

April 1

Gideon

Judges 6:25-32

A daring act

The Lord's angel had told Gideon that God would use him to rescue the Israelites from their enemies. That evening, the angel told him to take two bulls and go and destroy his father's altar to the heathen god, Baal. The Lord also told him to build an altar on the exact same spot and burn one of the bulls on it using the wood from the Asherah pole (which was also an idol).

That night, while everybody was sleeping, he and ten of his servants took the two bulls and tore down the altar. In the morning, when the people of the town got up and found that their altar had been torn down, they asked each other, "Who did this?" When they found out that Gideon had done it, they said to his father Joash, "Bring Gideon here so we can put him to death."

But Joash said, "Are you trying to defend Baal? It is his altar that was torn down; let Baal defend himself!"

What should I do about bad words on our school walls?

People usually talk and write about the things that fill their minds. David wrote many beautiful songs and poems about the Lord because he thought about God all the time (Psalm 63:6).

Those who watch and listen to horrible things, fill their minds (and hearts) with wrong things. The evil that litters their minds starts to spill out in different ways that can be seen and heard by those around them.

If someone in your school has scribbled bad words on a desk or a wall, or written something dishonouring about the Lord, you could ask your teacher if you can clean it off or blot it out with a marker pen. God will honor your bold step when you, like Gideon, do the right thing.

Verse for today

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Matthew 5:8

April 2

Gideon

Judges 6:36-40

Just checking

Gideon wanted to make very sure that God wanted him to rescue the Israelites from their enemies. He said to the Lord, "I will put a sheep skin on the ground outside tonight. In the morning, if there is only dew on the fleece and not on the ground, I will know that You are going to use me to rescue Israel."

When Gideon got up the next morning, the fleece was so wet that he filled a bowl with the water he squeezed from it—even though the ground around the fleece was dry. Then Gideon said to God, "Don't be angry with me. Please just let me ask one more thing. This time, let the fleece be dry and the ground wet." The next morning when Gideon woke up, the fleece was completely dry, yet the ground around the fleece was wet!

Is it wrong to ask God for a sign?

In most cases, you won't need a special sign to show you whether or not to do something that is right and good. You don't need the Lord to give you a sign to be kind to someone or to listen to your parents. These are things the Bible says are good and right. The Bible also tells us that we should not test the Lord or expect Him to answer a silly request (Luke 4:12).

Some people ask for a special sign from God because of their unbelief (Mark 8:11-12), and some because they don't want to do what God has already told them to do.

However, Gideon may have put the lives of many Israelites in danger if he had not made sure that he understood God's message clearly. God will also show you what to do if you earnestly ask Him to lead you.

Verse for today

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God. James 1:5

April 3

Gideon

Judges 7:1-8

Too many!

Now that God had given Gideon a clear sign that He would give him victory over the Midianites, Gideon and his men got up early the next day and camped next to a little river.

The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men. Your men might boast that they won the battle all by themselves. Let those who are afraid go back home." After thousands had gone back home, the Lord said to Gideon, "You still have too many men. Take the men down to the river and I will show you who to choose."

Then the Lord showed Gideon that the men who scooped up the water with their hands and lapped it should go with him, while those who got down on their knees to drink were to go back home. So Gideon was left with only three hundred men.

How can fewer be better?

How would you feel if your team coach decided to halve the number of players just before the team runs onto the field? You would probably hear comments from both sides about the slaughter about to take place. You would wonder if the coach even cared that you would be facing one of the strongest teams out there.

Yet, how would you feel afterwards if your half-sized team beat the strongest team so badly that the scorekeeper couldn't keep up? Wouldn't you be proud to have a coach who knows what he is doing and who knows what his team can do?

Our Lord gets all the glory when the odds are against us—when victory seems impossible. Let us never boast in our own strength but in the strength of the Lord our God (1 Corinthians 1:28-29).

Verse for today

*It is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's...
1 Samuel 17:47*

April 4

Gideon

Judges 7:9-10, 15-22

A silly dream comes true

The Lord had told Gideon to send back most of the men in the Israelite army. He was left with only three hundred men. That night the Lord told Gideon to get up and attack the Midianite camp. Then He said, "If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant and you will hear what they are saying."

So Gideon and his servant Purah went down to the edge of the camp. There they heard a man telling someone else about a dream he'd had. "I dreamt that a loaf of barley bread rolled into our camp and flattened a tent."

The other person replied, "It is the sword of the Israelite, Gideon."

When Gideon heard about the man's dream and what the other person said, he worshiped and praised God.

Does being afraid mean that I don't trust God?

God made us with a natural fear that keeps us from doing dangerous things and taking unnecessary risks. If we were scared of nothing at all, we would walk across a road without looking, jump off buildings and tease crocodiles!

Fear is only good when it keeps us from doing daring things that could harm us. Fear is not good when it keeps us from enjoying life; when it keeps us from being the best we can be; and when it keeps us from doing what God has planned for us to do.

The Lord called Gideon a brave man even though he was afraid (Joshua 6:12). Being brave is when we trust God enough to step out in faith and obey Him, even when our fear tells us that the situation is not safe.

