

A vibrant field of wildflowers, featuring numerous red poppies and purple cornflowers growing densely together. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others as buds. The green foliage of the plants is visible between the colorful blossoms.

GOD's KINDNESS

What the Bible says

By

Jean Stapleton

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INTRODUCTION

When we see around us all that God has made: the plants, the animals, the sun, moon and stars, we know that God must be very wise and powerful. We might wonder whether this great and powerful God cares about people like us. One of the answers the Bible gives us, is to tell us that God is kind. Each chapter in this book begins with a short Bible reading. We will look at some of the words the Bible uses to describe God's **kindness**:

grace: **kindness** to those who do not deserve it.

mercy: **kindness** to those who are troubled and unhappy.

lovingkindness: God's **kindness** because of His unchanging love for His people.

Chapter 1 - Grace for Noah

Read: Genesis 6: 5 – 8 and 14 – 22

God had created a perfect world: we read this in the first chapter of the Bible. The first man and woman, Adam and Eve, were given a beautiful garden to live in. God had given them life and everything that they needed to live happily. He gave them just one rule to show their loving obedience to Him. Sadly, Adam and Eve disobeyed the God who had been so good to them, breaking the one rule that He had given them. This was how sin came into the world. Since that time, everyone born into this world (except for the Lord Jesus) is sinful.

Sin brought trouble: hatred, violence, sickness, sadness and death. As the years passed, God saw that the world was full of wickedness and violence. God is very patient: He gave the people many years to change their ways. They did not change and God said that He would send a great flood to destroy those wicked people.

One man was different from the people around him. Noah loved God and lived in obedience to Him. We read that Noah 'found grace' from God (Genesis 6: 8). This means that God showed kindness to Noah, more than even he deserved. God gave Noah instructions for building an ark: a very large boat in which Noah's family and many animals would be kept safe.

Noah warned the people of what was going to happen to them because of their evil ways. No-one

listened to him, but Noah had faith in God and did all that God told him to do. He and his wife and his three sons and their wives, were the only people saved from the flood.

THINK AND PRAY: Noah had faith (trusted) in God and he was saved by God's grace towards him. The Bible teaches us that God punishes sinful behaviour, but has grace for those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2: 8).

Chapter 2 - Lot's rescue

Read: Genesis 19: 1-3 and 15-21 and 29

Abraham was Lot's uncle who had brought Lot with him to the land of Canaan. Both men owned many animals and needed more space for them. Abraham allowed Lot to choose which part of the land he would take. Lot decided to move near to the River Jordan, where there was good grassland.

Lot's choice brought him near to some very evil cities and as time went by, he moved into the city of Sodom. One day, Abraham had three visitors. Although these visitors appeared as men, two were angels and one was the Son of God. Sarah (Abraham's wife) prepared a meal for them and then the Lord talked with Abraham. After this, the two angels went towards Sodom. Abraham knew that the people of Sodom were very wicked and that the time of their punishment had come. He prayed that God would not destroy Sodom even if there were only fifty people in the city who were not evil like the rest. The Lord promised He would not destroy the city if there were fifty people who did right. Abraham continued praying: what if there were forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty or even just ten? God promised to do as Abraham had asked.

The angels came into Lot's house and told him to be ready to take his family out of the city. Only Lot's wife and two of his daughters were willing to leave. Even though the angels warned Lot of what was about to happen, he and his wife and daughters

would not hurry. God had mercy on Lot and the angels took him and his family by the hand and brought them outside the city.

The angels told Lot to escape to the mountains, but Lot was afraid to do this. Lot knew that he had been shown great mercy, but he asked another favour. Could he take refuge in a small city nearby? The angels said that he could do this and they promised that they would not destroy the small city of Zoar. When Lot was safe in Zoar, God destroyed the evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because the people of those cities would not give up their evil ways.

THINK AND PRAY: God heard Abraham's prayer and saved Lot, even though there were not even ten people in those cities who loved God. When we pray for our friends, we know that God listens and will answer.



Chapter 3 - The Servant

Read: Genesis 24: 10-27

Abraham's servant had a very important task. He was to go on a long journey to the land where Abraham's relations lived. He was to bring back from there a wife for Abraham's son Isaac. It was so important that Isaac did not marry a woman from Canaan who was an idol-worshipper. Abraham knew that God would help his servant and so he sent him on his journey.

Ten camels carried the servant and his helpers to the city of Nahor, where Abraham's family lived. He waited by the well outside the city because he knew that the women would soon come to get the water they needed. As he waited, Abraham's servant prayed that the woman he asked for a drink of water would be the one God had chosen. He would know this if she said that she would draw water for the camels to drink as well. This was a wise request. Ten camels would need a lot of water. Anyone who offered to bring so much water from the well would be both kind and hard-working.

The man had not finished praying when a beautiful woman called Rebekah, came to draw water from the well. She gave Abraham's servant the drink he requested and then drew enough water for the ten camels. How amazed he was to learn that Rebekah belonged to Abraham's family: she was Abraham's brother's granddaughter. He thanked God for his mercy to his master.

When Rebekah's family heard how God had answered the servant's prayer by the well, they knew that it would be right for Rebekah to go with him. She was willing to go and she did marry Isaac and we read that Isaac loved Rebekah (Genesis 24: 67).

THINK AND PRAY: God does not always answer our prayers as quickly as the answer we have read about today. Sometimes God wants us to be patient, as He knows when it is the right time to answer our prayer.

Chapter 4 - Jacob's prayer

Read: Genesis 32: 9 – 12

Isaac and Rebekah had twin boys who they named Jacob and Esau. Esau had been born first, so he was counted as the oldest son. This was important, because as the oldest son, Esau would expect to be the head of the family after Isaac died. However, in this family it would be different. God had told Rebekah, before her twins were born, that the younger one would be the head of the family.

In Genesis chapters 25 and 27, we read about how Jacob took the place that Esau expected to have. Esau was so angry with his brother that he actually said he would kill him. Isaac and Rebekah sent Jacob away to the land where Rebekah's family lived. Jacob stayed there for twenty years, was married and had a large family.

At the end of twenty years, God told Jacob that it was time for him to go back to the land of Canaan. Jacob took his large family and all the animals that he owned and set out on the long journey. As he came nearer to his home, Jacob heard that Esau was coming to meet him and that he had four hundred men with him.

Jacob was afraid that Esau was still angry with him and was going to attack him and his family. Jacob did what we should always do when we are afraid: he prayed. Jacob said that it was God who had told him to return to Canaan. Then he spoke about all the mercies, the kindness, that God had

shown him. Jacob told God how afraid he was of Esau and he asked God to keep him safe.

God answered Jacob's prayer. When Jacob and Esau met, Esau gave his brother a hug and talked kindly to him.

THINK AND PRAY: Think about Jacob's prayer, how it helped him to remember how kind God had been to him and how honest he was, telling God that he was afraid.

Chapter 5 - God's mercy to Joseph

Read: Genesis 39: 1-4 and 20-23

Prison is a place where people who have done wrong, are punished. They have to leave their home and their family and they are no longer free to do the things they want to do. Joseph was different. He had been put in prison, but he had not done anything wrong.

