

October 1

The disciples

Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:48

The greatest and the least

While the disciples were on their way to Capernaum they got into an argument about which of them was the greatest. When they arrived in Capernaum, Jesus asked them, "What were you arguing about while we were walking along the road?"

The disciples were embarrassed and didn't answer. Calling the twelve together, Jesus sat down and said, "If someone wants to be first he must put himself last and if he wants to be great he must be the servant of all."

Jesus brought a child to stand in front of them and gave him a hug. Then He said, "Whoever welcomes a child welcomes Me, and whoever welcomes Me, welcomes the One who sent Me. The one who becomes the least—he is the greatest."

If I am the least, when do I become great?

Being last and least has nothing to do with how fast you are or how young you are. No one likes being at the bottom of the pile, being last in the queue or coming last in a race. And being least definitely doesn't mean that you are unimportant!

Jesus didn't say to His disciples that they *are* the least, but that they should *become* the least. Becoming the least is something we choose to do—whether we happen to be the fastest or slowest, tallest or shortest, oldest or youngest.

The one who is least has a kind and humble attitude. He doesn't think of himself as being too important to kneel down and make a child feel welcome. In God's Kingdom, those who are greatest are the ones who see the good in others, who encourage others, and who make friends with the lonely. When you choose to put others first, you become the greatest in God's Kingdom!

Verse for today

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 1 Peter 5:5a

October 2

Jesus

Luke 9:57-62

The cost of following Jesus

One day, when Jesus and His disciples were walking along the road, a man said to Jesus, "I will follow You wherever you go."

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lie down."

Later, Jesus said to another man, "Follow me!"

But the man replied, "Sir, let me first wait until my father has died, then I will follow You."

Jesus replied, "Let those who don't have eternal life take care of things like that. You go and tell people about the kingdom of God."

Someone else said, "I will follow you Lord, but let me first go home to say good-bye to everyone."

Jesus said to him, "Anyone who is distracted from doing the work I have planned is like a farmer who tries to plow in a straight line, but keeps looking behind him."

What does it cost to follow Jesus?

If you were to ask a sports coach if you could join the 'A' team, do you think he would invite you to play in a match without training? No, he'd tell you about the many hours of training and practice that lie ahead before you can even hope to be selected for the team. (And no excuses for not attending practices!) Fitness and skill only come with proper training and lots of practice!

Jesus told the man who was interested in joining His team that being a follower would not be easy. When we join the winning team, led by Jesus, we can expect things to be tough! We must learn the rules and study examples of others in the Bible. We must listen to the Holy Spirit who is our coach. We need to stay spiritually fit by praying every day. Living a holy life is not easy, but the prize at the end will be better than you can ever imagine!

Ready for the challenge?

Verse for today

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:14

October 3

Jesus

Luke 10:25-37

The Good Samaritan

One day, an expert on the Law of Moses came to Jesus and tried to trap Him by asking Him what a person must do to live forever. Jesus first asked him a question; then He went on to tell him a story to explain what it means to love your neighbor.

"There was once a man who was walking along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him. They stripped off his clothes, beat him and left him half dead beside the road.

A priest happened to be going down the same road. When he saw the wounded man, he crossed to the other side and walked on.

Later a Levite who worked in the Temple came along. He went over and looked at the man. But he too left the wounded man and carried on walking.

Then a Samaritan came along. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him. He knelt down, cleaned the man's wounds and bandaged them. Then the Samaritan put the man on his donkey and took him to an inn where he was cared for until he got better."

How can I be a 'Good Samaritan'?

When you have hurt yourself and someone has helped you, that person has been like the Good Samaritan to you. Perhaps you would also like to show your kindness by helping someone in need.

Why not ask your mom to show you how to clean a graze, put on a plaster, and tie a bandage. You may not find someone beaten up on the side of the road, but you won't have to go far to find someone who has been hurt in a different way.

Some may have been hurt deep inside because of what others have said or done to them. You can help to make a wounded heart better by being a loyal friend and by letting God's healing love flow through you.

Verse for today

*The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
Galatians 5:14*

October 4

Mary

Luke 10:38-42

Sitting at the Mater's feet

As Jesus and His disciples went on their way, they came to a village where a woman named Martha welcomed Jesus into her home. Martha had a sister named Mary who went to sit at the feet of Jesus and listened to His teaching.

But Martha became upset because of all the work she had to do. So she went to Jesus and said, "Lord, don't you care that my sister is just sitting here and has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!"

"Martha, Martha," Jesus said. "You are worried and upset about many things. There is only one thing that is really important. Mary has discovered it, and now that she has, it won't be taken away from her."

What is the most important thing in life?

If you were to ask some people what the most important thing is to them, you would get many different answers. Some may say that being happy is really important; others might choose a good education, health, being rich, or having a loving family. People spend time and energy on that which is most important to them.

To Martha, it was important to have things work out just right; and when Jesus came, she wanted everything to be perfect. When things weren't going exactly as she wanted, she got all worked up. Yet Jesus would have been just as happy to have a simple meal. Actually, He would have preferred Martha to relax and join the conversation, rather than fuss over things that didn't really matter. What is the most important thing in your life? To Mary, it was spending time with Jesus.

One day, the earth and everything we own will no longer be around (2 Peter 3:7). Will that which is important to you now really matter when we are with the Lord in heaven?

