a clue, but could see that an explanation was forthcoming! I was told that an aeronautical engineer, whose job it is to design golf balls, says that a perfectly smooth ball would travel only about 130 yards off the tee. But the same ball with the right kind of pockmarks in it will fly twice that far! Those apparent flaws minimize the ball's air resistance and allow it to travel much further.

This caused me to consider that sometimes it is so easy to wonder why we have certain limitations, physical and otherwise. It is so easy to think that we could do so much better without this and that imperfection of which we are so conscious. But God has said that we are *“fearfully and wonderfully made”* - with a purpose! This is certainly nothing that we ourselves can do. We are well reminded of this in the Scriptures, when we read – *“Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?’ ”* (Proverbs 20:9)

In fact, the Bible makes it clear that our perfection will only be completed when we see Christ face to face. *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”* (1 John 3:2) Each one of our imperfections in this life is permitted so that God can use us to the ultimate. If we accept them and allow Him to use them as He thinks best, the greatest glory will be brought to our wise and loving Heavenly Father.

Paul said in Colossians, chapter 1, verse 28, *“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”* The word *“perfect”* here means mature or complete, not flawless. Paul wanted to see each believer mature spiritually. We have the power of His Spirit working in us, therefore we can learn and grow daily, knowing that He can give us the strength to become mature and complete in Him.

Perfection needs to be the goal to which we move. We can never be flawless in this life, but we can aspire to be as much like Christ as possible. The wonderful thing is that God has reached out to each one of us, in spite of our imperfect ways. Instead, He wants to make us what He knows we will be like, if we will just look to Him and let Him have His way in our lives.

These thoughts have been vividly expressed in the following lines:

*“The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver’s skillful hand
And the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned.”*

August 27

HEAVEN IS BEAUTIFUL!

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

(Matthew 5:8)

"Toshiko, how many times do I have to tell you to do your homework?"

Her mother's voice brought Toshiko out of the dream-world of the book that she was reading to an awareness of the drabness of her everyday existence. She hated homework, because there was not one subject at school that she enjoyed or could do well and the uppermost thought in her mind in those minutes was, "Why was I ever born?"

So, at the age of twelve, her parents decided that Toshiko might as well leave school and they found her a job in a blanket factory. The work was heavy and involved a lot of overtime. This affected Toshiko's health and, as a result, she contracted lung tuberculosis and was in and out of hospital. By then Toshiko was pretty convinced that she would die young, but maybe first of all she needed some sort of religion. Her parents were believers in a Buddhist sect and prayed to the god, Amida, who was alleged to assure them of salvation and rebirth in the "pure land".

She did not know much about Amida, but had heard that there was a religious group in the hospital, which spoke about the need for a pure heart. It might be much more convenient for her to join the 'pure heart' religion, than to travel all the way up to the temple of the 'pure land' religion, she reckoned.

So it was that Toshiko started attending the Christian meetings in the hospital. The evangelist spoke of a God who created man in His own pure image, but afterwards man had become defiled by sin. God's desire was that man's heart should be cleansed so that God could have fellowship with him.

The message appealed to Toshiko and for the first time in her life she saw a gleam of hope in living. She knew that she desperately needed a change of heart and if this foreign God could do that for her, she was interested. The evangelist also sensed in her a needy soul and made a point of visiting her as often as he could. One day

the Truth dawned on Toshiko and she asked God to make her heart clean, through the precious Blood of His dear Son.

After Toshiko left the hospital, she became an active member of her local church and at the age of forty-one the minister arranged a marriage for her with a fellow-believer. They lived together happily, until her husband went to be with the Lord some sixteen years later. In spite of her sorrow, his deathbed proved to be a great inspiration to Toshiko. As he passed into Eternity, he victoriously shouted, "I can see heaven. It is beautiful. My heavenly Father is standing there waiting for me." From then on, Toshiko lived for her Savior and looked forward to going to heaven in the same victorious way as her dear, departed husband had done.

August 28

HIS STRENGTH

"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness'." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

God longs to help us, but He can only do so when we are weak enough in our own eyes to have to depend on His strength. We must realize that we can only really demonstrate the marvel of His strength when we are conscious of our own weakness.

God does not want us to become self-sufficient, because being so becomes our enemy when it causes us to believe that we can do anything in our own strength. To prevent this attitude occurring among Gideon's soldiers, we read in Judges, chapter 7, verse 2, "*... the Lord said to Gideon, 'The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me'.*" After they had all been put to the test, the number was reduced to three hundred and with that reduced number the Midianites were defeated.

Are you feeling weak today? If so, you are a candidate for His Strength to be manifested through you. We can always depend on God as our source of strength. Even the strongest people get tired at times, but God's power and strength never diminishes. He is never too tired or too busy to help us. We need to remember that we can

call on His Strength at all times, no matter how weak we may feel.

The following is the recorded prayer of an anonymous confederate soldier, who served his country in the American Civil War. As we read it, what a wonderful strength it brings into our hearts too, no matter what our circumstances may be:

*"I asked for strength, that I might achieve.
I was made weak, that I might learn to obey.
I asked for health, that I might do greater things.
I was given infirmity, that I might do better things.
I asked for riches, that I might be happy.
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men.
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life.
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing that I asked for, but everything I had hoped for.
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am, among all men, most richly blessed."*

May the Lord help us to follow his example, no matter how impossible things may seem.

August 29

THE PRAYER BUDDHA COULD NOT ANSWER

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7)

One of Atsuko Uenishi's earliest recollections in life was of seeing her grandmother reverently walk around the outside of their farm house, sprinkling some large stones with water and one day she plucked up the courage to ask her, "Honorable Grandmother, why do you do that every morning?" "My child, these stones are gods and I must pay my respect to them", was the reply.

When the time came for Atsuko to go to school, her grandmother had also reminded her every morning without fail to worship at the children's shrine, alongside the road on the way to school, usually

adding, "If you do anything bad, remember, the gods will see and you will be punished."

When Atsuko was nine years old, a battle with pneumonia nearly cost her life and suddenly the fearful realization that life would one day come to an end entered her young mind for the first time. But when she recovered, the thought was soon pushed aside by the many activities of school life.

On graduation, Atsuko decided to help in a Buddhist institution for homeless children. She enjoyed it to begin with, but before long realized that she had nothing within herself to help those needy children. Also, she had little respect for the leader. His words and his deeds just did not match up, she reckoned. So, in an attempt to deal with her frustration, Atsuko started to smoke, drink and have a gay time in the evenings. But she was shocked back into reality one day on hearing of the sudden death of her grandmother, whom she had dearly loved. A deep despair then settled on Atsuko and she made several vain attempts to take her own life. Before she could succeed, however, another blow struck – her mother contracted cancer and the prognosis was that she did not have long to live.

"Honorable Buddha, please take me if you want to, but not my mother," she tearfully pleaded. But Atsuko had no assurance that her prayer had been heard. Maybe the answer was in some other religion, she thought. Then, a few days later, Atsuko's eyes fell on a book that she had acquired when she was in high school. It was a Bible and she picked it up and started to read it. The words, "Ask and it shall be given to you" struck her with amazement and then and there she decided to 'ask' in the hope that it would really work. Atsuko eventually managed to locate a Christian church and unburdened her heart to the minister. Before long, she knew without a shadow of doubt that she had found the God who answers prayer and took Him as her Savior.

There are so many seeking souls around us. May the Lord help us to be ready to tell them of the God who is real and can meet their every need.

August 30

HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE SORROW?

“So it was, when the angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept.” (Judges 2:4)

If we read the rest of this incident in Judges, we will see that the people started to cry, because they knew that they had sinned in not obeying what God had told them to do. Because we all have a tendency to sin, difficult as it may be to understand, we need to realize that tears may sometimes be necessary and can also be a measure of our spiritual condition.

Repentance is the true measure of spiritual sensitivity and it reveals to us that we sometimes need to ask God for forgiveness. Then, of course, at the same time, we must be willing to abandon our sinful ways, but we cannot do so sincerely unless we are truly sorry for what we have done. Maybe, however, we are only trying to live to please ourselves, selfishly pushing aside anything that gets in our way, and also not willing to count the cost.

When experiencing sorrow, we may sometimes need to realize that what caused it may have happened because we were negligent in some way. It sometimes takes great sorrow to cause us to look to the only One who can help us. But one of the most serious dangers of inconsolable sorrow is that it may lead us to neglect our duty to the living.

God certainly does not want us to waste our life in tears, but rather us to put our grief into new energy for service for Him. God’s work must never be allowed to suffer while we weep! But, wonderfully enough, we will only experience sorrow here on earth, because the Bible tells us that when we are in heaven, “...**God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.**” (Revelation 7:17) All our tribulations and sorrows will then be over. There will be no more tears for sin, for all sins will have been confessed and forgiven. There will be no more tears for suffering, for all suffering will be over. There will be no more tears for death, because all believers will have been resurrected to die no more!

The following words express it very well:

*"I have been through the valley of weeping,
The alley of sorrow and pain;
But the God of all comfort was with me,
At hand to uphold and sustain."*

May the Lord help us to live so closely to Him that our heart may be sensitive to His will for our lives every moment. The future then will be in His blessed Hands and we will have absolutely nothing to fear!

August 31

NO MORE USE FOR A GOD-SHELF!

"Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)

Eiko Ando was most grateful when her mother paid a lot of money for a god-shelf to be installed in their home, so that in times of distress they had easy access to the gods. Eiko recalled how often she had made use of their private god-shelf. When she had secretly longed to get away from the dreariness of her circumstances, she had often prayed there. She had even prayed that some money would fall out of heaven to enable her to go to university. But such a miracle had not happened and she had had to settle for a business school instead.

When graduation day had dawned, she had suddenly felt as free as a bird. The thought of going to Tokyo was so exciting that she could hardly sleep. She knelt before the god-shelf, seeking protection and guidance for the future. But after a few months in that large, impersonal city, she had become completely disenchanted. Her workload was so heavy that her dream of studying in the evenings for a university degree soon vanished. The best she could do was to squeeze in minor classes such as needlework and typing.

Before long, however, Eiko found time for fun, like horse riding and dancing, and also became acquainted with a dashing young man in her office. But when the friendship blossomed into the possibility of marriage, Eiko was secretly scared. He came from a very rich home and she from a poor one. She was convinced that his parents would reject her and could hardly believe her ears when she heard

the news that they had accepted her as a bride for their son.

Eiko was most grateful for the good husband that had been given her and for the gift of two strong sons, who were later added to the family. But even more than that she was later to become more grateful for the day when a friend invited her to some special meetings in a church near her home. In the beginning she had not really been interested in Christianity, but she liked to join with them in the hymns they were singing.

Then came the added attraction of a foreigner coming to the church to teach them English. But above all, she would never forget the day when a special speaker came to the church and told of the necessity of repenting before the Living God, who would give her eternal salvation. Eiko did just that and that day found the peace and joy of knowing that He was her Savior. She had no more use for the god-shelf, because she now knew a God who dwelt within her and with whom she could commune every moment of the day or night.

May the Lord help us to be on the lookout for the needy ones around us who need peace and joy that He alone can bring into the heart.

September 1

MOMENT BY MOMENT

1. *“Dying with Jesus, by death reckoned mine;
Living with Jesus, a new life divine;
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine,
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine.*

Chorus

*“Moment by moment
I'm kept in His love;
Moment by moment
I've life from above;
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine;
Moment by moment,
O Lord, I am Thine.”*

2. *“Never a trial that He is not there,
Never a burden that he doth not bear,
Never a sorrow that He doth not share,
Moment by moment I’m under His care;*
3. *“Never a heartache, and never a groan,
Never a teardrop and never a moan;
Never a danger but there on the throne,
Moment by moment He thinks of His own.*
4. *“Never a weakness that He doth not feel,
Never a sickness that He cannot heal;
Moment by moment, in woe or in weal,
Jesus, my Savior, abides with me still.”*

(Major D. W. Whittle)

It is said that during the great World’s Fair evangelistic campaign, conducted by the famous evangelist, Rev. Dwight L. Moody, that when he and his workers were gathered together at the close of the day for prayer, they sung the well-known hymn, ‘I need Thee every hour’. When the singing ceased, Mr. Henry Varley, an English evangelist, is said to have commented that he did not feel he could whole-heartedly agree with the words of that hymn, because he felt that he needed Christ moment by moment.

The thought so impressed Major Whittle, who was also present, that he could not sleep that night and by 2 a.m. until he had written the words of the above hymn.

September 2

THE MIRACLE OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS

“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” (Hebrews 8:12)

Maybe there is some sin in your own life that is eating away at your heart. In fact, maybe the sin seems so awful that you just cannot imagine that God could ever forgive it.

If that is so, maybe you need to realize that there is just nothing too hard for God! He has said, as we read above, “their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” God is only waiting

for us to turn to Him in repentance and all will be forgiven and also forgotten.

Just imagine, if a person broke a precious piece of china at a friend's house and apologized profusely when it happened and was verbally forgiven. If, however, forgiveness was repeatedly requested every time they saw each other, how would the friend whose china was broken feel. He or she would certainly tell the offender, in no uncertain terms, to believe that the incident had already been forgiven, to please forget about it altogether and not keep repeating the apology!

If, unnecessarily, guilt and fear are allowed to have their icy hands around our heart, it will doubtless strangle our joy and cause us to forget that God's forgiveness is not based on what we do, but on what Christ has done for us. That is the miracle of His forgiveness.

If we expect to be forgiven, we need to practice forgiveness. If we refuse to forgive others, God will forgive us. He has said in Matthew, chapter 6, verses 14 & 15. *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

Realizing how completely Christ has forgiven us should produce a generous attitude of forgiveness towards others. When we don't forgive others, we are setting ourselves outside of Christ's law of love.

We just need to ask for His forgiveness once on any matter and then thank Him for having done so. From then on, we always need to remind ourselves of the wonder of God's love and grace toward all of His children.

If, on the other hand, we feel that we have been sinned against by someone, but have never been asked by them to forgive them, for us to forgive them will, in any case, bring healing to our soul. How well it has also been said that God's forgiveness is the 'door to a new beginning'.

September 3

THE PATIENT WHO TREATED THE NURSE!

“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:24)

There is nothing as miserable as having had a sulky, irritable nurse when you are sick, Sakai San thought to himself just as he was about to leave Kiyose Hospital. Being a Christian, however, he somehow wanted to be a blessing to her, so he handed her a New Testament, which he had obtained from the hospital evangelist. On saying goodbye to her, he also told her that, if she had time, she should consider going to the weekly meetings held in the hospital.

Nurse Fukue Obiki thanked him and very much thought about his kindness after he had gone. She was conscious of her shortcomings and realized that Sakai San could easily have reported her rude behavior to the matron, but instead he had always spoken kindly to her.

Fukue's mother had died when she was six years old and she had been inconsolable. Her father soon married again, but her step-mother, also having a young daughter of her own, had very little time for Fukue, who often cried herself to sleep, clutching a snapshot of her own mother. She also wondered why she did not receive pocket money any more, but, to earn a little, did some odd jobs for the neighbors.

After leaving middle school, Fukue managed to find a job as a receptionist to a doctor and often doubled as a nurse when there was an opportunity. This gave her the idea that she might be able to qualify as a nurse and it was during her training days that she came into contact with Sakai San.

After he left the hospital, Fukue started to read the New Testament that Sakai San had given her and was particularly struck when she came across the words in Matthew 6:25, *“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”* She had always been so taken up with material things, but from then on decided to attend the Christian meetings in the hospital.

Not long after, Fukue contacted the evangelist, found the Savior and started to earnestly pray that her family, including her step-mother, would be saved. Her attitude towards her patients also changed and she tried to be a blessing to them. But Fukue never forgot the patient to whom she was so unkind, who gave her the wonderful gift of a New Testament, which resulted in her life being so much changed.

May the Lord help us to freely give a copy the Word of God to those in need, so that they too may find the Savior.

September 4

HOW TO BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS

"... it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your Works." (Psalm 73:28)

If we turn to Psalm 73, we will see the story of Asaph, one of the three musicians of King David, who was taken with the Israelites into bondage in Babylon.

He had an open, clean heart before God, but was suddenly struck by the amazing prosperity of those around him. He could not help but wonder how God could let them prosper. Was there no punishment for evil? Now, because of his religion, he was a captive, treated as a slave day by day. He could not help wonder why!

These thoughts drove Asaph to realize that his wild thoughts were the result of broken fellowship with the Lord and he turned to God once again and rejoiced in renewed fellowship. As a result, he wrote this beautiful psalm to console his fellow captives in Babylon.

We are always told to seek to be a blessing to everyone, even to our enemies, "*... I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.*" (Luke 6:27-8) But, how easy it is to sometimes unconsciously lose vital fellowship with the Lord through something that we do or say to others. The much-used servant of the Lord, Samuel Brengle of the Salvation Army said that if he had the privilege of delivering a last exhortation to Christians, it would be, 'Wait on God'.

God has so often told us to be a blessing to all with whom we come into contact. He has said, *“To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.”* (Luke 6:29-31)

May God help us to watch and pray lest we lose our vital contact with Him and cease to be a blessing to those around us.

This truth has been summed up well in the following words:

*“Be still, my heart, for faithful is your Lord,
And pure and true and tried His holy word.
Through stormy flood that rages as the sea,
His promises your stepping stones shall be.”*

September 5

SOURCE OF PEACE

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)

As the clock struck eleven, Yasumoto San looked up from his desk in the medicine business, in which he worked with his uncle. His face was drawn and the telltale, hollow cough, which broke forth from his lungs, caused his uncle to say, “You had better pack your things up, my boy. There is nothing we can do to save the business now. This is the end and we might as well face it. If you don’t do something about that cough of yours, it may be the end of you too, you know!”

As Yasumoto San made his way home in the crowded train, his mind was working fast. Just to think that his name meant the “source of peace” and he had absolutely no peace in his heart at all. Some time ago, feeling tired and having a constant fever, he had gone to the doctor for a check-up. An X-ray had revealed that he was suffering from tuberculosis and needed hospitalization. Much as he had hated to leave his uncle, who was on the verge of bankruptcy, he really did not know how to break the news to his mother and sister too that both of his lungs were seriously affected, due to neglect and he had to be hospitalized.

Then, one day, when he was taking a walk in the hospital grounds, a young man with a smiling face approached him, and handed him a piece of paper, saying, "I'm very sorry to be a nuisance, but I wonder if you would be so good as to read this when you have time." Yasumoto San took it from him, with a blunt, "Thank you", and put it into his pocket. The young man saying, "when you have time", was intended as a joke, he imagined. He certainly had all the time in the world in this dreary hospital!

So, before long, Yasumoto San took the leaflet of his pocket and started to read it. He discovered that it contained some words from a book called the Bible. He soon came across the words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Whatever could that mean, he vaguely wondered. He was certainly "poor in spirit"! On reading further, he discovered that it also contained an invitation to the Christian meetings in the hospital and, having a lot of spare time, he decided to attend.

So it was that for the very first time in his life, Yasumoto San heard about getting saved. What particularly gripped him was that it contained a message of hope and, before long he became more than vaguely interested and asked for an interview with the hospital evangelist. A few days later, with tear-filled eyes, he recognized that he was a sinner and confessed his need before the Living God.

Several years lay before him as a hospital patient, but during that time Yasumoto San became a powerful witness for his Savior, helping others find the way of salvation. May the Lord help each one of us to realize what a tremendous influence a simple tract, handed out in faith, can have on the heart of a needy soul.

September 6

THE BENEFITS OF OBEDIENCE

“... If you diligently heed the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the Lord who heals you.” (Exodus 15:26)

God promised that if the people obeyed Him, they would be free from the diseases that plagued the Egyptians in those days. How often God’s laws are designed to keep us from harm and we don’t always realize it.

If we obey God, not only will our relationship with Him be open but it is always in our best interests to do so. God has called us to keep His commands, at the same time reminding us that His laws are not hidden from us or beyond our reach. He has clearly written in the Bible that obeying them is all that we need to do. We must just remember not to put off doing so.

We may sometimes question if it is right to obey what He tells us to do, especially if it looks difficult. If so, we need to remember that we may only be facing difficulty, not because we have fallen out of God’s favor, but because we are doing good in an evil world.

We must remember too that the ability to obey God results from His grace in us and that we are only able to obey. If we should stumble, we will not fall back, but be caught up and held in Christ’s loving arms.

Obedience to God is always pleasing to Him. Many people think that prosperity and success come from having power and a relentless desire to get ahead in the world. However, we read in the book of Joshua that he was told by God that in order to succeed in his ministry, he had to be strong and courageous, because the task that was ahead of him would not be easy.

We must remember that we may not always succeed by the world’s standards, but the important thing is to be a success in God’s eyes – and His opinions are the only ones that matter! We should realize that what is right in God’s eyes must never be questioned by us, who are His children and whom He loves with an everlasting love.

May the Lord help us not only to obey Him, but also to tell others in spiritual need of His wonderful mercy and love, if they will just put their trust in Him.

September 7

JUST A LITTLE CARD!

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

“Hiroshi, a foreigner with a big nose and blue eyes has started some meetings in the town! Let’s go and see what it is all about, eh?” said Hiroshi Suda’s step-sister excitedly one day, when she ran into the house on return from school.

They decided to attend one of the meetings and, although he did not understand too much of what the foreigner had to say, Hiroshi was fascinated by the little card that they gave him, On it were the words, “My peace I give unto you”.

The word ‘peace’ was a magical word for Hiroshi, because in his home there was nothing but arguing and quarrelling from morning to night. Not that his parents were not religious. They both belonged to a Buddhist sect, but whatever their religion brought them, Hiroshi knew that it certainly did not bring them peace.

But God was at work in the hearts of the Suda family. Mrs. Suda needed to go into hospital and there met an old school-friend. But she sensed that her friend did not seem the same as she used to be – she had become a believer in Jesus Christ! As a result, Mrs. Suda also started to read the Bible and, on leaving the hospital, took Hiroshi with her to church. He was delighted and yielded his life to Christ when he was seventeen years old.

On leaving school, Hiroshi found work in a firm, a considerable distance from his home. The men that he worked with were a rough lot and sought to draw him into their bad habits.

Quite discouraged, Hiroshi went to discuss his problems with his mother and was encouraged when she told him not to look at his past failures, but to look up to Jesus where he would find power and victory. As a result, Hiroshi found strength to pray and the power to witness to others.

Before long, those around him started to seek the Lord and together they rented a house in which they could start Christian gatherings. They soon had a full schedule, holding meetings

there four days a week and on the other days visiting hospitals, distributing tracts and holding open-air meetings.

Soon after, conscious of his need of Bible training, Hiroshi entered Bible College and subsequently became a full-time evangelist.

May the Lord help us to remember that just a small thing, even a few words on a little card, may well be the beginning of a life dedicated to God.

September 8

O LOVE, THAT WILL NOT LET ME GO!

1. *"O Love, that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.*
2. *"O Light, that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.*
3. *"O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.*
4. *"O Cross, that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be."*

(George Matheson -1842-1906)

George Matheson, who was engaged to be married, suddenly learned that he would soon be totally blind. His fiancée apparently told him that she could not marry him and his dreams were completely shattered.

He thought of taking his life, but is said to have taken hold of himself and instead wrote this beautiful hymn on June 6th, 1882. Although eventually completely blind, he became a great preacher in the Church of Scotland, assisted by his sister, who learned Greek and Hebrew to help him in his ministry.

God has used this hymn to bless and heal many other broken hearts.

September 9

SANCTIFICATION

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them."

(Ezekiel 36:26-27)

The story is told of an elderly, uneducated native, who knew Christ and earnestly longed to live for Him. One day he said to the missionary in his best English, "Before saved, only one native, now two. One good and other bad. How get rid of bad one?"

We may laugh at what he said, but behind those words we can see that he earnestly sought to live the best he could for the Lord. It might have been difficult for the missionary to have answered his question in his native language, but for us it amounts to our realizing the fact that we are made up of spirit, soul and body - a 'spirit', through which we can make contact with God, a 'soul', through which we can make contact with other people and a 'body', through which we can contact material things.

When the body and spirit came together, the soul came into being. In the unsaved the spirit is imprisoned within the fallen, sin-prone soul. In the saved, the prison doors are opened and Eternal Life enters. From that time on, the spirit is potentially free to be one with the Spirit of God, but here a fight begins. Up until then, the soul with its principle of sin, has been in control of the spirit and does not want to give up its power, and this is where the problems start for the believer.

How well this is expressed in Romans chapter 7, verses 21-25, *“I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

So, how can we experience this wonderful deliverance from our sinful nature? First, we need to recognize our need, and then, ask God, as the Psalmist did in Psalm 51:10 – to – *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”* Then, by taking His Promises at face value, for instance, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”* (1 John 1: 9-10)

September 10

THE STOLEN CAKES

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Sadayo knew without a shadow of doubt what she had to do. There was no way out! She had to go back to the store and confess that she was a thief! Making the decision was half the battle. So, the next day, she set out for the store in question.

As the train took her nearer to her destination, Sadayo just could not imagine why she had stolen those cakes! She was thirteen years old and had certainly known the difference between right and wrong. She had been brought up in a Christian home and had regularly attended church and Sunday school! Her parents had so often quoted the Scriptures to her when she had done something wrong and many times she had confessed her sins. But, somehow, she had never really obtained the assurance that God had forgiven her

When the train stopped at her destination, her heart beat overtime. But, doing her best to pluck up courage, she made her way to the cake counter, inwardly trembling. She asked to see the

supervisor and while they were looking for him, she was tempted to run away, but managed to stand her ground. After listening to her story, the supervisor said, "Alright, my girl, I will let you off, because I admire your courage in confessing what you did!"

Sadayo literally danced out of the shop with joy. Her heart was as light as a feather. While she had confessed her sin, her heart had suddenly been transformed. She knew without a shadow of doubt that Jesus had saved her. She was only thirteen years old, but it was suddenly wonderful to be alive.

Six years passed by during which Sadayo constantly proved the goodness of God. Then, during a school vacation, she and a friend obtained a job to advertise the special sales of a company. They had to walk around, wearing the advertisement boards on their backs. While they did so, the sun poured down on them hour after hour, and, as a result, her friend collapsed from the heat and was taken to hospital.

The next time Sadayo saw her was at her funeral service and, while she sadly looked at her friend's face, she determined in her heart to spend the rest of her life in God's service, so she took a three-year course at Bible College.

After two years subsequently spent in God's service, a marriage was arranged for her with a minister. But Sadayo always testifies that she will never forget the cake counter at the shop, because it was there that God transformed her from a thief into a soul-winner! May the Lord help us, no matter how difficult it may be, to put even the smallest thing right in our walk with Him!

September 11

UNDERSTANDING SUFFERING

"From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." (Matthew 16:21)

Maybe something that we very much need to realize is that the Bible clearly shows that God's plan does not exclude the possibility of suffering in our lives, much as we, as human beings, would want

to escape it, if it were at all possible!

Suffering is by no means always avoidable, as we can well see from the passage quoted above. Peter, Jesus' devoted follower, sought to protect Him from suffering, when he said to Him, " ... *Far be it from You, Lord, this shall not happen to You.*" (Matthew 16:22). Jesus reply was doubtless Words that Peter and the disciples would never forget. "... *Get behind Me, Satan, You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.*" (Matthew 16:23)

When we think about this, we need to be cautious of advice that we might receive from someone, who might question our need to go through suffering of some kind. We need to remember too that sometimes our most difficult temptations come from those who love us and seek to protect us from suffering.