Joseph's life began in the land of Canaan. His father, Jacob, was Abraham's grandson. Jacob loved Joseph, but his ten older brothers hated him and were jealous of him. They sold him as a slave and he was taken to Egypt. He was bought by an important man named Potiphar. God helped Joseph to do his work well and Potiphar saw that he could trust him. Joseph was put in charge of all that Potiphar owned.

One day, Potiphar's wife told lies about Joseph. Potiphar believed his wife and had Joseph put in prison. It is very hard to be punished when you know that you have not done anything wrong. In all the unhappiness Joseph must have felt, we read that God was with him and had **mercy** on him (Genesis 39: 21). The man in charge of the prison saw that he could trust Joseph and he put him in charge of the other prisoners.

One day, two of the prisoners were very troubled by their strange dreams. God helped Joseph to understand the meaning of the dreams. When Pharaoh (the ruler of Egypt) also had strange

dreams, one of his servants remembered Joseph. Joseph was brought from the prison and again God helped him to understand what the dreams meant. In Genesis chapter 41, we read about how Joseph became the second most important person in Egypt, in charge of the food during seven years of famine.

THINK AND PRAY: Think how God showed kindness to Joseph when he was in trouble. God never changes: He still shows kindness to boys and girls and men and women who trust in Him.

Chapter 6 - A Prayer for mercy

Read: Genesis 43: 11 – 15

Jacob believed that his son Joseph was dead. Joseph's brothers had pretended that he had been attacked by a wild animal. In fact they had sold Joseph, so that he would become a slave. Jacob did not know that Joseph was alive in the land of Egypt.

There was a famine in the land of Canaan where Jacob lived. He sent ten of his sons to Egypt to buy corn. They did not know that the important man in charge of the corn, was their brother, but Joseph recognised them.

Joseph wanted to know whether his brothers were sorry for the wrong things they had done. He spoke roughly to them and accused them of being spies. They told him that they were honest men who lived with their father and their youngest brother.

The time came when the grain the brothers brought home, was used up. Jacob said they must go to Egypt again to buy more. The brothers said they could not go unless their youngest brother, Benjamin, went with them. Joseph had said they must bring him, to prove they were telling the truth.

Jacob did not want Benjamin to go, because he could never forget what had happened to Joseph. Judah promised that he would make sure that his brother Benjamin came safely home. Jacob knew they needed food, so Benjamin must go to Egypt.

Jacob had known God's help many times, so he prayed that the 'important man' in Egypt would show

mercy to his sons. The remaining chapters of the Book of Genesis, tell us how God answered this prayer, as Joseph did treat his brothers with **kindness**.

THINK AND PRAY: Jacob had many troubles in his life, but he had learned to trust God. When there are things we find hard to do, we can trust God to help us, like Jacob did.



Chapter 7 - A Song of Praise

Read: Exodus 14: 21 – 27, 15: 1 and 13

Life in Egypt had been hard for the Israelites. Jacob and his large family had moved to Egypt during seven years of famine and Joseph had made sure they had all they needed. Years went by and a new Pharaoh did not remember how Joseph had saved the country during the seven years of famine. He thought there were too many Israelites (Jacob's descendants) living in his country.

Pharaoh made the Israelites work as slaves, making bricks and doing a lot of building. Worse still, he said that their baby boys must be killed. God saw all that was happening and He chose Moses to bring the captives out of Egypt. We read in Exodus chapters 7 to 12, all that God did to the Egyptians because they had treated the Israelites so cruelly and would not let them go.

At last Pharaoh had to obey God and he sent the Israelites away. God told Moses to lead the people towards the Red Sea and as they went, Pharaoh had second thoughts about letting them go. He made his soldiers get their chariots ready and they followed the Israelites. When the Israelites saw the Egyptians coming and the Red Sea in front of them, they were very afraid. Moses told the people that God would help them. God made a path through the sea and all the people went safely to the other side. The Egyptian army followed the Israelites, but God

brought the water back, so that the Egyptians were drowned.

Moses led the people in a song of praise to God for His mercy, bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and saving them from their enemies.

THINK AND PRAY: The Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry ground. This was a miracle that only God could do. Think about how great and powerful God is.

Chapter 8 - The Mercy Seat

Read: Exodus 25: 17 – 22

When the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, where they were slaves, they were on a journey to the land that God had promised them. They camped for about a year near Mount Sinai. God had much to teach them before they entered their new land.

First of all, God gave them rules telling them how they should live. We call these rules the ten commandments. Then God gave them instructions for making a very special tent called the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle had two rooms: the holy place and a smaller room called the most holy place. In the most holy place was a wooden box covered with gold. This was the ark of the covenant. Inside the ark, the two pieces of stone on which God had written the ten commandments, were kept.

The ark of the covenant was the place where God promised to meet with His people. It had a lid made of solid gold, called the mercy seat. God said that He would speak from above the mercy seat.

God is very great and powerful. He is greater than any king in any country. Yet, the place where He met with His people, was a place where God's kindness was shown.

God's law was hidden in the ark by the mercy seat. No-one has ever been able to keep God's laws perfectly, except the Lord Jesus. God was showing His people that there was a place of forgiveness: a

place where God had mercy on sinful people, who came to Him in the way He taught them.

THINK AND PRAY: The Lord Jesus is our mercy seat. He has kept all God's law and when He died on the cross, He took the punishment for the sin of His people. When we come to God, trusting in the Lord Jesus, He will forgive our sin. We can then know God as our greatest Friend and Heavenly Father.

Chapter 9 - Trusting in God's mercy

Read: Numbers 14: 6-9, 18-20

It was Moses who God had chosen to lead the Israelites from the land of Egypt to Canaan, the land God had promised to give them. At last the time had come for them to enter the land.

As they came near to Canaan, Moses sent twelve men to be spies. They would be able to report to the people what Canaan was like and what the people who already lived there were like. The twelve men would have to be very careful that no-one in Canaan saw what they were doing.

After forty days, the twelve spies returned with their report. They all agreed that it was a good land, where crops grew well. They brought some of the fruit to show to Moses and the people. Then ten of the spies made the Israelites afraid, by telling them how strong the people of Canaan were. The ten spies said that the Israelites would not be able to take over the land.

The people who lived in Canaan were very wicked. They bowed down to idols and did many evil things. God had given them many years to change their ways, but they did not change. The time had come for the Israelites to fight against them and take their land.

Just two spies, Joshua and Caleb, told the people that God would help them and the land of Canaan would be theirs. Sadly, the people were too afraid and refused to enter the land that God had promised

them. Moses prayed that God would forgive the people for their disobedience. He knew that it was very serious for the people to disobey the God who had been so good to them. But Moses trusted in God's **mercy** and God answered his prayer.

THINK AND PRAY: The people disobeyed God because they did not trust in God's power to help them. Think about what made the difference between Joshua and Caleb and the other ten spies (Numbers 14: 6-9).

Chapter 10 - Kindness to Naomi

Read: Ruth 2: 19 – 23

Ruth had been in the field gleaning. This was something that God said the poor people in the land of Israel could do at harvest time. God said that the reapers must leave crops growing in the corners of the field, so that the poor people could take some and have food to eat.

Ruth had come from the land of Moab with Naomi, her mother-in-law. Ruth and Naomi were widows: their husbands had died. Naomi's home was in Bethlehem and she and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest.