Verse for today

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me? Psalm 56:3-4

April 5

Gideon

Judges 7:15-22

Confusion and panic!

When Gideon got back from spying on the enemy camp, he divided his three hundred men into three groups. He gave each man a trumpet and an empty jar with a flaming torch inside. He told his men, "When I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly what I do."

Just before midnight, Gideon and his men got to the edge of the enemy camp. All at once, they blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. They held their torches high and shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon."

The enemy troops panicked. In the confusion they started attacking each other and fled. So Gideon sent a message to the tribe of Ephraim to stop the Midianites from crossing the Jordan River.

Does the devil know what God is planning?

No one knows what God has got planned or how He will work things out. Only God is all-knowing and eternal. He does not have to wait for His plan to happen in order to see how it will work out. He already lives in the future! That means, even though God makes a decision now, He can already see His plan happening.

As believers, we have the Spirit of Jesus living in us. Because we are God's children, He lets us know as much as we need to know about His plan (1 Corinthians 2:16). God shows His children things that His enemy knows nothing about. God had worked out a plan; Gideon was told about the plan; and guess what—the enemy knew nothing!

The devil doesn't have a clue about God's plans. So when the devil tries to mess up what God is doing, God just goes ahead and uses the devil's little schemes for His own glory!

Verse for today

*In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.
1 Corinthians 2:11b*

April 6

Gideon

Judges 8:1-3, 28

Feeling left out

When all the fighting was over and the two Midianite chiefs had been killed, the people from the tribe of Ephraim complained to Gideon. "Why didn't you call us to help you fight the Midianites?" they asked.

So Gideon said to them, "The little I did was nothing compared to what you have done. With God's help you killed the Midianite chiefs! What have I done to compare with that?" When they heard what Gideon said, they were not so angry anymore.

In the end the Midianites were completely defeated and were no longer a threat. The Lord sent peace in the land for as long as Gideon lived.

What should I do about someone who feels left out?

Have you ever been told that you could only invite a certain number of friends to a party? If you were to meet one of the friends who wasn't invited and feels hurt, what would you say?

Maybe you are the captain of a team and have to decide who gets to play in a match. How would you explain to your friend why you didn't choose him or her?

You could say; "You aren't quite good enough," or "There wasn't enough space for everyone." However, deep down you know that you would not be happy with an answer like that. On the other hand, trying to avoid your friend in the hope that the problem will go away will only make your friendship cool off.

Gideon realized that a tribe had been left out of the action, but he let them share the feeling of victory by making them feel important and useful.

Can you think of some ways to encourage a friend who feels left out?

Verse for today

*Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
Philippians 2:4*

April 7

Samson

Judges 13:1-5, 24-25

An unexpected messenger

Gideon had died and the Israelites had started sinning against the Lord again. So the Lord let the Philistines rule over them for forty years.

One day, the Lord's angel appeared to a woman who had not been able to have children and said, "You will soon be pregnant and have a son. After he is born, you must never cut his hair because he will be dedicated to God."

When the angel had gone, the woman told her husband Manoah about the message from God. Manoah prayed to God and said, "Please let the man of God You sent come back and tell us how to raise the boy." So God answered Manoah's prayer and sent the angel again.

When the boy was born, his mother named him Samson, and the Lord blessed him and made him strong.

Why was Samson not meant to cut his hair?

During the time of Moses, if someone wanted to give himself to God in a special way, he had to follow God's instructions (Numbers 6:1-8). Any person could take a Nazirite vow to fully dedicate himself to God for a certain time. During that time, he was not allowed to eat grapes or drink wine, nor was he allowed to cut his hair (which was a sign of his dedication to God).

If *you* would like to give your life to God for Him to use in a special way, you don't need an outward sign to show others about your dedication to God. People will see your faithfulness to the Lord by the way you live.

However, if you want to do something to remind yourself of the commitment or pledge you made to the Lord, you could write it on a decorated card and keep it in your Bible.

Verse for today

You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own. Leviticus 20:26

April 8

Samson

Judges 14:1-4

Samson gets his way

When Samson had grown up, he went to a place called Timnah where he met a Philistine woman he liked. He went back home and said to his father and mother, "I have met a woman in Timnah and I want you to get her for me."

His parents asked him, "Why do you go to those heathen Philistines to look for a wife? Can't you find a girl from your own people?"

"She is the one I want," Samson said; "get her for me!"

Why do parents 'always' say no?

At times, it may seem as though the only answer you get from your parents when you ask for something, is 'NO!' Has the thought ever struck you that you may be asking for the wrong things?

Samson wanted to date a girl from the Philistine people who did not believe in God. His parents knew that this was not a good idea and tried to reason with him. "Surely there are many pretty girls here among God's people," they said.

But Samson was stubborn and demanded his own way. What he didn't know was that before long he would find out that the Philistines were not friendly people and that he couldn't even trust this Philistine girl.

In spite of how it seems at times, your parents want you to have what is best (Luke 11:13). But not only that, they want to keep you from things that are not good. They want to keep you safe and unharmed in every way. So whenever your parents say no, remember that they are protecting you or trying to help you control your many wishes.

