

Orthodox Vacation Bible School 2020
Theme Book: Intermediate

Flowers



SHAUNA MARY BIJU



OSSAE

Diocese of UK, Europe & Africa of Indian (Malankara) Orthodox Church

THE INDIAN (MALANKARA) ORTHODOX CHURCH

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SOUK/20/007

01 March 2020

Blessings to the Vicars/Priests-in-Charge, Sunday School Teachers, Parents and Students:

Dearly beloved in Christ!

Sunday School is the cradle and foundation of our Church. With all gratitude to God Almighty We are overwhelmed to see the blessed functioning of the OSSAE activities in our diocese. We appreciate the Parents and Teachers for your vigour and commitment for providing the right spiritual nourishment for our young children.

OVBS indeed plays an inevitable role in the Sunday School activities. It brings up motivation and enthusiasm in young children to learn the Holy Book and Church's teachings. This year our OVBS classes will be conducted in all our Sunday School units during the months of May to July as per the convenience of individual units.

The theme for OVBS 2020 is "Discern the will of God." This is based on 1 Thessalonians 5:18 which says, "*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" Let us remember and teach our children that Praising and Glorifying God is the corner stone of Christian Faith. Whatever we receive, whether it is as per your wish or not so comfortable to you, is the will of God which we shall adhere and accept in full spirit. We could see that Thanksgiving to God is very prominent throughout the Bible.

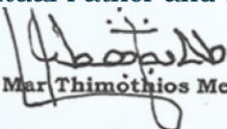
OSSAE diocesan Vice President Fr Anoop Abraham, Diocesan OSSAE officials and Sunday School Teachers are extensively contributing their wisdom and energy for the preparations for the sessions and it is well noticed that a song book will be published for this year's OVBS classes. The songs are well chosen and We are sure that it would be an added benefit and cheer for our children. Congratulation to the team behind this wonderful achievement.

We urge all the Parents and Sunday School teachers to encourage our children to attend the OVBS classes and be blessed.

We pray and extend best wishes for the success of OVBS 2020.

May God Bless you all!

Your Spiritual Father and Shepherd


+ Mathews Mar Thimothios Metropolitan

Foreword



Beloved Sunday School teachers, parents and my dear children,

First of all, I thank Our Lord Almighty for His kindness and mercy upon us during this pandemic. As we prepare ourselves for another OVBS, amidst all the joy and happiness of OVBS this year, we are also going through a very tough and sad situation. Let's seek the loving kindness of our Lord to overcome this, with all positiveness and Christian hope.

Orthodox Vacation Bible School is the season of fun, most of our children look year after year, but it's also a season of transformation and learning lessons that kids carry with them for the rest of their lives. Also, it is an opportunity for the church to teach children The Holy Bible and the Orthodox faith. This year we have an interesting theme for our OVBS "Discern the Will of God" from 1 Thessalonians 5:18 "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus". This verse gives an inspiring hope in perceiving, recognising and understanding the Will of God and giving thanks to God during a pandemic, which badly affects our life. If we belong to Christ, we have to renew our thankfulness by delighting to look into our heavenly Father's will he has revealed in the Scriptures. OVBS 2020 theme will help us to "Discern the Will of God" in our spiritual journey.

I take this opportunity to thank you all, especially our Diocesan Metropolitan H G Dr Mathews Mar Thimothios Thirumeni, all Vicars, OSSAE UK Director, Secretary, Treasurer, OVBS coordinators, District Inspectors, Head Teachers, Teachers, Volunteers and Parents, for your dedication, selfless work and support to OSSAE-UK and OVBS 2020. Special thanks to the team behind the song and theme books. Your every effort to support and nurture our children in Christ will be rewarded by Our Lord.

In our song book, as previous years, we have included official songs provided by OSSAE OVBS 2020 and a few English songs to make it more lively for our children. Each unit has the freedom to choose a number of songs from the song book based on their OVBS duration, however, prayer, marching and theme songs are mandatory to be taught in all units.