A Frenchman painted a picture of 'Universal Genius'. There were orators, philosophers and martyrs included, in fact, all who have achieved preeminence in any sphere of life. But the remarkable fact about the picture is that those who were preeminent for their ability were preeminent first for their suffering.

There we see Moses, who was denied entrance to the Promised Land. Beside him is another, feeling his way – blind Homer. Milton is also there blind and heart-broken. Then the form of the One who towers above them all - the Face that was marred more than any man – that of Jesus!

It is vital to realize that suffering is not a punishment that we receive as a result of sin. Innocent people also suffer. If God took suffering away whenever we asked, we would follow Him for convenience, not out of love and devotion. Regardless of the reasons for suffering, Jesus has the power to help us deal with it. When we suffer from a disease, tragedy or disability, we should not ask why it is happening to us, but rather ask God to give us the strength to endure and learn anything He wants to teach us from that experience.

May the Lord help us to be willing to endure any suffering that He may allow to come across our pathway and not seek a way of escape, which He never intended for us to take.

September 12

NEVER TOO OLD

“Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you!” (Isaiah 46:4)

As Jiro Nakamura lay on his hospital bed, in his heart he was cursing all the gods he could think of. It seemed as if the whole world was against him too! To think that after all the years he had given in the service of his country as a soldier, he now had to lie flat on his back, stricken with tuberculosis of his lungs.

His thoughts were interrupted, however, by an announcement that the Christians were holding their weekly meeting in the hall. At that, Jiro looked at the patient in the next bed and scornfully said, “There’s that Jesus group at it again!” Then, to his surprise, his fellow-patient said, “Why don’t we go? It’s so boring here and I’ve heard that there are plenty of nice girls there!”

So it was that Jiro found himself for the first time in a Christian meeting! As he listened to the evangelist explaining the way of salvation, he suddenly became conscious of the desperate need of his heart. When he heard the evangelist say, “Your sins nailed Jesus to the cross”, he was on the verge of tears. He had thought himself incapable of such emotion, but in those moments Jiro was broken at the feet of the Cross and yielded his life to the Savior. Before leaving the meeting place, he purchased a Bible and went back to his room, determined to clean up his life.

After fifteen months in hospital, the medical opinion was that he needed an operation and, as Jiro prayed about the matter, he knew that God was leading him in that direction. As a result, his health was completely restored.

In the years that followed, he had one burning passion and that was to go to a Bible College. But his wife was unsaved and did not want to listen to his vision. She told him rather to wait until he was sixty years old. Jiro realized that God’s time had not yet come and so he opened a bread business to make a living and served as a layman in his local church.

On the day that he turned sixty, Jiro again broached the matter with his wife. This time she said, “You should wait until all the

children are married!" Jiro was disconsolate, but again committed the whole matter into the Lord's Hands. Then, soon afterwards, his wife fell sick and on her death-bed she told Jiro, with tears, how sorry she was that she had held him back so long from serving God.

So it was that at the age of 61, Jiro Nakamura entered Bible College and struggled for the next four years with the courses, including Hebrew and Greek. On graduating, he became the minister of a small church in Osaka City and is greatly used by God.

May the Lord help us realize that it is never too late to serve Him!

September 13

DIFFICULTIES ARE ALLOWED FOR PROFIT

"But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." (Philippians 1:12)

Paul wrote these words when he was in prison. Can we think of any more difficult a situation than that to be in!

We can also recall Joseph, who rose to prominence after encountering many difficulties along the way. He was sold into slavery by his own brothers, later falsely accused of sexual assault and imprisoned and then forgotten there by a man who had promised to help him gain his release.

In spite of all these obstacles, Joseph became second in command to Pharaoh, saved many lives and freely forgave his brothers.

It is also told concerning the famous German composer, Ludwig van Beethoven, that he lived in fear of becoming deaf. His hearing did in fact gradually deteriorate to such an extent that he could only communicate with others by means of writing.

Amazingly, however, it was after losing his hearing that he wrote some of his greatest masterpieces. Apparently, shut off from the distractions of the world, new melodies flooded into his brain and he wrote them down, as fast as his pen would let him.

We need to remember that God does not always remove difficulties. But if He does not remove them, He will doubtless use them for our good and His glory. If we are landed in difficult

circumstances, we cannot control events, but we can choose our response and trust Him to work through us in spite of them.

How often we have experienced in our lives the fact that when God is going to do something extraordinary, He begins with something that looks virtually impossible! Then we see how wonderful He is!

Anything worthwhile has obstacles, but if God has given us a vision, we must not give it up. But we need to submit our difficulties to Him for His guidance. He will remove them, if they will not be for His and our profit. How well it has been said:-

*“We would not cling to His guiding Hand,
If the way was always bright
And we would not care to walk by faith,
If we could always walk by sight?”*

September 14

THE RACE

“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus...”. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

As Tsutomu Aoki grew up, he was very much conscious that he was different from the other children at school and it bothered him. It made him feel an outcast! “Why are you always so dressed up on Sundays?” his friends would ask him and he was always too ashamed to tell them that his parents were Christians and he was on his way to Sunday school.

Then, one day, when he was ten years of age, it was time for the annual sports gathering. Tsutomu knew that he was no match for the school’s three best runners, but he so much wanted to win. That day he prayed, “God, I know that it is not possible for me to win, but if I do win, I will know for sure that you are the real God.”

The whistle blew and off they went! Tsutomu made pretty good headway, but just could not catch up to the three leaders, no matter how he tried. Then, amazingly, the runner ahead of him stumbled over something in the road and immediately fell back.

Next, to his surprise, the boy ahead of him suddenly slackened his pace and Tsutomu found himself in second place. Maybe God was answering his prayer, he thought, as he followed on the heels of the leader!

Then, although the goal was in sight, he realized that his energy was almost gone. But just then another miracle happened! The boy ahead of him stumbled and before he could regain his balance, Tsutomu shot ahead of him and over the finishing line. He had made it! Now he knew without a shadow of doubt that the Christians' God can even do the impossible!

As a result, when a special evangelist visited his church soon after, Tsutomu had no doubt whatsoever that it was not enough to be brought up in a Christian home, but that it was necessary personally to confess your own sins and have an intimate relationship with God and so he did just that!

Having a desire to serve God, after finishing at university, Tsutomu joined a Christian organization and was able to reach many others for His Savior.

No matter how difficult our way may be, may we look to the Lord to help us to press on, keeping our eyes on the goal, knowing that He will be with us every step of the way!

September 15

STAND UP! STAND UP FOR JESUS

1. *“Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Ye soldiers of the cross;
Lift high His royal banner,
It must not suffer loss:
From victory unto victory,
His army shall He lead,
‘Till every foe is vanquished,
And Christ is Lord indeed.*
2. *“Stand up, Stand up for Jesus,
The trumpet call obey;
Forth to the mighty conflict,
In this His glorious day:*

*“Ye that are men now serve Him”
Against unnumbered foes;
Let courage rise with danger,
And strength to strength oppose.*

3. *“Stand up, Stand up for Jesus,
Stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you,
Ye dare not trust your own:
Put on the gospel armor,
Each piece put on with prayer;
Where duty calls, or danger,
Be never wanting there.*

4. *“Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
The strife will not be long;
This day the noise of battle,
The next the victor’s song:
To him that overcometh,
A crown of life shall be
He with the king of glory
Shall reign eternally.”*

(George Duffield - 1818-1888)

Rev. Duffield was inspired to write this hymn during the great revival in Philadelphia in 1858 by a fellow minister, Rev. Dudley Tyng, who was only thirty years old when his arm was caught in some machinery and he died of his injuries. As he was dying, he sent a message to the ministers with whom he had been working in the revival, which began with the words, “Let’s all stand up for Jesus!”

A few weeks later, Rev. Duffield preached in his church on Ephesians 6:14, *“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness”*. He closed the meeting with the hymn he had just written, having been inspired by Dudley Tyng, “Stand up! Stand up for Jesus”.

September 16

LASTING SATISFACTION

“O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.” (Psalm 63:1)

When David wrote this Psalm, he was hiding from his enemies in the barren desert of Judah. He was intensely lonely and longed for a friend that he could trust to ease his loneliness. So, he cried out to the best Friend that he could ever have and joy filled his heart as a result.

However, if we look at the life of Esau, of whom we read in Genesis, we see that he traded his birthright for temporary satisfaction. *“And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.”* (Genesis 25:34) Esau acted on impulse, satisfying his immediate desires, without pausing to consider the long-range consequences of what he was about to do.

We can easily fall into the same trap when we see something we very badly want. When we get it, at first we may feel very glad, because we have obtained what we wanted. But that pleasure may well fade in the future. We can avoid making Esau’s mistake by considering the short-term satisfaction of an action against its long-term consequences, before we act. Esau exaggerated his need. He said that he was about to die of starvation! The pressure of the moment completely distorted his perspective and caused him to make an extremely stupid and costly decision.

We may also face similar temptation at times. It may land us in an unsuitable relationship in business or even in marriage. We might feel such great pressure in some area that nothing else seems to matter and we may, like Esau, lose our focus. Getting through a short, pressure-filled time is often the most difficult part of overcoming a temptation. But let’s look to the Lord for His wisdom and guidance at such vital times in our lives. Therefore, we should always be careful not to pay too high a price for temporary satisfaction.

May our eyes be so much on the Lord, that we will never make such a mistake for something which has no lasting value.

We need to realize that real, lasting satisfaction can only be found in God. Without Him, we search in vain. The only way to enjoy life is to take it each day as a gift from the Lord, thanking Him for it and serving Him in it.

September 17

A BROKEN JOURNEY

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10)

Ko Yoshida, a 25-year-old schoolteacher was on a train speeding towards the famous honeymoon resort called White Beaches. Alongside her sat a honeymoon couple, very much engrossed in each other's company. A few weeks ago, she herself had happily contemplated marriage and a honeymoon trip to the same destination.

Her family had arranged a marriage for her with a fellow schoolteacher, when suddenly a medical check-up revealed that she had tuberculosis. A diet of mainly corn and grass during the bitter war years had unknowingly made inroads on her health. As a result, her destination suddenly changed from a happy honeymoon at White Beaches to a nearby tuberculosis sanatorium!

In those days, there was no adequate medicine for tuberculosis. As she lay there on her hospital bed, Ko saw so many people die around her that she was often in the depths of despair. Then, one day, she unexpectedly received a gift – a copy of the New Testament. She read it from cover to cover and found that its contents reached down to the deepest need of her greatly troubled mind.

She came across the Words, which made a deep impression on her " ... *do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*" (Matthew 6:34) They were the most comforting words that she had ever read and it was somehow easy for her to commit her life to the Author.

Ko was then 28 years old and after twelve years in hospital, she gradually regained her health, but did not consider going back to teaching. She wanted to dedicate whatever strength she had left to God. Although still quite weak, she recuperated at home for a while and then applied to serve the Lord in the ranks of the Japan Mission, where she ministered for the next thirty-nine years. She became the office manager and the key liaison between the missionaries and the Japanese.

As the years passed by, her body became weaker and weaker, but she never thought of retirement. Her strong spirit helped her to report for duty in the office every morning at 8.30 a.m. and she asked us to let her serve Him until the day He saw fit to take her "home". Then, on March 11th, 2001, while waiting in a local hospital for a simple cataract operation, her heart stopped beating and she went to be with the Lord at the age of 78. She was greatly missed in the Japan Mission office, but "at home" with the One she loved and so faithfully served for so long.

September 18

HOW RESPONSIBLE AM I?

"So David said o God, 'I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing; but now, I pray, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly'." (1 Chronicles 21:8)

When David realized that he had sinned, he took full responsibility, admitted his wrong and asked God to forgive him. Many people want to add God and the benefits of Christianity to their lives without acknowledging their personal responsibilities. But we need to remember, and also tell others whom we are seeking to help spiritually, that confession and repentance must come before receiving forgiveness.

Another thing that we must not forget is that we need to be faithful in what we have received from the Lord. This is very clearly brought out in the Scriptures in Matthew 25. We see particularly in verses 14 & 15, "*... the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey.*"

In this case, the master divided his goods out among his servants according to their abilities and with the intention that they should invest it for him, while he was away. No one received more or less than he could handle.

But when the master returned, he found that the servant who had only received one 'talent' had done nothing with it, except to

bury it in the ground and hand it back to him, with no interest. His master was most displeased and gave the money to the servant who had earned the most money for him by investing it wisely in his absence.

With each one of us too, the issue is always not how much we have, but how wisely we use what we have. The above parable describes the consequences of two attitudes towards Christ's return. Those who diligently prepare for it by investing their time and talents to serve God will be rewarded. But those who do not do so will be punished.

The talents represent any kind of resources that God has given us. He gives us time, abilities and other resources and expects us to invest them wisely, until Jesus returns. May the Lord help us to be good stewards of the talents He has given us and to encourage others to do so also.

September 19

A GOD-SHELF FOR KINDLING!

"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." (Isaiah 64:6)

Setsuko was born into a family where they worshipped Buddha every day. Her father was very authoritarian and expected each member of the family to line up in an attitude of prayer behind him as he knelt and faced the god-shelf ever morning at 6 a.m. and every night at 9 p.m.

Setsuko hated getting up early every morning to worship and was glad when she got married. Her husband was very kind to her and even agreed for them to buy their own Buddhist god-shelf so that they could worship as a family by themselves. She was never very strong physically, however, and was later hospitalized - a victim of tuberculosis!

On the first night there, Setsuko wept more than she slept, thinking of the young children that she had had to leave behind and, during the next few months, continued in deep despondency.

Then, one evening, overwhelmed by her burdens, she walked out of the front door of the hospital and, in the moonlight, she noticed a fellow-patient sitting on a bench. Utterly weary, Setsuko slumped down beside her.

As they both looked up at the stars on that cloudless night, the patient earnestly talked to Setsuko about the Creator of the universe and also invited her to a meeting the next day when a preacher would talk to them about the Creator God.

At the meeting next day, Setsuko fully expected a minister in ceremonial robes, waving holy sticks and chanting words that no one could understand. How surprised she was when a cheerful foreign lady, in a brightly-colored dress, appeared and spoke to them. The message was from Matthew 11:28, *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* To the despairing Setsuko it was a Word from God Himself and that very day she started to seek Him.

The next day she walked slowly up the hill beside the hospital and told the Lord how sinful she was. As she wiped away the tears from her eyes, an unexplainable joy came into her heart and she knew that she would never be the same again.

When she left the hospital, her husband, knowing of her love for the Living God, destroyed the heathen religious trappings in their home and Setsuko sensed that God was working in his heart too. Then, one Sunday morning, how overjoyed she was when he went with her to church and that day found the Savior!

September 20

ETERNAL LIFE BEGINS HERE & NOW!

“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Corinthians 5:1)

In this passage Paul contrasts our earthly bodies and the bodies that we will have at the resurrection. He goes on to say in this chapter that our earthly bodies may now well make us groan when they are not functioning as we would like them to, but that our new, resurrected bodies, which we will receive when we die, will be new

and perfect for our everlasting life.

Our eternal life, however, begins in this life. The Holy Spirit dwelling within us is our guarantee that God will give us everlasting bodies at our resurrection. Whoever believes in God's Son, has eternal life. We know this because He has said so in His Word, *"And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."* (1 John 5:11-12)

Some people hope that they will get eternal life, but John says that we can now know that we have it! Our certainty is based on God's promise that He has given us eternal life through His Son. We must always remember that this is not based on feelings but on fact! May we look to the Lord to help us to believe this and also to help others to obtain an assurance of salvation and eternal life as well.

Others are scared at the idea of eternal life, because their lives are pretty miserable now. However, we need to tell them that eternal life is not an extension of a person's miserable, mortal life. Eternal life is God's Life, embodied in Jesus, and given to all believers now as a guarantee that they will live forever.

In eternal life there is no death, evil or sin. When we don't know Christ, we make choices as though this life is all we have. In reality, this life is just an introduction to eternity.

How wonderful it is to remember that the moment that we open our heart to Jesus, heaven comes in! That is all we need. We don't need to wait for eternal life because it begins the moment that we believe. We don't need to work for it, because it is already ours when we believe. Some people hope that they will receive eternal life. John says that we can know we have it now. That is true, no matter how we may feel.

We don't need to worry about it, because God has given it to us Himself. There is not a shadow of doubt about it. It has been infallibly guaranteed! When we have received this new life, we will begin to evaluate all that happens from an eternal perspective and all fear will leave our hearts.

September 21

HOW COULD GOD BE SHUT IN A BOX?

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” (Psalm 51:10)

Setsumi grew up in a Buddhist home, where they had a traditional Buddhist altar, but her family did not give it much attention. In fact, her mother only opened the little door, which revealed a statue of Buddha, on very special occasions.

Since childhood, Setsumi had known that somewhere there must be a real god, but she was pretty convinced that it was not the one shut in behind the door of the Buddhist altar. She just could not believe that a real god would be shut up in a little box!

When she was nineteen, Setsumi felt an urge to go to the nearby church and was so impressed that she continued to attend. There, among the Christians, she sensed the presence of the real God. She had certainly never experienced such love and genuine caring before in her life, as she did among those who attended the church. She also sensed a real depth in the ‘religion’ of the Christians.

Having been brought up with the typical Japanese idea that it was only necessary to worship once a year – during the New Year season – it was a totally new concept to Setsumi that people would worship in church, sometimes several times a week and be so happy about it.

When she was 24 years old, Setsumi accepted Jesus as her Savior and knew the peace and joy which came through a personal relationship with Him. From that time on she trusted Him to cleanse her heart and to guide her in everything. Among other things, she had a great desire to marry someone who would actively spread the Gospel and was convinced that God would answer her prayer.

Almost sooner than she expected, a marriage was arranged for her with a Japan Mission evangelist, Mr. Sakurai. Even though their marriage was actually arranged by the minister of the church, neither of them have any doubt that it was really arranged by God in heaven and not by man!

Many years have passed since that day and Rev. Sakurai is now the pastor of a church. They are also the fond parents of four

children. Their life is a very full one, but Setsimi testifies that no matter how busy they all are, every day they find some time together to worship God.

Every day she so much rejoices that she found the Living God, whose presence is with her every moment of the day and night, and she does not have to worship a god who is shut up in a box!

September 22

JESUS LOVES ME

1. *"Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak, but He is strong.*

(Chorus)

*"Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.*

2. *"Jesus loves me! loves me still,
Tho' I'm very weak and ill;
That I might from sin be free,
Bled and died upon the tree.*

3. *"Jesus loves me! He who died,
Heaven's gate to open wide;
He will wash away my sin,
Let His little child come in.*

4. *"Jesus loves me! He will stay
Close beside me all the way;
Thou hast bled and died for me,
I will henceforth live for Thee."*

(Anna Bartlett Warner – 1827-1915)

Anna Bartlett Warner and her sister Susan were the unmarried daughters of a prominent New York lawyer, who lost his fortune during the 1837 depression. After Mr. Warner moved the family to an old house across the Hudson River from West Point, the sisters

opened their home to the cadets and held Sunday school classes there.

Anna loved writing hymns and wrote a fresh one each month for her students. Eager to supplement the family income, the sisters also turned to writing novels and children's books.

September 23

HOW TO HANDLE DISCOURAGEMENT

"... she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish." (1 Samuel 1:10)

In this passage of the Bible we see that Hannah was deeply distressed because she could not bear children. Her husband loved her, but could only solve her problem by eventually arranging to take another woman into their household so that he could have children. But that woman ridiculed Hannah because she could not conceive children, and, deeply distressed, Hannah took her burden to the Lord in prayer. But when the high priest only saw Hannah's lips move when she was praying and did not hear any words coming forth from her mouth, he thought she was drunk!

However, instead of giving up hope, Hannah went on crying to the Lord, taking her problem to Him alone and we read in verses 19 & 20 of the same chapter, *"...the Lord remembered her. So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, 'Because I have asked for him from the Lord.'"*

Each one of us, at some time or other in our lives, will face difficulties. It may be in our work, in our relationships or even some physical problem that we face. At such times what do we do? Our only effective recourse is to take it to God in prayer, as Hannah did. If we don't do so, we will be like Hannah was before she took her problem to the Lord, bitter and discouraged!

The key to handling any discouragement is prayer. We should always remember that God is able to do wonders at any time, even in the most difficult of circumstances. There are always pressures that can cause us to be discouraged, but how we act in such situations will always be a reflection on what we really believe in our hearts.

Some tasks that face us may seem to be almost impossible to accomplish. At such times we must remember that nothing is too difficult for us to do, if it is in line with God's will and we are looking to Him to strengthen us while we are doing it. If we look up to Him in prayer in any circumstances, He will give us His strength in exchange for our weakness.

How well the subject of discouragement has been expressed by an anonymous writer in the following words:

*"I refuse to be discouraged, to be sad or to cry,
I refuse to be downhearted, and here's the reason why;
I have a God who's mighty, who's sovereign and supreme,
I have a God who loves me, and I am on His team."*

September 24

THE SALT TREATMENT

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10)

Koji Honda was born in 1912 in a small town in Japan, called Maruoka, which is now famous for its idol worship, but in those days, the central building was a restaurant, which belonged to Koji's father. A lot of drinking was carried on there, but, early every morning and again at night, his father called the family together to kneel with him before the god-shelf. After lighting the candles and ringing a small bell, he chanted from the Buddhist scriptures.

When Koji was a small boy, his grandmother made him wear a good-luck charm to ward off evil spirits. Then, when he was eight years old, he once went with a friend to a Christian Sunday School and, on returning home, he was severely rebuked and had salt thrown on him to purify him. They also made it clear to him that he was never to go to that "dirty Jesus church" again!

As Koji grew up, he learnt to worship various gods, but superstition and fear filled his life. He was repeatedly reminded never to have anything to do with the Christians' God, so he just frequently visited the temples and shrines to worship. With the same dipper used by hundreds of others, he drank holy temple water, believing that by doing so, he would receive special blessings and also do well at school.

Koji's first real contact with Christianity was as a high school student. In order to become proficient in English, he went with some friends to attend English classes being held at the local church. There, the students had to take turns in reading some verses aloud from the Bible. When his father heard about it, he was furious and insisted on giving Koji the 'salt treatment' again, in order to cleanse him from the foreign devils. He was also beaten and his Bible burned. His father then went so far as to say that he would kill him, if he didn't cease his contact with the church. But Koji just did not say a word; he had already determined in his heart to follow Jesus.

Koji was frustrated, however, by his inability to always do what was right and secretly asked the pastor to baptize him, hoping that a miracle would result. But even then, he still felt like a sinner and had no assurance of salvation. Often severely persecuted for going to church, he left home and found work in Tokyo. There, one day, he walked into Tokyo Ginza Methodist church and truly repented of his sins. From that day, his life was completely changed!

He persevered through the many trials of the war years, went to Bible College and eventually became one of the greatest evangelists that Japan has ever known. One day, his parents, who had resisted him so bitterly, turned up at one of the crusades that he was holding and found Christ as their Savior too!

September 25

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE!

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

'Light' in these verses represents our relationship with Jesus. If we live for Him, we should glow like a light, showing others what Christ is like. The light of a city that is situated on the top of a hill will be seen for miles around. That is how much our light should shine. If we live for Christ, we will glow like lights, showing others what Christ is like.

We hide our light by being quiet when we should speak or going along with the crowd and even letting sin dim our light. Maybe there are times when we should be explaining the reason for our light to others and in that way not ignoring their needs.

We must always remember that we should always be a 'beacon of truth', being a testimony to all with whom we come into contact. We must never let our light be shut off from the rest of the world.

If we keep quiet when we should speak, letting sin dim our light or not explaining our light to others, then we will never be a light for Him. If a lamp does not help people, it is useless. Similarly, we will find little purpose in our lives if they do not show others how to find God and how to live for Him.

His Word tells us so clearly, *"... be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror, for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was."* (James 1:22-24)

We must put His teachings into practice and then, as we do so, we too will understand more and more of the wonderful truths to be found in Him, as well as being a blessing to others.

A candle gives out light by itself being consumed. So it is true that we can only give out His Light by giving up our lives for Him for others.

The famous St. Francis of Assisi expressed it so well when he prayed, "Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace! Where there is hatred, let me sow love ... where there is darkness, light."

How a world in darkness needs the Light of the precious Gospel!

September 26

A RUNAWAY GANGSTER

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

"You will get sick if you read the Bible!" his father told Yukio, who had just received a copy of John's Gospel from a friend and was about to read it. In their home they earnestly practiced the Soka

Gakkai religion and early every morning Yukio had to join the other family members in chanting the Buddhist scriptures. In spite of all that daily show of religion, Yukio was bored with his very existence. His life was utterly unfulfilled and pointless.

When he was nineteen, Yukio decided to throw his weight in with a gangster group and soon became an expert at extorting money from people. But a few years later, he also became disenchanted with that type of lifestyle and desperately sought some way of escape. He decided therefore to run away from home and start life over again. In the process of doing so, he met Kimiko and they started living together.

One day Kimiko saw an advertisement in a newspaper about English lessons being taught in a nearby church and wanted to take part. Yukio warned her before she went, however, to be careful not to read the Bible, because, if she did so, she would certainly get sick!

Then, unexpectedly, one day, an old gangster contact of Yukio's, who had subsequently become a Christian, turned up at their home. After telling them how Jesus had changed his life, he said to them, "If God could change me, He can change you too. But you must believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins". Yukio did not really have a clue what the man was talking about, but Kimiko did. Apart from attending the church for English lessons, she had attended Sunday school when she was a child and knew about the Living God. She also had a Bible buried away in her possessions.

Soon afterwards, Kimiko became pregnant and felt very exhausted physically. But the ladies in the church helped her in such a wonderful way that, after the birth of her baby, Kimiko felt a stronger link with the church. So, because she and her husband had never been formally married, she suggested to him that they should go through a marriage ceremony there. Yukio reluctantly agreed, but, before the ceremony could be performed, Yukio and Kimiko were told by the minister that they had to attend the services for a while.

After the visit of the gangster, Kimiko had started to attend the Bible class and the prayer meeting at the church and soon realized that she was a sinner and sought the Savior. Before long too, Yukio, seeing the difference that it made in his wife's life, followed in her footsteps, took Jesus as his personal Savior and also proved that reading the Bible did not make him sick at all!

September 27

THE SOLUTION FOR GUILT

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:1)

Guilt comes from giving into temptation. We see in Genesis chapter 3, verses 6-7 what happened in Eve's case – *"... the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."*

She saw, she took, she ate and she gave. In other words, as is often the case, the battle was lost at the first look. Temptation often begins by just seeing something that you want. In such cases, when we instinctively know that something is wrong, we should run from it as fast as we can! We need to heed what we read so clearly in 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 22 – *"Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."*

Maybe we are sometimes guilt-ridden and afraid that we don't love others as we should or that we are not doing enough to show our love for the Savior. At such times it is often difficult to escape from the gnawing accusations of our conscience. But at such times we should remind ourselves that God knows our motives as well as our actions and will not always condemn us.