Verse for today

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Ephesians 6:1

April 9

Samson

Judges 14:5-9

Keeping secrets

Samson was on his way to Timnah with his father and mother to meet the Philistine women he wanted to marry. On their way, walking through the vineyards, Samson heard a young lion roaring. The power of the Lord came on Samson and made him very strong. He went after the lion and killed it with his bare hands, but He didn't tell his parents what he had done.

A few days later, when Samson went back to marry the Philistine woman, he went to look for the dead lion. A swarm of bees had made a hive inside the lion's body, so Samson scraped the honey out and, when he met up with his parents again, gave them some too. But Samson did not tell his parents where he had got the honey.

Should I tell my parents everything?

Isn't it amazing how parents seem to find out about the things their children try to hide from them? For a while, children may be able to cover up something, but in the end, parents always seem to stumble across the evidence or start asking uncomfortable questions. When you try to cover up your sin, you'll end up feeling guilty, dirty, dishonest, and miserable. God knows you are not perfect; so when you do sin, He wants you to confess your sin straight away (1 John 1:9).

Samson was not supposed to go near anything that was dead—and he knew it; yet he was disobedient and kept it a secret. You don't need to carry the weight of guilt in your heart, or live a life of secret failures! Tell your parents about your temptations and struggles so they can pray for you and encourage you.

Verse for today

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:13

April 10

Samson

Judges 14:10-20

Samson throws a party

Samson was having a party, which was the thing to do after getting married. He and his father went to the woman's house where thirty young Philistine men joined them. Samson said to the men, "Let me ask you a riddle. I bet each of you a piece of fine linen and special clothes that you can't solve the riddle by the time the wedding feast is over." They all agreed, so Samson said, "Here is the riddle: Out of the eater came something to eat; out of the strong came something sweet."

Day after day the young men tried to work out the riddle. On the fourth day, they went to Samson's wife and told her to trick Samson into telling her the riddle. At first Samson would not tell her, but after she had nagged and cried about it for days, he told her. She secretly went to tell the Philistines the meaning of the riddle, and Samson lost the bet.

Is it wrong to take a bet?

Why do people take bets? Is it because they are convinced they are right; is it because they enjoy proving someone wrong; or is it to get something for nothing out of the deal? These reasons (and probably some others) seem pretty selfish and are likely to cause quarrels and disappointment.

Solving a riddle can be a lot of fun, and it is good when it just a friendly brainteaser. In Samson's case, this was more than a friendly brainteaser—it was a show of power and pride. (Samson didn't even have the linen and clothes he promised as a reward.) With any bet, someone is always the loser! Don't take a bet in order to prove yourself better than someone else or to get something from the other person.

Verse for today

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. 2 Timothy 2:23

April 11

Samson

Judges 15:1-8

Mean, nasty and cruel!

Samson's wife had tricked him into telling her the meaning of his riddle. He was furious when he found out that she had told the Philistines what it meant.

So Samson went back to his parents' home, leaving his wife behind. Later, when he went back to look for her, her father told Samson that he had given her to someone else to marry. Samson became very angry and said, "This time I am not going to be responsible for what I do to the Philistines."

Then He went out and caught three hundred foxes and tied them in pairs by their tails. He put flaming torches in the knots and let them loose in the Philistine's cornfields. As the foxes ran, they burned all the corn in the fields, as well as the corn that had already been harvested.

Why did God allow Samson to use His strength in the wrong way?

How would you feel if you were given a wonderful present, then as you started using it, the person who gave you the present took it back because you didn't use it properly?

God has given you certain skills in order to do things well. He has given you the gift of a mind to make decisions. And because God doesn't want to control you like a puppet, He has also given you the gift of freedom.

God respects our freedom to make decisions, and even when we dishonor Him by the way we use our abilities, He seldom takes them away. However, as Samson found out later, God may eventually take away an ability He has given us.

God wants us to make good decisions and He wants us to use our abilities in a way that is good. Make it your goal to please Him, because one day we will all stand before God and tell Him how we used our abilities (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

Verse for today

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. Luke 12:48b

April 12

Samson

Judges 15:9-17

Without God's power

Samson had destroyed the cornfields of the Philistines and they were determined to take revenge. They set up camp near the Israelites and attacked them. When the Israelites asked them, "Why are you attacking us?" they replied, "We have come to take Samson prisoner."

So the Israelites went to look for Samson and when they found him they said, "Don't you know that the Philistines are our rulers? Why did you burn their cornfields? We have come to tie you up and hand you over to them."

So Samson allowed himself to be tied up. As they got close to the Philistines, God's strength came on Samson and he broke the ropes. Then he found an old jawbone of an ass and killed a thousand Philistines with it.

How strong are we without God?

Your mom has probably told you that you should eat all your food if you want to be healthy and strong. She is right! Our bodies do need good food, exercise and rest.

Do you sometimes wonder what made Samson so much stronger than anyone else? Is it because he ate all his vegetables or spent hours doing bodybuilding? Although Samson was probably well-built and strong, we read that his super-strength came from the Lord. Every time Samson had amazing strength, the Spirit of the Lord had just come upon Him (see Judges 14:6, 19, 15:14).