When Ruth came home from her day's gleaning, Naomi saw that she brought quite a lot of grain and also some of the food given to her during the day. Naomi realised that someone must have been especially kind to Ruth. When she knew that Ruth had been gleaning in a field belonging to Boaz, Naomi gave thanks to God, because Boaz was a close relation of her husband, Elimelech.

Naomi believed that God had guided Ruth to Boaz's field. Many sad things had happened to her, but now she knew that God was treating her with **kindness**. Ruth gleaned in the land belonging to Boaz through the barley harvest and the wheat harvest. In this way, she and Naomi, although they were poor, had enough to eat.

The Book of Ruth tells the true story of how Boaz and Ruth were married. When their little boy, Obed,

was born, Naomi was so happy. She had thought that God had brought her great troubles, but now she knew that God had been kind, bringing her to a time of great happiness.

THINK AND PRAY: Knowing the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and Friend does not mean that life will always be easy. We can learn, like Naomi did, that through difficult days or good days, God is kind to those who trust in Him.



Chapter 11 - The King's kindness

Read: 2 Samuel 9: 1-7

When David was young, he was a shepherd looking after his father's sheep. David learned to trust God: he knew that it was God who helped him when wild animals attacked the sheep. God chose David to be Israel's second King, but years went by before this happened.

King Saul had been the first king of Israel. He was jealous of David and wanted to kill him. For a long time, David had to move from place to place, trying to find safety. However, Saul's son Jonathan became a true friend to David. He knew that David would be the king one day, but he was not jealous. David promised that he would always be kind to Jonathan's family.

King Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in a battle with the Philistines. David then became king of Israel. In those days, a new king who had been treated as badly as Saul had treated David, would have taken revenge on the king's family. King David did not want revenge: he remembered his promise to Jonathan. He found that Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth. He said he wanted to show 'the **kindness** of God' to him.

Mephibosheth may have wondered what was going to happen to him when the king sent for him. He had not done anything to deserve the king's **kindness**. But David was kind to him for Jonathan's

sake. In future, Mephibosheth would always have a place at the king's table.

This true story teaches us about God's **kindness**. We are all sinful people and we do not deserve **kindness** from God. But God is kind to us for Jesus' sake. The Lord Jesus lived a perfect life and died to take the punishment for the sins of everyone who trusts in Him.

THINK AND PRAY: King Saul was Mephibosheth's grandfather. Think how thankful Mephibosheth must have been, that King David showed **kindness**, not revenge.

Chapter 12 - Goodness and mercy

Read: Psalm 23, John 10: 11

Reading today's Psalm, we can see that it was written by someone who knew a lot about caring for sheep. While he was young, David learned how to keep his sheep safe and healthy. He protected them from wild animals that would have harmed them. If a sheep went astray, he would go after it and bring it safely back. When there were difficult places to pass through, David led his sheep, using his staff to keep them on the right path.

God chose David, the shepherd boy, to be king over Israel. He said that He had taken David from the sheepfold, to be a shepherd to His people (Psalm 78: 70 – 71). God gave to David the task of leading and caring for the people of Israel.

In Psalm 23, David tells us that God is his Shepherd. He thinks of how God has led him through life and provided all he needed. He is sure that God will continue to be with him, in His goodness **kindness** and **mercy**. David had known so much of God's to him, that he trusted that this would always continue.

Psalm 23 is probably the best known of all the one hundred and fifty psalms in the Bible. Its words are loved by many, who have been comforted as they think about God as the shepherd who cares for them.

THINK AND PRAY: The Lord Jesus said that He is the Good Shepherd, who gave His life for His

sheep – boys and girls and adults who trust in Him. We all need someone to be our shepherd: to lead us and care for us. We know that Jesus cares for His people, because He died on the cross to save them from sin's punishment. We know that He can lead us, because He is the Son of God, who knows what is best for us.

Chapter 13 - The King's prayer

Read: Psalm 51: 1 – 4

David became a great king. God helped him to win many battles against the enemies of Israel. In those days, the king would lead the soldiers into battle, but there came a time when David decided to let the army go without him. It was at this time that he did something very wrong. He took a lady to be his wife, even though she was already married to someone else. The lady's name was Bathsheba.

Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, was a brave soldier and he was away from home. David made sure that Uriah was put in a dangerous place and he was killed in the battle. What had happened to King David who had loved and trusted God since he was a boy? He had broken the good rules that God had given to his people, so that they would live good and happy lives (Exodus 20: 1 – 17). It seemed as if he thought that no-one knew what he had done.

God knew all that David had done. He sent Nathan the prophet to speak to him. As soon as the king realised how wrong he had been, he confessed his sin. In Psalm 51, we have David's prayer for **mercy**, because he understood that he had sinned against God. David was truly sorry for his sin and God did forgive him. Even though he was forgiven, David's sin had some sad results. We must never think that because God is a forgiving God, doing wrong does not matter.

THINK AND PRAY: King David's sin was very serious, but he confessed his sin to God and God forgave him. Think about how the Psalm he wrote (Psalm 51) has helped many people. Sometimes people think that they have done so much wrong that God will never forgive them. When they realise how merciful God was to David, they are encouraged to trust God to forgive them and to change their lives.

Chapter 14 - Solomon's request

Read: 1 Kings 3: 5- 9

King Solomon loved God and made offerings to Him on the altar at Gibeon (Gibeon was about six miles north of Jerusalem). While he was there, God spoke to Solomon in a dream. God asked him what he would like Him to give him. Solomon thought of the mercy and the kindness that God had shown to his father David.

What a lot of things Solomon could have asked for, like being very rich, or having a good long life. But Solomon thought carefully about what he most needed as king over God's people. He realised that he needed wisdom to understand and to deal with the problems that people brought to him.

God was pleased with Solomon's request. He promised that he would give Solomon wisdom and the understanding that He knew he would need as king. God also said that He would give Solomon the riches that he had not asked for and also long life, if he continued to obey Him.

King Solomon became famous for his wisdom. The Queen of Sheba travelled a long way to find out for herself whether all that she had heard about Solomon was really true. She found that he could answer all the hard questions that she asked him. She also saw what a great and wealthy King Solomon was. She had not believed all she had heard about him, but now she had seen his greatness for herself. God had kept His promise.

Solomon remembered God's mercy to his father David and now he knew God's kindness in his own life.

THINK AND PRAY: Solomon believed that God showed kindness in giving King David a son to sit on his throne. We know that this was not all: it was from King David's family that the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem, many years later.



Chapter 15 - Unchanging mercy

Read: 2 Chronicles 5: 1-3 and 13-14

King David loved God and he wanted to build a temple in Jerusalem, where the people could come to worship God. God told David that it would be his son Solomon who would build the temple. His reign would be a more peaceful time, after the battles that his father had fought. However, God gave David the plans for the temple, so that David knew what the building should be like.

When Solomon became king, he knew that God had given him the task of building the temple. His father had given him the plans for the building and many things that he had collected for the work. It took seven years to complete the work and when everything was finished, Solomon called all the leaders of the people together.

The ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence, was carried by the priests into the temple. They placed it in the room called the most holy place, just as it had been placed in God's special tent, the tabernacle.