Verse for today

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. John 10:27

October 5

Jesus

Luke 13:10-21, Mark 4:26-29

The kingdom of God

On the day set aside for worship, Jesus went to teach in the synagogue—a Jewish place of worship. While Jesus was there, He healed a woman who had been ill for many years. This made the person in charge of the synagogue very angry, because to him, rules were more important than people.

Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a large tree in which birds made their nests.

The Kingdom is also like yeast that a woman mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked through the dough and made it rise."

What is the kingdom of God?

What does a bit of yeast have in common with a tiny mustard seed? Although neither seems like much, in the right place, both grow bigger and bigger!

When Jesus started His ministry, the kingdom of God was like a small seed. Then the disciples joined Him, and soon others believed and also became part of God's kingdom. The kingdom spread from town to town, and from country to country as more and more people heard about Jesus and believed. But what is the kingdom of God—and where is this kingdom?

A kingdom is all the land and all the people over which a king rules. As Lord of all, the Kingdom of God is everywhere He rules. God has a heavenly kingdom and an earthly kingdom. He rules in heaven where His perfect will is done (2 Timothy 4:18). And if the Lord is King of your life, His kingdom is also inside you (Luke 17:20).

If you are a child of the King, your name is written in heaven. That makes you a registered citizen of His heavenly kingdom even though you are still living on earth (Philippians 3:20).

Verse for today

The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Psalm 103:19

October 6

Jesus

Luke 14:15-24

The great feast

While Jesus was having a meal at the home of a Pharisee, He told one of the guests this story: "There was once a man who invited many guests to a great feast. When everything was ready, he sent his servants out to tell the guests, 'Come to the banquet. Everything is ready.' But those who were invited each had an excuse.

The first man said that he had just bought a field and needed to go look at it. The second man said he had bought some oxen, which he needed to try out. The next man said he had just got married and therefore couldn't come.

So the servants went back and told their master that no one would come. The owner of the house was angry and said to his servants, 'Go out quickly into the streets and country roads of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'"

Why would someone not want to go to a feast?

If you were invited to a friend's party, would you think up a silly excuse not to go? Yet many people come up with all sorts of excuses for not accepting God's invitation to the greatest celebration ever—in heaven!

Some don't believe in God (or in heaven) and so they don't believe that there is going to be a feast.

Some are just too busy. One man had bought some property; another was busy (at work) wanting to try out his new oxen.

Some are afraid of upsetting their family and friends. One man had just got married and didn't want to risk a disagreement.

Invitations to the great feast in heaven have been sent out, and your name is on one of them: Jesus has invited you to come. When it is time and everything is ready, will you be there?

Verse for today

'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' Revelation 19:9

October 7

Jesus

Luke 15:1-2, 11-24

The Father's love

One day, some tax collectors and 'sinners' came to listen to Jesus. The Pharisees and teachers of the Law started complaining, "This man [Jesus] welcomes dishonest crooks and even eats with them."

Then Jesus told them this story to show how much God loves sinners. "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Give me my share of the inheritance now.' So the father sold a part of his property and gave the money to his son.

The son left home and went to a country far away where he wasted all his money. Then a famine spread across the country and he was left with absolutely nothing. So he went to work on a farm where he looked after smelly pigs. He was so hungry that even the pigs' food started to look tasty.

At last the son came to his senses and said, 'I will get up and return to my father.' While he was still a long way from home, his father saw him and ran out to meet him. The father hugged his son and welcomed him home. Then he held a big party to celebrate because his son had come back."

Does God's love for us ever change?

When we have sinned and gone our own way, it may not feel as if God loves us because our guilt and shame makes us feel far from Him. The son who left home could not feel his father's love while he was far away, but that didn't mean that his father had stopped loving him. The son only felt his father's love the day he returned home and was hugged.

God's love for us will never change, even when we rebel and go our own way. He is overjoyed when we come back to Him, no matter how far we have gone or what we have done.

Verse for today

In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15:10

October 8

Jesus

Luke 17:11-19

The man who came back

On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus entered a village and met ten men who had a dreaded skin disease called leprosy. The men stood at a distance and shouted, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us."

When Jesus saw them, He said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." (In those days only the priests could declare someone free of leprosy and give them permission to live among the people of the town again.)

On their way to show themselves to the priests, the ten men were healed of their disease.

One of them, when he saw that he was healed, praised God in a loud voice and went back to thank Jesus.

Jesus said to him, "There were ten of you; where are the others? Are you the only one who came back to give thanks? Go your way; your faith has made you well."

Wouldn't God get bored if we thanked Him for every little thing?

If you had to think of a hundred things to thank God for, it probably wouldn't take you long to make up a list. For a start, just look around you.

You can thank God for those big things you are very grateful for, and for small things you really appreciate. But instead of going through a long list at the end of every day, you could get into the habit of thanking God for things as they happen, or as you see them.

For example, you can thank Him for a warm bed on a cold winter's night, or for delicious food when you are hungry. You can thank Him for eyes to see the beauty of a sunrise or for the love of a friend when you're feeling down.

God loves it when we thank Him because it shows that we are grateful for His goodness to us and that we notice the details of His creation—the things many others take for granted.

Verse for today

Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything... Ephesians 5:19b-20

October 9

Jesus

Mark 10:13-16

Jesus blesses children

While Jesus was teaching a group of people, mothers brought their children to Him so that He would bless them and pray for them. But the disciples told the mothers to take their children away.