One of the realities of sin is that its effects spread. After Eve sinned, she involved Adam in her wrongdoing. When we do something wrong, we often try to relieve our guilt by trying to involve someone else in it. We desperately need to confess our sin to God, before we are tempted to pollute those around us.

Isn't it wonderful, however, that we are declared 'not guilty' of the sins of the past that we have confessed, because of what Jesus did for us on the Cross. Trusting Him means putting our confidence in Him to forgive the sins that we have consciously and even unconsciously committed, to make us right with God and to enable us to live the way He taught us.

May the Lord help us not to rely on our feelings, but to remind ourselves that He is greater than our conscience.

If perchance we are facing this problem in the life of an acquaintance of ours, we need to make sure that they have really trusted Jesus to take away their sins. Then and only then can a guilty conscience become something of the past when that person rejoices in what Jesus has done for them on the Cross.

We just need to thank God that we have a conscience within us, which is a warning sign to us when we do something wrong.

September 28

CONSCIOUS OF HIS PRESENCE!

“You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11)

As Yasumasa Shimizu was lying day by day on his hospital bed, sick with tuberculosis, he was desperately lonely and, in an endeavor to escape from it all, he sometimes tried to recall the things that had happened to him in the past. Even his childhood, although it had not been a very happy one, was part of him and therefore precious. His mother had died when he was quite young, but his father, who had been a research chemist in China had been the center of his life.

Providentially, when the Russians attacked China in 1946, he had been with his father there and they barely escaped capture and deportation to Russia – the inevitable fate of all scientists and technicians. He remembered how his father had crept out, before it was light, to the wholesale area to purchase peanuts, so that he could sell them, in order to earn a little money to keep them from starvation.

When they eventually managed to escape back to Japan, Yasumasa had to cram six years of grade school into two years. It was hard work, but he was so glad to be home. It was then, however, that he became sick with tuberculosis. An operation was necessary and five long years of sickness and weariness followed.

One day, feeling downhearted, he turned on the radio in the hospital to pass away the time. It so happened that a Christian broadcast was being aired and someone was reading a passage from a book called the Bible. The words, though somewhat strange, brought comfort to his heart and Yasumasa decided to tune in to the broadcast again the next day.

From then on, he listened regularly and one day sent a post card to the address given on the broadcast for those who wished to obtain spiritual help. He was taken by surprise however, when a few days later, a bright young man entered his room, introducing himself as a hospital evangelist, who have been sent by the broadcasting office to visit him. With just a little encouragement from the evangelist, Yasumasa prayed the sinner's prayer. *"God, be merciful to me a sinner!"* (Luke 18:13) and the joy of salvation flooded his heart in those moments.

Before long, Yasumasa was able to leave the hospital to recuperate at home and soon afterwards entered Bible College to be trained as an evangelist.

Fruitful service and a happy marriage followed and Yasumasa can never forget the day when he tuned into the Christian broadcast and for the first time in his life was conscious of God's presence.

September 29

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

1. *"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."*

(Chorus)

*"It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

2. *"Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*
3. *"My sin— oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

4. *“And, Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend!
Even so – it is well with my soul!*

(Horatio Spafford – 1828 - 1888)

Horatio Spafford was a lawyer, who lived in Chicago. In 1871 he lost all his possessions as a result of a great fire which swept the city. In 1873, he sent his wife and four children on a holiday to Europe, on the ‘Ville de Harve’, while he stayed behind to work.

The ship collided with a sailing vessel. Immediately after the collision, Mrs. Spafford gathered the children on the deck and prayed with them, asking God to save them or make them willing to die. Within fifteen minutes the boat sank and they were separated. Mrs. Spafford was taken out of the water unconscious, but the children were drowned. Ten days later, she landed in Cardiff, Wales and cabled her husband, ‘Saved alone!’ Soon after receiving the terrible news of the tragedy from her, he wrote this hymn!

September 30

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)

It is important to remember that constructive criticism is motivated by love. It is so easy to point out someone else’s faults or sins, maybe not even having the intention of correcting them. We just do it to make them feel guilty. This is what Job’s friends did to him as we read in Job, chapter 19, verses 3-4, “These ten times you have reproached me; you are not ashamed that you have wronged me. And if indeed I have erred, my error remains with me.”

Another thing that we have to remember is that constructive criticism always gets the facts straight! If we hear of friends who have wandered from the Lord, we should check the facts and find out the truth, before saying or doing anything that would later prove harmful. There may well be times when God wants us to take some

action in such circumstances, when a friend needs rebuking or a child needs disciplining. But first of all we must make doubly sure that we have the facts correct.

If we feel that we must admonish someone, we should be sure that we are confronting that person because we love him or her, not because we are annoyed, inconvenienced or seeking to blame them.

In the passage in Galatians, quoted above, Paul reflects a gentle and gracious attitude, showing us how we are to treat people. When confronting others about something that we see wrong in their lives, we would do well to remember how gentle Christ is in showing us our sins. Although it grieves Him when we sin, He is never bitter. He holds us accountable, yet supports us with His love, at the same time as seeking persistently to convince us. He is always kind and quick to forgive, if we will only ask Him to.

If our criticism is constructive, its motive is to bring that which we are criticizing to a person's attention, with the purpose of being a blessing to that person. So, when we feel that we must rebuke someone for a sin, we need to prayerfully check our own attitude before we speak to him or her. Do we really love the person and are we willing to forgive. We always need to remember that unless a rebuke is tied to forgiveness, it will not help that person at all.

When it is necessary to criticize others, let's treat them in the same way that we would like to be treated and in the way Jesus treats us. It is said of Him in John 1:14 that He was "... *full of grace and truth*". May we be the same in our judgment and dealings with others.

October 1

FROM BUDDHA TO JESUS

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)

Kiichi Ariga was born into a staunchly Buddhist family and when he was only three years old, his mother tried to teach him a Buddhist prayer. He made so many mistakes, however, that she scolded him and sometimes even made him go without breakfast!

When he was twelve years old, his best friend suddenly died and Kiichi thought about death for the first time in his life. He was pretty sure that he would go to the Buddhist heaven, but a voice inside him would give him no peace, asking him such questions as, "Have you never told a lie? Have you been a perfect boy? If not, you will go to hell!"

Kiichi certainly did not want to go to hell, so the next day he got up early in the morning and cleaned the yard of the local shrine. After that, he went into the inner sanctuary to pray. "Please cleanse my heart!" he cried, bearing in mind that there were eight million gods in Japan and surely one would hear him.

Some two years later, Kiichi plucked up the courage one day to ask the priests if his good works would help him. But he was quite discouraged when they told him that he had to die before he would know the answer to that.

It was obvious to him then that the best thing to do then would be to commit suicide and he tried to do so that night by lying down on the railway line. But when the train passed and he saw that he was unhurt, he realized that he had been lying between the tracks and went back home utterly discouraged, concluding that even the god of death disliked him too!

Then one day, desperate for spiritual blessing, he set out for the temple. On the way, however, he met a friend, who asked him where he was going. Kiichi explained what he had in mind to do and his friend told him that, if he wanted to get blessed, he should go with him to church. They kept arguing with each other for some time, until his friend, knowing "judo", twisted Kiichi's arm behind his back and virtually dragged him into the church building!

That day, Kiichi learnt three things that changed his life – (a) that there is only one true God, (b) that he was a sinner and needed to repent, (c) that Jesus died for him so that he could receive eternal life. As a result, Kiichi not only got saved, but later became an evangelist, mightily used by God, and fifty-five of his family members subsequently found the Savior.

May the Lord help us never to hold back when faced with a seeking soul, no matter how difficult it may seem!

October 2

HIS WINGS

"As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him." (Deuteronomy 32:11-12)

Have we ever realized the significance of His Wings in relation to us as His children? He makes it so clear to us in His Word that:

1. HIS WINGS ARE A PLACE OF SUPPORT

Just as an eagle uses its strength to care for its young at all times, so God cares for us. He said to his children when they were in dire straits, *"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself."* (Exodus 19:4)

2. HIS WINGS ARE ALSO A PLACE OF REFUGE

The Psalmist shows us this, *"He shall cover you with his feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler."* (Psalm 91:4)

3. HIS WINGS ARE A PLACE OF HEALING

"The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like shall-fed calves." (Malachi 4:2)

4. HIS WINGS ARE A PLACE OF TRUST

"How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings." (Psalm 36:7)

5. HIS WINGS ARE A PLACE OF HELP & REJOICING

"Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings will I rejoice." (Psalm 63:7)

Let's never forget that He is always there for us, no matter what our circumstances may be and He will undertake for us, no matter how desperate they may seem to us at any time of our lives.

Let us always remember that the Lord has said through Isaiah, His prophet in chapter 40, verse 31 – *"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."*

October 3

THE BEST SELLER

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

(Psalm 119:105)

While Ryoko San was reading through the newspaper one day, her attention was drawn to a short insert, which gave some statistics about the popularity of books. To her amazement, she read that a book, called 'The Bible', was the world's bestseller.

To Ryoko, this was a definite challenge. For as long as she could remember, one of her main interests in life had been literature. How could she possibly have overlooked the world's best-seller! She just must read it, she decided!

So it was, that before long, she purchased a cheap edition and studied its pages with great interest. One thing however, that particularly perturbed her was that, although she regarded herself as having an exceptionally acute mind, there were large portions of the Bible that she did not understand. So, she decided to visit a church, which she had noticed in her town, in order to ask someone to help her.

The minister did his best, and explained that the Bible is sometimes difficult to understand because, "... the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Corinthians 2:14)

On hearing that, Ryoko San went off in somewhat of a huff, but she could not lay aside the 'Best Seller' and pressed on studying it and the seed of the Word gradually began to bear fruit in her life.

But Ryoko had not reckoned on opposition from her husband. In a way, he secretly admired his wife's studious bent. However, when she declared to him one day that she had become a Christian, there was little peace in the home.

Physical violence was even sometimes resorted to, but Ryoko's consolation was in the precious words of the 'Best Seller', which she cherished in her heart, believing that God in His good time would answer her prayers for her husband's salvation.

She was most encouraged one day when she heard that her husband had paid a visit to the minister. His reason, he said, was that he was writing a thesis to obtain a doctorate in geology and

needed help with his English! Ryoko praised the Lord for what she was sure was another step in the right direction and is confident that the day will come when he too will find her Savior!

Maybe there is someone you know who desperately needs the consolation of the 'Best Seller'. May the Lord help you to reach out to that person with the precious Words of Life.

October 4

THE VALUE OF THE LOST

"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:7)

We read in this chapter of the shepherd who left ninety-nine of his sheep to go in search of just one that was lost. The shepherd knew that the ninety-nine were safe in the sheepfold, but was afraid that the lost sheep was in danger. Each sheep was of great value to him, therefore he went out diligently in search of the lost one.

In Isaiah 53, verse 6, we read, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* The prophet, Isaiah, speaks here of Israel straying from God and compares them to wandering sheep. But God sent His Son to bring them all back to the fold.

It may seem foolish for the shepherd to leave ninety-nine sheep and just go looking for the one that is lost. But the shepherd knew that the ninety-nine would be safe in the sheepfold, whereas the lost sheep was in great danger. Because each sheep was of great value to him, the shepherd regarded it of utmost importance to search diligently for the lost one.

God's love for each individual is so great that He seeks each one out and rejoices when he or she is found. He sent His beloved Son, Jesus, to associate with sinners on earth, because He wanted Him to bring the Gospel to the 'lost sheep'. Each individual is most precious to Him. He rejoices when even just one of His children is found and brought into the kingdom. How much we need to convey this great need to those around us, no matter where they may be.

If you feel far from God today, don't despair, He is still searching for you. Or maybe you belong to Him and are burdened for a loved-one who has not yet found the Savior. Keep believing and God will certainly answer your prayers. In fact, there are so many 'lost sheep' all around us, who desperately need the Savior. May we reach out to as many of them as we can with the Gospel and help bring them into the 'fold'.

How well this need has been expressed in the following powerful words:

*"You lived next door to me for years.
We shared our dreams, our joys and tears.
A friend to me you were indeed,
a friend who helped me when in need.
But for all the years we spent on earth,
you never talked of a second birth.
I'm lost eternally and tell you now.
You cannot do a thing for me.
No words today my bonds will free.
Do not err again, my friend.
Do all you can for the souls of men.
Plead with them now most earnestly,
lest they be cast in hell like me!"*

October 5

A MODERN DAY JOB!

"And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.'" (Job 1:21)

Mrs. Mori often looks back on her childhood with fond memories. It was a very happy one. Her slightest desire was always immediately granted. But when she grew up, a marriage was arranged for her with a man who turned out to be a great disappointment to her!

They had had a prosperous business, but calamity struck and it ended up an utter failure. As a result, she had to work as a servant in a school in order to get some money, so that they would have a little food in the house.

In despair, her husband started drinking and, before long, became unfaithful to her. In jealousy and anger, she tried to kill them, but mercifully did not succeed. Even more misery was to come her way, before God could have His way in her life.

They had six children, but one after the other died, until only one was left. A deep hatred burned in her heart and Mrs. Mori felt herself to be the most miserable being on earth.

Then, one day, a missionary knocked at her door and invited her to go to a meeting at the local church. Being in deep anguish and desperate for help, Mrs. Mori went. On hearing the Words, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:28-9), she completely broke down, confessed the hatred and jealousy that she had borne so long and found great peace of heart.

Mrs. Mori then testified that she had spent so long in misery, but that she was changed in a twinkling of an eye, when she yielded her heart to the Savior. In those moments, real joy flooded her heart and she was a different person.

From then on, every Sunday morning, she was to be seen sitting on the front row of the church, with a bright smile on her eager face, waiting for God to bless her. When a few of the members are asked to lead in prayer, she is always one of the first to respond, gladly opening her heart to the One who has made such a difference in her life.

Mrs. Mori believes that she is a modern day Job and praises God for all He has done and, she knows, will go on to do in her life and circumstances, because they are all in His precious Hands.

October 6

**O SOUL, ARE YOU WEARY AND
TROUBLED?**

1. *"O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free!*

Chorus

*"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.*

2. *"Thro' death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
Over us sin no more hath dominion -
For more than conquerors we are!*

3. *"His word shall not fail you - He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!"*

(Helen Howarth Lemmel - 1864-1961)

Helen Lemmel was already a noted Christian singer, when in 1918 a missionary friend handed her a tract, which contained the words, "... turn your eyes upon Him, look full into His face and you will find that the things of earth will acquire a strange new dimness."

The words struck such a chord in Helen's heart that she felt herself often pondering the words in her mind.

The words for this hymn were written in the same week and later, in the same year, the song was published in London. It quickly became a favorite, not only in England, but around the world.

October 7

THE SACRIFICE OF HUMAN LOVE

"Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind'."

(Matthew 22:37)

One day, a lawyer, who was a Pharisee, asked Jesus a question to test Him, saying, "*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?*" and Jesus gave him the answer in the words that we read above.

Maybe we see this truth most manifest in the lives of His children when heavenly love and earthly love come into conflict. An Englishman, Henry Martyn illustrates this so well.

After a brilliant career at Cambridge University, he heard God's call to the mission field and, although many other wonderful career openings were available to him at that time, he rejected them so that he could carry the Gospel to the lost ones, even though it meant going far away from home.

He said, "Here I am, Lord, send me to the ends of the earth, send me to the rough, the savage pagans of the wilderness. I give up all that is called comfort on earth and am willing to face death itself, if it be but for Thy service and for Thy kingdom."

Then something else unexpectedly happened. He fell deeply in love with a girl named Lydia. He told her of his love and that he was under orders from the Lord to go to India and asked her if she would go with him.

Sensing her reticence, he pleaded with her to do so, but she refused, telling him that she would marry him only if he stayed in England. He had to choose between her and India.

Henry Martyn went to India alone and never knew that kind of love again, but God mightily used his servant there.

Such a painful choice does not come to many Christians, but our choices at all times must be subordinate to His will for our lives, no matter what the cost! Only then will we be of real use to Him.

Let us always remember that he has said, "*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*" (Romans 12:1) We always need to remember that this is surely the very least we can do for the One who sacrificed His life that we might experience the joy and wonders of eternal life.

October 8

ONCE A DICE, NOW A TRUMPET!

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

Squatting on the floor, in typical Japanese fashion, Okumura San, a young man in his early twenties, was studying several notebooks, with a frown on his face. The telltale figures in the books revealed considerable financial losses and his mind was exercised as to how could become more skillful. True, he had been playing for high stakes, but having spent all his free time in gambling dens, he had hoped for better results! The metal business in which he was employed paid such a meagre wage that he had to augment his income somehow or other, he desperately thought.

The blaring forth of the radio from the next room suddenly interrupted his train of thought. Why his sister always had to leave the radio on so loud that that everyone could hear was more than he could fathom! As he was about to charge into the next room in angry protest, the clear voice of a soloist echoed through his room.

The words of the song that that was being sung, “Pass me not, O gentle Savior, hear my humble cry. While on others Thou art calling, do not pass me by” caused him to pause. They somehow or other stirred up long-buried memories in his mind. Suddenly, in his imagination, he was back again to the days when he was a boy. For a few months he had attended a Christian Sunday School and had loved the wonderful stories of Jesus that the teacher had told them. Then, suddenly, his father had forbidden him to go any more. “Those people worship a foreign god. You must worship the spirits of your ancestors”, his father had told him in no uncertain terms!

Instead of going to reprimand his sister for leaving the radio on, Okumura San continued to listen to the testimony of a young man that followed. It somewhat disturbed him and he deliberately went into the kitchen so that he could not hear the broadcast. He had in mind to open a bottle of rice wine, so that his mind would feel more at rest.

But during the days that followed, Okumura San began to realize that neither rice wine, nor gambling could meet the need of his hungry heart. So, when Sunday came around, he found himself out

on the street, wandering around, looking for a Christian church in his neighborhood. He then came across an open-air meeting being held by the Salvation Army.

He had never experienced such a gathering and he accepted their invitation to join them in their evening worship in a nearby hall. While listening to what was said, Okumura San found a peace and satisfaction, which was beyond words to describe and he now uses his trumpet in the service of the Lord!

October 9

OUR NEED OF FAITH

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

Most people are well practiced in faith. They sit down on chairs, put keys in locks, turn on electric lights, expecting them all to work, because they have proved that they work in the past. But, in spite of the fact that we have proved God works in the past, how often we are hesitant, in certain circumstances, to believe Him, even although we just need to exercise faith as small as *“a mustard seed”* (Matthew 17:20).

Effective faith is hopeful anticipation. To understand this, maybe we should look back to the time we were very young and were anticipating a birthday which was approaching! We were sure that we would certainly receive some gifts, but some things would no doubt have been a surprise.

In other words, we had assurance and also anticipation! We were excited and most interested at the same time. Faith is the conviction, based on past experience, that God will undertake and provide for us, no matter what happens.

When we need to believe God, appearances should not be taken into consideration. Probabilities are not to be taken into account. The question is whether God is asking us to trust Him for a given task or not. Faith is not waiting for a thing, hoping for a thing, looking for a thing.

True faith counts on God and believes before it sees. Therefore it does not faint, but believes God for the seemingly impossible and praises Him for the deliverance that is on the way. He just wants us to believe that He will give us the power to fulfill that which He has asked us to do.

Faith is the only way that the life of God can enter into our souls. Love, peace and joy will inevitably follow. It won't help for us to seek Him through the door of reason. We will then only fail and experience disappointment. There is nothing which God will not do for those who dare to step out in faith. There will always be a rock beneath their feet.

With God all things are possible. We read in Matthew, chapter 19, verse 26 " ... *Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'*".

*"Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come,
'Tis faith that brought me safe thus far,
And faith will lead me Home!"*

October 10

"THE VOICE OF JOY"

"Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

(Nehemiah 8:10)

As Tomoko Hasui was setting the hair of a client in the hairdressers where she worked, many thoughts were racing through her mind. How miserable she was and how cold and indifferent were those among whom she worked. How she hated living with them too in the dreary rooms above the shop. Alongside of that, she always felt badly that her widowed mother had to work in a bar until late at night. Life with all its burdens was really not worth living.

As those thoughts were racing through Tomoko's mind, the radio that incessantly boomed forth in the shop, indicated that it was six o'clock. Then suddenly she heard something that drew her attention. A young man was speaking and telling of how he had found Christ as his Savior, while in a tuberculosis sanitarium and how his life

had been changed as a result. Where there had been despair and misery, suddenly there was peace and joy.

In fact, Tomoko listened so intently to the young man's words that her hands automatically slowed down and the woman in the chair, who was anxious to be finished, turned her head slightly in impatience. Tomoko pulled herself together, at the same time doing her best to listen to the radio. A girl's voice was telling a similar story, relating how Christ had saved her from the fear of death.

As she listened, tears began to well up in Tomoko's eyes and she could not help but think how that sort of experience was what she had been seeking for so many years. At the end of the program, the lady announcer gave an address where anyone could write in for more information and Tomoko hastily wrote it down, simultaneously furtively glancing at her client, who, to her relief, had settled down into a peaceful doze. After work hours were over, Tomoko wrote a letter to the 'Voice of Joy' broadcasting office, pouring out all her misery.

When the long, pathetic letter was dealt with in the 'Voice of Joy' office, Miss Maeno could not hold back the tears as she read of the girl's aching heart in the closing words of the letter. "Please write and tell me something that will help me out of my dreadful misery. I so much need your help."

So it was that before long, Tomoko received two letters. One was from Miss Maeno, explaining to her the way of salvation and the other was from a minister near her home, inviting her to his church.

Before long, Tomoko found peace in her heart and wrote Miss Maeno, telling her that she had yielded her life to the Savior and that a wonderful joy had entered her heart as a result. She went on to say that she had just one purpose in life and that was to know the Lord Jesus better and at all times to do His will and be a testimony to those around her.

October 11

JESUS ATONEMENT FOR OUR SINS

“ ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:23-26)

We see that in the Old Testament days there was no other atonement for sin, except by the shedding of the blood of an animal, through which God granted the forgiveness of sin. We read that, *“... the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”* (Leviticus 17:11)

How does blood make atonement for sin? The blood represents the sinner's life, which had been infected by his sin and the penalty of which is death. On the other hand, the blood represented the innocent life of the animal, which was sacrificed in place of the guilty person making the offering. The death of the animal fulfilled the penalty of death, which the individual needed to pay and enabled God to grant forgiveness to the sinner. It is only God who can forgive sin and His forgiveness is based on the offering of the sacrifice.

Because of the sacrificial system explained in the Old Testament, the Israelites were generally aware that sin has a penalty and that they themselves were sinners. Many people take Christ's work on the cross for granted, not thinking how costly it was for Jesus to secure our forgiveness – it cost everything He had – His very life itself!

May the Lord help us never to take His death for granted, but to constantly thank Him and praise Him for what He has done for us.

How well this is expressed in 1 Peter 1:18-19 *“knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot.”*

In His death Jesus took on Himself our punishment and Paul gives us the wonderful news that by trusting in Jesus, our sins will be forgiven and we will be made right with God. We will also be empowered to live a life pleasing to Him.

October 12

DAYBREAK!

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

Life had been hard for Sueko Azuma. First there had been the war, bringing with it a shortage of food and long hours of work to enable her to make ends meet. As a result, she had contracted tuberculosis. She had tried to hide her condition at first, realizing that she would likely be put into a dreary hospital. Her heart nearly broke when she thought about who would care for her two little sons if that happened.

Her worst fears were eventually realized, however, and hospitalization resulted. The next blow came when her husband took another woman in her place and she virtually became the cast-out wife! How she hated that woman and how conscious she was of the sin in her heart for that very hatred!

At that time of desperation and utter loneliness, she came into contact with someone who told her about how it was possible to get salvation in Jesus and the words “Come to Me” immediately brought peace into her lonely heart. She was still desperately ill, with little hope of recovery, but her physical condition was no longer her prime concern, because she had found ‘Someone’ who could meet her every need. From then on, her life was dedicated to the one task of being a testimony for Jesus in the circumstances in which He had placed her, no matter what the cost might be.

The day dawned when there was nothing more that the doctor could do for her and she went into the presence of her precious Lord, She left behind little of this world’s goods, but her testimony, in her own words (translated) continues to be a blessing to many:

“The Lord Jesus looked back and saw me and asked, ‘Why do you follow me?’ ‘Trembling, I answered, ‘Please let me, if I am not

in your way'. I could not venture to say any more than that. Jesus turned round and spoke to me again, 'Have you any request?' All flustered, I replied, 'Please save my family. Jesus just quietly said, 'Follow me.'"

"Because Jesus kept walking on and on in silence, my heart began to get ruffled, and I nearly lost sight of Him. But Jesus turned once more and asked me, 'Why do you get so weary and why are you so joyless?' I seized hold of His garment and said, 'Oh, I am so weak, please let me rest, and please talk to me till daybreak.'" – and we know that He did just that!

'Daybreak', as she called it, came for Azuma San one day, after she had been a patient in a tuberculosis hospital for ten years and she joyfully went into the presence of her Savior.

October 13

LORD, SPEAK TO ME, THAT I MAY SPEAK

1. *"Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
In living echoes of Thy tone;
As Thou hast sought, so let me seek
Thy erring children lost and lone.*
2. *"O teach me Lord that I may teach
The precious things Thou dost impart;
And wing my words, that they may reach
The hidden depths of many a heart.*
3. *"O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
The wand'ring and the wav'ring feet;
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
The hung'ring ones with manna sweet.*
4. *"O strengthen me, that while I stand
Firm on the Rock, and strong in Thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea.*
5. *"O use me, Lord, use even me,
Just as Thou wilt, and when and where;
Until Thy blessed face I see,
Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share."*

(Frances R. Havergal)

In addition to the wonderful hymns that she wrote, Miss Havergal wrote many helpful books. She lived a very devoted life and was a great influence in many ways on the hearts of Christians. She was most gifted and truly consecrated to the Lord all her life. She died in Wales on June 3rd. 1879 at the age of only forty-three. She was buried at Astley and, at her request, these Words were engraved on her tombstone. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."

October 14

THE TESTING OF OUR FAITH

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice!"

(Philippians 4:4)

How difficult it is for us to go through trials, but what an encouragement it is to read in His Word that trials are allowed for a definite purpose - to test our faith and that, in the very process of the trial, patience will be produced in us. Not only will patience be produced in us, but God also intends every trial and sorrow to be a pathway to our Savior, so that we may learn more of His love and power than we have ever known before.

God has also promised that with every trial there will be a 'way of escape', for He has said, *"No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Trials and temptations are in fact two sides of the same coin. A single Greek word conveys both ideas in James chapter 1, verse 2 *"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials"* and in verse 13, *"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone."*

How we need to believe what He says to us and to look for the blessing that is bound to come out of every trial. We must never give in to life's troubles. Through them our faith will be developed and

to have it developed is much more precious than gold! Tests in life can teach us to think clearly and to constantly trust in God.

When famine struck, Abram went down to Egypt where there was food. He must have wondered why there would be a shortage of food in the land to which God had called them. This was a real test of his faith and he passed. He did not question God's leading when facing this difficulty.