The Levites, who helped the priests, played cymbals, harps and other instruments and they sang praise to God. The words they sang were, 'For He is good, for His mercy endures forever' (2 Chronicles 5:13). They would have known that there were many things they could praise and thank God for, but they chose to sing about God's mercy. The Levites knew how much the people of Israel needed mercy. How

often they had disobeyed God and brought trouble on themselves and how patient God had been with them. How often God had forgiven the sins of His people when they had called upon Him.

THINK AND PRAY: The words that the Levites sang, mean that God's mercy never changes. It is just as important for us to know this as it was for the Israelites long ago. When, like then, we have done wrong things, we find that God is very merciful: He forgives us when we confess what we have done.

Chapter 16 - Kindness rejected

Read: 2 Chronicles 30: 5, 8 - 11

King Ahaz did not love or obey God. He bowed down to idols and he closed the doors of the temple, so that the priests and Levites no longer sang praises to God or offered the sacrifices there.

Ahaz's son Hezekiah was quite different from his father. When he became king, he opened the doors of the temple and he set the priests and Levites to work, cleaning the temple and clearing out all the rubbish that should not have been there. Once again, the Levites sang praises to God, using words written years before by King David. The priests were also able to do their work, bringing the offerings as God had taught them. There was great joy in the land of Judah, as the people returned to worshipping the one true God.

The Feast of the Passover, which should have been held once a year, had been neglected. King Hezekiah decided that this feast should be kept. He sent messengers to the people of Judah and to the northern kingdom of Israel. All the people were invited to come to Jerusalem, to keep the feast. They were told that God would receive them, if they returned to Him, because He is gracious and **merciful**.

Today's Bible verses tell us that in the northern kingdom, many people laughed at the messengers. They had become idol-worshippers and did not want to hear about the true God. They rejected the

invitation and they rejected the God who would have shown **kindness** to them.

It is good to know that there were some people from the north who did travel to Jerusalem, where they shared in a time of great joy.

THINK AND PRAY: How sad that anyone should prefer useless idols, to the God who is kind and ready to have **mercy** on those who are sorry for their sins. Do you think that there are still people like this today?

Chapter 17 - The King's letter

Read: Ezra 7: 12-15 and 27-28

Cyrus, King of Persia, said that people from Judah could go back to their own land. Jeremiah the prophet had told the people that this would happen when they had been captives for seventy years. Zerubbabel who came from the family of King David, led many people back to Judah.

Some time after Zerubbabel's journey, Ezra the priest brought more people to Judah. Ezra's special task would be to teach the people of Judah God's law. King Artaxerxes of Persia encouraged Ezra to do this and he gave him gold and silver to buy the things that would be needed for the temple. The king also gave Ezra a letter saying that if he needed more, he could have money from the King's treasury. At the end of the journey, this letter could be shown to the treasurers there. In the letter, the king said to them that money must be given to Ezra for 'the house of the God of heaven'.

The journey back to Judah was not easy but Ezra did not ask King Artaxerxes to send soldiers to protect them. He had told the king that God would be with them and so the people prayed that God would protect them.

Ezra believed that it was God who caused the king to be interested in the building of the temple at Jerusalem. He also knew that it was due to God's **mercy** to him, that the king treated him so kindly.

God did protect Ezra and those who made the journey with him. They arrived safely at Jerusalem with the gold and silver they had been given for the temple. They could have been attacked on their way and precious things stolen from them. But God heard their prayer and kept them safe.

THINK AND PRAY: A very powerful king treated Ezra kindly. If we ever feel nervous or afraid of someone, we can ask God to help us, as He helped Ezra.

Chapter 18 - Nehemiah's prayer

Read: Nehemiah 1: 1 – 11

Nehemiah was very sad about the news he had heard from Jerusalem. Men from Judah had told him that the city wall was broken down and the gates had been burned. Nehemiah was in Persia, working for King Artaxerxes. He looked after the king's wine and was known as the king's cupbearer. Although he was far from Jerusalem, he cared so much about it, because it was the place where God had chosen to meet with His people.

As the weeks went by, Nehemiah kept on praying. As he prayed, he thought about God's mercy to those who love and obey Him. He prayed that God would cause the king to be merciful to him and God answered his prayer. Just as the king had shown kindness to Ezra, now He treated Nehemiah kindly as well.

One day, when Nehemiah was bringing the king his wine, the king noticed how sad he looked. The king's servants were not supposed to look sad: they were meant to be thinking only about the king. However, King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah why he was sad. When Nehemiah told the king about the state Jerusalem was in, the king asked him what it was that he wanted. Nehemiah prayed silently in his heart and asked the king for permission to go to Jerusalem. King Artaxerxes agreed to send him to Jerusalem. He also gave him letters saying that he must be allowed to go to Judah. As well as this, he

was given a letter to the man who looked after the king's forest, telling him to give Nehemiah the wood he needed for the work he planned.

THINK AND PRAY: The God who answered Nehemiah's prayers, is the God who we pray to. God does not change. He still hears the prayers of those who love Him.



Chapter 19 - Mercy remembered

Read: Nehemiah 9: 16 - 17 & 31

Nehemiah did travel to Jerusalem and he was soon able to see for himself the damaged walls and gates of the city. He encouraged the people to join with him, rebuilding the city walls. The Jews had enemies who tried to stop the work. Nehemiah reminded the builders that their great God was with them and the work was completed.

With their work finished, the people gathered together and asked Ezra the priest to read God's law to them. As Ezra read God's rules for life to them, the people felt sad. They knew that they had not lived in the way God meant them to. Ezra and the Levites who were with him, told the people that it was not a day for sadness. This was to be a joyful time, because they had heard and understood words from God.

There came another day when the people met together and this time the Levites reminded them of all that had happened to them and of how good God had been to them all through the years. They spoke about the time when the Israelites refused to go into the land God had promised them, also the many times they had forgotten God and turned to useless idols.

The Levites told the people that the reason God had not given them up because of their sinful ways, was because God is gracious and **merciful**. Twice that day, the words were repeated, "God ... gracious

and **merciful**". God is very kind, but He had not excused the people's sin. They had to leave their own country for seventy years, so that they could learn how much better it was to love and obey God. Now, back in their own land they were learning how **merciful** God had been to them.

THINK AND PRAY: God never changes. We can be sure that God is still **merciful** and gracious. He will forgive our sinful ways, when we confess our sins to Him.

Chapter 20 - Everlasting mercy

Read: Psalm 136: 1 – 9

Every one of the twenty-six verses of this Psalm has the refrain, 'for His mercy endures for ever'. Also, every verse has a reason to give thanks to God, for what He has done. We know that King David had given instructions for singing praise to God. The singers would be divided into two groups and in Psalm 136 we can be sure that one group would sing the first line of each verse and the other group would sing the refrain.

In this psalm, we read about many of the good things that God did for the people of Israel, helping them when they were in trouble. The Israelites had not done anything to deserve God's kindness. So, with each event, the psalmist reminds us that it was because God is merciful that He helped His people.

The special thing that we learn about God's mercy, from this psalm, is that it never changes. God's mercy continues forever. We may know someone who is very friendly and pleasant to us one day, but on another day is cross and does not speak to us at all. The fact is that we are all changeable: we do not feel or act in the same way every day.