Yet, it is not just super-strength that comes from the Lord; every move we make and every breath we take is by God's grace, because He is the One who holds us in His hands (Daniel 5:23d).

Verse for today

(Jesus said,) "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

April 13

Samson

Judges 16:4-6, 18-22

The trap

Some time after Samson had killed the thousand Philistines, he fell in love with Delilah, another Philistine woman. A group of Philistine kings got together and offered her a big reward if she could find out the secret of Samson's strength. So Delilah nagged Samson to tell her the secret of his strength. Three times he told her what would make him weak, but each time she tried to make Samson weak, he broke loose without any effort.

Day after day she nagged him and said, "If you really love me you will tell me the truth." Finally, he got so tired of her nagging that he said: "I have been dedicated to God as a Nazirite, and if my hair were cut, I would be as weak as anyone else."

Later, while Samson was asleep, she cut off his hair. When she woke him up, he was truly as weak as anyone else and the Philistines captured him.

Can love make one blind?

Samson loved Delilah so much that he didn't realize how the Philistines were using her to find out the secret of his strength. Every time she would try to make him weak, the Philistines were right there to capture him. He was using his *strength* to tease the enemy, but sadly he didn't use his *mind*. He should have known better than to fall in love with one of the Philistine women. Selfish 'love' made him blind to the devil's trap.

God's kind of love makes us blind too, but in a good way. God's love makes us blind to the imperfections and faults in others (Proverbs 10:12), while His love in our hearts helps us see the hidden traps of sin.

Verse for today

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

April 14

Samson

Judges 16:23-30

One last time

The Philistines had finally found out where Samson's strength lay. They realized that he had been dedicated to God from the day he was born and that his hair was a sign of the Nazirite vow. Now Samson was their prisoner; blind and in chains, grinding grain in the prison. But his hair, which had been cut, started to grow again.

The Philistine kings got together to celebrate their victory over Samson, and said, "Let's get Samson here to entertain us." When they brought Samson out he asked the servant to put him between the pillars that support the Temple.

Samson prayed to God and said, "Remember me, O God. Please make me strong just one more time." Then Samson put one hand on each pillar and pushed with all his might... and the whole Temple came crashing down. Samson died with the people and killed more Philistines that day than he had during his whole life.

Can God still use me if I have really messed up?

If God stopped using everyone who sinned, made a mistake, or went the wrong way, there would be no one left to use. All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Even the apostle Paul said, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" Philipians 3:12.

Even though Samson had messed up, God was still able to use him. In the end, Samson turned to God because he knew where his strength came from. Maybe he had not prayed for a long time, but God saw his faith and answered his prayer. In the New Testament, Samson is even mentioned for his faith, together with others like Gideon! (Hebrews 11:32-33).

Verse for today

Therefore this is what the LORD says: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me." Jeremiah 15:19a

April 15

Ruth

Ruth 1:1-5

A peaceful home

During the time that Israel was ruled by judges there was a famine in the land. A man who was living in Bethlehem at that time moved to the land of Moab with his wife, Naomi, and their two sons.

While they were living there Naomi's husband died and she was left alone with her two sons. Naomi's sons married women from Moab. One woman's name was Orpah, and the other was Ruth. After about ten years both sons died and Naomi was left without a husband or sons.

Why do bad times come to ruin our good times?

Imagine if the world was as flat as a board: no canyons or cliffs, no valleys or mountains. What if it wasn't only flat, but everything on it was the same color: no happy reds and oranges, and no darker shades of blue and green.

Life is seldom uneventful for long. Our lives seem full of ups and downs. However, God doesn't just let us have good and bad times to keep us from getting bored; there is a purpose for everything that happens to us. God uses the ups and downs to help us grow in different ways. Struggles help our characters to grow strong; difficulties build up our faith; and tough times help us become more like Jesus (Romans 8:28-29). But more often than not, God sends us times of blessings so we can renew our strength, take courage and enjoy life!

Life was rather up and down for Naomi. First, it was the hardship of a famine and moving to a distant country. Then there were happy weddings and a peaceful home life. And then her husband and sons died. Life had also robbed Ruth and Orpah of their joy at a young age. Yet even as spring follows winter, and dawn follows the dark night, so our seasons of hardship will pass.

Verse for today

... We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. Romans 5:3-4

April 16

Ruth

Ruth 1:6-18

A tough decision

Some time after Naomi's husband and sons had died, she heard that the famine in her home country had ended. The Lord had given His people a good harvest. So she packed up her things and got ready to go back to her country with her two daughters-in-law. They started out together and as they were walking Naomi turned to them and said, "Why don't you go back home and stay with your mothers? May the Lord make it possible for you to marry again and bless you both for what you have done for me."

So Orpah left to go back home, but Ruth said to Naomi, "Don't ask me to leave you. Wherever you go, I will go: wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God."

When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her she said nothing more and they carried on walking.

Who should I follow when people have a different faith?

Who is right and who is wrong - or are they all right? How can I know whose god is the true God?