When Jesus noticed this, He was upset and said to His disciples, "Let the children come to Me, and do not stop them because the kingdom of God belongs to them."

"I tell you this: anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it."

Then Jesus took the children in His arms, placed His hands on each of them and blessed them.

Are kids as important to God as adults?

Adults seem to have so many privileges like going to bed when they want, making up rules in the home, and buying whatever they want at the store. Adults are also able to do so many things that kids can't do. At times, it may even feel as if your church is mainly for grown-ups, and this could make you think that God is actually more interested in adults than in kids.

Although adults do have more privileges and are able to do more than children can, they also have more responsibilities. But in God's eyes, that doesn't make adults more important than kids.

We are important to God because He created us and because we belong to Him—not because of our age or ability!

When it comes to getting God's attention, you don't have to wait at the back of a queue while God sorts out important things with the adults. Jesus told His disciples never to stop children from coming right up to Him, because the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like children. And you are one of them!

Verse for today

From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise. Psalm 8:2

October 10

Zacchaeus

Luke 19:1-10

A tax collector in a tree?

As Jesus was passing through the town of Jericho, a large number of people lined the streets to see Him. In the same town lived a tax collector named Zacchaeus who had cheated many people. He stood right at the back somewhere, and because he was short, he couldn't see Jesus. So he ran on ahead and climbed a tree.

When Jesus passed by, He stopped, looked up into the tree and said, "Zacchaeus, come down, because I must come and stay with you today!"

Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed Jesus with great joy. Then he said to Jesus, "I will give half of what I own to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay him back four times as much!"

Would Zacchaeus have met Jesus if there had not been a tree?

Do you think Zacchaeus' life would have changed if that big tree had not been next to the road?

While Jesus was on earth He could only be in one place at a time. Even so, He changed the lives of many people by going out of His way to meet those who were searching for truth. Now that Jesus is in Heaven, He makes Himself known to every single person who wants to know Him.

God said, "You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart" Jeremiah 29:13. He is watching for anyone whose heart longs to find Him. Whenever someone, like Zacchaeus, wants to meet Jesus, God in His power can make it happen. God can work things out for that person to be in the right place at the right time to hear about Jesus and invite Him into his heart.

Maybe God wants to use you to speak to someone at your school who, like Zacchaeus, wants to meet Jesus.

Verse for today

For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. 2 Chronicles 16:9

October 11

Mary

John 12:1-8

The sweet smell of perfume

It was the time of the year when Jewish people celebrate the Passover, so Jesus and the disciples made their way from Jericho to Jerusalem. On their way, they stayed over at someone's home in Bethany.

Martha served the dinner, which had been prepared in honor of Jesus. While they were eating, Mary took a jar of very expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet. Then she wiped His feet with her hair. The sweet smell of the perfume filled the whole house.

Judas, one of the disciples, sneered; "We could have sold this perfume and given the money to the poor!"

But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone! She has done a beautiful thing to Me. The poor will always be around, and you can help them whenever you want, but you will not always have Me."

Why did Mary pour perfume on Jesus' feet?

In those days, it was a custom to offer a guest a jar of water to wash his hands and feet when he entered the house. Mary did much more.

She went across to Jesus and poured her precious perfume over His feet. The perfume—which cost as much as some people earn in a year—was Mary's gift of love. It was the most precious thing she owned. By pouring it over His feet, Mary showed that she no longer had anything that was more precious to her than Jesus.

Yet Mary felt that even this gift was only suitable for washing the feet of her Lord. So Mary gave more: she gave herself by bowing down at the feet of Jesus and used her hair to wipe His feet.

Verse for today

May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. Psalm 141:2

October 12

Jesus

Luke 19:28-44, Matthew 21:1-7

"The Lord needs it"

On their way to Jerusalem, where Jesus and His disciples were headed, they came to the village of Bethpage. Jesus sent two of the disciples on ahead, saying, "Go to the village over there and you will find a donkey tied up with her colt next to her. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will let you take them."

The two disciples went and did what Jesus told them. They fetched the donkey and the colt and threw their cloaks over them for Jesus to ride on.

Should I allow others to use my things?

Someone leans over and taps you on the shoulder. "Could I use your pencil for a minute?" After school, someone wants to borrow one of your books to take home. That afternoon, a friend wants to know whether he can borrow your bike to go for a ride.

If someone wanted to borrow something from you and you were to follow the example of the man who owned the donkey, how would you know whether to say yes or no?

We may want to do the right thing by being kind and helpful, yet we also need to be responsible about lending things to others.

For a start, there are some things that are personal—like your toothbrush. Don't let others use your personal things!

There are certain things that are valuable, which you should not lend to others without first checking with your mom or dad.

But there are things you can let others use in order to help them out. Remember; sharing builds friendships.

The Lord does not want us to selfishly hold onto everything we own, but rather, share whatever we can with others.

Verse for today

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. Matthew 5:42

October 13

Jesus

Matthew 21:6-17, John 12:12-15

Jesus enters Jerusalem

The disciples brought a donkey and its colt to Jesus as He had asked them to. As Jesus rode on the donkey, a large crowd spread their coats to carpet the road; others cut palm branches from nearby trees and spread them on the road.

Some walked ahead of Jesus and some walked behind Him. They all shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in chaos. Some people asked, "Who is this?"