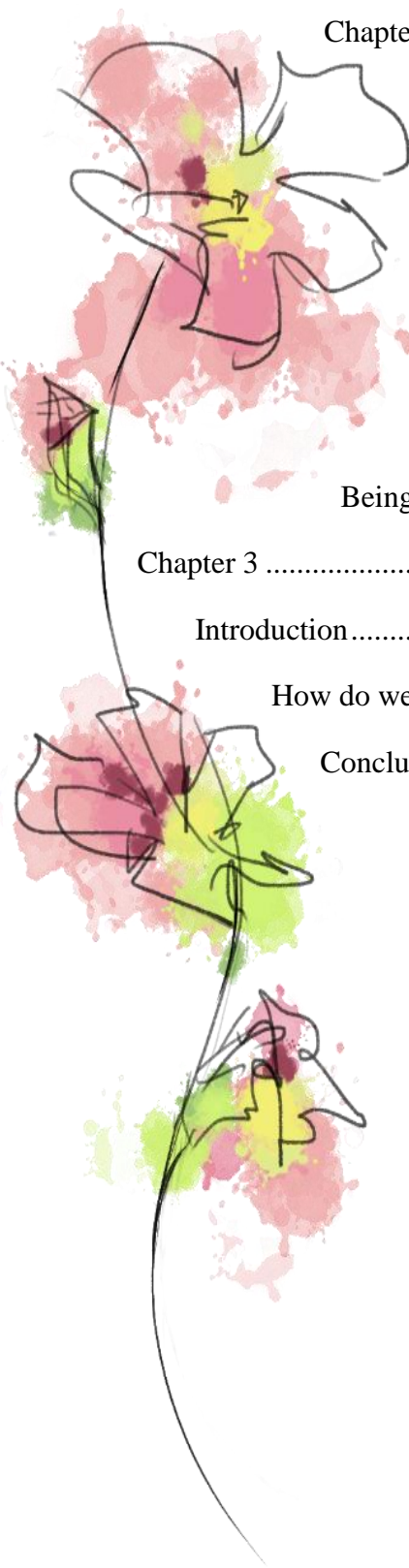
Even though we conclude our OVBS with a Holy Qurbana and rally every year, I would request vicars and head teachers to conduct OVBS 2020 based on the convenience available at individual churches i.e. using online medium or smaller groups depending on the situation.

Prayers and wishes for a blessed OVBS 2020.

Yours in Christ

Fr. Anoop Abraham Malayil
(Vice President OSSAE –UK)

Table of Contents



Chapter 1	3
Saint Paul	3
The First Book of Thessalonians.....	4
Discern the Will of God.	4
Conclusion.....	6
Chapter 2	8
Give Thanks in all Situations	10
Being in Jesus Christ for you	11
Chapter 3	14
Introduction.....	14
How do we discern the will of God?.....	15
Conclusion	17

Chapter 1

Discern the will of God - Theme Background

Prelude to the theme

"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

1.Thessalonians 5:18

Saint Paul

Saint Paul (Paul the apostle) also known by his Hebrew name Saul of Tarsus, was born in the Roman city of Tarsus (Turkey) in the tribe of Benjamin. He grew up in Jerusalem and became a Pharisee under the guidance of Gamaliel, a famous Jewish teacher. Acts says that he was an artisan involved in the leather or tent-making profession. He is considered as one of the most important persons of the Apostolic Age. Even Though he has the title of an apostle, he was not a disciple of Jesus. He became a Christian only after the death of Jesus. He was a member of Roman army who was involved in the killing of many Christians including that of St. Stephen, who was the First Martyr of Christian church.



St. Paul Icon
Image source: Orthodox Monastery

On his journey from Jerusalem to Damascus, Lord Jesus appeared to him and he became a Christian and was baptized into the faith by Ananias. St. Paul was a strong orator and writer and he has written 14 books in the new testament of the bible. He also has undertaken three missionary journeys to different parts of Asia and Europe and was a cornerstone in building many early churches. He is also known as the Apostle of Gentiles. St. Paul during his second missionary journey in 49 A.D., was accompanied by Silas and Timothy. Around A.D. 50, he came to Greece and converted people of Philippi and Thessalonica into faith. In Athens, he had strong opposition from Jews and gentiles and had to flee from there. After one year, he met Timothy, his companion who informed him about the situations in the church of Thessalonica and he wrote two letters to strengthen and instruct them about their closer walk with Christ Jesus. The Church remembers St. Paul along with St. Peter on June 29. Our Church lectionary introduces readings from each of these epistles as "from the epistle of St. Paul to..."