Ruth had grown up in Moab where they did not worship God as they did in Israel. Over the years she had watched Naomi's steady faith in God through good times and bad. Ruth saw how Naomi's faith had stayed strong, and how God had been faithful to her. Now Ruth was ready to trust God with her life, as Naomi had.

You may know someone who believes in a different god, or who says he believes in the true God but doesn't believe that Jesus is the Son of God. You can know for sure that the God of the Bible is the living God who created the world and the One who hears your prayers (read Hebrews 11:6). If you read believe the Bible, be assured that you are trusting in the true and living God.

Verse for today

*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.
1 Timothy 2:5*

April 17

Ruth

Ruth 1:22 2:1-10

Caring and being cared for

When Naomi and Ruth got to Bethlehem, the barley harvest was just starting. The women of the town recognized Naomi and welcomed her back.

One day Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields to gather grain that has been dropped. I am sure someone will let me work with them."

So Ruth went to a field and walked behind the reapers, picking up grain. She didn't know that she was working in a field that belonged to Boaz, a rich relative of Naomi.

Boaz happened to arrive there some time later and when he saw Ruth he asked the workers about her. They told him that she had come from the land of Moab with Naomi and that she had worked in the field from early morning. Then Boaz went to talk to Ruth and told her not to gather grain from any other field except from his field.

Will God always provide for me?

Jesus said that we should not worry about our needs for tomorrow because our Heavenly Father has taken care of them already (Matthew 6:31-34). So does that mean we should not plan ahead, save up, or work for a living? Not at all! God wants us to live responsibly by planning for the future and working hard. In fact, Paul had some strong words for a group of Christians who had stopped working and become lazy: he told them to get back to work (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12).

Ruth worked hard every day to gather enough grain for Naomi and herself. Yet Ruth knew that it was God who had provided the good harvest, the field, the kind reapers and a caring owner.

Verse for today

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Matthew 6:26

April 18

Ruth

Ruth 3:1-11

Loyalty is rewarded

Day after day, Ruth gathered grain from the field of Boaz (a relative of Naomi). One day, Naomi said to Ruth, "I must find a husband for you so that you can have your own home again. Boaz, in whose field you have been working, will be threshing barley tonight. Now, get dressed in your best clothes, put on some perfume, and go to where he is threshing; but don't let him see you. This evening, when he has finished eating, see where he lies down and when he is asleep, go lie at his feet."

Ruth did everything exactly as Naomi had told her to do. When Boaz woke up in the night, he said, "Who are you?"

Ruth answered, "It is Ruth, Sir. You are my relative. Please will you look after me?"

Then Boaz replied, "The Lord bless you! You are showing even greater loyalty by doing this than by what you have done for your mother-in-law."

What is true loyalty?

Loyalty is a quality that doesn't always seem that important to people. Often, a person's physical strength, power, influence, wealth, and cleverness impress people far more than his or her loyalty. Yet God sees things differently (see 1 Samuel 16:7).

Loyalty:

- ties love and faithfulness together.
- does not expect to be rewarded.
- wants only the best for the other person.
- is costly—it may cost a life.
- does not quit.
- does not change sides.
- takes time to prove itself.

Verse for today

*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.
Romans 12:10*

April 19

Ruth

Ruth 4:1-10, 13

A branch of the tree

During the night, Ruth had gone to lie at the feet of Boaz and had asked him to marry her. Boaz loved Ruth very much and wanted to marry her, but there was a problem. Ruth had a relative who was closer to her than he was. So Boaz said to her, "Stay here for the night and in the morning we will find out whether he will look after you."

In the morning, Boaz sent Ruth home with a huge amount of barley. Then Boaz went to the meeting place in town where he waited for the other relative. When he came, Boaz said to him, "Naomi wants to sell her field, and you have the first option to buy it. However, if you buy the field, you must take Ruth too, so that her children will inherit the field." When the relative, who had children of his own, heard that the deal included any children Ruth would have, he said, "No, I don't want to buy it."

So Boaz was able to buy the field and marry Ruth. The Lord blessed her, and she had a son named Obed. Obed became the father of Jesse; and Jesse became the father of David—the greatest king of Israel.

What is a genealogy (family tree)?

Do you know who your grandfather is? Do you know who your grandfather's grandfather was? Every person has a family tree, which is a way of writing down the names of each person's parents, going back many generations.

Imagine that you are a twig joined to a thin branch, which is attached to a thicker branch that grows from the stem of a huge tree.

The genealogy (family tree) of Jesus is written in Matthew chapter one. In Matthew 1:5, you will see the name of Ruth. Isn't it great that someone who was hardly known during her lifetime would be part of the earthly genealogy of Jesus, the King of kings?

Verse for today

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
Isaiah 11:1*

April 20

Samuel

1 Samuel 1:9-18

Brokenhearted

After the death of Samson, God raised up other judges to lead Israel.

There was a woman named Hannah who was very sad and upset because she couldn't have children. One day, after she and her husband had finished their meal, Hannah was really upset and went to the Tabernacle to pray. She sobbed as she prayed, "Lord Almighty, look at me and see my deep hurt. If You give me a son, I promise that I will dedicate him to You for the rest of his life."