Next time we face a difficult test, we must not try to second-guess what God is doing. We must rather use the intelligence that God gave us, as Abram did when he temporarily moved to Egypt for a while. When he was there, he made a bad choice out of fear. He asked his wife, Sarah, to tell a half-lie and say that she was his sister. She was actually his half-sister, but also his wife. His intent was to deceive the Egyptians, because he feared that they would kill him to get hold of his beautiful wife.

*"Be this the purpose of my soul,
My solemn, my determined choice:
To yield to God's supreme control,
And in my every trial rejoice."*

October 15

THE LADY IN THE GREY COAT

"Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until He has mercy on us." (Psalm. 123:2)

One day, having some business in the city, a missionary lady arrived at the local train station. There, many people were lined up at the four automatic ticket dispensers and she chose the one where only one lady, wearing a gray coat, was inserting the money for her fare. The 70 yen button lit up, indicating that she was only going one stop further or otherwise just purchasing a platform ticket - the cost would have been the same.

But the lady moved so slowly that the missionary got more and more impatient by the minute. She was sure she was going to miss the next train, if she did not hurry. Finally, the lady reached out her

hand and pushed the platform ticket button. The ticket dropped into the tray below, but she took so long to pick it up!

By this time, the people who had formed a line behind the missionary were curiously craning their necks to ascertain the reason for the delay and, exasperated, the missionary reached over the lady's shoulder to insert her money into the machine.

Feeling somewhat bad at her attitude, she made her way through the crowds in the direction of the platforms and while she did so, prayed, "Lord, please forgive me for my impatience, but you know I have a very full schedule today."

Momentarily, she forgot the lady in the gray coat, but then spotted her going through the wicket and up the stairs and across to the opposite platform. As the missionary went down the steps, the express bound train for Kobe drew into the other platform and suddenly there was an eerie thud and the screeching of brakes. For some reason or other, the express had come to a sudden halt, before fully getting to a normal standstill. She then saw people rushing to the front of the train.

Before the eyes of the dazed missionary, the scene slowly unraveled itself. The lady in the gray coat had in fact bought a ticket for a leap to eternity! She was under the train! "O, Lord what are you trying to say to me?" was the thought that sped through the missionary's mind in those moments. How badly she felt that all she had cared about was that the lady in the gray coat had almost caused her to miss her train and thought nothing about the need of her soul!!

During the year 1978, when this incident happened, some 20,000 people were said to have committed suicide in Japan. For every one who succeeded, there were also said to be some ten who failed. May the Lord help us to be so much in touch with Him that our hearts may be open to anyone around us in need.

October 16

ACCEPTANCE

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Romans 5:1-2)

How important it is to remember that God's acceptance of us is based solely on Christ. On the one hand, we need never doubt that He has accepted us if we have yielded our heart to Him, but on the other hand, we must keep growing spiritually and become more and more like Him day by day. Although we may feel the presence of Christ in our hearts, we still have to face daily problems that, if we face them correctly, will also help us grow spiritually.

If we remember these two sides of the Christian life, we will not grow discouraged as we face the temptations and problems that will inevitably come our way. Instead, we will learn to depend on the power available to us from Christ, who lives in us by the Holy Spirit.

But isn't it wonderful to realize that we are accepted by a God who does not change. God's nature and his promises will never change. God embodies all truth, and He therefore cannot lie and, because God is truth, we can safely believe all of His promises; We don't need to wonder if He will change His plans. To the true seeker who comes to God in faith, God gives an unconditional promise of acceptance and this gives us courage and hope, no matter what happens.

How wonderful it is to realize that He has singled out those who are humble for acceptance. When the greatest event in history, which the Jews had waited for so long, finally occurred, the announcement came to humble shepherds.

The good news about Jesus is that He comes to ordinary people. He comes to anyone with a heart humble enough to accept Him. May the Lord help us not only never to forget this truth for ourselves, but to pass it on to others whenever we have an opportunity to do so. We also have an obligation to accept each other. He has said to us, *"... receive one another just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God"* (Romans 15:7).

We must always remember that everyone can have a place in God's family. The challenge that comes to us is whether we can do anything to help those, with whom we come into contact, to gain acceptance by our wonderful heavenly Father.

The wholehearted acceptance of others needs to be part of our outreach as believers. If we love Him, we need to tell them what He means to us and to share with them the truths of the Bible. As we grow in grace and come to know Jesus better, we become more capable of doing so. May the Lord help us to do just that every day of our lives, so that we may be a real testimony to others.

October 17

AN ASSIGNMENT THAT CHANGED A LIFE

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

Fusano Tanabe very much enjoyed school and was a diligent student, but one day, in the Ethics class, she received an assignment, which she did not know how to tackle. They asked her to write a paper on the life of Jesus Christ!

All Fusano knew was that 'Jesus Christ' was the god of the Americans and, as she returned home from school that day, she was puzzled to know how she could possibly tackle such an assignment.

She knew quite a lot about her grandmother's religion, called, Tenrikyo (the religion of heaven & earth). That god was obvious, because it was on a god-shelf and her grandmother had to wake it up every morning, by clapping her hands. Fusano had difficulty seeing the benefit of a god who slept most of the time and had thus decided that she would grow up an atheist.

On arrival home from school one day, Fusano looked through all the leaflets that had been delivered at the house and happened to find one that caught her attention. It was an advertisement concerning special Christian meetings for high school students to be held at a church in Tamba, a place about 15 kilometers from her home. It was a long way away, but Fusano reckoned that to go there was her only hope of completing her assignment.

When she got there, she started to fire questions at the minister, but his answers were somehow not exactly what she wanted. He gave her a copy of the New Testament, however, wisely saying, "Read this Book for yourself and I think you will discover all you need to know".

Desperate to complete her assignment, Fusano started to read it from the beginning. When she got as far as the Words, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" the Holy Spirit gripped her heart and suddenly she knew that this was the true religion and that God was now speaking to her personally.

So it was that before her assignment was completed, the Living God became hers and from then on she gladly regularly cycled the fifteen kilometers to the church to obtain spiritual food for her soul. She also attended evening classes after she left school and graduated as a teacher, with the purpose of leading handicapped children to her Savior.

Who knows what spiritual blessing may result from a leaflet prayerfully put into an unknown mailbox!

October 18

AFTER THE SORROW, JOY!

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance." (Psalm 42:5)

How easy it is to be weighed down by sorrow! Sorrow may come to us in various ways, through pain, loss, disappointment, loneliness or even ill health. But how wonderful it is to realize that God's purpose in each sorrow is to bring us nearer to Himself. We should therefore be careful not to allow it to drive us further from Him.

Sorrows are too precious to be wasted. They will, if we let them, bring us nearer than ever before to the only One who can really help us at our deepest time of need. Sorrow is meant to be a giver of strength and it also equips us to give strength to others at their time of need. How beautiful are the Words in Psalm 61:2 – *"From the*

end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

There is a loneliness in unshared sorrow. Sorrow that has an audience can frequently find relief by telling its story to others. There is no need to be cast down. There is only reason to be cast down, if we are unsaved or living in sin as a Christian. Even then, our sorrow can be dealt with if put things right with the Lord. Let's remember that sorrow stretches our hearts, so that there is more room for joy and also that faith can even see God through the eye of a storm!

We may well experience sorrow while we are here on earth, but how wonderful it is to know that one day sorrow will be no more!

We read in Revelation, chapter 7, verse 17, *"... God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."* This passage tells of those who have been faithful through the ages and are singing before God's throne. Their tribulation and sorrows are over. There will be no more tears because of sin or death and suffering are something of the past.

*"When a sorrow comes upon you that no other soul can share,
And the burden is too heavy for the human heart to bear,
There is One whose grace can comfort,
if you'll give Him an abode,
There's a Burden-bearer ready, if you trust Him with the load.
For the precious promise reaches to the depths of human woe,
That however deep the waters they shall never overflow."*

Let's never waste our sorrow. It is intended to draw us nearer to God and not further away from Him.

October 19

I KNOW HE CARES!

"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:6-7)

When the postmaster suddenly summoned Mitsuko Tanaka into his office, she was convinced that she must have done something

wrong. "Miss Tanaka, my father and mother have asked to meet you," he told her in a very friendly tone of voice. "Would it be convenient for them to see you tonight?" Mitsuko was quite taken aback, but politely acquiesced. But all day long she wondered why they wanted to see her, when she was only the office girl! That evening, she was utterly amazed when it emerged that the Toyama family were in fact considering her as a bride for their son! So it was that at the age of twenty-two Mitsuko Tanaka became Mitsuko Toyama.

She took easily to married life, always having liked working in the house and it was great to be able to lean on someone as strong as her husband. But everything did not work out as well as she had expected. As time went by, she had a constant physical struggle which made life very difficult. Her circulation was poor, her feet were always cold, she had pain in her arteries and her tear-ducts stopped functioning. As a result, Mitsuko found herself more in hospital than out.

Hard enough as her physical problems were to endure, more difficult was the fact that her husband began to reject her and started an illicit relationship with her sister. It was just more than she could bear and her very helplessness to do anything about the situation drove her to distraction.

Physically and mentally drained, Mitsuko lay on her hospital bed. Life was just not worth living and the uppermost thought in her mind was as to how she could effectively end her life. But the problem was how to do so! A Christian fellow-patient, however, sensing her need, arranged for the Evangelist, who regularly visited the hospital, to speak to her. Mitsuko found comfort in what she heard and occasionally attended the Christian meetings that were held in the hospital. But somehow she just could not apply the Gospel to herself. God seemed to be so far away from her.

Still convinced that the only way out of her problems was to commit suicide, Mitsuko wandered out into the hospital grounds, seeking a spot where she could put an end to her life. "No one cares for me in this miserable world," she said to herself. Then, suddenly, she heard a voice singing the words that they had sung in the Christian meeting that she had attended the previous day. "O yes, He cares; I know He cares His heart is touched with my grief. When the days are weary, the long nights dreary, I know my Savior cares."

Suddenly, all the misery of the past years seemed to drop away and in those wonderful moments everything seemed so different and she was able to open her heart to the Living God.

October 20

I'D RATHER HAVE JESUS

1. *"I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold,
I'd rather be His than have riches untold;
I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands,
I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hand.*

Chorus

*"Than to be the king of a vast domain
Or be held in sin's dread sway;
I'd rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.*

2. *"I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause,
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I'd rather have Jesus than world-wide fame,
I'd rather be true to His holy name.*

3. *"He's fairer than lilies of rarest bloom,
He's sweeter than honey from out the comb;
He's all that my hungering spirit needs,
I'd rather have Jesus and let Him lead."*

(Rhea Miller)

Beverley Shea, while attending a Bible College in Canada, was offered a contract to sing on one of the radio stations. On requesting that he might be permitted to sing Gospel songs, he was told that he might just use one occasionally.

Desiring to be used by the Lord, Beverley did not know quite what to do. He suddenly remembered, however, that one day, when his mother had been praying, she had placed a poem, written by Rhea Miller, on his piano, asking him to try to put music to it. As he began to play, a melody came to him and this wonderful hymn was born.

A short time later he was offered a position with a Chicago radio station where he could use the Gospel songs he loved so well. While there, he met Billy Graham and a wonderful relationship developed.

October 21

BLESSED ASSURANCE!

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

(John 5:24)

It is so easy sometimes, even after we have the assurance that we have been saved by the Precious Blood, to lose our assurance of what God has done for us and even doubt our salvation. The devil is always glad if our faith waivers. If we are tempted in regard to our assurance, then we must immediately turn to the Word of God, take hold of His promises once again and believe afresh on the work of the Holy Spirit, because we know, *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."* (Romans 8:16)

Our union with the blessed Holy Spirit brings about assurance. When we trust Him, the wonderful assurance that entered into the heart of Paul, when he said, *"...I suffer these things ... for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."* (2 Timothy 1:12), will enter into our hearts too.

Firm assurance is based on God's Word. God gave the Israelites a pillar of cloud and of fire, so that they would know that day and night God was with them on their journey to the Promised Land. But He has given us the Bible as a reassurance of His Presence. That was something that the Israelites did not have. We can always look to His precious Word, day and night, to know that He is with us to help us on our journey!

Assurance does not lie in what we are or what we have done. It lies in what God has done for us in His wonderful plan of salvation. Firm assurance is always based on God's Word. We must never seek any other ground of assurance than what God has told us.

God gave the Hebrews a cloud. Our Rock is Christ. Our assurance may ebb and flow, but it will not do so, if it is grounded in Him. We must never forget that our faith is based on His promises, which are to be found in His Word. *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may have eternal*

life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:13)

Let us resolve to be those who do not doubt, but by faith, hold on to the wonderful promises given to us by God in His Word!

October 22

THE WORD OF GOD BRINGS BLESSING

“ ... The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12)

One day, when Nishio San went to visit his wife, who was in hospital, sick with tuberculosis, he was somewhat surprised when she handed him a pile of religious books, with the request that he should burn them.

He did not ask why, assuming that she had found that the various religions that she had tried did not help her. He had always told her that religion did not work. Maybe she had come to her senses at last too, he reckoned. With little more thought, therefore, he left the hospital that day and did as his wife requested.

Three weeks later, his busy life was interrupted by an unexpected phone call from the hospital, telling him that he needed to go there immediately, because his wife had had a sudden lung hemorrhage and had died!

When he entered the room, he found that the hospital authorities had already arranged for her personal possessions to be burnt, as was the custom, so that the tuberculosis germs would not be spread.

However, before she died, he was told that she had requested that one of the books should not be burnt with the other items, but be handed to her husband. Nishio San sadly put it in his pocket and left the hospital, realizing that if that book had meant a lot to his wife, the very least he could do was to take a little time to read it himself.

He discovered that it was the Christian's Book, called the Bible, but, as he tried to read it, he found that he could not understand

much of what was written there. However, before long, he discovered that a lady in the office where he worked, was also in the habit of reading the Bible and she gladly took time to explain its contents to him.

As a result, Nishio came to accept the truth that was to be found in the Bible for himself and took Jesus as his personal Savior. He subsequently attended the local church and some time later felt God was leading him to ask the Christian lady in the office to become his wife!

Have you ever realized how powerful the Word of God is and what wonderful blessing can result from giving a copy of even a portion of it to someone? May the Lord help us to seize every opportunity to be bearers of this precious seed of Life.

October 23

HOW TO HANDLE ANGER

“... do not let the sun go down on your wrath.” (Ephesians 4:26)

The temptation to be angry at some circumstances that come our way is natural, but an unforgiving spirit results in darkness in our walk with God. Unresolved anger arising out of the past can do much damage to present relationships.

Let us not forget that uncontrolled anger will inevitably lead to sin. If someone suggests that we have done something wrong, rather than deny it, we should seek to correct it.

Anger's choice tool is very often the tongue. We read of this in the very strong language of James, chapter 3, verse 6 “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.”

THEREFORE HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE OUR ANGER?

1. ACKNOWLEDGE IT – It won't help pretending that it is not there. The Bible tells us, *“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”*. (1 John 1:6)

2. SLOW DOWN – We are told that - *“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy.”* (Psalm 103:8)

3. CHANGE OUR WAY OF THINKING – “... *be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” (Romans 12:2)

4. CONFESS OUR ANGER BEFORE GOD AND REPENT OF IT – “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” (1 John 1:9)

5. WALK IN THE SPIRIT – “... *for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness and truth, finding what is acceptable to the Lord and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.*” (Ephesians 5:9-11)

God is not only aware of what is needed for our spiritual development, but He is also well capable of providing it, if we just look to Him.

But we can always remember that anger does not have to lead to sin. There is a place for righteous indignation. Christians are right to be upset at sin and injustice and should take a stand against them. However, we must be sure that our anger is directed toward the right issues.

October 24

CHRIST OR BUDDHA?

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1)

“Chieko, we are going to spend an interesting day on Sunday at your aunt’s house. She makes the most delicious food. You must come with us, eh”, Mrs. Okada said to her 15-year-old daughter one morning, just as she was about to leave for school. Chieko just smiled and nodded in a very noncommittal way. The usual weekly battle to try to prevent her from attending church was on again, she grimly thought. As she moved towards the door, her mother added, “Chieko, Sunday is the only day we can spend together as a family. Please don’t disappoint us this time!”

The next attack came that very same evening from her grandmother, just as she was doing her homework. “Chieko, I am pretty sure that your mother has finished cooking the rice. Get a

bowful and set it before the Buddhist god-shelf. Buddha also needs fresh water every day, remember. If you take care of Buddha, he will take care of you”, she added. Chieko loved her grandmother and had always done her best to please her, but why could she not understand that she just could not do that as a Christian, she wondered.

Chieko had first come into contact with Christianity at the age of ten, when she had been invited to church by her close friend, Yumiko. But it was not until three years later that she had accepted Jesus as her Savior and received the assurance that she was a child of God. On that occasion she had attended a special meeting in the church and when the evangelist made an appeal at the end of the service, she had stepped forward and yielded her life to God. Great joy flooded heart and she would never forget that wonderful day.

From that time on, however, a battle had started in her home. They just could not understand her desire to follow her Savior and when she graduated from high school, their opposition reached its peak. Her parents, who were usually loving towards her, strongly opposed her desire to dedicate her life to serve the Lord. But Chieko pressed on in faith and joined the office staff of a Christian organization.

Two years later, she became a student at Kansai Bible College and is now the wife of a minister, Rev. Kawaharasaki, and they now unitedly serve the Lord day by day.

Maybe you know someone who is living in a divided household. If so, may the Lord help you to be a source of encouragement to the one, who, in spite of opposition, is seeking to follow Him.

October 25

HIS HANDS MAKE WHOLE!

“... He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole. He shall deliver you in six troubles, yes, in seven no evil shall touch you.” (Job 5:18-19)

God does not permit a sorrow to come our way without providing strength sufficient to bear it. In fact, it is important to remember that through the gateway of sorrow, we pass into a richer and fuller life.

We do not always have to understand God's ways with us though. He does not expect us always to understand, only to trust Him. One day we will see the glory of God in the very things that we did not understand.

One of the dangers of sorrow, however, is that it may lead us to neglect our duty. God does not wish us to waste our life in tears. He wants us rather to put our grief into a new energy for service. It is His will that we turn away from our sorrow and go on with the duties that await us. God's work must never be allowed to suffer while we feel sorry for ourselves. We must remember that there are so many around us who are also suffering and in need of our help.

Sorrow is not the last word, it is just a preparation for a deeper walk with Him.

We should therefore be careful not to waste our sorrow. It is always intended to draw us nearer to God and not further away from Him. What is lost sorrow? It is sorrow out of which we fail to get the blessing which God meant to come out of it. Out of every sorrow God means that there should come submission and a drawing nearer to Him.

We should never shut ourselves up with our sorrow. In the midst of great suffering we can be tempted to isolate ourselves. However, we must always get on with our duty. Sorrow tends to be selfish, refusing to be comforted. In such a case, we will surely miss the very lesson that God wants to teach us out of it.

Sapphires and rubies are very beautiful, but they are all the result of fire. These jewels are produced out of very ordinary ingredients, which have been subjected to tremendous pressure and terrific heat. We need to accept things that we cannot understand and patiently wait until He reveals to us the purpose of the sorrow.

The cloud that has settled down on us at the time when we are experiencing sorrow has a silver lining. God is in it and the other side is radiant with His glory!

*"I do not understand, Lord
But one day I will see
Your loving Hand was taking pains
To mold and fashion me."*

October 26

TO A SUMMERLAND OF SONG

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff,
they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)*

As Nobuo lay on his hospital bed, sick with lung tuberculosis, the all he could think of was whether his wife would have time to visit him that day. He was so lonely and desperately wanted someone to talk to.

To his relief, Yukiko came during the afternoon. He had never appreciated her so much as now that he was sick. He expected that the conversation would, as usual, mainly center around the children and was quite surprised when she started to talk about a subject they rarely discussed - religion! They had been nominal adherents of Tenrikyo (the religion of heaven and earth) for a long time. But Yukiko went on to tell him that she had a friend who was a Christian and had gone with her to one of their meetings.

Nobuo could see that his wife was enthusiastic about the idea of becoming a Christian, but he certainly did not want to get involved in a foreign religion. The idea of gaining salvation without working for it sounded very strange, he told her frankly.

Yukiko said little more on the subject that day, but from then on every time she visited Nobuo she told him a little more about her new-found faith, praying that God would open his eyes to the simple truths of salvation through Jesus.

Somewhat curious to hear more, Nobuo discovered that there was a weekly Christian meeting for the patients in the hospital and he started to attend. The Words from the Bible that were spoken there somehow eased the fear in his heart, especially in the middle of the night when he lay awake, wondering if he would ever make it through the tuberculosis and asthma from which he was suffering.

The next time the evangelist entered Nobuo's room, he had the joy of leading Nobuo to the Savior. From then on, although his physical condition did not soon improve, Nobuo knew for sure that, whether he lived or died, he belonged to the Lord.

It was wonderful to be one with his wife in their faith and to know that the very circumstances which were pressing so hard upon him, were the tools that God was using to fashion him for eternity.

October 27

JESUS LOVER OF MY SOUL

1. *“Jesus, Lover of my soul, Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll, While the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Savior, hide, ‘Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide, Oh, receive my soul at last!*
2. *“Other refuge have I none; Hangs my helpless soul on Thee:
Leave, ah, leave me not alone, Still support and comfort me!
All my trust on Thee is stayed, All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenseless head, With the shadow of Thy wing.*
3. *“Thou, O Christ, art all I want; More than all in Thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint, Heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is Thy name, I am all unrighteousness:
Vile and full of sin I am, Thou art full of truth and grace.*
4. *“Plenteous grace with Thee is found, Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound, Make and keep me pure within:
Thou of life the Fountain art, Freely let me take of Thee;
Spring Thou up within my heart, Rise to all eternity.”*

(Charles Wesley)

While Charles Wesley was conducting one of his open-air meetings in Ireland, he faced so much resistance from those who took exception to his views that they assaulted him. Unable to withstand the mob, he had to flee for his life. He took refuge in a nearby house and, just moments before his assailants caught up with him, the kind-hearted farmer’s wife hid him in the milk house.

When the mob reached her door, Mrs. Moore gave them refreshments and then went into the milk house on the pretext of getting some cold milk for them. She then advised Charles Wesley to get out of the window and hide outside. He managed to do so and, while waiting for his assailants to disappear, he took out a piece of paper and a pencil and wrote the words of this beautiful hymn.

Dr. George Duffield, the author of another famous hymn, “Stand up, stand up for Jesus”, said that if there is anything in Christian experience of affliction and prosperity or of life and death, it is to be found in this hymn.

October 28

FAITH

“Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes’.” (Mark 9:23)

Some things look so impossible to us that we are almost afraid to ask God for them. But we need to remember that such difficult requests give Him a chance to magnify Himself and to fulfill His promises. God does not give us faith to play with. It is a sword with which we can fight the enemy. He came into our hearts to fight our battles for us. We must hold fast to our faith (a) in the Father’s Love, (b) in the cleansing Blood of Jesus Christ and (c) in the sanctifying Power of the Holy Spirit.

Ineffective faith seldom goes beyond words. It is easy to talk a lot about faith, but just talking is not enough. We may know all the right words to say, but if our lives do not reflect our faith in God and our daily lives demonstrate that we are living our faith, they will have no real meaning. To maintain our faith when situations are difficult, we have to keep our eyes on Jesus’ power, rather than on our own weaknesses.

Is there something in your life for which you need to trust God? If so, take Him at His Word and a miracle will take place in your life today.

It is said that the battle of the Marne was won by a decision on the part of General Foch, whose sudden and daring movement outflanked the enemy and changed the whole tide of the campaign. His message to field-Marshal Joffre, as he began the battle was, “My left wing is broken, my centre is shaken, the situation is grave, but I have given the order to advance.” It was that advance that won the day and saved Paris!

As we read these words, we cannot be help but recall the wonderful words in Philippians chapter 1, verses 27-8, “... *with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries*”.

Effective faith is more concerned with its life than with its size. We read in Matthew chapter 17, verse 20 that Jesus said, “... *if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.*”

A mustard seed is very small, but it is alive and growing. It is almost invisible at first, but will begin to grow, first under the ground and then above. Like a small seed, a small amount of faith in God will take root and grow. We don't need more faith, so long as we have a tiny seed of faith. If it is alive, it cannot help but grow. We always need to remember that faith in His guidance can lead us through even the darkest night!

October 29

LOST AT THE HOSPITAL GATE

"I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you." (John 14:18)

Five-year-old Yasuko walked to the Buddhist temple, holding a bowl of rice in one hand and a ten yen coin in the other. She placed the rice on the altar and laid the money down beside it. Confident that the gods would bless her, Yasuko then ran off to school with a smile on her face. But Yasuko soon began to realize that her confidence was somehow misplaced. First of all, her mother, who had been divorced when she was three years old, suddenly took up with another man and an unhappy relationship developed. Yasuko kept out of their way as much as possible. Then, when she was seven, her mother arranged for her to deliver newspapers and baby-sit to supplement the family income.

As far as Yasuko was concerned, the happiest hours of the day were spent at school. She loved to study and her heart was nearly broken when her mother decided, when she was 14, that she should leave school and find a job. Yasuko's 16-year-old brother was already working in the large city of Osaka and so it was decided that Yasuko should join him there.

There was an opening for an office worker in Kanaoka Hospital and Yasuko decided to apply for the position. Thinking that she knew where the hospital was, she made her way there. But when she got to the gate of the hospital, she was shocked to see that she had mistakenly arrived at Kinki Chuo Hospital instead! Quite confused, Yasuko stood for a moment, on the verge of tears, when a young woman asked her if she could help and, on hearing her problem, said, "I am a hospital evangelist and know where Kanaoka Hospital

is. I can easily take you there." During the time it took to get there, Kazuko Okamoto spoke briefly to Yasuko about the Savior and gave her address to her, telling her to write her, if she could be of any further help.

Still very young, Yasuko was lonely in her new surroundings and soon did so, telling her newfound friend how she felt. Part of Miss Okamoto's reply contained the words, "I will not leave you orphans" and Yasuko was deeply moved by those words. She had never really known the love of an earthly father and now she was hearing of a heavenly Father who loved her. A strange feeling came over Yasuko and from that moment on she strove to attain a relationship with Him.

Miss Okamoto sent her a Bible and before long Yasuko realized what a sinner she was and confessed her sins to her heavenly Father and also became a staunch member of her local church. Then, when she was 35, she felt called to minister to Japanese living overseas and spent much time in England, Brazil and America, telling them of the wonderful experience she had, when she was lost at the hospital gate!

May the Lord help us too to reach out to any we come across who are lost, no matter where they may be in this needy world.

October 30

DEATH

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff,
they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)*

Surely the greatest loss one can experience is that of a life-partner, who has shared all our joys and sorrows for so many years. How deep such a loss goes can only be adequately expressed by one who has personally suffered it.

Mary Pennington, who so deeply loved her husband, that after his 'home-call' she was able to let him go without great grief. In fact, she testified that her spirit ascended with his in the moment that his spirit left his body. She saw him safe in his heavenly home and rejoiced with him as she glimpsed the glory of that which awaited

him. She said that her joy at seeing him then was greater than that which she had ever experienced in his physical presence.