"This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth," the crowd answered.

Then Jesus went to the Temple and chased out the people doing business there, saying, "My Temple will be called a house of prayer, but you have turned it into a den of thieves." Then He healed the sick; and all the children shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

What does 'hosanna' mean?

A large crowd had gathered for the Passover feast. Jerusalem (called the city of David) was buzzing with activity as people from all over the country came for the yearly celebration.

By this time, many people had either met Jesus or heard of Him. When they saw Jesus riding into the city, they started shouting "Hosanna!" meaning 'save us.'

The Romans, who had conquered the country, were making life difficult for the Jewish people. Jesus had shown His power by doing many amazing miracles, and some thought that He was the One who would set them free from the Romans. They did not realize that Jesus had come to earth for a greater purpose than to save them from the Romans: it was to save the whole world (John 3:16).

That is why we can also sing (or shout) "Hosanna in the Highest" to Jesus, because He is the One who saves us and sets us free from our enemy, the devil.

Verse for today

... Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zechariah 9:9

October 14

Jesus

Matthew 22:15-22

Should we pay taxes?

The Pharisees were very unhappy that Jesus had dared to drive traders from the Temple area while allowing children to shout praises to Him as He healed the blind and lame.

So the Pharisees tried to think of a way to trap Jesus by getting Him to say something against the Romans (who ruled Judah). If He did, they would be able to accuse Him of something for which the Romans could punish Him. They came up with a plan and asked Jesus, "Is it against our Law to pay taxes to the Roman Emperor, or not?"

Jesus asked them to show Him a coin for paying taxes and said, "Whose name and face is on the coin?"

"The Roman Emperor's," they answered.

"Well then, pay to the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor, and to God, what belongs to God."

What are taxes?

There are many things that a government—those in charge of a country—must do for its citizens; like building roads and hospitals and schools, and making sure that people obey the law. The government needs money to do all these things, and one way of raising money is by getting everyone to pay a portion of what they earn. The money that is paid is called tax.

Paying part of one's hard-earned money for tax is no fun and some people try all sorts of ways to get out of paying what they should. But Jesus made it clear that paying tax to those in authority is the right thing to do.

Be a person of honor by giving to each one what you owe them—whether it is respect at home and at school, or paying taxes when you become an adult.

Verse for today

Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Romans 13:7

October 15

Jesus

Mark 12:41-44

She gave all she had

As Jesus was sitting near the Temple offering-box, He watched people come to put their money in it. Some rich people put in lots of money.

Then a poor woman came along and put in two small coins, which were not worth much.

Jesus called His disciples together and said to them, "Let me tell you this. That poor widow over there has put more into the offering-box than all the others. The rich only put in some of their spare cash, but the widow put in all she had—every last bit she had to live on."

How can a little be more than a lot?

If you were to tell your friends that the few copper coins in your hand are worth more than a fat bundle of banknotes, they would probably look at you strangely. Imagine the looks on the disciples' faces when Jesus told them that the poor woman had put more into the offering-box than all the money the rich people had put in. It didn't make sense!

The actual value of the money the rich had given may have been more than the widow's coins, but let's look at it the way Jesus saw it. Pretend that you and a friend decide to give your teacher some chocolates. Your friend gives the teacher three chocolates from a big packet she brought to school. You decide to give the one small chocolate your mom put in your lunchbox. Who gave more? You gave more because your friend only gave a little from the big packet she had, while you gave everything you had. 'Everything' is more than 'a little!'

Jesus doesn't look at how much you give, but how much you have left. Do you put some of your pocket money into the offering?

Verse for today

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7

October 16

Peter

Luke 22:7-20

The Passover meal

Jesus sent Peter and John ahead to prepare a room for the Passover meal. He told them that they'd meet a man carrying a water jar who would lead them to a house with a large room, which the owner would let them use. Everything happened exactly as Jesus said it would.

When the meal was ready, Jesus and the disciples made themselves comfortable around the table.

Then Jesus said, "I have looked forward to sharing this Passover meal with you before I suffer. For I won't eat it again until the Passover is given its full meaning." Jesus took the bread and gave thanks for it. Then He broke off pieces, which He gave to them, saying, "This is my body which is given to you. Do this to remember me."

After supper, Jesus gave them a cup of wine to share, saying, "This cup is the sign of God's new agreement to save you—a lasting covenant sealed with My blood."

How does the bread and wine remind us of Jesus?

Although Jesus had told His disciples that He would suffer and die, they didn't understand what He meant.

At the Passover supper, Jesus used the bread and the wine to explain to the disciples what was about to happen. The symbols Jesus used would also be a practical way for His followers to remember His death until He comes to take us to heaven.

As Jesus broke the bread, He was showing how His body would be broken. He would be whipped and beaten and nailed to a cross the next day.

Then Jesus took the wine and used it to show how His blood would flow as He hung on the cross.

God's new agreement said that Jesus would take the blame and punishment for everyone's sin, and that He would die in our place. This means that all you need to do to be made sinless is ask Jesus to forgive you.

Verse for today

For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:26

October 17

Peter

John 13:1-10

Peter has his feet washed

While Jesus and the disciples were celebrating the Passover meal in an upstairs room, Jesus got up and wrapped a towel around His waist. He poured water into a bowl and went from one disciple to the next, washing their feet and drying them with the towel.