Eli, the priest who had been watching her, thought she was drunk, but when he realized that she was talking to God about her deep hurt, he said, "May the God of Israel give you what you have asked Him for."

Does God understand my deepest hurts?

We cannot avoid disappointments or steer our lives around hurts along the way, but it helps when we have someone who understands what we are going through.

If there was someone who could have had an easy ride through life, it was Jesus. He had the power to calm a storm at sea and make enough food to feed thousands. He could heal any sickness, and even escape death (Luke 4:28-30). Yet Jesus chose to go without food for forty days and leave home even though He had nowhere to sleep (Luke 9:58). He was born in a smelly stable, and was buried in a tomb that did not belong to Him. Even though Jesus healed many others of their pain, He allowed Himself to be whipped and crucified. Jesus became a man so that He could feel the pain that you feel; and because He is God's Son, our Father in Heaven feels your pain too.

Verse for today

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

April 21

Samuel

1 Samuel 1:19-28

True to their word

A little while after Hannah had prayed to God for a son, she became pregnant and gave birth to a son whom she named Samuel.

Every year Hannah's family would go to offer sacrifices to the Lord at Shiloh. However that year, Hannah stayed behind with Samuel while her husband Elkanah went to offer their yearly sacrifice.

When Samuel was a bit older, Hannah and Elkanah took him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. There they took Samuel to Eli the priest. Hannah said to Eli, "Do you remember me? I am the woman you saw praying to the Lord. I asked the Lord for a child and He has given me this boy. Now I am dedicating him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he will belong to the Lord."

What happens when parents dedicate their child to the Lord?

If you have been in a dedication service and watched parents dedicate their child to the Lord, you may have wondered what a dedication is all about. Perhaps you were dedicated as a baby, or even as an older child, and now you wonder what difference your dedication has made in your life.

When a mother and father dedicate their child, they choose to give their son or daughter back to God, even though they raise up their child themselves. By offering their child to God in front of others, parents are not likely to forget their promise to teach their child about the Lord. The others who are there can pray for the child and help the parents raise the child in such a way that he or she will gladly serve the Lord.

When a mother and father dedicate their child, they choose to give their son or daughter back to God—even though they raise up their child themselves. By offering their child to God in front of others, parents are unlikely to forget their duty to teach their child about the Lord. The others who are at the dedication also pray for the family and help the parents raise their child in such a way that he or she will gladly serve the Lord.

In this way, a child is surrounded by love, care, Bible teaching, and above all, God's grace from a very young age.

Verse for today

Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. Matthew 19:13a

April 22

Samuel

1 Samuel 3:1-10

A voice in the night

The boy Samuel served the Lord at the Temple by helping Eli. Eli was almost blind and slept in his own room while Samuel slept in the Temple near the Covenant Box. One night the Lord called Samuel. Samuel got up and went to Eli thinking that it was Eli who had called him.

But Eli said, "I didn't call you; go back to bed." A while later the Lord called Samuel again. Samuel didn't know it was the Lord and went to Eli again. Eli said to him, "I didn't call you; go back to bed." The Lord called Samuel a third time. This time, when Samuel went to Eli, Eli realized that it was the Lord and said, "Go back to bed, and if you hear the voice again say, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." So Samuel went back to bed.

When the Lord called Samuel again, Samuel answered, "Speak, your servant is listening." And the Lord spoke to Samuel.

Can I really hear God speaking to me?

You may have heard people say that the Lord spoke to them, or that God has told them to do something. Does God really speak to people the way He spoke to Samuel that night? If not, how can we hear from God if we don't hear his voice?

Before Jesus came to earth, God used leaders like judges and prophets to give a message to His people. God would speak to them in a voice they could hear, through special dreams, or through an angel that would give them the message.

Then God sent his very own Son, Jesus to speak to us (Hebrews 1:1). Now we have the words and the example of Jesus, and we have the Holy Spirit who was sent to make the words of Jesus real in our hearts. This is the way God speaks to us now.

Verse for today

Your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." Isaiah 30:21

April 23

Samuel

1 Samuel 4:1-11

What a shame

During the night, the Lord had told Samuel that He was going to do something terrible to the nation of Israel because the people had turned away from Him.

Not long after that, the Philistines gathered for war against the Israelites and defeated them. When the survivors got back to camp the leaders of Israel said, "Why did the Lord let us be defeated? Let us fetch the Covenant Box and carry it into battle with us. Then the Lord will be right there with us and He will save us."

When the Covenant Box arrived, the Israelites shouted so loudly that the Philistines were afraid. So the Philistines fought even harder than before and defeated the Israelites again, this time killing thousands more and capturing the Covenant Box.

How do people dishonor the name of the Lord?

Have you ever felt embarrassed for God's Kingdom when Christians do things that are shameful and wrong?

The Israelites had forsaken God. They did not rely on Him or ask Him about important decisions anymore. So when they were faced with the enemy, they fought in their own strength—and lost! God was wanting to show His glory through His people, as He had done in the past. Now the Israelites were doing their own thing. They had taken the holy Covenant Box—which was not supposed to be moved—and put it on the battlefield like a good-luck charm.