The only thing that we need to remember is that no matter what happens, death is unavoidable for all of us, unless Jesus returns before we die. So we must be prepared for this event! All of us die physically, but Jesus died so that we would not have to die spiritually. We can, therefore, have the utmost confidence in His saving work for us – past, present and future! In addition to that, He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us deal with present sin and to be our Comforter along life's journey.

Every beat of the pulse declares that time is passing. At every beat, the heart has one less to give. Time is ever coming nearer to its end. May God help us to spend those heart-beats in a way that will glorify Him.

*"I watched a sail until it dropped from sight
Over the rounding sea. A gleam of white,
A last far-flashed farewell, and, like a thought
Slipped out of mind, it vanished and was not!
"Yet to the helmsman standing at the wheel
Broad seas still stretched beneath the gliding keel.
Disaster? Change? He felt no slightest sign,
Nor dreamed he of that far horizon line.
So may it be, perchance, when down the tide
Or dear ones vanish, peacefully they glide
On level seas, nor mark the unknown bound.
We call it death – to them 'tis life beyond."*

October 31

THE THRESHOLD WAS TOO HIGH

"Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

(Isaiah 55: 6-7)

Kyoko Misu was brought up to be a Buddhist and was used to praying at the god-shelf in her home. Her husband was an easy-going person and their marriage was a fairly happy one. The only

thing that bothered Kyoko was that they both lived virtually separate lives, because he left home early in the morning and came back late at night. Therefore, she often felt very lonely.

There was a church near their home, however, and, although Kyoko was curious as to what they did there and liked the sound of the singing she heard when she walked past, she could never pluck up the courage to go inside. It seemed to her that the threshold was just too high for her to get over.

Then, one day, Kyoko saw an advertisement offering English classes in the church and decided it would be a good opportunity for her children to learn English. So she plucked up courage and ventured inside. As a result, they started attending the English classes and, because her children were still small, she accompanied them, and also listened to the short Gospel message that was given at the end of each lesson.

A year later, her father died and Kyoko missed him a lot. There was a sudden emptiness in her heart and she desperately needed someone with whom she could discuss her problems. Maybe the minister of the church could help, she thought, and began to attend the worship services. God's Word began to take root in her heart and before long she yielded her life to the Savior. She grew spiritually by leaps and bounds and was so overjoyed that her husband did not oppose her new-found faith.

Kyoko very much wanted to be baptized into the Christian faith, but did not want to do so until her husband became a Christian too. She invited him to attend church with her and was most surprised that he agreed to do so. Within six months, he had changed so radically that they were able to be baptized together. When she told the English teacher the news, he was overjoyed and they rejoiced together at the wonderful way in which the Lord had worked in her and her husband's lives.

Maybe you know someone who is lonely and longing for company. If so, why not reach out in love to that person. It may well be that by so doing, you will be instrumental in them finding the Savior.

November 1

DISOBEDIENCE RECEIVES GOD'S JUDGMENT

"Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them'." (Numbers 20:12)

If we read earlier in Numbers chapter 20, we will see that the Israelites desperately needed water and so they bitterly complained to Moses, when they sought his help.

As a result Moses and Aaron left the assembly and fell on their faces outside the door of the tabernacle and the Lord appeared to them and we read in Numbers, chapter 20, verses 7-8 the following words. *"Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals.'"*

But, if we read further, we see that Moses was really angry with the Israelites, calling them 'rebels', and instead of speaking to the rock, as the Lord had commanded him, he lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. The water came out abundantly and the congregation and their animals drank.

God was angry with Moses and said to him, *"Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."* (Numbers 20:12)

We may not always understand why God tells us to do a certain thing in a certain way, but this shows us how important it is to implicitly obey Him. It is likely that Moses was frustrated because the people had nagged him and did not trust him to provide them with water. However, as the leader of the nation, Moses was supposed to be a good example for the people to follow. Because of his great responsibility, God could not let him off lightly. By striking the rock, Moses had disobeyed God's direct command and dishonored Him in the presence of the people.

Let us not forget that disobedience can limit future opportunities, as it did in the case of Moses. May the Lord help us to obey the Lord, no matter what our inclinations are, realizing that He alone knows what the future holds for us.

*"I heard the call, 'Come follow' - that was all
My gold grew dim, my soul went after Him
I rose and followed - that was all,
Who would not follow if they hear His call?"*

November 2

WRITTEN OFF BY HIS FATHER

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." (Job 13:15)

"You are really not strong enough to be educated, you know. You should rather look after the younger children, I think," said Mr. Taira to his son, Kazuo, one day. Kazuo was only nine at the time, but the impact of those words were so strong that in his heart he gave up all hope of ever attending school. But when he was fourteen, his father agreed that he should go to the big city of Osaka to find a job, if he could. The only opening he could find was to do the cleaning at a tailor's shop.

Long hours of work and a dissipated life-style, however, were too much for his frail body and a lung hemorrhage resulted. He was speedily hospitalized and diagnosed as having tuberculosis. Kazuo was physically exhausted and frightened. Patients were dying all around him and the fear of death constantly filled his heart.

Hearing of the Christian meetings that were being held in the hospital, however, Kazuo, in desperation, dragged his weary body to the meeting place. There he heard about Jesus for the first time in his life. After the meeting, Evangelist Karasawa, realizing how little Kazuo could take in of what he had been saying, gave him a dictionary and a Bible and encouraged him to learn to read and write.

Soon after his 21st birthday, Kazuo's father became sick and he went back home. Although his father soon recovered, he did not feel like going back to the hospital. The only desire in his heart

then was to learn to read and write. So it was that, at the age of 21, Kazuo became a third grade student at an elementary school and, after school, put in long hours doing odd jobs to earn some money. Then, one day, Kazuo came across a church in his neighborhood and was reminded of the message of hope that he had heard while in hospital. He started to attend the meetings and a few months later found Jesus as his personal Savior.

But a relapse of tuberculosis resulted in him having to return to hospital. Kazuo was most discouraged, having thought that after he became a Christian there would be no more trials in his life. He was in fact so discouraged that he wanted to die, but the hospital evangelist was there to encourage him and eighteen months later he was discharged and immediately went back to his local church. Kazuo was somewhat surprised when the minister approached him one day and asked if she could arrange a marriage for him with a young lady in the church. When Kazuo was introduced to the lady in question, he was overjoyed, seeing in her one who deeply loved his Savior.

For eighteen years Kazuo and Sugako shared a happy married life and the Lord gave them a son. But when she was only 44 years old, Sugako died. Kazuo was desolate, but knew that God would be his Partner and the words he constantly clung on to were, *“Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.”*

November 3

ALL THE WAY MY SAVIOR LEADS ME

1. *“All the way my Savior leads me;
What have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy,
Who through life has been my Guide?
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort,
Here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate’r befall me,
Jesus doeth all things well.*

2. *"All the way my Savior leads me,
Cheers each winding path I tread,
Gives me grace for every trial,
Feeds me with the Living Bread.
Though my weary steps may falter,
And my soul athirst may be,
Gushing from the Rock before me,
Lo! a spring of joy I see.*

3. *"All the way my Savior leads me;
Oh, the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised
In my Father's house above.
When my spirit, clothed, immortal,
Wings its flight to realms of day,
This my song thro' endless ages,
Jesus led me all the way."*

(Fanny Jane Crosby -1820-1915)

Although blinded as the result of eye inflammation, when she was just six weeks old, Fanny Crosby wrote more than nine thousand hymns during her lifetime.

She felt that her blindness was a gift from God to help her write the hymns that just flowed from her mind.

She is said to have written three new hymns each week during much of her adult life!

November 4

OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

(2 Corinthians 4:17)

How often we feel that our afflictions are working against us, but God says that they are working for us! He says that they are producing a glory that will last for ever. Can we believe that? If we do, and compare our trials with the eternal weight of glory that He has promised, we will come to the realization that the glory is

so much better to have. In fact, all that God allows to happen to us in this world is to bring us to the place where we will trust Him perfectly. How well the Psalmist got across this truth in the Words, *"This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life."* (Psalm 119:50)

There may be something that seems to be working against us today. Perhaps a lack of some opportunity that we covet. It may be ill health from which we cannot seem to escape. It may be a friendship that just does not work out as we desire it to. We know that we should trust God, but how difficult it is to realize that these afflictions really are working for us and not against us!

If we see things from God's point of view, we will come to realize that our deepest disappointments are "but for a moment" and that the seeming affliction that we are experiencing is just a part of His perfect plan for our lives.

It is said that zebra mussels, if unchecked, could spread to two-thirds of Canada's waterways, causing billions of dollars of damage. But researchers have found that the mussels are adept at filtering toxic substances from the water and one such mussel can filter as much as two quarts of water a day! May the Lord help us to apply this illustration to the problems that come into our lives and realize that they may well conceal blessings from the Lord!

God never lets us go through suffering without intending to bring some great blessing as a result, which otherwise we would never have experienced. While we are passing through the suffering, we will rarely understand His purpose in it all, because He is teaching us to trust Him, when we don't understand. We should remember that He has said in His Word, *"What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this."* (John 13:7)

We should also remember that He sometimes needs to take us into the dark to draw us closer to Himself and to deepen us spiritually. After the darkness has gone, there will be nothing left behind but a memory and, because we experienced it, we will be more conformed to the image of the Lord.

Our attitude in affliction should be that, although we don't understand it, we press on in faith, trusting Him and knowing that what He has sent is for our blessing!

November 5

THE TEA THAT WAS NEVER DRUNK

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

“What about having a cup of tea now?” Yataro Ito said to his wife, after they had spent some time studying the Bible and praying together one morning. Kishiko also wanted some refreshments and gladly made her way to the kitchen.

As she did so, her thoughts went back to the past and how she rejoiced that she and her precious husband were one in the Lord. She could not help but wonder how they had ever thought that chanting a so-called sacred Buddhist formula over and over again could achieve salvation for the soul. The priest had even maintained that it could bring about the salvation of the world. How absurd it was!

Kishiko had realized that she was a sinner and had claimed Christ’s forgiveness early in their married life, but her husband had resisted the Christian message for many years and had refused to accompany her to church. But she had prayed earnestly for his salvation!

After Yataro had retired from work, however, he had become sick and very concerned about his health. As a result, his antagonism towards Christianity had gradually lessened and when a special evangelistic meeting had been held at her church, he agreed to accompany her. That very night Yataro trusted the Lord as his Savior! From then on, his life radically changed and even his poor-health had not deterred him from serving the Lord. He would talk for hours on the phone, witnessing to friends and relatives. He also prayed daily from 5 a.m. every morning for unsaved family members and taped services from the radio to pass on to others. As a result, many found the Savior.

When Kishiko finished the preparation of the green tea and ‘namagashi’ (bean-paste cakes), she returned to the bedroom, but as she did so, her heart missed a beat. At a glance, she wondered if her beloved husband would need them. When she called the

doctor, Yataro was confirmed to be dead and Kishiko knew that he was already enjoying better things, which his Heavenly Father had prepared for him. Although she wept, thanksgiving ascended from her heart to the Lord for all His goodness to them both down the years and for the peace He gave her at all times.

May the Lord help us to be ready when 'the call' comes to us or to our loved ones, no matter what our circumstances may be.

November 6

THE BURDEN-BEARER

"Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

How human it is to want to escape the burdens that come into our lives from time to time! But in fact it is only when we come to realize that there is something in our lives that we ourselves cannot bear, that we have a desire to take it to the Lord. We then know that there is no other way! We must simply take it to Jesus, who specializes in lifting burdens and carrying crosses. When we lay it at His Feet, He will, in exchange, give us His sweet peace and show us how to solve our problem too.

Having laid it there, we need to remember that we have done so and, in doing so, have obeyed His Word, which says, "**... casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.**" (1 Peter 5:7) The Greek word for care/anxiety is 'muerhoimuna', which has the meaning of "dividing the mind", "causing anxiety", "anxious thought" or "to have one's thoughts occupied with". All those will be gone, if we follow His will for us.

But we have to realize that He did not take the burdens away; they are still ours to bear. But from the moment we give them to Him, He starts to carry their weight. If we feel that we are carrying the burdens ourselves again, it is because we are not trusting Him to carry them for us. Then we need to run again into His Presence and exchange the burdens for His peace and joy in our hearts.

The Lord's purpose is to cause us to realize that every burden which comes across our pathway is intended to be a means of drawing us closer to Himself and that there is no burden which

will not become a blessing to us, if we take it out of His nail-pierced Hands.

We read in Galatians chapter 6, verse 5 – “... *each one shall bear his own load.*” This we doubtlessly have to work at, but He will sustain us while we do so. The load which He has laid on us will never be too much for us, because He will give us strength for every moment that we are bearing it. His grace is always sufficient!

How wonderful it is know that if we cast our burden on the Lord, He will always sustain it and us too. For He has said in Psalm 55, verse 22: “*Cast your burden on the Lord, And He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved.*”

November 7

LOST FOR THREE DAYS

“The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”

(Psalm 19:7)

“Can’t you do anything more for my son, doctor?” Mrs. Tsuchihashi pleaded, on hearing that she must take him home from the hospital uncured. As she saw the look on the doctor’s face, she knew the answer. But she just could not fathom how a seemingly slight accident in the school gymnasium could have caused such a drastic change in their happy home. After months of intensive tests, they had still not got to the root of her son’s problem. In fact, it seemed that the treatment was making him worse, rather than better!

His father, who was a professor of chemistry at Kobe University, took it particularly badly. He could not bear to think that his son, who had shown such outstanding ability at school, would not be able to excel scholastically in the future. His mother, who had been a Christian for years, was driven to her knees in desperation. In faith, she began a meeting in their home, at which many neighbors attended and were blessed.

But as her faith grew stronger, her son’s condition deteriorated so much that he was constantly depressed. The brain damage, which in the beginning had only caused impairment in his physical co-

ordination, now seemed to be affecting his mind also and they were afraid he would commit suicide. One day he went out, supposedly to the library, and did not return. His parents, in desperation, notified the police, but neither they, nor the family, could find any trace of his whereabouts. The search continued for three days.

When they had just about given up hope, he returned home of his own accord and told them that he had gone to a deserted place to be alone with God. He had heard that Jesus had fasted for forty days and he was so much wanted to follow His example. But he said that he could only continue for three days. During that time, however, God had spoken to him, and he told them that he had found Jesus as his personal Savior. His physical condition was the same, but his depression had gone and his parents rejoiced when they saw that he was a completely different person.

Some months later, the Tsuchihashis heard of a new treatment for their son's condition and decided to try it. As a result, he began to recover and was ultimately completely restored to health and started to work. He gave his first month's wages to God, as a thank-offering for the change God had wrought in him during those three days when he had been alone with his Savior.

May the Lord help us never to give up hope and to remember that with God nothing is impossible!

November 8

DIFFICULTIES REVEAL THE POWER OF GOD

"Who among you fears the Lord? Who obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God." (Isaiah 50:10)

Sometimes when we are going through difficult circumstances that we cannot understand, it is easy to forget that the Lord knows about them all, cares for us and has a purpose in it all.

Although we may not be able to change our circumstances, we can choose how we respond to them. Let's remember that nothing is too difficult for God. In fact, difficulties are a means through

which He can reveal His Power by working in wonderful ways in our lives.

For most of his adult life, the famous German composer, Beethoven, lived with the fear of becoming deaf. His hearing did in fact gradually deteriorate to the point where he could only communicate with others by means of writing. But, amazingly, it was only after he lost his hearing that he wrote some of his greatest masterpieces. Apparently, shut off from the distractions of the world, new melodies flooded his mind. In other words, his deafness became a blessing. Should God shut us away from the things of this world, we too would doubtless be more conscious of His Presence than ever before.

Difficulties always look much larger when we take our eyes off of the Lord. Someone has remarked that when God is going to do something wonderful, He begins with a difficulty, but when He is going to do something very wonderful, He begins with an impossibility.

When we are facing circumstances that we cannot understand, we should continue to trust in His wisdom and goodness. He knows all that we are going through, He has a purpose in it and He never ceases to care for us. So, let us look up in faith, knowing that He is in complete command of our life as we yield ourselves to Him and that He is all we need in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Nearly everyone has at least one person in life with whom it's hard to get along. As we think about people in our lives with whom we frequently run into conflict, have we ever considered that maybe God placed them there to challenge our faith and to open our eyes in areas where we are not following Him! Maybe it is an unreasonable supervisor, an unreliable employee, an unusually demanding customer or an unbelievably insensitive relative. Maybe we need to consider that these seeming problem people are not really problems, but may be a God-given opportunity for us to grow spiritually!

November 9

GOES TO CAMP IN A WHEELCHAIR

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

One day, a letter arrived in the office of a Christian organization from Toshio Omori, requesting a Bible correspondence course. It was gladly sent to him, but months went by and the completed course was not returned. They could not help but wonder why and prayed that the Lord would work in his heart.

Then, one day, it came back, together with a typed letter, explaining that, being a cripple, he was so ashamed of his terrible writing that he had decided to teach himself to type before returning it!

Correspondence continued, during which he was also told of some radio broadcasts to which he could listen. Toshio did so and apparently nearly drove his mother to distraction with questions about Christianity, which she could not answer. As a result, she decided to buy him a Bible, which he studied most diligently.

The Christian organization, which was in constant contact with him, then introduced Toshio to a church near his home. The minister faithfully visited him and had the joy of leading him to the Lord. But a battle was then going on in Mrs. Omori's heart. Following the birth of her crippled son, life had seemed pointless and she had turned against anything religious. She had suffered from severe depression and at one time had attempted to commit suicide.

When Toshio told her that he was saved, she failed to understand what he meant. On top of that, the frequent visits of the minister somewhat annoyed her. He was kind, but all the religious talk irritated her. Then, when her son wanted to go to church, that was the last straw. She knew that he could not go alone, so she must accompany him. Gradually, however, the warmth of the church and the kindness of the Christians opened her heart to the message of the Gospel and she too accepted Christ as her Savior.

Then one day, the staff members of the Christian organization which had first contacted Toshio were utterly amazed when a taxi drove up at the camp site, where they were holding their annual

camp gatherings, and a middle-aged lady emerged from a taxi. The driver alighted too and assisted a third person out in a wheelchair! It was Toshio Omori and his face was full of smiles as he greeted everyone around him. His joy was contagious and delighted them all.

May the Lord help us always to reach out to the lost, no matter how difficult it may seem to lead them to our Savior.

November 10

ROCK OF AGES

1. *“Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and pow’r.*

2. *“Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

3. *“While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne;
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.”*

(Augustus M. Toplady - 1740-1778)

On a visit to Ireland, Augustus Toplady was converted as a result of hearing the message of salvation from a layman, who was preaching in a barn.

He loved the Lord, but his body was weak, due to tuberculosis. He testified that the writing of this hymn was his means of expressing the difference that the Lord had made in his life. He was only 38 years of age when he died, but his faith was triumphant until the very end.

On the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Queen Victoria of England, an embassy came from Madagascar and the representative expressed the desire of their people for the prosperity of the queen and then asked permission to sing.

It was expected that it would be some heathen song. To everyone's surprise, however, he sang this hymn!

November 11

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS

"Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'"

(Matthew 24:3)

When His disciples asked Jesus the questions quoted above, He pointed out to them that they should be less concerned with knowing when He would return, and more concerned with being prepared for that event. When they asked Him for a sign of His return, He warned them not to be fooled and that there were many false prophets around who could easily mislead them.

He told them to continue the important work that they were doing and which needed to be completed before His return. The Gospel needed to be preached throughout the world. That was their task and it is ours too. Jesus also spoke about the end times and final judgment to show His followers the urgency of spreading the Good News of salvation to everyone.

As we read the Scriptures we can see that the time of His return will be mistaken. False prophets will be many and we need to be on the alert for them, but at the same time spread the Gospel as far and wide as we can. We must always remember that His return will be unmistakable, because we clearly read in Mark 13:24-26, *"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."*

May we remain prepared, realizing that each day is the possible day of His return, because we know that it will be sudden and

unexpected. This should motivate us to be ready at all times. In the meantime, may the Lord keep us faithful in reaching out with the Gospel as best we can, conscious that we don't know exactly when His return it will be.

If we knew the exact date, we might be tempted to be slack in our outreach for Him. Even worse still, we might even think that it would be alright to keep on sinning, so long as we turned to Him at the very end.

How wonderful it is to realize that His coming is certain and that then, we will be with Him for ever. What exciting Words we read in John, chapter 14, verses 1-3, *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

November 12

THE TROUBLESOME REBEL

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." (Romans 1:18)

"I'm a quick-tempered, troublesome rebel. I hate everyone and everybody hates me", Ichiro Goto declared to himself one day in desperation. His rebellion against the world had in fact begun early in life. Among others who had cause to remember him was his music teacher! In his first year at school, he had succeeded in making her shed many tears of frustration, when he had encouraged other boys to make crow and frog noises during their singing lessons!

His mother too was at wits' end to know how to handle him. She constantly had to cope with crises. To mention just a few – he had been bitten by snakes, fallen from trees, stung by bees, nearly run over by a train and almost drowned in the sea!

Hoping against hope for improvement, the Gotos had given their recalcitrant son the very best education they could afford. Surely a university would knock some sense into his head, they hopefully thought. In a measure, he did calm down there and was captivated

by the teachings of renowned philosophers such as Voltaire and Neitsche. Also, fascinated by nature, he sought to capture its beauty on canvas, but even this did not really satisfy him.

Then, one day, Ichiro got hold of a copy of the Bible and started to read it. When he got to Romans chapter 1, he suddenly saw himself portrayed in the words he read there and was filled with shame and remorse. In those moments, he poured out all his pent-up feelings before the Lord, realizing that the message of salvation was his only hope. As he repented of his sins before a loving, understanding God, joy and peace flooded Ichiro's heart and he found what he had sought for so long.

On hearing of his son's faith in Christ, his father ordered him to commit suicide rather than disgrace the family. But Ichiro was utterly transformed and wholehearted in his commitment to God. His life was so revolutionized that his family and those with whom he worked were amazed at the change that had taken place.

But Ichiro could not be satisfied until every moment of his life was spent in God's service and so he entered Bible College. After four years, he graduated and became the pastor of a church.

Ichiro now rejoices too that his parents, who once practiced fortune telling, have also become keen Christians and have a weekly gathering in their home.

Let's never despair of those we know, who seem utterly rebellious and unconcerned about the things of God. He can do miracles in their lives!

November 13

THE EVERLASTING ARMS

"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deuteronomy 33:27)

How often we feel the need of someone to lean on, who is stronger than ourselves, especially when the way seems difficult and we are unsure which direction to go.

The Word of God points us to the wonderful way in which a mother eagle cares for her little ones. Until they can fend for themselves, the mother bird flies off and gathers food daily to feed

the babies. Then, one day she comes back with nothing in her beak. She hovers overhead and begins to move them ever so slightly towards the edge of the nest with her head.

Next, she gradually pushes the eaglets out of the nest, one after the other. In spite of their terrified cries, she watches them go hurtling down the face of the cliff, surely to their destruction!

But no, as quick as a flash, she swoops down and catches them on her back and returns them to the nest, repeating the process again and again, until they can all fly. Then, one day, some time later, she stands on the edge of the nest and begins to pull out the feathers and leaves. She then takes the sticks in her strong beak and snaps them, pulling it all to pieces and completely dismantling the nest.

We too must be made to fly - to soar to the heights - but how we hate it when the Lord disturbs our cozy nest. But He would not do so, if there were any other way to help us to fly and soar into the heights with Him. When an eagle has a premonition of death, it leaves its nest and flies to a rock. It then fastens its talons to the edge of the rock and looks straight into the setting sun – then it dies!

The Bible so often speaks of eagles. For instance, if we look at Isaiah, chapter 40, verse 31, we read, *“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint”*.

Then in Proverbs chapter 30, verse 18-19, it says, *“There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand; the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a virgin”*.

God sometimes has to wreck our nest, perhaps because it has become too precious to us and He wants something better for us. Although we may not always understand what He is doing, let us trust Him and praise Him for teaching us how to fly, with the knowledge that, no matter what may happen, “underneath are the everlasting arms”.

November 14

SMILING FOR JESUS

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

(Philippians 1:21)

Yasuko Yukimoto knew that she would never forget the year 1949 as long as she lived. She had then been a bright high school student, with so many wonderful dreams for the future, until a medical check-up revealed that she had contracted tuberculosis. Earlier that same year Yasuko's father had had a sudden lung hemorrhage and, before help could be summoned, he had died. Her younger sister had also become a victim of the dreaded disease.

The bereaved mother had no alternative but to leave her two sick daughters in bed and go out to work to support her family. But even so, nourishing food and medical care were almost non-existent and Yasuko's condition deteriorated to such an extent that hospitalization became inevitable.

The following month, Yasuko had two lung hemorrhages and was at the point of death. It took forty injections to enable her to regain consciousness. But as she came to, she had an experience, which was never to leave her. She had been so conscious of the love of the God, of whom she had been told during her high school days, that her soul overflowed with peace and thanksgiving. As she thought about the Living God and of His great love for sinners, she personalized the text that she had memorized, ***"For God so loved ME that He gave His only begotten Son, that I, believing in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."*** (John 3:16)

From that time on, Yasuko longed to be a testimony for God, who loved her so much, but she had so little strength. Then she suddenly realized that there was one thing that she could do and that was to smile for Jesus!

One day, a student nurse, on hearing that she was to look after a very sick patient, who had been bedridden for thirty years, was most concerned. She wondered if she would be able to handle such a patient, who she was sure would be dark and discouraged. But when she saw the smile on her face, she could not believe it.

On another occasion, when a young doctor was adjusting her oxygen breathing system, he said to Yasuko, "I just cannot believe that you are 48 years old, you look more like 20!" She smilingly

replied, "That is because Jesus lives within me." While it pleases God to keep her alive, Yasuko is determined to smile for Him moment by moment, so that others may also come to know her wonderful Savior.

Maybe you, or someone you know, are struggling with some infirmity at this time, which is hard to endure. May the Lord help you to rest in Him through it all and to be a bright testimony to those around you.

November 15

THE REFINING PROCESS

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ ... " (1 Peter 1: 6-7)

Because He loves us and wants the best for us, the Lord sometimes drives us forth from the shelter that we so much enjoy into a situation that we find hard to bear. In so doing, we have no alternative but to completely rely on Him alone.

Because He can see the hidden potential in every life, He works in us in the same way that the refiners of gold work to purify it. First, the ore is crushed to the consistency of fine sand. Then, cyanide is added to dissolve the granules into a clear solution and zinc dust is added to separate the gold from the mixture. The gold was in fact there all the time, but it could not be seen.

He sometimes lets us go through the heat of the refining process, committing Himself to be with us every step of the way, as He was in the case of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego when they went into the burning fiery furnace and four men were seen there, "*... the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*" (Daniel 3:25). How wonderful it is to know that when the fire is hottest, He is always there!

God uses such trials not only to make us useful in His service, but through them He also gives us an inner strength to face the trials that will inevitably come our way and to make us "*perfect and complete, lacking nothing*". (James 1:4)

The pine tree is nearly always to be found in desolate places, where it serves a very useful purpose. When a strong wind comes, most other trees will not be able to cope with the strain, but the pine will somehow find something to cling to or lean against and will continue to grow straight. Most upright Christians are usually reared amidst the sternest trials. The divine Life within them, so triumphs over difficulties that it can overcome them.