When it was Peter's turn to have his feet washed, he said, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet too?"

"You do not understand what I am doing," Jesus replied, "but later on, you will understand."

"No!" Peter said, "I won't let You wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you won't belong to Me or be part of what I am doing."

"Then wash my hands and my head as well—not just my feet," Peter exclaimed.

Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath only needs to wash his feet, and you are clean; though not everyone of you," because He knew that one of them would betray Him.

Why did Jesus wash Peter's feet?

Peter couldn't bear the thought of His Master—the Lord of all creation—doing the job of a servant by washing his dirty feet. It made him feel awkward. But when Jesus explained why He needed to do this, Peter wanted Jesus to wash him all over.

Why then did Jesus only wash Peter's feet? Jesus had brought about a change in Peter's life: he had already been made clean by becoming a follower of Jesus. Yet, Peter was not perfect. He still got dirty from being in this sinful world and doing things his way instead of God's way.

Although Peter had learned many things, there was one lesson—a very important lesson—he needed to learn, and later he would understand what it was. To become the leader Jesus wanted him to be, Peter needed to learn to humbly serve others.

Verse for today

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. John 13:15

October 18

John

John 13:21-26, 33, 36-38

"I will die for You!"

After Jesus had washed the disciples' feet, He told them that one of them was planning to betray Him (hand Him over to His enemies). The disciples stared at each other puzzled and confused. What did Jesus mean? Who would do such a thing?

John, who was next to Jesus, asked, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread after I have dipped it in the sauce."

Then Jesus took a piece of bread, dipped it in the sauce and gave it to Judas. Immediately, Judas got up and left, and he headed into the darkness. Jesus turned to the others and said, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me."

Peter asked, "Where are You going, Lord?"

"You cannot follow Me now, but you will follow Me later on," Jesus replied.

"Lord, why can't I follow You now?" Peter asked. "I am ready to die for You!"

Jesus replied, "Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, three times you will say that you don't know Me."

What is the test of real love?

Both Judas and Peter had been chosen by Jesus. Both had followed Jesus as He travelled from town to town. They had seen many miracles and faced many hardships. Now, both disciples faced an important test: a test of their love and loyalty.

Judas was planning to throw away everything he'd been through; turn his back on his only friends, and betray Jesus—all, for a handful of silver.

Peter was willing to die, if that's what it would cost to stay close to His Lord. He had failed often, but he loved Jesus! He had followed Jesus everywhere and was set on being faithful to the end. Although Jesus knew that Peter would fail this test, He also knew that, one day, Peter would prove the full extent of his love.

Verse for today

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13

October 19

Jesus

Luke 22:39-46

Jesus prays in the garden

Jesus and His disciples left the house and went to the Mount of Olives, a hill east of Jerusalem. When they arrived at their usual spot, Jesus said to the disciples, "Pray that you will not be overcome by temptation."

Then Jesus walked on a little way and knelt down to pray. "Father," He said, "if You are willing, please take away this cup of suffering so that I don't have to drink it. But I want to do Your will, not Mine."

An angel from heaven came to Jesus and strengthened Him, for He was in such agony that His sweat dripped onto the ground like drops of blood. And He prayed even more earnestly.

Then Jesus got up and went back to the disciples. He found them asleep, worn out by their sadness. "Why are you sleeping," He said. "Get up and pray that you won't fall into sin when you are tempted."

Did Jesus have to die?

Jesus knew that the time had come for Him to take away the sin of the world. He had prepared His disciples for what lay ahead. Late that night, there in the garden, Jesus prayed to His Father.

Was there still time for Him to get away instead of staying in the garden where Judas and the others were sure to find Him? Could God have taken Jesus straight back to heaven so He wouldn't have to suffer? Could Jesus have called down thousands of angels to defend Him? (Matthew 26:53).

As the Son of God, Jesus could have chosen not to die for us. He thought of the cruel death that awaited Him and wondered if His Father could come up with another way to save the world. But there was no other way! And because Jesus loves us so very much, He was willing to become the Passover Lamb for us and give His life to set us free (John 10:17-18).

Verse for today

But the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me... John 14:31

October 20

Peter

Luke 22:47-54

Jesus is arrested

As Jesus was speaking to His disciples in the garden, a crowd arrived led by Judas. It was night, and Judas came right up to Jesus and kissed Him. Jesus said to Judas, "Are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

When the disciples realized that the group of people had come to arrest Jesus, they said, "Lord, should we use our swords?" But before Jesus could answer, Peter swung his sword at the servant of the High Priest and cut off his ear.

But Jesus said, "Stop this and put away your sword." Then He touched the man's ear and healed him.

Jesus then said to the chief priests, the elders, and the officers of the Temple; "Why have you come with swords and clubs as though I am a criminal? I was with you in the Temple every day. Why didn't you arrest Me there? But now that it is dark, this is your time to act."

So they arrested Jesus and took Him to the High Priest's house. And Peter followed at a distance.

Does God plan the exact time for things to happen?

God does nothing without a plan. For a plan to work, it is important for things to happen at the right time.

- *God's timing.* This was not the first time people had tried to kill Jesus (Luke 4:28-30). Even when Jesus had been in the Temple a few days earlier, the time was not right (verse 53).
- *Peter's timing.* Peter asked, but he didn't wait for an answer. He wanted to do the right thing by bravely defending Jesus, but it was the wrong time. In Ecclesiastes 3:1,3 it says that there is a time and a season for everything under heaven: a time to kill and a time to heal.
- *The devil's timing.* The devil had his plans too. But his plans always have to fall in with God's will and timing. The devil can only do *what* God allows—and *when* God allows!