It is so important for us to know that God does not change. God always does what He says He will do. He is always merciful to men and women and boys and girls, who confess their sins to Him and are truly sorry for the wrong things they have done.

THINK AND PRAY: The words, ‘for His mercy endures forever’, can be found in at least ten other places in the Old Testament. It was God who helped those who wrote the books of the Old Testament. So, we can be quite sure that God wants us to know that He is kind, even when we do not deserve His kindness.

Chapter 21 - The Best thing

Read: Jeremiah 9: 23-24

Today's Bible verses tell us about three things that people can be proud of. There are people who are very wise: they always know what to do whatever happens. These people may feel proud of their wisdom and boast about it. Others are proud of their strength. They may boast that they are not afraid of anyone, because they are sure no-one could harm them. The third thing our verses tell us, is that someone may boast about, is being very rich. It is easy to 'show off' if you have a lot of money and can buy anything you want.

People today may still boast about the three things that Jeremiah wrote about. In your class at school there may be boys and girls who are rather proud of being clever, or stronger than others. Some may also have rich families who give them everything they want.

God says that we should not be feeling proud or boasting about any of these things. There is one thing that is much more important and worth telling others about. That one thing is, to know God and to understand what God is like. When we look at all that God has made, we know that He is a very wise and powerful God, but there is so much more to know about Him.

In verse 24 we learn that God is just, which means that He is always fair. We learn that He is righteous: He always does what is right. We also learn that God

acts with **lovingkindness**, His unchanging love for His people.

THINK AND PRAY: Our wisdom is not perfect, our strength can grow weaker, our riches can be used up or taken from us very quickly. The God who made us is eternal and unchanging. Knowing that He is a God of justice, righteousness and **lovingkindness**, brings us great joy and peace, whatever is happening around us.

Chapter 22 - Everlasting love

Read: Jeremiah 31: 1 – 6

God chose the nation of Israel to be His special people. He gave them His commandments (rules for life). He taught them how sinful people could come to a God who is holy. He sent His prophets to them with many warnings and many promises. God promised that, if they obeyed the good rules He had given them, He would bless them, providing everything they needed.

Israel should have been an example to other nations, of how good it is to trust in the one, true God. Sadly, instead of being an example, Israel often copied the nations around them. They turned to idolatry, bowing down to useless idols that could not help them.

Did God give up His people to their own foolish ways? When they refused to listen to the warnings that the prophets brought, God was very patient. He gave many opportunities for Israel to change its ways. At times He sent trouble to them, to teach them how much better it was to trust in Him and know His blessing, than to worship idols.

The lovely words in Jeremiah 31: 3 were spoken by the prophet to Israel, telling these undeserving people, that God's love for them was everlasting. However, these words were not spoken just for Israel, but for all those who love God and want to obey Him.

THINK AND PRAY: Like the Israelites in Old Testament days, we choose to go our own way, forgetting that the God who made us, knows what is best for us. It is God's lovingkindness that draws us to the Lord Jesus and shows us that we need a Saviour. If we love the Lord Jesus, it is because God has loved us first. There is a verse that helps us to be sure that our love for Him is genuine: look up John 14: 15.



Chapter 23 - Jeremiah's hope

Read: Lamentations 3: 22 – 27

Jeremiah was very, very sad. Tears filled his eyes, when he saw what had happened to the land he loved. King Nebuchadnezzar's army had come against Judah. They had taken many of the people captive to Babylon. Those who did remain in the land of Judah were weak, because they could not get enough to eat. All the best buildings, including the temple, had been damaged.

Jeremiah had spent years warning the people of Judah of what would happen, if they kept bowing down to idols. God would not protect them from their enemies, while they prayed to useless idols. No-one wanted to hear what God told Jeremiah to tell them. Sometimes Jeremiah was put in prison, so that he could not speak to the people.

There were some men who the people of Judah listened to. These were men who pretended that they were prophets and had a very different message to bring. 'Do not listen to Jeremiah, nothing bad is going to happen. Everything will be alright. We call these men 'false prophets'. Their words were not true.

Jeremiah loved his people and gave God's true messages to them. He was filled with sadness, because they would not listen to the warnings he brought. Then, when it seemed that nothing could comfort him, Jeremiah remembered God's mercy. God had not allowed His people to be completely

destroyed (your Bible may use the word 'consumed' in verse 22). There was still God's promise, to bring them back to their own land. Jeremiah knew, that when the people confessed their sin, God was ready to forgive them.

THINK AND PRAY: Jeremiah said that it is good to hope and wait patiently for God to save us (verse 26). What can we learn from this when we are praying for God to help us?

Chapter 24 - A Prayer for forgiveness

Read: Daniel 9: 1 – 9

God had promised the people of Israel that He would bless them (give them good and happy lives) if they obeyed His good commandments. He sent prophets such as Isaiah and Jeremiah to warn them of what would happen to them if they continued to bow down to idols, like the other nations did. The people would not listen to the prophets. God would not go on helping them, while they thought that their useless idols were their helpers.

God is very patient, but the day came when the people of Judah (the southern part of the land of Israel) were taken away to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar's army. However, God promised that their captivity would end after seventy years had gone by (Jeremiah 29: 10).

Nebuchadnezzar wanted clever, good-looking young men to be brought to Babylon and trained to work for him. One of these young men was named Daniel. Daniel was determined that even in a strange land, he would obey God. God helped Daniel and he became a very important person in Babylon. He still held a high position when the Persian empire took over.

Daniel read the words that Jeremiah had written about Israel's captivity lasting just seventy years. He did not just sit back and wait to see how God would help His people. Daniel prayed for God's **mercy** and forgiveness for the people of Judah. He also prayed

about the ruined state of the temple at Jerusalem. He must have hoped that one day God would help the people to build it again. In Daniel chapter nine, we see how much Daniel loved God, how much he loved his people and how he included himself in confessing the people's sin.

THINK AND PRAY: When we pray, we can tell God about all the things that trouble us. We can ask Him to give us the things we need. But do we pray for other people too: that churches in our land, as well as in other lands, will tell people about the Lord Jesus?

Chapter 25 - What Jonah knew

Read: Jonah 3: 10, 4: 1 – 4

Nineveh was the capital city of the land of Assyria. God told the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh, but he disobeyed God and deliberately found a ship going in a different direction. Jonah was almost drowned in a great storm, but God sent a very large fish to rescue him.

God told Jonah again that he must go to Nineveh and this time, Jonah obeyed God. He warned the people in that city, that God would soon destroy them because of their wickedness. The king and all the people of Nineveh believed the message that Jonah brought. They did everything they could, to show that they would change their ways.

When God saw that the people were willing to give up all the wicked things they had done, He said that He would not destroy the city. We would expect that Jonah would be pleased that his words had been believed and that the people were willing to change. Instead of this, the Bible tells us that he was angry.

In the last chapter of the Book of Jonah, Jonah explains why he did not want to take God's message to Nineveh. He knew that God was **merciful**: that He forgives those who are sorry for their sin. The Assyrians were a strong nation, cruel to those they overcame in battle. Jonah did not want these sinful, cruel people to be forgiven, even if they repented.