*“Though waves and billows o’er me roll
In crushing floods of ill,
Within the haven of God’s love
My soul is anchored still.*

*“When trials come, and storms arise,
When tempests darken earth and skies
And everything my spirit tries,
I’ll hide myself in Jesus.”*

November 16

GIVEN UP BY THE SEA

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye.” (Psalm 32:8)

As Teruko Nagao was walking along the beach, she was arguing with herself as to whether or not she should end her life just there. She decided that she really wanted to do so and started walking further and further into the sea, until she lost consciousness. That would have been the end of her, if a stranger had not spotted her and saved her life!

During the night spent in the police station, Teruko was restless and rebellious. Why had she not been allowed to die? There was just nothing on earth worth living for. Her unhappy childhood came back so vividly to her mind again. The constant quarrels in the home, because her father had squandered their money, either at the bar or on gambling, were constantly in her mind. As a result, there had never been enough money for food.

But, realizing that there was nothing else to do but to try to make a new start, Teruko left the police station as soon as she could and

went home. As she watched what her mother did, she suddenly realized the importance of helping others. Maybe, while caring for the sick, she would escape from her troubled mind, and so she started a nursing course. She did very well in her studies and one of the tutors suggested that she go on to university to study social science. Knowing that it was a chance in a lifetime, Teruko studied day and night to attain the entrance requirements, but, unfortunately, overworked and, as a result, had a nervous breakdown.

During that time, her mother was most sympathetic and helpful, but Teruko again lost her desire to live and it took her several months to recover sufficiently to be able to return to work again. Then, one evening, she switched on the radio when a Christian program was being aired and the words, "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28), that were quoted spoke to her heart and gave her a desperate desire to know more. So she wrote asking for the copy of the New Testament that was offered by the broadcasting station.

Determined to find out more about Christianity, Teruko also managed to find a church, not too far from her home, and there took Jesus as her Savior. Gradually all the scars in her heart were healed and her life was radically changed. Wanting to serve the Lord, she found work in a center for handicapped children. Then God led her to Bible College and Teruko subsequently joined the staff of a Christian organization involved in hospital evangelism and was able to tell the sick about her Savior.

Let's never give up on ourselves, or on others. No matter how difficult things may seem, God is always there and will meet our every need, if we just turn to Him.

November 17

I WOULD BE TRUE

1. *"I would be true, for there are those who trust me;
I would be pure, for there are those who care;
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;
I would be brave, for there is much to dare.
I would be brave, for there is much to dare.*
2. *"I would be friend of all – the foe, the friendless;
I would be giving, and forget the gift;
I would be humble, for I know my weakness;
I would look up, and laugh, and love and lift;
I would look up, and laugh, and love and lift.*
3. *"I would be prayerful thro' each busy moment;
I would be constantly in touch with God;
I would be tuned to hear His lightest whisper;
I would have faith to keep the path Christ trod;
I would have faith to keep the path Christ trod."*

(Howard Walter)

Howard Walter graduated from Princeton University in 1905. He was well-known for his bright smile and, because of his consecration and keen mind, his company was much sought after and he was a blessing to many.

He sought further ministry, however, in the foreign field and went to India as a missionary, where he worked among the students of the great educational center of the Punjab, Lahore.

One Christmas, he wrote and sent the first two verses of this poem to his mother, as his Christmas greeting to her. She recognized its value, had it published and later set to music. The author of the third verse is unknown!

In 1919, when influenza was raging in the land of his adoption, Howard fell a victim to it and went to be with the One he so much loved. His influence is still said to be felt in India.

November 18

MY WITNESSES

"You are My witnesses," says the Lord, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me." (Isaiah 43:10)

Mr. Kimball, a Sunday School teacher in 1858, led a Boston shoe clerk to the Lord. His name was Dwight L. Moody, who became a powerful evangelist.

He, in turn, in 1879, awakened evangelistic zeal in the heart of the pastor of a small church in England, Frederick Meyer!

F. B. Meyer, preaching on an American college campus, brought J. Wilbur Chapman to Christ.

J. Wilbur Chapman, who became engaged in YMCA work, employed a former baseball player, Billy Sunday, in his evangelistic outreach.

Billy Sunday held a revival meeting in North Carolina. As a result, a group of local men planned another campaign at which Mordecai Hamm was the preacher.

In that meeting Billy Graham found the Savior.

If we have experienced the Gospel ourselves and praise God that we have done so and that He has saved us, we will not be able to keep it to ourselves. We even read in 2 Kings, chapter 7, verse 9 of some poor, disfigured lepers, who heard some very Good News and were so conscious of the importance of sharing it with others, that they could not keep it to themselves, but said: "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. If we wait until morning light, some punishment will come upon us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king's household."

The Good News about Jesus must be shared, because no other news is more important. We must never forget that there are those who are dying without it! We must never become so preoccupied with our own faith that we neglect sharing it with those around us. We should not even put it off until "the morning"!

If we simply proclaim what we know about God, we may be surprised at how many people will listen. To testify to others about our Savior is not an option, it is a responsibility. We are not all

evangelists in the formal sense of the word, but we all have received gifts that we can use to help others find the Savior. He just asks us to be His faithful witnesses. He will do the rest! We cannot determine who will respond. He alone knows that.

November 19

ONCE A DRUNKARD, NOW A PREACHER

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

(2 Peter 3:9)

Kenichi Utsunomiya was more often drunk than sober and hopelessly in debt. Reduced to sharpening saws for a livelihood, he could not even raise enough money to keep himself in drink. But deep down in his heart he longed to be rid of his bondage and often vowed that he would stop drinking. His resolution, however, usually lasted until one of his many friends turned up with a bottle!

Kenichi was also desperately lonely in his heart, but would not admit it. Then one day, tottering down the street, he happened to see a poster pasted on a shop window, advertising a meeting in the village hall that night. He decided to go and found that it was a 'Jesus' meeting.

As Kenichi sat in the back of the hall, he was amazed because the speaker seemed to be reviewing the thirty-five years of his own sinful life and he saw himself for the first time as a sinner. He did not completely understand all that was said, but he desperately wanted help and, when the preacher asked if anyone wanted God's salvation to go forward, he was the first one on his feet.

That day, Kenichi confessed his sins to God and became a 'new creature' in Jesus Christ and loves to testify that what he could not accomplish himself by all his striving and effort, God did for him in that moment. From that time on, Kenichi went to church three times a week, started avidly reading the Bible and testified to others about his wonderful Savior.

A deep love for his wife was also born in his heart from then on and he humbled himself before her, asking her to forgive him for

the evil way he had always treated her in the past. When he did so, she was utterly amazed. Very soon after his salvation, she too found the Savior, as did his mother and his sister. By working together, they eventually managed to deal with his debts. They started again with nothing, but the joy of the Lord was in their hearts and that was enough for them.

Before long, God showed Kenichi that He wanted to use him as an evangelist. It seemed like a vain dream with a wife and seven children to support, but God made it possible. Now, Kenichi Utsunomiya is a minister and has the privilege of proclaiming the glorious Gospel to many others.

Maybe there is someone you know who is a slave to alcohol. Don't give up, keep praying for them and believe that God will answer your prayers.

November 20

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

“ ... as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” (James 2:26)

When the famous missionary, Hudson Taylor, first went to China, he journeyed on a boat. One day the wind suddenly became still and the vessel drifted very near to the shore of an island, said to be inhabited by cannibals. The captain, knowing Mr. Taylor to be a man of prayer, beseeched him to pray for their safety.

Hudson Taylor's reply was that he would pray if the captain set his sails to catch the breeze. But the captain refused, fearing lest he should make himself a laughing-stock before the crew by unfurling the sails in a dead calm. But Hudson Taylor persisted, saying that he would not pray unless his request was granted. The captain, having no alternative, did so! Hudson Taylor was still praying, when the captain knocked at the door of his cabin and told him to stop praying. They had more wind than they could manage!

What a wonderful example of praying in faith. Let us remember that if we wish to receive anything from God, we must pray and believe, and then do what we can, sure that God is going to answer

in His way! We always need to remember that faith is not waiting for a thing, hoping for it, looking for it. True faith counts on God and believes before it sees. Therefore it does not faint, but believes God for the seemingly impossible and praises God for the deliverance that is on the way. Effective faith is quiet certainty.

The beginning point of faith is believing in God's character. He is who He says He is! The end point is believing in His Promises. He will always do what He says He will! When we believe that God will fulfill His Promises, even though we don't see those promises materializing, we demonstrate true faith in Him!

The Bible tells us this in John's Gospel, chapter 20, verses 24-31, *"Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, 'We have seen the Lord.' So he said to them, 'Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the prints of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.'" Later, if we read on we see how Thomas regretted his lack of faith.*

*"Faith, mighty faith, the promises sees
And looks to God alone,
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, 'It shall be done!'"*

November 21

WHO MADE SUNDAYS?

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

Kiyo Nagahama married a boat-builder, who lived in Hokkaido, the northern island of Japan. One day she noticed that her legs were beginning to give her trouble, but did not go to see a doctor. Instead, she sought help through all kinds of religions, searching for healing. At first, she offered vegetables, rice and even wine to the gods, but soon she could no longer afford to do so and gave up.

One person in the neighborhood, however, caught her attention in those days. It was a woman who went to her front porch three times a day, clapped her hands two or three times and cried out,

“Faraway god, Faraway god!” Kiyō often wondered if that god had ever answered the woman’s prayers, but she never found out.

When Kiyō was 50 years old, her husband died and soon all her resources were gone, both physically and spiritually. She just did not know what the future held, but one question that had always burdened her mind was, “who made Sundays?” That was the day that her daughter stayed home from work and tidied the house, did the washing and such things. She just did not know what she would do without Sundays!

The mystery was solved when one day a Christian worker visited her and invited her to a women’s meeting. There, for the first time, Kiyō heard about the Living God and, from then on, went to church regularly and arranged for her daughter to buy her a big-print Bible that she could read.

As Kiyō studied the Bible, she realized that it was the Word of God and gladly took Jesus as her Savior. She also went to a Bible camp and, on her return, destroyed the Buddhist god-shelf in her home. Although she had known it was futile, she had worshipped the spirits of her dead ancestors before it every day, also putting food there as an offering. Then, Kiyō realized that the Living God would not approve of her doing such a heathen thing. Her decision was especially significant that year, because it was the 23rd anniversary of her husband’s death – a year when Buddhists hold a very important memorial service for their dead.

Even when she was 81 years of age, Kiyō received visitors from the church and still testified to the goodness of the God who made Sundays, but she often wishes that someone had told her about the Savior when she was still young. Then she could have spent so much more time serving Him!

Maybe there is someone who lives near to you, who is getting old and frail and is facing a lost eternity. May the Lord help us to constantly reach out to those who do not yet know our wonderful Savior!

November 22

THE GAIN OF SUFFERING

“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” (Philippians 3:8)

It is so difficult to handle suffering, but the measure of our faith is so often revealed by our ability to do so. Especially in the times when we don't understand why God is allowing suffering to come into our lives, He so much longs to see in us a willingness to suffer, knowing that He always does what is best for us. At such times that very suffering will deepen our spiritual lives and lead us closer to Him.

How well it has been said that we would never see the stars if the sun did not go down. How true too that we would never know the depths of God's comfort, if we had never experienced suffering. It is allowed in our lives to drive us to a depth of prayer that we have never known before. By and by, the suffering will be forgotten and the blessing of the depths to which we have been driven, will bring sweetness to our soul, which will overflow to others too.

One thing that we can be sure of is that Jesus understands our suffering and will always help us through. Something that we must never forget is that He Himself suffered pain and faced temptation as a human being all through His life. If we make sure to go to Him when we face trials, He will help us through, because He so well understands what we are facing.

We always need to remember that suffering is one of the unavoidable passages in life. It is not a question of IF we will face suffering, but WHEN we will face it. Jesus was willing to obey no matter what the cost. He was in great agony when he prepared to face His death. This is so well expressed in the Words, *“Father, if it is your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done.”* (Luke 22:42)

Jesus did not avoid suffering, because He always had a higher purpose in mind. His life was not a script that He passively followed. It was a life that He chose freely. It was a continuous process of making the will of God, the Father, His own. Jesus chose to obey, even though obedience led to suffering and death.

Because Jesus obeyed perfectly, even under great trial, He can also help us to obey, no matter how difficult obedience may seem to be. We need to remember that suffering is unavoidable in this life and we should not be sorry when we have to face it, for we read in James, chapter 1, verses 2-3, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”*

November 23

ONE GREATER THAN THE STARS

“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Matthew 16:24)

Isao Fujii’s life had always seemed to have been full of stark tragedy. His father had left Japan as a soldier before he was born and, after an absence of two years, had died on foreign soil. Therefore Isao had never even seen him.

His mother had married again fairly soon afterwards and his fate and that of his sister’s was solemnly decided by a family council – they were to live with their aunt and uncle, who had no children of their own. Then, after ten years, his aunt and uncle’s first child was born. Much joy was soon turned into unspeakable sorrow, however, when the mother’s life was taken in exchange for that of the newborn baby!

To Isao too it seemed that with the loss of his adoptive mother, he had lost everything. She was the only mother he had ever known and his heart was utterly broken. He tried to fathom where she had gone to, but the more he thought about it, the more he became convinced that she had become one of the stars that shone so brightly in the darkness of the night. So, every night he would look up into the sky, searching for the star that might be his mother and, in talking to it, he found temporary comfort for his desolate heart. Then change put its icy fingers on Isao life again. After completing Junior High school, he was apprenticed to a tailor in the large city of Kobe. There he had to move into a cold, sparsely-furnished room that he had to share with the other apprentices.

Seven years passed with little incident, until stark tragedy struck his life again. He had a sudden lung hemorrhage and he was rushed off to the nearest hospital. There one day, when Isao could see little point in living, a young man entered his room unexpectedly and handed him a small magazine, called 'Fountain of Joy'.

The warmth of the smile on the young man's face and the message that Isao read in the magazine touched his heart, but it took six months of persistent prayer, visiting and correspondence on the part of the evangelist, before the message of God's love and salvation could find a foothold in Isao's lonely heart. But one day he had the joy of leading him to the Lord and together they rejoiced about what God had done.

Ten months later, Isao was able to leave the hospital. After a period of recuperation, he felt the Lord leading him to enter Bible College for four years of training to become a hospital evangelist.

Maybe there is some lonely soul that you know of, who is lying on a hospital bed, longing for hope in life. May the Lord help us to reach out to the needy ones with the precious Gospel, no matter where they may be.

November 24

GLORIOUS THINGS OF THEE ARE SPOKEN

- 1. "Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
He, whose Word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for His own abode:
On the Rock of Ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.*
- 2. "See, the streams of living waters,
Springing from eternal love,
Well supply thy sons and daughters,
And all fear of want remove:*

*Who can faint, while such a river
Ever flows their thirst to assuage?
Grace which, like the Lord, the Giver,
Never fails from age to age.*

3. *“Round each habitation hovering,
See the cloud and fire appear
For a glory and a covering,
Showing that the Lord is near!
Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God;
He, whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for His own abode”.*

(John Newton -1725-1807)

No hymn-writer has probably had a history as remarkable as that of John Newton. He was born in London, England and his mother, who was a very pious woman, died when he was only six years old.

His father was a sea-captain, who took his son to sea when he was eleven years old. John ended up in the navy himself. Later, he became a wild slave-trader in Africa. Some experiences there reminded him of the religion his mother had taught him and he turned from his sins with true repentance.

His conversion led to his becoming a Christian minister and he settled in Olney, England when he was 39 years old. There he formed a friendship with William Cowper, the famous hymn-writer, and that led to John Newton’s burden to write hymns too.

November 25

PRAISE BRINGS VICTORY

*“I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be
in my mouth.” (Psalm 34:1)*

How challenging are the words, quoted above, ‘at all times’! It is so easy to praise Him when things are going well, or at least when we think they are going well! But His Word teaches us that we must praise Him, no matter what difficulties, what problems or what hurts may come our way.

The more we murmur, the more we complain, the more we allow our problems to overtake us, the more exhausted we will become. But when we lift up our hearts and praise Him in all circumstances, even when our eyes are filled with tears, or our hearts are full of pain, we can praise Him with our spirit. Then we will soar up into His Presence, as high as our praise does. There may be times when it is difficult to do so, but we need to learn to praise Him in naked faith.

So, when we are in the midst of trouble, longing for God to deliver us, we should praise Him straight away and not wait until later, because we read in Psalm 22:3 that He is *'enthroned'* in our praises.

Maybe we sometimes wonder when we should praise God. The Bible answers that question in no uncertain terms. *"... let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."* (Hebrews 13:15) In other words, we need to praise Him at all times. Our praise will result in God blessing us more than ever.

Praise is giving thanks to God for who He is. Praise is thanking Him for every aspect of His divine nature. When we praise God, we help ourselves by expanding our awareness of who He is. How wonderful it would be if we always followed what the Psalmist did, who wrote, *"I will praise You, O Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all your marvelous works."* (Psalm 9:1)

It has been well said that a praising heart will always be the despair of the devil! So, let us always remember that the best remedy for ALL ills is to keep praising the Lord and not be led by our feelings!

So remember, when we are in the midst of trouble, longing for God to deliver us, we should praise Him then and not wait until later!

*"Does all the world seem against you
And you're in the battle alone?
It's often when you are most helpless
That God's mighty power is known."*

November 26

A TRIP TO LONDON CHANGED HER LIFE

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

(Romans 3:23)

When Keiko Hamano received a copy of the Bible from a friend, she was irritated. She just could not fathom why her friend should think that she needed to read something that she felt was only for the old and decrepit. So, she decided to pass it on to someone else.

Keiko was much more interested in making money than in religion and, before long, she was on her way to England in connection with her flower-arrangement career. There, one day, she got lost in London and had to ask someone the way to her destination. She was somewhat amazed to find that the lady was most friendly and ended up by inviting her to her home for a meal. Keiko felt very much out of place, being in a foreign country, so gladly accepted the offer.

That visit was the first of many pleasant times with that family, even though, for the most part, she could only communicate with them properly with the help of a dictionary! During their first evening together, Keiko thought it strange however that the father prayed before the meal. But it seemed such a simple gesture and she soon realized that their religion was a vital part of their lives. That gave her cause for serious thought.

Every time she was in their home, Keiko was conscious of an atmosphere, which she found difficult to define, but which made her experience a strange calmness. Their family life left her with a very different impression of Christianity than she had had before. They were not chanting prayers all the time and their kindness to her, a complete stranger, eventually broke down her antagonism towards Christians and the Bible. Finally, she agreed to accompany them to church and found it a most worthwhile experience.

When Keiko returned to Japan a year later, she was still not a Christian, but she managed to find a Christian gathering near her home and attended it regularly. At first, she was not really conscious of a need to surrender her life to God. She had always thought that only weak people needed religion. But on hearing the words, "For

all have sinned and come short of the glory of God", Keiko came to a realization that her sin had helped to put Jesus on the cross and that she needed to ask His forgiveness and yield her life to Him. Before long, she gave up her career of flower arranging and joined the staff of a Christian organization, seeking to lead others to her Savior.

Who knows what a casual contact with a stranger in the street may result in. May the Lord make us more conscious than ever before of the needs of those around us!

November 27

THE CROSSES IN OUR LIVES

"And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." (Matthew 10:38)

For many believers there is a cross, or maybe even more than one cross, which vexes the soul and from which we long to escape. It may be our circumstances from which we wish we could escape. It may be a job which we loathe. It may be the people we live with, who make life difficult for us. It may be ill-health from which we do not seem to be able to find a cure. Maybe we cannot even discuss our problems with anyone else, but they are lodged deep down in our hearts.

If that is so, we need to realize that crosses are so often allowed in our lives, because God wants to make us more like Himself. If they are His will for us, surely we should rejoice that we are *'counted worthy'* to suffer for His sake, as the apostles did in Acts chapter 5, verse 41, when they were beaten and suffered shame for Him. We need to remember that when difficulties come into our lives, they are always accompanied by His special grace, so that we can bear them.

We read in the Bible about Gideon, who was sent as a prophet to help the Israelites. He was just as desperate as they were and cried to the Lord for deliverance from his bondage. He had lost his own brothers in battle and his home was in Ophrah, which was in the hills of central Palestine, in the very midst of the district most affected by the enemy.

Then, one day, while he was threshing wheat, an angel appeared to him and said, *“The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor”* (Judges 6:14). Gideon found it most difficult to believe what the angel said. He had never regarded himself as *‘a mighty man of valor’!* But the Lord took no notice of his reticence and said to him, *“Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?”* (Judges 6:14) But Gideon was still unconvinced of his capabilities, until God reassured him with the words that we read in verse 23, *“Peace be with you, do not fear, you shall not die.”*

Gideon eventually became a hero, because He took God at His Word. He also became a great leader and sent three companies, of one hundred men each, by secret paths over the hills and told them to hide until he blew a trumpet. The plan worked perfectly. The enemy was seized with panic and fled into the desert. When they got to the River Jordan, they were cut off and two of their leaders were slain.

The rest of the Midianites were pursued over the river. A great victory resulted and the enemy’s power was crushed for many years. Peace continued during the rest of Gideon’s life, but it was only possible because Gideon believed God in spite of all the trials he had encountered.

November 28

NO GODSHELF

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

Yuriko and her nine brothers and sisters grew up under the shadow of the gods. Even when they were desperately hungry, they were never allowed to eat, or even drink water, until their mother had lined them up in front of the god shelf to bow, clap their hands and pray.

Yuriko’s first contact with Christianity was when she was six years old. A young man had held children’s meetings in their neighborhood and told them stories about Jesus, illustrating them

with pictures. Yuriko had very much enjoyed those meetings and had wished that he would come again. But he never did. Some ten years later, however, Yuriko was enrolled in a Catholic high school and especially loved the chapel times. Her teachers were all nuns and she sometimes thought how nice it would be if she could become a nun too.

For a while, Yuriko revelled in all that they had to offer, but before long felt empty and frustrated, sometimes feeling so lonely that she cried herself to sleep. Then, one evening she heard singing coming from a nearby apartment and went to investigate. The door was open and a friendly young man invited her in. "It is a Christian meeting and you are very welcome", he said. Curious, Yuriko decided to join them and found that she enjoyed it so much that she wanted to go again.

As Yuriko listened to the message one evening, it seemed as if the speaker was directing his comments to her personally. She pretended not to be listening when he spoke about sin, but she heard every word. There were so many bad things in her life from which she did not know how to obtain deliverance. She was sure that there must be some way to do so, but she just did not know what it was.

It seemed to Yuriko as if the evangelist was reading her innermost thoughts when he quoted the words from the Bible, "***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.***" (John 14:6) Those words remained in her heart all that night. She could hardly sleep and early the next morning fell on her knees and earnestly sought forgiveness from Jesus.

For the next six months Yuriko felt that it was a joy to be alive. Then, a medical checkup revealed that she had lung tuberculosis and she was hospitalized. The minister and the believers visited her regularly and assured her that "***... all things work together for good to those who love God***" (Romans 8:28). It proved to be so true for Yuriko, because in that hospital she came into contact with a fellow-patient, who, two years later, became her husband! Now Yuriko and her husband are the proud parents of three bright children and faithful members of their local church.

May the Lord help us to remember that any seed we sow for Him in another's heart will inevitably bring forth fruit for eternity!

November 29

EXPERIENCING GOD'S POWER

"But He said to them, 'Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?' And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, 'Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey him!'" (Mark 4: 40-41)

In this passage we see how the disciples panicked because the storm threatened to destroy them and Jesus seemed unaware and even unconcerned!

They were, in fact, experiencing an ordinary storm, but there can be other storms that occur in our lives and some that arise from situations which cause a great deal of anxiety.

Whatever our difficulty may be, however, we have two options. One is that we can worry and assume that Jesus is not at all concerned. Or, we can resist fear by putting our trust in Him.

But all we really have to do is to tell Him of our need for His help and then trust Him to deal with it in His own wonderful way.

If we look at the Scriptures, especially Mark, chapter 5, we see that when Jesus went to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, He found a tumult with many people weeping and wailing loudly.

When He went inside the house, He said to them, *"Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping. And they ridiculed Him. But when he had put them all outside, He took the father and mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. Then He took the child by the hand and said to her in their language, 'Talitha, cumi,' which means when it is translated, 'Little girl, I say to you arise.' Immediately the girl arose and walked"*.

Even today, we too can experience God's power for any situation that may come our way, if we look to Him to fulfill His perfect will in us. When we received Christ into our hearts by faith, He came to live within by the Person of His Holy Spirit. This has been made possible because of what happened on that wonderful day at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given to believers.

We cannot dictate to Him how to work in our circumstances, but through the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit, we know that He will do that which is best for us at all times, if we just place our trust in Him every moment of every day!

November 30

THE REBEL AT CAMP

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1: 9)

“I don’t want to go. I’m fed up with this church business”, declared Taeko Koura most adamantly, knowing only too well that her mother would insist that she accompany her older sister to the annual church camp, no matter what she said!

None of her friends were at all interested in Christianity and Taeko felt that she was old enough to go her own way! It wasn’t fair that her parents should insist on her going to church, just because they believed in God! In any case, having heard it all since she was a child, Taeko reckoned that she knew all there was to know about Christianity!

It was therefore in a very rebellious mood that seventeen-year-old Taeko went with her sister to the Bible camp. The camp was full of interesting activities, but Taeko could not get into the spirit of any of them, because the devotions that were bound to follow were always on her mind.

By the second day, she was thoroughly disgruntled with everything. To make matters worse, that evening she was faced with the prospect of having to participate in a discussion group. “I just don’t know why I come to this camp. The talks about the Bible are so boring,” Taeko impatiently stormed at her roommate. But after her outburst of temper, she realized that she could not get out of the situation, so she might as well make the most of it. Besides that, her roommate was so friendly and helpful that she felt ashamed of her behavior.

Taeko could hardly understand what happened to her, however, when she listened to the others in her group discussing the significance of true salvation in Jesus in their lives. She suddenly had an overwhelming desire to become the ‘new creature’ that they were talking about, conscious that somehow or other she needed to be different. So, that night, encouraged by her group leader and being more than ever conscious of her need of salvation, the tears flowed as she cried to the Lord to cleanse her from her sins. For the remainder of her stay at camp, Taeko was no longer a rebel, but

instead she was a joyful witness for Jesus, seeking to help others to find her Savior too.

After two years at Art College, Taeko joined the staff of a Christian organization, where her testimony and artistic ability were much used by the Lord.

May the Lord help us not to give up, even when we come across someone who seems strongly opposed to the Gospel. We never know when the Lord will work in their hearts and they will yield their lives to Him.

December 1

RESCUE THE PERISHING

1. *“Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave;
Weep o’er the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus the mighty to save.*

(Chorus)

*“Rescue the perishing,
Care for the dying;
Jesus is merciful,
Jesus will save.*

2. *“Tho’ they are slighting Him, still He is waiting,
Waiting the penitent child to receive;
Plead with them earnestly, plead with them gently,
He will forgive if they only believe.*
3. *“Down in the human heart, crushed by the tempter,
Feelings lie buried that grace can restore;
Touched by a loving heart, wakened by kindness,
Chords that are broken will vibrate once more.*
4. *“Rescue the perishing, duty demands it;
Strength for thy labor the Lord will provide;
Back to the narrow way patiently win them;
Tell the poor wanderer a Savior has died.”*

(Fanny Jane Crosby - 1820-1915)

Although blind, Fanny Crosby is said to have written three new hymns each week during much of her adult life, amounting to 9,000 hymns during her lifetime. The fact that she was blind in no way diminished her productivity

She apparently formulated a song in her mind and then dictated it to a friend. Her first book of poems was published in 1844 and was called, 'The Blind Girl and Other Poems'.