Doing something that keeps people from seeing God's power, dishonors His name. Yet God does not need to prove His power and glory to anyone. He also will not change His standard of holiness to save His people from embarrassment or defeat, or to defend His name.

The Lord's name will always be above all other names. That is why we must be careful not to dishonor His holy name by calling ourselves Christians and living in a way that is no different to that of unbelievers.

Verse for today

Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

2 Peter 2:2

April 24

Samuel

1 Samuel 5:1-11, 7:1-2

Trouble for the enemy

After the Philistines had captured the Covenant Box, they took it to the temple of their god Dagon. Early the next morning, the people of the city found the statue of Dagon lying in pieces, flat on its face. The Lord punished the people of the city by letting bumps grow on their bodies. When they saw what was happening, they said, "We are being punished by the God of the Israelites." And they took the Covenant Box to another city.

The Lord punished that city too, so the Philistines took the Covenant Box to another city. Wherever they took the holy Covenant Box, the people were punished.

Eventually, they put the Covenant Box on a wagon drawn by two cows. The cows headed straight for the town of Beth Shemesh in Israel from where it was taken to Kiriath Jearim. There it stayed for twenty years.

Can the enemy of God keep whatever he captures?

The Bible says that God's enemy (the devil) has come to steal and destroy what belongs to God (John 10:10). He wants to take everything he can, and what he cannot steal, he will try to destroy. The devil hates anything that is pure and good!

God's enemy has stolen our innocence and left us with guilt. The devil robs us of joy and leaves us with sadness and pain. He takes peace from our hearts and leaves us with worry and fear.

But Jesus died on the cross to take away our guilt. He has given us His purity and made us acceptable to God (Ephesians 1:4). He gives us joy in place of sadness (Isaiah 61:3) and puts His peace deep down in our hearts (John 14:27). The devil may take away our possessions for a while, as he did with Job, but he can never take away the treasure inside us. Paul said "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

Verse for today

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. John 10:28

April 25

Samuel

1 Samuel 8:1-9, 19-21

Israel wants a king

When Samuel grew old, his sons became judges in Israel. But they were not good judges like Samuel was. They were dishonest. So the leaders of Israel met with Samuel and said, "You are getting old and your sons are not following your example. Choose a king to rule over us so that we can be like all the other countries."

So Samuel prayed and asked the Lord what he should do.

The Lord said to Samuel, "They have not only rejected you; they have rejected me as their King and have turned away from me to worship other gods. Let them have their way, but give them a strict warning about how an ordinary king will treat them."

What's wrong with having a king?

What could be wrong with a nation asking for a king to rule over them? Does God not like kings; does He not want someone to rule a country?

God is not against a nation having a ruler or king. The Bible even says that God sets up kings (Daniel 2:21), and Hebrews 13:17 tells us that we should obey our rulers.

God was angry with Israel because they wanted a human king, while He was already their King. He had rescued them from slavery in Egypt, provided for them in the desert, and helped them conquer the heathen tribes in the Promised Land. He was better than any earthly king could ever be! He not only protected and provided for His people, He also loved them and cared for them. Now the Israelites were turning their backs on God and wanting a human king so they could be like the other nations.

Who is king of your heart? Allow Jesus, the King of kings to rule in your heart, and you will be blessed!

Verse for today

I will be their God, and they will be my people. Hebrews 8:10

April 26

Samuel

1 Samuel 9:1-6, 18-20

Lost and found

There was a man named Kish who had a tall, handsome son named Saul. Some of his donkeys had wandered off, so Kish asked Saul and one of the servants to go look for the donkeys. For three days they walked all over the countryside looking for the donkeys. Eventually Saul said to his servant, "Let's go back home or my father may become more worried about us than about his donkeys."

His servant said, "Wait! There is a holy man in this town; maybe he can tell us where the donkeys are."

As Saul and his servant were going into the town, Samuel came walking towards them. Samuel said to Saul, "Don't worry, your donkeys have already been found."

What should I do when something is lost?

How terrible it feels when a pet you love disappears. It could be a puppy that has run away or a rabbit that got out. How would you feel if an important schoolbook went missing or something valuable got lost?

Saul did the right thing. First he went to look for his father's donkeys and then, when it was clear that they were nowhere to be found, he went to see Samuel, a man of God. Saul realized that God could see exactly where his donkeys were and could lead him straight there.

When something goes missing, you should pray to God. Remember, your prayer of faith is as valuable to God as the prayer of an adult. After you have prayed, keep looking—like the woman who searched for her lost coin (Luke 15:8-9). Trust God to lead you; and if He gives you peace, then thank Him for hearing your prayer. Expect God to answer, and trust Him to work things out in the very best way!

Verse for today

'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' Luke 15:6

April 27

Samuel

1 Samuel 9:17, 10:1, 17-24

God's second best

While Samuel the priest was speaking to Saul, God told him that Saul was the one He had chosen to be the king of Israel. So Samuel said to Saul, "The Lord has chosen you as ruler of Israel. You will rule His people and protect them from their enemies."

Then Samuel called the people together for a special meeting and said; "This is what the Lord says: 'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. But you have pushed away your God who saves you out of all your troubles, and have asked for a king.'"