God spoke patiently to Jonah about how wrong he was. He explained that there were many people in

Nineveh, including children, who did not understand how to lead good lives.

THINK AND PRAY: The Lord Jesus was kind to the sinful people who came to Him. If we meet children who cause a lot of trouble at school, do we pray about this? We need to remember that God can change the most rebellious boy or girl, who comes to him for forgiveness.

Chapter 26 - Good things

Read: Micah 6: 8

We learned from Jeremiah chapter 9 verse 24, that God delights to act justly, righteously and with **lovingkindness**. It should not surprise us that these are things that God looks for in the lives of those who trust in Him.

When the people of Israel were asking what they should bring as an offering to God, the answer that the prophet Micah gave, is in our Bible verse for today. God was more interested in His people's lives, than in any offering they could bring. As He is always just (fair) in all that He does, He wants us to act fairly. As He treats us with **lovingkindness**, He wants us to treat others **mercifully**: to be kind even when others are not so kind to us.

The third word in today's Bible verse that tells us about how we should live, is the word 'humbly'. To be humble is the opposite of being proud or boastful. Humble people are not full of their own importance, always wanting other people to take notice of them.

Micah does not just tell us that we should be humble. He tells us to 'walk humbly with your God'. This means that we trust God as our Heavenly Father and depend on Him to do what is best for us.

There is one word that Jeremiah uses about God, that is not in the verse we have looked at today. That word is 'righteousness'. God knows that we do not always do what is right. Only the Lord Jesus always

did this and He lived a perfectly righteous life for everyone who trusts in Him.

THINK AND PRAY: It is not always easy to be fair, to be kind and not to join in when other children are boasting about what they can do. If we have put our trust in the Lord Jesus, we must ask Him to help us to live in a way that pleases Him.



Chapter 27 - Kindness for Elizabeth

Read: Luke 1: 13 – 14, 58

Elizabeth was married to Zacharias the priest. Elizabeth and Zacharias would have liked to have children to love and care for. As the years went by it seemed that this would never happen, even though they had prayed that they would have a child.

One day, when Zacharias was in the temple, an angel appeared to him. The angel told him that his prayer had been heard: Elizabeth would have a baby boy. Zacharias found it hard to believe the angel's words, because he and his wife were older than people usually are when their children are born. The angel had brought a message from God which Zacharias had not believed. Because of this, he would be unable to speak until the baby was born.

Of course, the angel's message was true and Elizabeth was soon looking forward to the birth of her baby. What a joyful time for Zacharias when their baby son was born.

When the baby was eight days old, he was to be given his name. Neighbours and relatives came to show how pleased they were for Elizabeth. They had heard that God had shown **mercy** to her: they realised God's **kindness** in giving Elizabeth and Zacharias the child they had so wanted.

The baby was named John, as the angel had told Zacharias he should be. John's parents knew that he would have a special job to do. God had chosen John to make the people ready for the promised

Saviour, the Lord Jesus. When he grew up, many people came to hear him, as he told them that the Saviour was coming.

THINK AND PRAY: Think how wonderful it is that the God who is so great, hears our prayers. He may not always answer in the way that we expect, or as quickly as we would like. But He always answers in the way that is best.

Chapter 28 - A Cry for mercy

Read: Mark 10: 46 – 52

Bartimaeus was blind and he was poor. He sat by the road near the city of Jericho, begging. He hoped that people passing by would take pity on him and give him money. One day, as Bartimaeus sat at the roadside, he heard a crowd of people coming. The crowd was with the Lord Jesus and when Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was coming that way, he began to call out.

Bartimaeus knew that Jesus was special. He called 'Son of David' and he asked Him for mercy. The people around him told him to be quiet, but he called out even more. Jesus stopped and asked for Bartimaeus to be brought to Him. He asked the blind man what he wanted.

Bartimaeus spoke to Jesus with great respect and asked to be given sight. He showed by the way he spoke, that he knew that Jesus was not an ordinary man and that he believed Jesus was able to do as he asked. He had faith in the Lord Jesus and he received what he had asked for: straight away he was able to see.

The Lord Jesus showed kindness to this poor, blind man. He also showed that He was God's own Son with power to heal. Being unable to see is so sad: never to see the faces of your family or friends, never to see the blue sky, the flowers or the trees and so much more.

There is another sort of blindness that the Lord Jesus can heal. We may see with our eyes and yet be blind to the truth about God and about ourselves. This is being blind in our minds, so that we do not understand that we are sinful people who need a Saviour.

THINK AND PRAY: Ask God to help you to see the truth that the Bible teaches us about God and about ourselves.

Chapter 29 - Kindness to all

Read: Luke 6: 35-36

It is not very difficult to be kind to people who are kind to us. But how should we treat people who are unkind and seem to enjoy causing trouble for us? Today's Bible verses tell us that we should love people who are our enemies. Instead of speaking angrily to someone who hurt us, we should think of some good thing to do for them. This is hard to do and why should we even try?

We need to think about God's **kindness**. There are many people living in this beautiful world, who enjoy the sunshine, the countryside and the seaside, but who never think of saying 'thank-You' to God. They have food to eat because God sends the rain to make the crops grow, but they are unthankful. God still provides the things that these people need. He still allows them to enjoy the beauty of His creation. If we love the Lord Jesus, we should want to be like Him, showing **kindness** to people who do not deserve it.

There is something else that will help us to treat other people kindly. We need to remember that none of us really deserves God's **kindness**. We all have sinful hearts and we like to go our own way, instead of God's way. God has shown **kindness** to us in so many ways. We should certainly thank Him for our health, for loving families and friends, for parents and Sunday School teachers who have taught us about the Lord Jesus.

THINK AND PRAY: Think about the Lord Jesus who, when He was being nailed to the cross, prayed that His Father would forgive those who were treating Him so cruelly (Luke 23: 33-34).

Chapter 30 - My Neighbour

Read: Luke 10: 29 – 37

If you have read today's Bible verses, you have read the story Jesus told, that we call 'The Good Samaritan'. The Lord Jesus told this story to answer the question, 'who is my neighbour?'. The man who asked the question, knew that God had said that we should love Him with all our hearts. He also knew that God said that we should love our neighbours.

We usually think of a neighbour as someone who lives near to us, maybe in the house next door, or just across the road. The story of the good Samaritan teaches us that everyone we meet is our neighbour: someone we should be kind to, if they need our help.

The Samaritans lived in the northern part of the land of Israel. The Jewish people tried not to have anything to do with the Samaritans, who lived in part of their country. In this story, the Samaritan did not say to himself, 'here is a Jewish man. He would not help me and I am not going to help him'. How surprised the man who asked the question must have been at the answer Jesus gave.

We love our families and our friends and that is good. But we need to learn to look for ways to help other people too. Maybe we could visit someone who is not well or take time to listen to someone who is feeling sad. When we meet boys and girls who have come from another country and are feeling strange, we could try to befriend them.

THINK AND PRAY: Say thank you to God if you are taken to church or Sunday School, where you learn about the Lord Jesus. If you have friends who do not know about Him, you could pray for them and perhaps you could invite them to come to Sunday School or a children's meeting with you.