December 2

FAITH OVERCOMES FEAR

"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You." (Psalm 56:3)

It has been well said that faith chases out fear or fear chases out faith! But isn't it wonderful to know that when we are Christians, we no longer have to fear either God or man.

Of course there is a sense that as Christians we need to bow the knee to our Holy God, who is a 'consuming fire'. There is also a sense in which if we are too afraid, we will be uncertain about God's love for us and uncertain that we are dear to Him, as His sons and daughters.

The matter of fear is expressed in the wonderful passage in Genesis, chapter 15, verse 1 *"... the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.'"* If we read further, we may wonder why Abram should have been so afraid. Maybe he feared revenge from the kings that he had just defeated. But God gave Him two very good reasons why he should rather take courage. God promised to defend Abram and also promised to give him "great blessings".

When we fear what lies ahead, we too should remember that God has promised to be with us no matter how difficult circumstances may seem to be and that He has also promised to bless us. When we are afraid of circumstances, all we have to do is to draw near to Him and trust Him moment by moment.

There is, nevertheless, a right fear of God that needs to typify a Christian. This is displayed through a reverent awe and respect for Him and humility before the Holy One.

We must never forget what the Scriptures emphasize in Psalm 118:6 *"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"*

How well this thought that we do not need to fear God has been expressed:

*“What should I fear, when He is by my side?
What should I fear, when He’s my constant guide?
What should I fear? He’ll never let me go.
What should I fear in this whole world below?
What should I fear, when earthly shadows fall?
What should I fear? He’s my all in all!
What should I fear? What should I fear?”*

December 3

DECEMBER CHRISTIANS!

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” (John 14:6)

When Yozo Saito was a child, his favorite month of the year had always been December. It had seemed to him as if the whole nation of Japan turned Christian for those thirty-one days. In every department store where his mother took him, he could hear Christmas songs and carols. Maybe he especially liked the Christmas atmosphere because he could so vividly remember his father having taken him to a Salvation Army Christmas meeting when he was only four years old. He had loved the joyful music and the Christmas songs they had sung.

But when Yozo got older he had little interest in any sort of religion. He just did not seem to have enough time and energy to think about it. His aim was to earn enough money by distributing newspapers, to pay for his university fees. Finally, he did manage to get enough money together and left for Tokyo to study acoustics.

After two years, Yozo graduated from the course and returned to Osaka, only to find that his family was more involved in the Christian religion than ever before. So it was that, more to please his mother than anything else, Yozo started to attend a Christian meeting and there met two foreign young men who only spoke English. He was not very good at English, but he spent a lot of time with them and noticed that no matter what they did, Jesus Christ was the most important factor in their lives. He could see no guile in them, but only a love for those with whom they came into contact and that amazed him.

On one occasion, they handed him a Japanese Bible, opened at John chapter 14 verse 6 and sought to explain to him the meaning of the words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." It was difficult to understand, but the Holy Spirit was their Helper and Yozo's spiritual eyes were in those moments opened to the Truth.

Very soon he was baptized into the Christian faith and started to enquire about the possibilities of serving God. Having been trained in acoustics, he had very good qualifications and was accepted into the film section of the Japan Mission.

Yozo always testifies that the first seeds of the Christian faith were sown in his heart when he was young and then also by hearing Christmas carols, all those years ago, in the department stores.

There is no doubt that the Japanese are more open to the Gospel at Christmas than at any other time of the year. Do pray for them especially at this season of the year.

December 4

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF HONESTY?

"... The prince asks for gifts, the judge seeks a bribe, and the great man utters his evil desire, so they scheme together. The best of them is like a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge." (Micah 7:3-4)

In the above verses we read of what happened in the days of the prophet Micah. But it is also true today, that honesty and integrity are difficult to find. The standards for honesty certainly do not come from society or from those around us. The standards for honesty come from God alone. Therefore we need to be honest, because God requires it of us and we want to be like Him and follow Him, moment by moment, as best we can.

Within each of us there is always a tendency to embellish the truth to impress other people. As a result, small untruths can easily creep into our conversation with others. It is so tempting sometimes to take the easy path and not to follow the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit in our relationships with others.

At the time that we do so, we may not realize that we are not telling the absolute truth and completely forget that we are not

obeying His Word, which clearly says to us, *“Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge, according to the image of Him who created him”*. (Colossians 3:9-10)

If we are Christians, we should be especially careful not to use flattery as a means to an end. We have a responsibility to be honest. It is so easy to tell people what they want to hear, in order to gain what we want. Although we may not realize it, they will likely see through our scheme.

We need to remember that honesty always breeds trust. A person with a reputation for exaggeration or lying will have a hard time getting others to believe him or her. As Christians, we must be careful not to get such a reputation. By avoiding lies, half-truths and even omissions of the truth, we will become known as a trustworthy person.

Perhaps we have never considered it, but rejected honesty is better than accepted dishonesty. If we have placed our faith in Jesus, as our Savior, lying is inconsistent with what God expects to be. If we genuinely care about people, we don't need to try to impress them at any cost.

May the Lord help us to be honest in our dealings with everyone with whom we come into contact. How well it has been said that *“honesty is the best policy”*. This is certainly true in all circumstances!

December 5

FRUITLESS WANDERINGS

“You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book? When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me.”

(Psalm 56:8-9)

When Eri was thirteen years old, she first became aware of Jesus. She was then a student at a Christian school in Tokyo and the lives and actions of some of the teachers at that school revealed to her the reality of Him.

After learning that Jesus could give lasting peace in the heart, she shared her thoughts with her sister one night. They were already in bed and chatting after the lights had been turned off. Eri then told her sister that if they gave their lives to Christ, she was sure that there would be more peace and joy in their home. But that was where the conversation ended.

Having been born the last of five children, Eri had always felt that she did not receive the attention she wanted from her parents and had a feeling of anger and bitterness towards them. She therefore grew up quite independent and, although outwardly confident, there was always loneliness and a longing to be cared for deep inside her heart.

Trying to forget her spiritual needs, Eri made her main purpose in life to shine academically, but soon found that it did not deal with her deep inward desire for love. Even going to Sunday school and church services did not satisfy her empty soul, but when her minister suggested that she should get baptized, she followed his advice. Even then, the loneliness and bitterness still remained. It seemed as though she could find no solution for the problems in her lonely heart.

It took a journey to America to deal with her need. When she started to attend a church in Los Angeles, the warm fellowship that she experienced there began to deal with the need of her empty heart. When Eri asked the members of the church to pray for her one day, she felt a sudden warmth well up inside and tears streamed down her cheeks. God at last then entered her needy heart and caused her to cry to Him to help her love her family as He loved her.

The heavy burden of her heart having gone, Eri was at last able to reach out in love and with the Gospel message to her parents and to all those that with whom she came into contact.

There are so many needy people around us, who have little or no purpose in life. May the Lord help us to reach out to them in love and tell them of a Savior, who loves them and longs that they will reach out to Him, so that He can meet their every need.

December 6

HOW CAN WE FACE DEATH?

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff,
they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)*

When we think about death, it somehow casts a frightening shadow over us because we have never experienced it and feel helpless to do anything about it. If we are sick, we can struggle with injury, disease or pain, but we feel that we will never be able to overcome death, no matter how much courage we may have. When death overtakes us, even our dearest ones cannot be with us. We feel that we will be completely alone.

Death is a result of Adam's sin and of the sins we all commit too. But Jesus defeated death for us. Satan looked as though he was going to be the victor in the Garden of Eden that we read of Genesis chapter 3. But God turned Satan's apparent victory into defeat when Jesus rose from the dead! How wonderful it is for us now to have the assurance that Someone will be with us when we pass over to the other side! Only one Person can walk with us through death's dark valley and bring us safely to the other the side – our Shepherd.

How important it is for us, not only to be prepared for that day which will inevitably come, but also to constantly be on the alert to tell others who do not know the Savior. Maybe some of those that we are contacting daily are fearful of death, especially those who are unwell physically, but they would never mention it to us. May the Lord make us good stewards of the wonderful message that He has entrusted to us.

*"I watched a sail until it dropped from sight
Over the rounding sea - a gleam of white
A last far-flashed farewell, and, like a thought
Slipt out of mind, it vanished and was not.
Yet the helmsman standing at the wheel
Broad seas still stretched beneath the gliding keel.
Disaster? Change? He felt no slightest sign,
Nor dreamed he of that far horizon line.
So may it be perchance, when down the tide
Our dear ones vanish. Peacefully they glide
On level seas, nor mark the unknown bound.
We call it death - to them 'tis life beyond!"*

December 7

“I WAS LOST, THEN JESUS FOUND ME!”

“I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplication. For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling.” (Psalm 116: 1 & 8)

“One day I, then Peggy Davey, was sitting in my office in the Civil Service in London, when a friend came into the room and invited me to an evangelistic meeting. I had little desire to go with her, but I did not like to refuse. At the time, I was 22 years of age and, until then, had not been inside a church more than five or six times in my life – not even to Sunday school!

I cannot even remember what was said in the meeting, but as I stood on the railway station on my way home, I was conscious, for the first time in my life, of the promptings of the Holy Spirit in my heart, drawing me to God. When I got home, I knelt beside my bed and accepted Jesus as my Savior and, in those moments, I was saved!

From then on, a completely new life began for me - a life of peace and joy - and I had a purpose in life, as I sought to serve the One who had saved me. I soon joined a local church and helped in the youth meetings there. Before long, I was able to contact several other Christians in the Board of Trade, where I worked, and a lunch-time fellowship meeting was started.

But more and more my time seemed to be taken up talking to others about the Lord and a desire was then born in my heart to serve God in a full-time capacity. I entered All Nations Christian College, feeling that China was my ultimate destination for service for Him. Then God closed that door and, after a short period of evangelistic outreach with the Faith Mission in Northern Ireland, I went out as a missionary to Japan with the Japan Evangelistic Band.

During the first two years spent in studying the difficult Japanese language, I became acquainted with Neil Verwey, a missionary from South Africa, with the same Mission. Before long, we became conscious that God was leading us to become one and we were married on the 9th September, 1954 in the Kobe Mission Hall.

At that time, having suffered malnutrition as a result of the recent war, many Japanese were also suffering from tuberculosis and were lying on hospital beds, with little hope in life. Realizing how needy they were, we, together with several Japanese evangelists

who joined our ranks, went into some hospital or other daily with the wonderful message of the Gospel. So it was, that the "Japan Mission for Hospital Evangelism" was formed, which later became known as "Japan Mission".

After being married for seven years, God gave us the priceless gift of a son, David. He, with his wife, Sue, who was also in Japan, joined us in the outreach here after graduating from university in the U.S.A. They are now gradually taking over responsibility for the oversight of the Mission, while we slip into the background as the years go by! Do pray for us and also for David and Sue's three children, Jesse, Alex & Chris - who are also reaching out for the Lord, in the spheres in which He has currently placed them.

December 8

COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING

1. *"Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace:
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above;
Praise the mount - I'm fixed upon it -
Mount of Thy redeeming love.*
2. *"Here I raise mine Ebenezer;
Hither by Thy help I'm come;
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood.*
3. *"O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;*

*Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for Thy courts above."*

(Robert Robinson - 1735-1790)

Robert Robinson was born in a poor home in England, his mother was a widow and, at the age of fourteen, he worked as apprentice to a barber.

He found the Lord under the ministry of the great preacher, George Whitefield, and soon began to preach himself.

He later became the pastor of a small church in Cambridge and also took up farming to augment his scanty income. During his life he was known to have written two hymns, one of which is the above.

December 9

HOW MUCH DO WE TRUST HIM?

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." (Job 13:15)

How much easier it is to trust when the sun is shining than when a storm is raging, but if we are ever to be really strong in the Lord, that strength will inevitably be born in a storm. Only then we will know how much faith we have. The Bible tells us that, ***"It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes."*** (Psalm 118:8-9) We can trust men too much, but can never trust God too much. He has promised to be with us every moment of every day, if we just keep our eyes on Him.

We need to remember that trust only really grows in the midst of the storm, for then we find, as we look to Him, that He is always there to undertake for us. The strongest tree is not found in the shelter of the forest but out in the open where the winds constantly beat against it, until it becomes strong. Such a tree is often sought for some great use.

We read in the book of Exodus how the Israelites faced the Egyptian army sweeping in to destroy them and they thought that they were doomed. Even though God's powerful hand had in the past delivered them many times, their response was fear and despair. The Israelites should have learned to trust God from past experience.

Such examples are preserved in the Bible so that we too can learn to trust Him. Sometimes we need to remember the past and how wonderfully God undertook for us, so that we will have enough courage to face the present and the future too.

Someone has said that 'the beginning of anxiety is the end of trust', however the beginning of true trust is the end of anxiety. However near the precipice He may take us, we may never snatch the reins out of His Hands.

Trust also includes giving God our future plans. We need to look at our priorities. What is most important to us? In what areas have we not really acknowledged Him? Are there perhaps some areas in which we have tried to restrict His guidance and overruling?

In many areas of our life we may have already acknowledged Him, but it is in the areas where we attempt to restrict or ignore Him that we will doubtless later experience considerable grief. Let us make sure to make Him a vital part of everything we do, then He will guide us, because we will be working to accomplish His purpose.

The much used missionary in Japan, Paget Wilkes, so well expressed this truth when he said, "There is one standard by which you can judge your spiritual life, and that is your ability to trust God."

December 10

A WORD IN SEASON

"... a word spoken in due season, how good it is!"

(Proverbs 15:23)

A young Japanese Christian girl went out for a walk one evening. As she was crossing a bridge not far from her home, she saw a young man, leaning over the side and deeply gazing into the water beneath.

She could not help but wonder what he was doing and the thought crossed her mind that maybe he was contemplating suicide. Even as she drew closer, she noticed that he did not attempt to look in her direction. "Lord, if he is a needy soul, please show me if there is anything I can do", she cried to God.

As she drew alongside him, the girl felt that she must say something to him, so she said, "Excuse me, I am so sorry to bother you, but I am on my way to visit a friend and am not quite sure how to get there. I wonder if you can help me. I need to get to Suehiro cho".

Saburo, who was, in fact, on the point of committing suicide, because of a broken love affair, had noticed the girl approaching out of the corner of his eye. But he was very much hoping that she would pass by quickly, so that he could throw himself into the water and speedily put an end to his life. He therefore deeply resented the interruption, but did not see how he could ignore her request. "It is difficult to explain the way, but I guess that I could quickly show you", he somewhat impatiently replied.

As they walked over the bridge, the girl, by now convinced that the young man was in some great need, immediately started to tell him about her best Friend. Saburo listened in silence as the girl related how she had met that Friend, called Jesus, and what He meant to her. She went on to tell him how wonderful it is to have Someone who is with you every moment of the day and night.

As they continued walking, she went on to confide in him that, before she had found that Friend, she had even contemplated committing suicide. At those words the young man could control his emotions no longer. "I was going to commit suicide when you spoke to me," he brokenly said.

There and then, the girl explained to Saburo how he too could have Jesus as his Friend and, before she left him, told him how to go to a church where he could get spiritual help.

Saburo did go to the church, became a Christian and was so grateful to the unknown girl who had gone to the trouble of telling him about her Friend.

May God help us always to be available to give a "word in season" to those who maybe unknown to us, desperately need our Savior!

December 11

WHAT IS FAITH?

“ ... this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.”

(1 John 5:4)

Do we sometimes wonder what faith in God really is? It is so central to the Christian message, we know that we can never do without it! However, there are times when we need to simplify what it means to those who show an interest in Christianity.

1. FAITH is the cable that links earth to heaven. If that cable is cut, how can we communicate with God?

2. FAITH is an assurance that the thing which God has said in His Word is true and that He will act according to what He has said.

3. FAITH is counting on God, not merely waiting for a thing, hoping for it, looking for it. True faith counts on God and believes BEFORE it sees.

4. FAITH is the doorway for God to enter the soul.

5. FAITH is a stepping-stone out onto a seeming void, just trusting in God.

How strong is our faith? Our faith is strong if we can survive contact with sinners, without falling into their life-style and their patterns of living. It is weak, if we must avoid certain activities, people or places in order to protect our spiritual life. In areas of weakness, we certainly need to be careful. We should also remember, and tell others too, that there is nothing that God will not do for the person who dares to step out in faith, trusting Him.

Someone has said that ‘faith is not waiting for a thing, hoping for a thing or looking for it. True faith counts on God and believes before it sees’. Therefore it does not faint, but believes God for the seemingly impossible and in advance, in faith, praises Him for the deliverance that is on the way.

We also need to remember that true faith grows in times of great difficulty, when we believe that God is always there in the midst of the storm.

When faith steps out on the seeming void, it finds the rock beneath it. We know this because it is written – “ ... *God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did*”. (Romans 4:17)

If God has a really big task to be performed, faith gets the contract! So let’s keep on believing, no matter how difficult our circumstances may seem to be!

December 12

PRAISE

"O give thanks unto the Lord; for His mercy endures for ever."

(Psalm 136:1)

"Whoever offers praise glorieth Me." (Psalm 50:23)

"From the rising of the sun to its going down the Lord's name is to be praised." (Psalm 113:3)

*"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."
(Hebrews 13:15)*

At the dedication of the temple:

"It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God." (2 Chronicles 5:13-14)

What causes us most to praise? When we remember all that God has done for us in the past. It also inspires us to trust Him for all that lies ahead.

The word 'remember' occurs 148 times in the Bible.

When we are in the midst of trouble, longing for God to deliver us, we should praise Him then - not wait till later!

December 13

THE PATH OF LONELINESS

" ... I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him."

(Isaiah 51:2)

Loneliness can be like a keen east wind that is blowing our way, but when feel lonely, we need to remember that God has said that *" ... those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."* (Isaiah 40:31) Loneliness is part of the process of living. It inevitably comes to each one of us at some time in our lives and, although we may not realize it at the time, it helps us grow and mature and relate to new circumstances

We see how lonely Elijah was when he ran away from Queen Jezebel and crawled into a cave in despair and self-pity, until God called him out. Loneliness had robbed Elijah of his perspective. It had caused him to think that everything depended on him, until God reassured him that there were seven thousand in Israel who were faithful to Him and that he was just one of them. Nothing happens to us by chance - no matter what happens, we should not allow ourselves to wallow in self-pity. We must draw near to God, build bridges for ourselves to others and not forget our value as a Christian in His service. When we think of human company, we need to remember that we come into this world alone and will leave it alone!

One more thing that we should remember is that caring for the lonely can be a cure for loneliness. Maybe we should go out of our way to invite people to visit us for fellowship and, if possible, offer them a meal. This can be a way of showing our love for others and at the same time filling a gap in our own lives. There are many lonely people around, who doubtless wonder if anyone cares if they live or die.

*"One by one He took from me
All the things I valued most;
'Til I was empty-handed,
Every glittering toy was lost.*

*And I walked earth's highways, grieving,
In my rags and poverty
Until I heard His voice inviting,
'Lift those empty hands to Me!'
Then I turned my hands toward heaven,
And He filled them with a store
Of His own transcendent riches
'til they could contain no more
And at last I comprehended
With my stupid mind, and dull,
That God cannot pour His riches
Into hands already full."*

December 14

REDUCED TO A WHISPER

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

"I hate that doctor!" Chizuko tried to shout, but only a hoarse whisper escaped from her lips, as she collapsed on her hospital bed in utter despair.

When the benign growth on her ovaries was removed and the operation on her intestines was completed, they had promised that she would regain her strength and be back to normal in no time. She had believed them and pictured herself healthy and back with her family within a few weeks. But it later emerged that a slip on the part of the anesthetist had maimed her and she was unable to breathe without the aid of the pipe inserted in her throat!

The next seven months were sheer misery day after day and Chizuko often thought that she would go out of her mind. Sometimes she wondered if religion would not help her, but which religion to turn to was the problem. If just her grandmother, who had knowledge of all sorts of religions, was still alive, she often thought.

Her husband was a kind man and her three children were a special joy to her – until she became sick! Then everything had become a burden! If only her husband was more enterprising, he would be able to help, she reckoned, but he shunned religion even more than she had in the past.

The next eleven years passed with Chizuko being in and out of hospital. The strain of such a life proved too much for her husband and one day, while she was in hospital, he disappeared, leaving the children in the care of relatives. As a result, in spite of her physical limitations, Chizuko was forced to leave the hospital and to create a home for her children and also somehow or other become the breadwinner!

Then, one day, Chizuko turned on the radio and happened to tune into the 'Voice of Joy' broadcast. The preacher quoted from the Bible words which, in those moments, met the deepest need of her heart, "*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" As Chizuko listened, she knew that it perfectly described her need! That warm invitation was more than enough for her and she immediately wrote to the 'Voice of Joy' office, asking for more information about the 'rest' that they offered. As Chizuko read the New Testament, which they sent her, and worked on the Bible correspondence course that was included with it, she longed for peace of heart and gladly confessed her sins and her need of the Savior.

Chizuko was far from strong physically, but she managed to have fellowship with fellow-Christians and to hold a light job. "I am still just able to whisper when I talk, but I have forgiven the anesthetist and realize that if it had not been for his error I might not have been desperate enough to find the Savior", she often testifies.

December 15

BENEATH THE CROSS OF JESUS

1. *"Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty rock
Within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness,
A rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat,
And the burden of the day.*

2. *“Upon that cross of Jesus
Mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One
Who suffered there for me;
And from my stricken heart, with tears
Two wonders I confess, –
The wonders of His glorious love,
And my own worthlessness.*

3. *“I take, O cross, thy shadow
For my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
The sunshine of His face;
Content to let the world go by,
To know no gain nor loss,
My sinful self my only shame,
My glory all the cross”.*

(Elizabeth Clephane - 1830-1869)

Elizabeth Clephane was born in Scotland, where she had found the Lord as her Savior, and spent much of her life ministering among the poor and needy in her community.

She also wrote many poems, of which the best known is ‘Beneath the cross of Jesus’. It was written in 1868, just one year before she went to be with the Lord.

December 16

THE WAY OF FAITH

“For we walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

God may sometimes answer our prayers in unexpected, miraculous ways, but He does not want us always to depend on the miraculous. We have a wonderful example of how He worked in such a way, however, in John Gospel. We read that *“... there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.”* (John 4:46-47)

In response to the nobleman, Jesus said, *“Go your way, your son lives.”* (v.50) We read in the next verse that the man believed what Jesus had done and went back home. When he got there, his servants went out to meet him and told him that his son was alive. The nobleman immediately enquired of them as to what time he got better and discovered that it was the very moment when Jesus had spoken to him!

Sometimes it is difficult to believe, as no doubt it was in the case of the nobleman, but how wonderful it is see the way in which God does work. Sometimes God intervenes in miraculous ways, as in the case of the nobleman’s son, but even if he does not do so, we must trust Him no matter what happens. We may well be called upon to trust God when we endure sickness or grief or some great disappointment. Then we must realize that *“we walk by faith, not by sight”*.

We read in 1 Corinthians, chapter 16, verses 8-9, Paul said, *“... I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”* Paul was not at all discouraged by the adversary. He did not run away, but tarried and was challenged to greater and bolder faith.

We must always fight to hold fast to our faith, especially in:

- (a) The Father’s Love
- (b) The cleansing Blood of Christ
- (c) The sanctifying Power of the Holy Spirit

*“Though I know not what awaits me,
What the future holds in store,
Yet I know the Lord is faithful.
I have proved Him ‘ore and ‘ore.”*

December 17

THE LORD’S MESSENGER BOY

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

As far back as Hiroshi Kaneko could remember, his life had been aimless. He was just a drifter! He had lost his father in the war and, as the eldest son, he realized that he should become the breadwinner of the family.

He had managed to get a job in the Ground Defense Force, but that had not lasted long, because he very much disliked it when he was told what to do. He had then tried the Marine Defense Force, but there the discipline was also just too much for him.

In fact, Hiroshi could settle nowhere and was a constant trial to his mother and a misery to himself. Life at home became unbearable for him and he decided to run away and went to the big city of Tokyo. Surely he would find something interesting to do there, he reckoned. But before he had a chance to find out what that might be, he found himself flat on his back in hospital. He had a sudden hemorrhage and was diagnosed as having a stomach ulcer!

As Hiroshi lay on his hospital bed, he began to reflect on his life. What a horrible mess it had been. But his thoughts were suddenly interrupted when a group of young people entered the ward and started singing to the patients. Why they did not go out and enjoy themselves somewhere else instead of spending their time in a miserable hospital, Hiroshi could not fathom. But they were so friendly that he was drawn to them, in spite of himself. They also gave him a portion of what they called, God's Holy Book, and, as he read it, it opened a new world of thought to him and he felt a desire to know more.

On leaving the hospital, Hiroshi started to attend the services at the simple little wooden church from which they had come and there he found a new way of life. It did not take long for him to find their Savior and, having been radically changed by the experience of the 'new birth', he became a good, trustworthy, dependable office worker. His spare time was dedicated to serving the Lord and every weekend he visited the hospital in which he had been a patient, giving out copies of the 'Fountain of Joy' magazine and other Christian literature to the patients.

'I am the Lord's messenger boy and my calling is to pass on to others the Good News of My Savior's glorious salvation', Hiroshi joyfully declares, as he moves from bed to bed, ministering to the sick.

May the Lord help us also to be His messenger, no matter in what sphere He has placed us!

December 18

CONSIDER HIM!

“For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.” (Hebrews 12:3)

It is so easy to get discouraged when difficult things happen in our lives that we did not expect, and maybe we think that we did not deserve. At such times it is so easy to become frustrated and dissatisfied with our lot in life. At those very times, we need to remember that there are multitudes who have walked difficult pathways and even now are doing so. Maybe they are in circumstances that are a lot worse than we are at the present time.

We can think back on Elijah, for example, who was so desperate that he sat under a juniper tree and cried to God for deliverance. We are also reminded of the desperate cries for help, recorded in the Psalms, that David sent up to God. But perhaps, more than ever, we are reminded of the cry of the Man of Sorrows in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross.

So we should not think that we are the only one who has difficulties in our lives and feel sorry for ourselves. We need to remember that God is able to do wonders even in discouraging situations. It is good to read how Nehemiah reminded the people when they were doing a great task for the Lord and were afraid of the enemy, ***“Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”*** (Nehemiah 4:14)

So, let's plod on in naked faith, knowing that God is with us every moment of every day and that He has not forgotten us and will undertake for us every step of the way, if we look up to Him and not down at our circumstances.

The enemy of souls, the devil, is always endeavoring to make us discouraged. If he can get us 'under the weather', he wins! We must always remember that God can use seemingly discouraging circumstances to bring glory to himself. Being imprisoned for his faith, as Paul was, would cause many of us to become bitter or to give up, but he saw it as one more opportunity to spread the Gospel. He knew that the circumstances in which he found himself were not as important as what he did with them. May we learn a lesson from his wonderful example.