Verse for today

My times are in your hands. Psalm 31:15a

October 21

Peter

Luke 22:54-62

A rooster crows

The soldiers that arrested Jesus in the garden took Him to the High Priest's house. A fire had been lit in the courtyard, and Peter, who wanted to be near Jesus, joined those sitting around the fire. In the flickering light, one of the servant girls recognized Peter, and said, "This man was with Jesus too!"

But Peter said, "I don't even know Jesus!"

Later, one of the men said, "You are also one of them."

But Peter replied crossly, "I am not!"

About an hour later, someone else said, "This man is definitely one of them. He comes from Galilee."

Peter replied, "I don't know what you're talking about!"

As Peter was still speaking, a rooster crowed. Jesus turned and looked at Peter. At once, Peter remembered that the Lord had said; "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Then Peter went away and wept bitterly.

Can someone who has denied Jesus still go to heaven?

We don't get to heaven by what we do (or by what we don't do). All our good deeds put together cannot get rid of our sin; and no one who has a sinful heart may enter heaven.

You can only be saved from sin when you ask Jesus to forgive you and allow Him to change your life. From that day on, you will always be God's child—even when you say something wrong like Peter did. If you are sorry for what you did, Jesus will forgive you!

While you are on earth you will never be perfect. Peter discovered that. He thought he would be strong and defend Jesus, but later he became fearful and denied Him. Yet he was still a disciple... and a child of God! And because Jesus loved him and forgave him, he carried on and followed Jesus for the rest of his life (John 21:19).

Whenever you are tempted to take sides with the world, stand firm and be bold enough to let others know that Jesus is your friend.

Verse for today

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

October 22

Jesus

Luke 23:1-7, Matthew 27:24-26

Pilate must decide

The religious leaders took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor. They lied about Jesus and accused Him of misleading the people.

So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

Then Pilate spoke to the chief priests and to the crowd, saying, "I find no reason to condemn this man." When Pilate found out that Jesus came from the region ruled by Herod, he sent Jesus to Herod (who happened to be in Jerusalem at that time). But Herod too could find no fault with Jesus and sent Him back to Pilate.

Again, Pilate could not find Jesus guilty of a single crime. So he took a bowl of water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. Then he had Jesus beaten and handed Him over to the people to be crucified.

Why did Pilate wash his hands?

By washing his hands in front of the crowd, Pilate was trying to prove that his hands were clean; that there was no 'blood on his hands' from sentencing an innocent person to death.

Yet, by not using his power and position to make a fair judgment, Pilate chose to side with the unjust. Although he knew that the religious leaders were jealous of Jesus, Pilate was too scared to take a stand against them. He even tried to pass the responsibility for the decision on to Herod, hoping that he would make a decision about Jesus.

Every person has to make the decision Pilate had to make: either to be *for* Jesus, or *against* Him. Jesus said, "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30). Because Pilate was afraid to decide for Jesus, he went along with the crowd's decision to be against Jesus.

Verse for today

*Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."
John 19:11a*

October 23

Jesus

Mark 15:21-28, 33-37

The darkest day

Although Pilate could find no fault with Jesus, he let his soldiers take Jesus to be crucified. The soldiers made Jesus carry a heavy wooden cross. A large crowd followed them to a hill outside the city.

When they came to a place, which was known as The Skull, the soldiers nailed Jesus to the wooden beams and lifted the cross upright. They also crucified two criminals: one on His right and one on His left.

Then Jesus said, "Forgive them, Father, for they do not know what they are doing." The soldiers divided His clothes among themselves, throwing dice to decide who would get each piece.

At midday the sun stopped shining and darkness covered the country for three hours. Suddenly, the thick curtain that hung in the Temple was torn in two. Then Jesus cried out, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." And with those words, He died.

Why did the Temple curtain tear?

There was a special curtain in the Temple that separated the part where the priests could go from the Most Holy Place behind the curtain (see Exodus 26:33). Only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. No one else could enter the Most Holy Place, and live! Sin kept people from meeting with God in the Most Holy Place.

When Jesus died, He took our sin and guilt on Himself and opened a way for us to draw near to God. God Himself tore the curtain from top to bottom to show that everyone is welcome in His presence now. If we ask Jesus to forgive us, He takes away our sin and makes us absolutely pure so that we can go meet with God.

Verse for today

Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ... let us draw near to God. Hebrews 10:19-20

October 24

Joseph of Arimathea

John 19:31-42

A stranger's tomb

By mid-afternoon, Jesus had died. Because it was a special Sabbath day the next day, the Jews did not want to leave someone hanging on a cross. So the soldiers broke the legs of the two men hanging next to Jesus to make them die quickly. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. However, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, causing blood and water to flow from the wound.

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple, went to ask Pilate for permission to take the body of Jesus down from the cross. Then Joseph and Nicodemus wrapped the body of Jesus in a long linen cloth with the spices used for burial.

There was a big garden near the hill where Jesus was crucified. It so happened that Joseph owned an unused tomb in the garden, so they laid the body of Jesus in the tomb and rolled a large stone in front of the entrance.