Chapter 31 - The Ten Lepers

Read: Luke 17: 11 – 19

Leprosy is a serious illness, but now-a-days there are medicines that help people to get better. In the days when the Lord Jesus was on earth, there was no cure for leprosy. Lepers had to live away from other people, so that others would not catch the illness.

One day, Jesus went into a village and heard some people calling to Him. There were ten lepers, standing at a distance from Him. They were calling out for Jesus to have mercy on them. The Lord Jesus told the ten lepers to go and let the priest see them. Long ago, God had given instructions about leprosy to the priest. When anyone had a sore that he thought might be leprosy, he had to go to the priest. The priest knew how to be sure whether it was that disease or not. Also, it was the priest who could say when the leprosy had gone and the person could return to his family.

The ten men set off to see the priest. As they did what Jesus told them to do, they showed that they had faith in Him and as they went along the road, they saw that they were better: the leprosy had gone.

Just one man turned and went back to say thank-you to the Lord Jesus and to praise God for his healing. Jesus asked where the other nine men were who had also been made well. How sad, that only one said thank-you.

THINK AND PRAY: We have many things in our lives to thank God for. God has given us life and placed us in the beautiful world that He has made. If we are well and strong, have we thanked Him? If we have families and friends who love us, are we thankful? When you pray each day, don't forget the thank-yous.

Chapter 32 - The Two prayers

Read: Luke 18: 9 – 14

Today's Bible verses tell us about two very different men who went to the temple to pray: a pharisee and a tax-collector. Pharisees believed that they kept all God's laws, as well as some more rules that they had added. This pharisee was a proud man, who was sure that God would be very pleased with him.

The tax-collector was not proud. Tax-collectors worked for the Roman government, so other people did not like them, because they did not like the Romans ruling their land. Tax-collectors also cheated: they took more money than they should have done and kept some for themselves. The tax-collector in the temple, knew all about what other people thought of him.

The proud pharisee did not really pray at all. He stood in the temple telling God how good he was. He told God that he did not do the wrong things that other people did. In fact, as he explained, he did very good things all the time.

The tax-collector stood with his head bowed. His prayer was very simple: 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' This very short prayer tells us two things about this man. He knew that he was a sinner, with nothing to be proud of and instead of depending on his own goodness, he depended on God's mercy.

The pharisee and the tax-collector went home. Jesus said that it was the tax-collector who went

home 'justified', a word that means 'not guilty'. This did not mean that his sins did not matter. It means that God had forgiven him, because he asked for God to be merciful to him.

THINK AND PRAY: The pharisee did not realise what a proud, sinful heart he had. The tax-collector came as a sinful man, seeking forgiveness. Think about what it was that the pharisee got wrong, but the tax-collector got right.

Chapter 33 - Different times

Read: John 1: 17

In this one verse, we read about two very different times. First, we read about the time of Moses, when God gave His law, God's rules for life, to the people of Israel (Exodus 20: 1-17). God's law is good. It teaches us to love and worship God, not useless idols that cannot help us. Then it teaches us how we should treat other people: not doing anything that would harm anyone and not being envious of others, wanting what they have for ourselves.

God's law is good. It tells us how we should live good and happy lives. However, knowing what God wants us to do, does not help us to do it. We are sinful people and we are not always able to do what is right. When we speak unkindly to someone, tell a lie, or even take something that belongs to someone else, we know we have done wrong and deserve to be punished.

We might ask, why did God give us His law if He knew we would not be able to keep it? God gave us His law so that we would understand why we need a Saviour. The second part of today's Bible verse tells us about the time when the Lord Jesus came, bringing **grace** and truth. We remember that **grace** means **kindness** that we do not deserve.

When the Lord Jesus came into the world, He did two things for everyone who would believe in Him. He kept God's law perfectly: He never sinned in His thoughts, His words, or His actions. Then He gave

His perfect life to die on the cross, to take the punishment for the sin of everyone who trusts in Him for forgiveness. For those whose sin is forgiven, God counts His Son's righteousness (perfect life) as theirs. The prophet Isaiah described this as a robe that covered him (Isaiah 61: 10). This is God's **grace**: His **kindness** that we do not deserve.

THINK AND PRAY: Because the Lord Jesus died so that we could be forgiven, does not mean that sin does not matter. If we love the Lord Jesus, we will ask God to help us to live in a way that pleases Him.

Chapter 34 - Saul the persecutor

Read: Acts 9: 1-6; 1 Timothy 1: 13 & 16

Saul was a pharisee, which means that he was very strict about God's law and other rules that the Jewish people had added. He thought that he lived a very good life and that God would be very pleased with him. Saul hated Christians. He did not believe that Jesus was God's Son and he persecuted anyone who believed in Him: he treated Christians very cruelly, having them put in prison or even killed.

One day, the Lord Jesus spoke from heaven to Saul and Saul's whole life was changed. He now understood that Jesus was God's Son: the Messiah that the Jewish people had waited so long for. Saul the persecutor became Paul the preacher.

In Paul's letter to Timothy, we read what he thought, as he looked back on his life. He believed that there were two reasons why God had mercy on him. Firstly, God knew that Paul just did not know the truth about the Lord Jesus. Paul said that when he persecuted Christians, he was ignorant. Secondly, he believed that, knowing Paul had been forgiven for such very serious sins, would help others.

We all do things that are wrong: the things the Bible calls 'sin'. It is when God's Holy Spirit begins to work in our hearts, that we realise how sinful we are. We hear that God forgives people who confess their sin, but we may wonder, will he really forgive me when I have been so selfish and so unkind? Paul wants us to know that if God forgave him, he will

certainly forgive us, if we are truly sorry for our sin and ask God to help us to change our selfish ways.

THINK AND PRAY: God never says that because we can ask for forgiveness, our sins do not matter. The wrong things we do always bring trouble or unhappiness either to ourselves or to other people.



Chapter 35 - Grace that could be seen

Read: Act 11: 19 – 24

Before the Lord Jesus went back to heaven, He told His disciples that they would be His witnesses. A witness is someone who tells others about what they have seen and heard. Jesus said that His witnesses would speak about Him in Jerusalem, then in other parts of Israel and then in all the world.

It took a while for the Jewish people to understand that the Gospel – the good news about the Lord Jesus – was for both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jewish people).

Peter was told by God to go to Caesarea, to the house of Cornelius, an officer in the Roman army. Cornelius had gathered friends and relations to hear what Peter had to tell them. These were the first Gentiles we read about, who believed all that they heard about Jesus. They became Christians.

At this time, the Christians in Jerusalem were persecuted: treated badly just because they believed in the Lord Jesus. Many left their homes and moved to other places. This had one good result: wherever they went, they told people about Jesus. At first, they spoke only to other Jews, but in the city of Antioch in Syria, they spoke to the Gentile as well and many became Christians.

The church in Jerusalem heard about what was happening in Antioch and sent Barnabas there. We read how he saw the **grace** of God. This means that he could see in the lives of these new Christians, that

God's **grace**, was for them as well as for the Jews. Barnabas was very glad and he encouraged those Christians to keep on trusting in the Lord Jesus.

THINK AND PRAY: The work of taking the Gospel message to all the world, still goes on today. Pray for missionaries who have left their homes, so that they could go to people who still need to hear about the Lord Jesus.