It is also true that the devil is always on the lookout for a discouraged Christian that he can use. It is not what we 'go through' that matters, it is when we 'go under' that we are useless as servants of the Living God.

How well it has been said – “If God can enable the birds to whistle in drenching and stormy darkness and if He can make the butterflies able to bear up under rain, what can He not do for those who trust Him? If you meet anyone without a smile today, give them one of yours!”

December 19

IN BUSINESS FOR JESUS

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

It was Christmas day, but that meant nothing to Shigeo Masuda as he lay on his hospital bed, sick with tuberculosis. Then, suddenly, the hospital intercom system sprang to life, announcing that a Christmas meeting would be held in the hall in the afternoon.

Masuda San was so bored that he decided to attend the gathering. He could by no means enter the spirit of the meeting, but something about it disturbed him, although he could not define it. It somehow made him recall his past of which he had never been very proud.

He could not help thinking back on the many drinking parties, the gambling and the attractive women with whom he had been involved, as a salesman in a large wholesale camera business. He knew that his wife had always hated the way in which he had lived, but he had always reckoned that it could not be helped.

Vaguely curious about the Christians' religion, Masuda San managed to borrow a copy of John's Gospel from a fellow-patient and started to read it. Before he read very far, however, the truths he found there gripped his heart, as nothing had ever done before, and he started regularly to attend the Christian meetings in the hospital.

Before long, the Word of God found a lodging place in his heart and he obtained assurance that his sins were forgiven. From that time on, Masuda San's great burden was that what he did day by day would count for the kingdom of God. He soon learned that

firm assurance is based on God's Word and that he needed firmly to cling to the promises of God.

After two years, he was able to leave the hospital and the Lord soon showed him that He wanted him to be a businessman for Him. So, with a minimum of capital, he rented a little shop and commenced a camera business. His prime purpose was to earn money for the Lord's work.

He knew that the camera business was highly competitive, but Masuda San had the assurance that his business was the Lord's and that He would prosper him. As a result, the kingdom of God has been advanced through Masuda San's prayers and vision.

May the Lord help us to dedicate to His service what we are involved in day by day. Then we can be sure that His kingdom will be advanced through our vision and our prayers.

December 20

EXPRESSING THANKFULNESS

"It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and your faithfulness every night." (Psalm 92:1-2)

It has been well said that there are at least three significant aspects of thankfulness. We need to remember what God has done for us, tell others about it and offer ourselves, our time and our resources to Him.

We must always remember that we are Christians because of God's unmerited grace, not as the result of any effort, ability, choice or act of service on our part. We certainly cannot obtain salvation through any effort we can make, but His intention is that our salvation will result in acts of service and out of gratitude for His wonderful free gift, we should seek to serve others with kindness and love.

Thankfulness should therefore be a major part of all our relationships. No matter what our circumstances, thanks should be on our lips every day. We should of course primarily reveal our thanks to the Lord, but also to our loved ones, our friends and

those with whom we come into contact. In fact, when thanksgiving becomes an integral part of our lives, our attitude towards life will change. We will certainly become more gracious, loving and humble.

Thankfulness ought to be the prime characteristic in a Christian's life. When we receive a gift, we do not ask the giver how much we need to pay for it. Rather, we say, "Thank you very much!" Yet, how often Christians, who have been given the wonderful gift of eternal life, feel obliged to try to work their way to God. Rather, because our salvation and even our faith are gifts, we should receive them joyfully and respond with gratitude and joy.

While no action or work that we can do will help us obtain salvation, God's intention is that our salvation should result in acts of service. We are not saved merely for our own benefit, but to serve Christ and build up His church.

The famous Bible scholar, Matthew Henry, who was once accosted by thieves, and robbed, wrote in his diary, "Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; secondly, because they took my purse and not my life; thirdly, because although they took my all, it was not much and fourthly, it was I who was robbed and not I who robbed!"

May the Lord help us, like Matthew Henry, to be more thankful for our blessings than concerned about what happens to us!

December 21

NO LONGER ON THE SIDELINES

"Then Moses said to the Lord, 'O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since you have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue'. So the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing or the blind? Have not I, the Lord?'" (Exodus 4: 10-11)

As a boy, Takemitsu Sunayama had always stood awkwardly in the shadows, watching the other children play, conscious that he could not walk properly, because he had been born with one of his legs several inches shorter than the other. On leaving school, he obtained employment in a local furniture store, but, being very

lonely, he spent all his spare time and money on going to the movies, even neglecting meals. Then one day he found that he was spitting up blood and went to see a doctor. Pulmonary tuberculosis was diagnosed and hospitalization resulted.

Takemitsu was convinced that he would never recover and was utterly miserable. Then one day his attention was aroused at seeing a particularly attractive girl who was a fellow-patient. On making subtle enquiries, he discovered that she attended the Christian meetings held for the patients in the hospital. As a result, he also decided to attend, but was scared to join in the singing for fear of injuring his lungs.

After a while, his interest waned, but one day someone placed a Christian leaflet on his bed. Feeling utterly depressed, Takemitsu picked it up and started to read it. Some words that he read there caught his attention – *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20)

Takemitsu so much longed for new life in his weak body, that there and then he decided to put his trust in God and to hand over his diseased body to Him. The improvement in his condition was immediate, and although Takemitsu knew little of the full meaning of salvation, he did believe that it was God who had touched him. Within a month he was able to leave the hospital and started attending a church not far from his home. He had always felt that he was by no means eloquent, but before long felt a deep desire to serve the Lord as an evangelist. The Lord encouraged him through the Words, *“... go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”* (Exodus 4:12)

In his third year at Bible College, an earnest young girl, Kazuko Ando, especially caught his attention and one day he nervously approached her and proposed to her. Kazuko was quite taken aback and flatly refused. However, feeling sure that she was God’s choice for him, Takemitsu asked her to pray about the matter. She did so and is now Mrs Sunayama, and, together with her husband, is daily reaching out to seeking souls with the Gospel.

Maybe you know someone who always seems to be on the sidelines. A word of encouragement from the Bible may be all they need to bring them to the Savior.

December 22

TELL ME THE OLD, OLD STORY

1. *"Tell me the Old, Old story, Of unseen things above,
Of Jesus and His glory, Of Jesus and His love;
Tell me the story simply, As to a little child,
For I am weak and weary, And helpless and defiled.*

(Chorus)

*"Tell me the Old, Old Story,
Tell me the Old, Old Story,
Tell me the Old, Old Story
Of Jesus and His love."*

2. *"Tell me the story slowly, That I may take it in –
That wonderful redemption, God's remedy for sin;
Tell me the story often, For I forget so soon,
The early dew of morning Has passed away at noon.*
3. *"Tell me the story softly, With earnest tones, and grave;
Remember! I'm the sinner Whom Jesus came to save;
Tell me that story always, If you would really be,
In any time of trouble, A comforter to me.*
4. *"Tell me the same old story, When you have cause to fear
That this world's empty glory Is costing me too dear;
Yes, and when that world's glory Is dawning on my soul,
Tell me the old, old story: 'Christ Jesus makes thee whole.'"*

(Katherine Hankey)

This beautiful hymn was written by an English lady, Miss Hankey, when she was recovering from a serious illness in 1866. It expressed her condition at that time and took her nearly a year to complete it. It has since been translated into many languages.

December 23

SUFFERING

“ ... let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”

(1 Peter 4:19)

Inasmuch as the Cross is the symbol of our faith and the Man of Sorrows is our leader, why would we think it strange if some suffering comes into our lives? But when suffering seems more than we can bear, we can always remember that on the Cross even Jesus asked “Why?” But, having asked, He committed Himself to God. Jesus’ greatest triumph was the way in which He placed His trust in his Father in His darkest hour. It was then that He completely fulfilled God’s purpose for His life.

We cannot live a Christian life that will please God, without some cost to ourselves. But may our consolation be to remember that it will not take long for God to make up to us in the next world for all we have suffered here on earth.

It is very difficult for us to realize that even God is not immune from suffering. It was probably difficult for the disciples too, when they saw Him, to grasp the fact that He was God in human form. But through the suffering He endured on the cross, Jesus completed the work necessary for our salvation. When we face trials, we just need to go to Him for strength and patience. He alone really understands how we feel and is so well able to help us.

We always need to remember too that people who have known pain are better able to reach out with compassion to others who are suffering. The Lord is constantly taking us into the dark that He may tell us things that we would not otherwise have known. But we must always be careful how we face sorrow.

It is not God’s intention that we should look down at the grave, down into our breaking hearts, down at the emptiness, the loss and the darkness around us, but rather into the face of God and see there His love for us and His interpretation of its purpose in our lives. There alone will we find comfort and hope for the future.

Jesus never promised that His followers would not suffer. Most of the disciples were in fact martyred for their faith. Rather, He said

that none of His followers would suffer spiritual or eternal loss. On earth, each one of us will die, but believers in Jesus will be saved for eternal life.

How well Dr. A.B. Simpson, the famous preacher, expressed this truth when he said, "We shall find that most of the lives that count much for God had in them a great renunciation, where the dearest idol was laid upon Moriah's altar, and from that hour there was new fruit and power."

December 24

THE LONELY HEART

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psalm 34:8)

On the day that they brought home the 'honorable ashes' of her father, Noriko Sekine was quite bewildered. As she looked at the little white box, placed in front of the statue of Buddha, she just could not comprehend that those ashes were all that was left of her dear father.

When she arrived home from school the next day, her stepmother had not returned from work. Just one look at the little white box made her feel so scared that she ran out of the house, leaving the door wide open. In spite of the fact that it was raining heavily, Noriko did not go back to the house until she was sure that someone would be there.

"Noriko, how could you have gone out and left the door open. Have you no sense of responsibility?" were the words that greeted her on her return. In her misery, Noriko so wished that she had known her real mother, who had died less than a month after she had been born. She was sure that she would have understood how she felt.

Her father had, however, married again just two months after her mother's death. He had probably done this in order to look after her better, but now he was just ashes in the white box and she was left, feeling even more lonely and dejected than ever before. Maybe she could find the answer in religion, Noriko thought, and

burnt incense at the Buddhist altar, expecting a miracle to happen. But when nothing happened, she decided that there must be no god there.

On finishing school, Noriko's life was one round of pleasure, but she was deeply conscious of the uselessness and emptiness of it all. Deep down in her heart there was still an awful loneliness, which she could not overcome. But a great change took place in her life when she was twenty years of age. It was Christmas time and for the past two years she had gone to a dance party at that time of the year. But this year somehow she had no desire to do so. In fact, she had noticed a poster, telling of a special Christmas gathering to be held in a building with a cross on the top of it, not very far from her home, and she decided to attend.

The warm atmosphere in the church touched her heart and from then on she attended the services as often as she could. It did not take long for Noriko to take Jesus Christ as her Savior and then she knew, without a doubt, that she would never be lonely again.

If you are feeling lonely today, remember the One who always wants to be our Companion and Guide us and, if you know Him, always remember to share Him with others, who also may be lonely and don't know where to turn for consolation.

December 25

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

- 1. "O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark street shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.*
- 2. "For Christ is born of Mary;
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.*

*O morning stars, together
 Proclaim the holy birth,
 And praises sing to God the King,
 And peace to men on earth.*

3. *"How silently, how silently
 The wondrous gift is giv'n!
 So God imparts to human hearts
 The blessings of His heav'n.
 No ear may hear His coming;
 But in this world of sin,
 Where meek souls will receive Him still,
 The dear Christ enters in.*

4. *"O holy Child of Bethlehem,
 Descend to us, we pray;
 Cast out our sin, and enter in;
 Be born in us today.
 We hear the Christmas angels
 The great glad tidings tell;
 O come to us, abide with us,
 Our Lord Emmanuel."*

(Phillips Brooks)

When Phillips Brooks was a small boy, his parents encouraged him and his brothers to learn hymns and when Phillips went to college, he is said to have been able to repeat some two hundred of them. He then began to write hymns himself. This is one of them and was written when he was the rector of the Holy Trinity Church of Philadelphia. He especially loved children and wrote them for his Sunday school. The tune, St. Louis, was written by the organist of the church, Lewis Redner. In the middle of the night before the Christmas service in 1868, he woke up suddenly with angelic strains ringing in his ear. He took a piece of paper and jotted down the melody of the tune and had it ready for the church service the next morning!

December 26

HOW TO LIVE IN VICTORY

“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.”

(1 John 3:9)

Through the wonder of Christ’s love and help we are able to experience victory over sin. We all have areas in our lives where temptation is strong and habits are hard to overcome. Such weaknesses give the devil a foothold, so we always need to bear in mind our areas of vulnerability.

Four steps are necessary to find victory over prevailing sin. We need to feed on God’s Word, seek the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, stay away from tempting situations and, if necessary, seek the help of other Christians.

We can see a wonderful illustration of victory in 1 Samuel 14: 8-10, *“Then Jonathan said, ‘Very well, let us cross over to these men, and we will show ourselves to them. If they say thus to us, ‘Wait until we come to you’, then we will stand still in our place and not go up to them. But if they say thus, ‘Come up to us, then we will go up. For the Lord has delivered them into our hand, and this will be a sign to us.’”*

As we can see from this passage, spiritual victories often come from small steps taken for God. Jonathan did not have the authority to lead all the troops into battle, but he was able to start a small skirmish in one corner of the enemy camp. When he did so, panic broke out among the Philistines and victory was possible.

When we are facing a difficult situation that is beyond our control, we need to realize that a few small steps may be all that are needed to begin a chain of events, which will lead to eventual victory.

*“I refused to be discouraged, to be sad, or to cry,
I refuse to be downhearted and here’s the reason why.
I have a God who’s mighty, who’s sovereign and supreme;
I have a God who loves me, and I am on His team!
He is all wise and powerful, Jesus is His name,*

*Though everything is changeable, my God remains the same.
My God knows all that's happening; beginning to the end,
His presence is my comfort, He is my dearest friend.
When sickness comes to weaken me, to bring my head down low,
I call upon my mighty God; into His arms I go."*

December 27

HER PARTING GIFT!

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." (Job 13:15)

Many years ago, in the Okayama Prefecture of Japan, a baby girl was born to a cotton dealer, whose family were staunch Buddhists. In fact, her father's brother had dedicated his life and possessions to the cause of Buddha and lived a solitary life as a monk in the mountains.

When she grew up, an early marriage was arranged for her and she became Mrs. Doi. At the early age of seventeen, she gave birth to a baby girl, but soon afterwards, she contracted tuberculosis.

Immediate treatment might well have resulted in a speedy recovery, but the Dois had little money and she too was working as much as she could to help make ends meet. In addition to the financial problem, she just could not think who would look after her baby if she entered hospital. Before long, however, she could not carry on any longer and hospitalization was the only way.

In the providence of God, she was admitted to the same ward as a keen Christian, Mrs. Azuma. But mutual conversation was difficult at first, because the nurse needed to give her attention day and night. Gradually, however, there was slight improvement and Mrs. Azuma was able to testify to her about what God had done in her life. Her first attempt at such a conversation, however, met with little response from Mrs. Doi, who clearly told her that she had already been deceived by religion and had little faith in it. But gradually, in answer to prayer, the Light of the Gospel began to gain entrance into her dark heart and Mrs. Doi found the Savior

Before long, however, her physical condition deteriorated to such an extent that one day she whispered confidentially to Mrs.

Azuma, that she knew that she would die soon and badly wanted a book-holder affixed to her bed, so that she could read her Bible easily. She also added that, when she had a little energy, she also wanted to write her testimony for her husband in a notebook, because she had a great burden that he too might find her Savior and pass it on to their beloved daughter. That was all she had to leave them, she said.

Weak as she was, in answer to prayer, the doctor's permission was obtained and Mrs. Doi started painstakingly to write her testimony. During those days her only joy was in reading the Bible and she hung on in faith to the Words, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him". Her favorite hymn was, 'Count your blessings, name them one by one' and those words were constantly on her lips until she went to be with her Savior.

May the Lord help us especially to reach out with the Gospel to those that are sick, for we never know how much longer they may have to take it in.

December 28

DYING TO SELF

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

When we are forgotten or neglected or purposely set aside and are not hurt by its having been done to us and our heart is happy, because we know that that very happening reveals that we have been counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self. When our good is evil spoken of, when our wishes are crossed, our advice disregarded, or our opinions ridiculed, and we do not let anger rise in our hearts, or even try to defend ourselves, that is dying to self.

When we patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity or any annoyance or when we face waste, extravagance and can stand by and say nothing, that is dying to self. When we don't desire to refer to ourselves often in conversation, or are not dying to tell others of our own good works, hoping for commendation, that is also dying to self.

When we can see others prosper and have their needs met and can honestly rejoice with them and feel no envy, although our needs may be far greater than theirs and we are actually in pretty desperate straits, that is dying to self. When we can receive correction from someone who we regard inferior to ourselves, and come humbly submit and feel no rebellion or resentment in our heart, that is dying to self.

There is no doubt that in the heart of each one of us there is a problem with 'self', which can only be dealt with through Christ's help. We even see this in the lives of His disciples. " ... *James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, 'Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask'. And He said to them, 'What do you want Me to do for you?' They said to Him, 'Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory'. But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you ask to sit on My right hand and My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared.'*" (Mark 10: 35-40)

Perhaps we have never thought of it, but seeds can only germinate below the ground and we never see it happening. We so often shrink from the thought of 'dying to self', although, in nature, we accept the fact that a seed must die if it is ever going to come to fruition. May we be willing to endure the same, knowing that only then will we be fruitful in His service.

December 29

THE THICKEST BOOK OF ALL

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1)

Kikue's marriage was on the rocks and she decided to file for divorce. All that was left were bitter regrets and a little girl, Taeko. Determined to forget the past, Kikue went back to using her single name and got a job in order to support herself and her daughter. But her problems were by no means over. A year later, when all seemed to be going well, a medical check-up revealed that she had contracted lung tuberculosis!

Heartbroken at the thought of being separated from her beloved little daughter, Kikue turned in desperation to her father, who had divorced her mother many years ago. She knew that he was kind-hearted and would do his best to look after his grandchild. Kikue's next task was to sort out the things that she needed to take to the hospital. As she did so, she wept in despair, but realizing that she would have to take hold of herself, she decided to take some books with her to take her mind off of her problems. So she selected the thickest books that she could find in her bookcase and packed them in along with her luggage.

As she sought to settle in at the hospital, all kinds of misgivings flooded her mind and, to divert her distracted thoughts, she decided to read the thickest book that she had with her. It was a Bible! Kikue read it day after day until the lights went out in the evening. In fact, she hardly took time off to eat and in ten days completed reading the whole Bible! From the reading of the Old Testament, Kikue learned that there is only one True God and that He is a loving, merciful Father. From the New Testament, she learned that Jesus had been sent to this world as a Savior and that He could save her from the penalty of her sins, if she trusted in Him.

Above all, Kikue craved Christian fellowship and managed to make contact with the minister of a church near the hospital. Kikue soon confessed her sins and joyfully entered into a personal relationship with the Living God. Physically, she was still far from well and an operation was recommended, necessitating the removal of five ribs. But God undertook for her and gradually she regained her strength.

When she was preparing to leave the hospital, Kikue sought to know what the Lord had in mind for her future. He especially spoke to her through the Words, "present your bodies a living sacrifice" and Kikue sensed that God was challenging her to enter Bible College to equip herself for meaningful Christian service. On graduation, Kikue became a worker in a local church and subsequently had the joy of seeing her daughter, Taeko, also dedicate her life to God.

How grateful Kikue now is that she took the thickest book that she could find with her into the hospital!

December 30

THE IMPORTANCE OF FELLOWSHIP

"And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

(Genesis 3:8)

If we think of two people trying to hide themselves from the all-seeing, all-knowing God it really seems stupid, eh. We might well wonder how they could be so silly as to think that they could hide from the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe!

Yet how often we are tempted to do the same and act as though God does not know what we are doing or thinking. We just need to remember that we can hide nothing from Him and to realize that honesty will always strengthen our relationship with Him.

God wanted to be with Adam and Eve, but, because of their sin, they were afraid to be with Him. Sin had broken their close relationship with their Creator, just as it will always break ours. But, how wonderful it is to remember that Jesus came into the world to open up the way for us to renew our fellowship with God, if we just yield ourselves to Him.

How well an unknown author has expresses this truth so vividly in the following words. It is just called – 'CLAY'!

*"A Persian fable says; One day
A wanderer found a lump of clay
So redolent of sweet perfume,
Its odor scented all the room.
"Who art thou?" was his quick demand,
Art thou some gem from Samarcand,
Or spikenard in this rude disguise,
Or other costly merchandise?"
"Nay, I am but a lump of clay."
"Then, whence this wondrous sweetness, say?
"Friend, if the secret I disclose,
"I have been dwelling with the rose."*

May the Lord help us to long for more and more fellowship with our Savior, knowing that, if we do so, the result will be personal blessing for us. More than this, His fragrance will also be passed on from our lives to those with whom we come into contact, who also have a great need to find Him as their Savior.

December 31

REJOICING IN JESUS

*“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.
Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching.”*

(2 Timothy 4:2)

Many years ago, on a beautiful spring day in the city of Kumamoto, the trains were packed with sightseers who had come from far and wide to view the delicate, pink, cherry blossoms. One of them was a foreign lady who was a missionary. Her destination was not connected with the beauty of the scenery, however, but rather with the famous Shinto shrine in that city.

The Japanese knight, Kato Kiyomasa, who had been lord of the shrine many years ago, had died, having been poisoned by an enemy. At his death the condition of his body had given the appearance that he had contracted leprosy. As a result, the legend was that the spirit of that shrine had great mercy on those suffering from that disease. For this reason, lepers from all over Japan came to seek healing there.

As the missionary walked the streets of the city, wherever she went she saw the emaciated bodies of the begging lepers, lying on the pavements. The sight was more than her heart could bear and resulted in a call from God to build a hospital in Kumamoto to care for the bodies, as well as the souls of those poor lepers.

One day, some years later, this missionary, with a heart still burning for those who did not know the Savior, went to a certain university to share the Gospel. Among the intelligent, bright young girls there, one in particular, Asako San, was greatly moved by her story and from then on began to attend the local church.

Some years later, however, she married a man who was a strong Buddhist and reluctantly laid aside her belief in the Savior. But when

she was 60 years old, she became sick with tuberculosis and entered Habikino Hospital. She was desperately lonely and was moved to tears one day, when a young lady entered her room, greeted her warmly and gave her some flowers.

Asako discovered that the girl, who was also a patient at the hospital, was a Christian and, as a result, a longing to hear more of the message of the Lord Jesus that she had heard years previously, entered her lonely heart. It did not take long for her to yield her life to the Savior and she became a radiant Christian. In the meantime, however, the missionary who first told her of the Savior had gone to be with the Lord. How wonderful to think that a seed sown some forty years earlier brought forth fruit!

May the Lord help us to sow the seed in season and out of season, knowing that He will bring about the harvest in His own wonderful time and way. May we have a strong desire to pass on the message of salvation, whenever we have an opportunity, conscious that there are so many around us who may well realize their desperate need of Him.

LIST OF SUBJECTS

Acceptance	June 7; Oct 16
Affliction	Mar 15; Aug 7; Nov 4
Anger	Jan 15; Mar 27; Oct 23
Assurance	Jan 17; May 1; Oct 21
Atonement	Oct 11
Believe	Feb 5
Bible	Jan 22; May 27
Blessing	Sept 4
Blood	Jan 26
Burdens	Aug 16, 23; Nov 6
Circumstances	Feb 12, 19; Mar 20, 29
Contentment	July 1
Cost	June 5
Criticism	Apr 10; Sept 30
Crosses	Nov 27
Death	Aug 12; Oct 30; Dec 6
Depression	Mar 25; July 8
Difficulties	Nov 8; Sept 13
Discouragement	Sep 23; Dec 18
Eagles	Nov 13
Endurance	Apr 29; Aug 5
Enemies	Mar 6
Eternal Life	Sept 20
Faith	May 3, 22; Aug 19; Oct 9, 28; Nov 20; Dec 16
Faithful	Aug 9
Fear	Jan 8; May 24; July 5; Dec 2
Fellowship	Jan 3; Dec 30
Forgiveness	Jan 5; Apr 22; Sep 2
Friendship	Jan 19
Gifts	Feb 21
Goal	Feb 23
God	Jan 31
Greatness	Jan 24; May 20
Grief	June 24
Guidance	Apr 19; May 29
Guilt	Sept 27
Happiness	Mar 22

Healing	May 6
Heart	June 28
Heaven	Apr 24
Holy Spirit	Feb 16
Honesty	Dec 4
Hope	Apr 5
Hospitality	Apr 1
Humility	Mar 11; June 10
Imperfection	Aug 26
Joy	July 24
Joyful	April 26
Light	Sep 25
Loneliness	July 19; Dec 13
Lost	Oct 4
Love	July 31; Oct 7
Ministry	Jan 10
New Year	Jan 1
Obedience	Feb 9, 14; Sep 6
Old Age	Feb 28
Peace	June 17
Perfect	Mar 1
Possible	Jan 12
Power	Nov 29
Praise	Mar 18; Nov 25
Prayer	Mar 8; July 17, 22
Presence	April 15
Pressure	July 3
Purity	Aug 14
Rejoicing	Aug 21
Remembering	Apr 12
Repentance	May 15
Responsibility	Sep 18
Rest	May 17
Sacrifice	Feb 2; July 26
Salvation	Apr 8; May 13; Aug 2
Sanctification	Sep 9
Satisfaction	Sep 16
Second Coming	Nov 11
Selflessness	Dec 28

Serving	Mar 4
Sin	May 8
Sorrow	Aug 30; Oct 18, 25
Steps	Apr 17
Strength	June 21; July 29; Aug 28
Suffering	Dec 23; Mar 13; June 3; Sep 11; Nov 22
Surrender	July 10
Thankfulness	Dec 20
Trial	Oct 14; Nov 15
Trouble	June 26
Trust	June 14; July 15; Dec 9
Unbelievers	June 19
Victory	Dec 26
Weakness	May 31; June 12; July 12
Wings	Feb 7; Oct 2
Witnesses	Nov 18
Words	May 10
Worry	Apr 3
Yoke	Jan 29

The Lame Take the Prey is a daily devotional book that features testimonies, hymns and portions of Scripture which have been an encouragement to Peggy over the years. It is our hope that the Lord would enable those who read this book to have a closer walk with Him and be inspired to tell others of the Savior.

When Peggy Verwey arrived in Japan by boat just after the war in 1951, she came with the idea of dedicating her life to missionary work. Little did she know that, together with Neil, she would be instrumental in reaching many thousands for the Lord in Japan over the next 50 years!

At the age of 86, her ministry in Japan is limited, but she never leaves the house without tracts to distribute and is still making precious contacts for the kingdom of God.



Neil & Peggy Verwey

Neil and Peggy Verwey are the founders of Japan Mission, a faith work established in Japan in 1957. Together with their son, his family and many co-laborers, they continue to strive to share the Gospel with the seeking ones among the masses, by whatever means the Lord reveals.

£ 6.00 GBP / \$12.00 USD

ISBN 978-0-900748-50-9