How do we know that Jesus is the promised Messiah?

'Messiah' is a Hebrew word meaning the Anointed One—the One sent from God to save us (Micah 5:2-5). Hundreds of years before Jesus came to earth, God gave Old Testament prophets and writers some signs that would help people recognize Jesus when He came.

Although it may seem obvious to us that they were speaking about Jesus, the Jews living at that time saw Jesus as a normal man and not the promised Messiah—the Son of God.

So how can we be sure that Jesus is the promised Messiah? Here are just three of the many prophecies that came true on the day Jesus died:

- They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing (Psalm 22:18).
- He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken (Psalm 34:20).
- "They will look on me, the one they have pierced" (Zechariah 12:10).

Verse for today

"We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). John 1:41

October 25

Mary Magdalene

Matthew 28:1-8

The empty tomb

The day after the Sabbath, before the sun came up, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to Jesus' tomb. It was Sunday morning, the third day after Jesus had been crucified.

Suddenly, there was a great earthquake and an angel of the Lord rolled away the stone from the entrance of the tomb. The angel was as bright as lightning, and his clothes were dazzling white. The soldiers who were guarding the tomb were so afraid that they fell to the ground like dead men.

When the two women arrived at the tomb, the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid! You are looking for Jesus who was crucified, but He is not here. He is risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Now, go quickly and tell the disciples that He is alive!"

So the women left the tomb; afraid, yet filled with joy.

Did Jesus raise Himself from the dead?

Jesus had brought a young girl back to life (Luke 8:53). He also raised His friend Lazarus, who had been dead for four days (John 11:43-44). And now, Jesus Himself was dead. He had been beaten, nailed to a cross and pierced in the side. His friends wrapped Him tightly in strips of cloth and laid Him in a tomb. They had even rolled a heavy stone in front of the entrance. How would Jesus be able to rise from the dead as He said He would?

The Bible tells us that God raised Jesus from the dead. By raising Him, God showed that the death of His Son was entirely enough to pay for every sin in the whole world. Jesus had taken the punishment for every sin and so God was now able to take it away forever (Romans 6:9-10).

In this way, Jesus became the first sinless man to rise from the dead. And when we put our faith in Him, He also makes us sinless; and God will raise us to eternal life with the same power that raised Jesus.

Verse for today

*By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.
1 Corinthians 6:14*

October 26

Jesus

Luke 24:9-19, 28-32

Jesus is alive!

When the women told the disciples that an angel had appeared to them saying that Jesus had risen, the disciples didn't believe them. But Peter and John ran to the tomb and found it empty.

The same day, two of Jesus' followers were walking back to their hometown after the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. They had seen Jesus being crucified, and as they walked along the road to Emmaus, they were very sad. Suddenly, Jesus started walking next to them and joined in their conversation, but they didn't recognize Him.

Even though Jesus explained what the prophets had said about the Messiah who was to suffer and be glorified, they didn't realize that it was Jesus talking to them.

When they arrived at Emmaus, they invited Him to stay with them. At supper, Jesus gave thanks and broke the bread; and as He gave it to them, it was as though their eyes were opened and they recognized Him.

Why didn't Jesus show Himself to everyone?

There was no need for Jesus to appear to those who didn't believe in Him. If they had not believed in Him before, they would not believe in Him now. Even if someone came back from the dead to warn them, they would not believe (Luke 16:31). They had seen the miracles of Jesus, but what they saw did not help them believe in Him. Jesus wants followers who believe in Him by faith.

And so, Jesus showed Himself to the two followers walking along the road. Then He appeared to the disciples, and later, to many other followers. Jesus wanted them to be eyewitnesses: to see that He truly was alive. Although the disciples had not believed the women at first, when they saw Jesus they needed no further proof.

If Peter and the others were so convinced that Jesus had risen that they were willing to live and die for Him, we too can be absolutely sure that Jesus is alive right now!

Verse for today

Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. John 16:22

October 27

Jesus

Luke 24:33-43

Jesus appears to the disciples

The two who had met Jesus on their way home, ran all the way back to the city to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. When they got to Jerusalem, they found the disciples together in a room and told them that Jesus had appeared to them.

While they were still speaking, Jesus suddenly appeared in the room with them and said, "Peace be with you."

The disciples were terrified, thinking that they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus said, "Why are you doubting? It is really Me! Look at My hands and My feet, and feel Me. A ghost does not have a body like this."

The disciples were amazed and filled with joy.

Then Jesus asked, "Do you have anything to eat?"

So the disciples gave Jesus a piece of cooked fish, which He took and ate right there in front of them.

Did Jesus have a real body after He rose from the dead?

If you have stubbed your toes in the dark or walked in to a closed door, you will know that your body cannot go through a solid object. (If you try, it may really hurt.)

You may wonder how Jesus got into a room with a locked door (John 20:9). The disciples were terrified that the Jewish leaders would do to them what they had done to Jesus. So they made sure no one could get in. But even a solid wall and a solid door couldn't stop Jesus. Suddenly, there He was!

Jesus was able to walk through anything, yet He was also able to eat, speak, and hold things. He even had marks in His hands and feet from the nails used on the cross. After Jesus had risen from the dead, He had a glorified body (John 12:16), and with this glorified body He returned to His Father in Heaven.