Then Samuel chose the tribe and the family as God directed him. Finally, Saul was chosen. So they brought Saul out to the people and Samuel said, "Here is the man God has chosen for you."

Can a bad decision ruin God's plan for me?

Israel wanted a king they could see. Their faith had become so weak that they no longer trusted in an unseen King. There was also another reason for wanting a king: they wanted to be like the other nations around them. The Israelites thought that a king would make their nation look strong and 'with it'.

God sometimes lets us have what we want if we insist on having our own way. When God sees that we are determined to do our own thing, He lets us learn from our mistakes.

Decisions always have consequences and, while God will forgive us for the bad choices we make, the results and effects of those choices don't go away. That is why it is so important to be careful when making a decision that could affect you (or others) for years to come. Important decisions should not be taken lightly or without asking God.

However, if you do make a bad decision, God who is merciful will find a way to keep on using you and blessing you. Just let God have His way in your life again.

Verse for today

Therefore this is what the LORD says: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me" Jeremiah 15:19

April 28

Samuel

1 Samuel 11:1-6, 11-15

The king looks good

After Samuel had introduced Saul as king to the people of Israel, he explained the rights and duties of a king and wrote a list of them in a book.

Not long afterwards, Saul heard that an enemy of Israel had threatened the town of Jabesh. When Saul heard this, the Spirit of the Lord took control of him. He was furious and gathered men from all over Israel to fight the enemy. Saul and his men went to attack the enemy at dawn, and by midday Saul's army had defeated them. Then the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Where are those who said that Saul should not be king. Let's get rid of them as well."

"No one must die," Samuel said, "for today is a day that the Lord rescued Israel!"

Does God also bless my bad decisions?

It seemed as though Israel's decision to have their very own king had not been such a bad idea after all. Saul had hardly begun his reign when the Israelite army went out and defeated an age-old enemy: Saul's first victory! Although Saul seemed to have gotten off to a good start, we are able to take a peep at what lay ahead. If you turn to 1 Samuel 16:1, you will see what God said about Saul.

God can and will do whatever He has planned to do—with or without our help. If we do things that displease the Lord, He finds other ways to carry out His plan. God may well decide to use a bad decision as part of His plan, but He may also choose to do something completely different. Either way, the person who decides to do things in his or her own way—and not God's way—loses out on the wonderful blessings of being in the will of God.

Verse for today

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. Proverbs 16:25

April 29

Saul

1 Samuel 13:5-14

Saul—on a mission

The Philistines were back! They had gathered to fight the Israelites again and were in such a strong position that the Israelites hid in caves and behind rocks.

Meanwhile Saul was waiting for Samuel at a place called Gilgal. He had been waiting for seven days and was becoming impatient. Many of Saul's people started deserting him, so Saul decided to make a sacrifice to the Lord by himself, instead of waiting for Samuel.

Just as Saul had finished his sacrifice, Samuel arrived and said, "What have you done?"

Saul replied; "The people were leaving me and you had not come. So I thought I could win the Lord's favor by offering a sacrifice to Him myself."

Samuel said, "That was a foolish thing to do. Because you have done this, your reign over the nation of Israel will end."

Why was God not pleased with Saul's sacrifice?

Saul must have thought to himself: "I will win this battle—no matter what! And, if Samuel doesn't come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord soon, I'll just have to bend the rules a bit and do it myself. I will do whatever it takes to get the Lord on my side so He can help me win this battle! And if I don't do it now, everybody will leave me... and there goes my popularity!"

Saul wanted to do something religious in order to get God to help him win. Saul was impatient and disobedient. He was relying on his own 'good ideas' instead of trusting God to do things His way. Saul only wanted God's blessing so that he could win; afterwards Saul would take all the glory for himself.

Verse for today

...To obey is better than sacrifice... 1 Samuel 15:22

April 30

Saul

1 Samuel 14:1-15

Faith and courage

One day, Jonathan, the son of king Saul, said to his helper, "Let's make our way across to the Philistine camp." Jonathan did not tell his father what he was planning.

When Jonathan was near the Philistine camp, he said to his servant, "Let's cross over to the camp. Maybe the Lord will help us: If He does, we will have the victory even though it is only us against so many. This is what we will do: we will let the Philistines see us. If they tell us to wait while they come to us, we will stay here. But if they call us, we will go across to them because it will be a sign from the Lord that He will give us victory."

When the Philistines saw Jonathan, they said, "Look! Some Hebrews are coming out of their hiding places." And they called Jonathan, "Come here; we have something to tell you."

So Jonathan and the young man went across to the Philistines and attacked them. The Lord gave them victory, and the Philistines in the area were terrified.

Is a daring deed an act of bravery or foolishness?

Would you say Jonathan was brave or foolish? How can we know the difference? Below are some thoughts that may help:

Bravery: Did Jonathan do a courageous deed...

- in obedience to God?
- for God's glory and honor?
- to rescue people in danger?

Foolishness: did Jonathan take a risk...

- for fun?
- to show off his power and skill?
- to get a reward?

Verse for today

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. 1 Corinthians 16:13