Chapter 36 - Paul's Message

Read: Acts 20: 17 – 24

In the days when Paul travelled through Asia and into Europe, travelling was not easy. His journeys took him across the Mediterranean Sea, in boats that depended completely on the weather. We read about one journey where the boat he was on was wrecked (Acts chapter 27), but he told the Christians at Corinth that he had been shipwrecked three times (2 Corinthians 11: 25). In some places Paul was beaten and sometimes even put in prison, just because he was teaching people about the Lord Jesus.

Why did Paul put up with so much hardship? The answer is that he knew that God had chosen him to tell the Gentiles about the Lord Jesus. Paul had known God's **grace** in his own life. As a man who had persecuted Christians, he knew that he did not deserve God's **kindness**.

So, it is not surprising that he called the message he brought everywhere he went, 'the gospel of the **grace** of God'.

The word 'gospel' means 'good news'. Many of the people Paul spoke to were idol-worshippers. They brought offerings and bowed down to idols that could not help them. Paul told them about the true God, who made them and who also made the world, the sun, moon and stars and all living things.

Paul would then tell the good news that this great and powerful God, had sent His own Son, to save

them from their sin and the punishment their sinful ways deserved. Paul met with different responses to his words. Some people were angry: they did not like to be told that they were sinners and that their idols were useless. Others understood that Paul's words were true. God's Holy Spirit helped them to repent of their sin and trust in the Lord Jesus.

THINK AND PRAY: There are still idol-worshippers in the world today. Pray for missionaries who tell them the good news that Paul told the people of his day.

Chapter 37 – Giving

Read: 2 Corinthians 8: 9, 9: 5-7

Paul wrote letters to the churches which had grown up in the places he had visited. He had many things to write to them about, helping them to understand how Christians should live. One subject that Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth about, was giving: those who had more than they needed, giving some of their money to help Christians who were poor.

Paul was very pleased that the church at Corinth had promised to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. However, the months went by and still the gift from Corinth had not been sent. So, Paul wrote to them about it. He explained that he was sending Titus and another trusted man, to receive their gift, so that it could be used to help Christians in need.

Paul reminded the church at Corinth, of what the Lord Jesus had given for them (2 Corinthians 8: 9). Jesus left heaven and lived as a poor man, not even owning a home of His own to live in. Paul calls this the **grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, the people that Paul wrote to, did not need reminding that the Lord Jesus had even given His life for them.

When someone becomes a Christian, they become a member of a family, with God as their Heavenly Father. It is right that Christians care for one another, making sure that those who are poor, have all that they need.

THINK AND PRAY: Can boys and girls give to help others? Yes, if they have their own 'pocket money', they can put some aside. Ask your parents, your Sunday School teacher or the minister of the church, how your money could best be used to help Christians in need.

Chapter 38 - Grace enough

Read: 2 Corinthians 12: 9

Paul had a problem in his life, which he never quite explains to us. He calls it 'a thorn in the flesh'. If you have ever handled roses or picked blackberries, you may have felt a sharp thorn, hurting your hand. So, Paul is describing something uncomfortable and painful that was troubling him.

Paul prayed three times that God would take his problem away, but God did not do so. God did give Paul an answer to his prayers and we find this in today's Bible verse. God told Paul that His **grace** was enough for him: God's love and **kindness** would support Paul and God's strength would be seen in supporting Paul's weakness.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He healed many sick people. This not only helped the people who had been ill, but it also showed that Jesus was the Son of God, with power to heal. But God does not always heal us when we are ill. He knows what is best for us and sometimes we have lessons to learn from the difficult times in our lives. Lessons about learning to trust in God whatever happens and knowing that He keeps His promise to be with us always.

A long time ago in America, a little baby, only six weeks old, became blind. This was Fanny Crosby, who determined when she was still very young, that she would live a happy and useful life. She wrote many hymns which are still in our hymn books today.

Her hymns are full of joy and thankfulness to God for His goodness.

THINK AND PRAY: If we are strong and well, we should thank God for this and we should pray that He will help those who are not so well as we are.



Chapter 39 - Not the Gospel

Read: Galatians 1: 3-7

Paul really cared for the Christians in the places he had visited. We know this from the letters that he wrote to help them in their Christian lives. He was very concerned about the Christians in Galatia. Some men had come to the church there and had begun to teach something different from what they had heard from Paul.

Everywhere he went, Paul told the people that their sins could be forgiven if they trusted in what the Lord Jesus had done for them. No-one can come to God by their own good deeds, because no-one has ever kept God's law perfectly. The Galatian Christians had trusted in the Lord Jesus, but now they were being told that they must also keep God's instructions to His Old Testament people. Paul said that this was not the Gospel at all.

In the Old Testament, we have God's rules for life, that we call the ten commandments (Exodus 20: 1 – 17). These rules teach us how we should live and they are for all people and for all time. They cannot make us Christians, because we have all broken them. There were a lot of other instructions for the people of Israel and it was these instructions that were for Old Testament days, that the Christians in Galatia were being told they must keep.

In today's Bible verses, we read how Paul reminded these people that the Gospel is all about grace. It is all about what Jesus has done for us, not

about us trying to earn God's favour, by what we do. God gave us the ten commandments to show us how much we need a Saviour and to show us how Christians should live.

THINK AND PRAY: Learn John 14: 6 off by heart. Say thank you to God, that we can know Him as our Heavenly Father, because of what the Lord Jesus has done for us.

Chapter 40 - The Kindest act

Read: Titus 3: 4-5; John 3: 16

One of our Bible verses today (Titus 3:4) tells us that there was a time when God's **kindness** appeared. What can that mean?

Think about the sun, which is always in the sky. On a clear, cloudless day, the sun appears. We know it is always there, but we cannot always see it.

God's **kindness** is always there, but when does it appear in such a way that we see it clearly? God is kind in providing food for us and in making so many beautiful things for us to see and enjoy. These are things we are thankful for, but they are not the things that show God's **kindness** most clearly. God's **kindness** appears most clearly in the words of our other Bible verse (John 3: 16), when He gave His Son, the Lord Jesus.

God gave His beloved Son to die a cruel death for sinful people like us. 'God so loved the world', but he hates our sin, because He is so pure and holy. God has said that the punishment for sin is death. Someone must take that punishment, or else our sin will always separate us from God.

The Lord Jesus Christ came willingly, to die on the cross of Calvary. He took on Himself all the sins of men and women and boys and girls who believe in Him. He died so that everyone who comes to Him for forgiveness, can live with Him for ever.

For the Son of God to come from heaven and die for sinful people like us, is the kindest action there has ever been.

THINK AND PRAY: The Lord Jesus never sinned in word or thought or action. We cannot fully understand how He could take our sin upon Himself and suffer its punishment. However, we can thank Him for what He has done and we can ask Him to forgive us for all the wrong things we have done. Then every day, we can ask God to help us to do what is right

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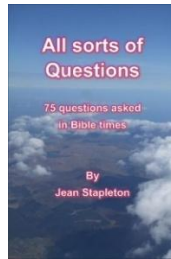
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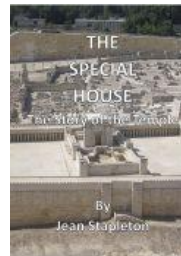
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