Verse for today

The Lord Jesus Christ ... will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Philippians 3:21

October 28

Thomas

John 20:24-29

Thomas believes

Thomas, one of the disciples, had not been there when Jesus appeared to the others. When they told him that they had seen Jesus, he said, "Unless I see the scars from the nails in His hands and feel the hole in His side, I will not believe."

A week later, the disciples were together in the same room. This time, Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus appeared to them again and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see My hands. Reach out your hand and feel My side. Stop doubting, and believe!"

Thomas replied, "My Lord and my God!"

Then Jesus said, "Happy and blessed are those who have not seen Me, yet believe."

Should I believe everything I hear about Jesus?

If a stranger gave you a little book and told you that it is even better than the Bible, would you believe every word in the book? If you heard someone talking on the radio about different religions having the same God, could you trust everything that person said?

Do you believe everything your friends say just because it sounds like the truth? Thomas didn't believe everything he was told by his friends. The problem was not so much that he doubted what his fellow disciples told him about Jesus, but that he didn't believe what Jesus Himself had said (Luke 9:22).

Everything God wants us to know about Him has been written in the pages of the Bible—and God's Word can never be changed! He has also given us the Holy Spirit to help us understand the meaning of what is written (1 Corinthians 2:12). God wants us to test the things we hear and read about to make sure that they agree with what He has said through His written Word.

Verse for today

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God ... 1 John 4:1

October 29

Peter

John 21:1-14

At the Sea of Galilee

After Jesus had shown Himself to the disciples, they left the house where they were staying and went to Galilee. Jesus had told them that He would go on ahead and meet them there.

While some of the disciples were at the Sea of Galilee (Tiberias), Peter said, "I'm going out to fish."

The others replied, "We'll go with you." So they went out in a boat; but that night, they caught nothing!

As the sun rose, Jesus stood on the shore and called out to them, "Friends, have you caught any fish?"

"No," they answered. The disciples did not realize that it was Jesus standing on the shore.

"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will catch some," Jesus called.

So they threw out their net. This time, they couldn't pull it in because of the many fish they had caught. John said to Peter, "It is the Lord." When Peter heard that it was the Lord, he jumped into the water and waded to shore.

What important lessons had the disciples learned?

From the time Jesus first called Peter and the others to follow Him, they had learned much from the things He taught them and from the example He set. This experience taught them that:

- Without Jesus, life's struggles turn to failure and frustration.
- Immediate and complete obedience is the key that unlocks God's power.
- God can, and will, supply all our needs... and more!
- When we help each other, we all share in the blessing.

Jesus showed the disciples that spiritual truths are very practical, and that these truths form part of our everyday lives.

Verse for today

Nothing is too hard for you. Jeremiah 32:17

October 30

Peter

John 21:15-25

Jesus speaks to Peter

When the disciples landed, they dragged their heavy net ashore. There was a small coal fire with some fish on it, and some bread. Jesus told them to bring some of the fish they had caught and invited them to breakfast.

When they had eaten, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, do you truly love Me more than these here?"

Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, You know I love You."

Again Jesus asked, "Simon, do you really love Me?"

"Yes, Lord," Peter answered, "You know that I love You."

Then Jesus asked Peter the third time. "Simon, do you love Me?"

Peter was very sad because Jesus had asked Him a third time. He answered, "Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You."

Why did Jesus ask Peter the same question three times?

Jesus didn't ask questions in order to find out things; He asked questions to make people stop and think.

Peter had denied Jesus three times by saying that he didn't know Him. Peter was obviously feeling very ashamed about what he had said. He felt like a miserable failure. How could the words "I'm sorry" ever make up for what he had done?

But Jesus knew that Peter still loved Him and He wanted to give Peter a chance to say so.

The first two times Peter said "I love you" he didn't have the courage to use words that describe a deep, loyal love. But when Jesus asked a third time, "Do you love Me?" Peter replied sadly, "Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You."

If ever you feel ashamed about something you've done, and the words "I love you" seem shallow, you can say, "Lord, look into my heart and You will see that I truly love You."

Verse for today

"...I have prayed for you... that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Luke 22:32

October 31

Jesus

Luke 24:50-53, Acts 1:6-11

Jesus goes back to heaven

Jesus and the disciples were back in Jerusalem. Forty days had passed since Jesus had been crucified, and the time had come for Him to return to His Father in heaven.

Jesus led His disciples out of the city to the town of Bethany, where He raised His hands and blessed them.

Then He said to them, "When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be filled with power, and you will be witnesses for Me in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and to the farthest places on earth."

After saying this, Jesus was taken up to heaven and hidden by a cloud.

While the disciples were still looking up, two men dressed in white appeared beside them and said, "Why are you standing here looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen Him go to heaven."

Where is heaven?

The Bible tells us that heaven is up above us. But in a world that is round, which way is up? Astronauts have gone into outer space, circled the earth, and come back saying that they didn't see heaven up there. So, is heaven really above us somewhere?

Like the sky above, heaven may be very near, or it may be further than the furthest star. Like the sky, heaven may be above us wherever we are on this earth.

But we should also remember that we cannot see heaven with the eyes we have now. Our eyes are not made to see spiritual things. But that doesn't mean that heaven isn't real. When we die, or if Jesus comes back before then, our bodies will be transformed (made new). Then—with our new bodies—we will be able to see just how real and beautiful heaven really is.

Verse for today

I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven. Psalm 123:1