The First Book of Thessalonians

Thessalonica, the capital city of Roman province of Macedonia, also known as the “mother of Macedonia” in Roman writings, was a major Roman Naval base and a seaport. St. Paul established a church here after he left Philippi and used this city as a gateway to reach the European region.

The first letter to Thessalonians is believed to be the first epistle written by St. Paul and is the oldest of writings which have been gathered into the New testament. It is considered to be a letter of encouragement as the believers who were previously idol worshippers had to stand firm in front of the Jewish persecution for being Christians. The book of Thessalonians follows the typical pattern of Pauline writings and is divided into 4 parts: Introduction, Gratitude and praise to God, teachings about the Christian conduct and second coming of Jesus Christ and final exhortations and blessings.

Discern the Will of God.

The Theme for OVBS 2020 “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” is taken from 1 Thessalonians 5:18. In the first part of Chapter 5, St Paul urges us to be watchful about the second coming of Jesus Christ. The second part of the chapter talks about the final exhortations and greetings. This theme can be divided into three parts.

1) Give Thanks in All Circumstances

St Paul in this verse talks about radical gratitude in which being thankful in all circumstances irrespective of the situations. Showing gratitude helps us to build a deeper relationship with oneself, others and with God. Throughout the bible we can see examples of people who lead a grateful life to God. In the new testament we can see an example of this in St. Luke chapter 17, where Luke mentions the healing of the 10 lepers and only one came back to say thanks to Jesus. We also are sometimes like the nine who forgets God's grace and we do not acknowledge God's goodness. However, it is much easier to forget God's faithfulness during hardships and difficulties and need the power of Holy spirit to acknowledge the need for thanking God in all circumstances.



Why should we thank God?

God is omnipotent and he gave his life as an atonement and continues to be merciful to us. All that we have in life is a gift of God and being appreciative of that, will help us to understand the will of God.

2) Discern the Will of God

The will of God for his people is indeed unpredictable and requires much patience to understand. It is quite acceptable to show eagerness in knowing all his wishes he has for our life, but He will reveal it only step by step. Jesus Christ as His only Son, could not understand the father's will and prayed in Matthew 26:39, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.". But there again he submits himself to God's wishes. As we walk with the lord obeying him and relying on his spirit, we will know Him and identify His will for us.



"not as I will, but as you will"
(Matthew 26:39).
Jesus at Gethsemane Painting by :
Yongsung Kim

But if anyone is a worshiper of god and does his will, he hears him. **John 9:31**

God's will can be classified into three:

- a) **Prescriptive will:** The strong will of God with no changes [example: creation of world].
- b) **Permissive will:** God's permissive will are those areas where God States His will but permits man to operate contrary to His will. God's sovereignty says that those who go against His will must either repent or pay the price for disobedience [example - Jonah was given an instruction to go to Nineveh but disobeyed God and was punished accordingly]
- c) **Provisional will:** God's secret will or plans for us may be revealed in the future or they may be revealed after they have been completed. (In St John 2:20 Jesus talks about tearing down the temple and rebuilding it in three days. The disciples thought it was about the Jerusalem temple but only after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ they understood that it was about Himself He spoke about)

3) In Christ Jesus for you

1 Corinthians 3:16 says that "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you"? And Galatians 2 :20 says: "I am crucified with Christ and it's no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me". So, when we understand that God dwells in us, we become the temple and God becomes knowable and personal. If we are the God's temple, then what are our responsibilities as Christians? We indeed have a fourfold responsibility:

1. To God because He bought us at a price
2. To Jesus Christ because we are part of His body
3. To ourselves to come out of sin
4. To our loved ones to serve them

Up on meeting all these responsibilities, we make sure that the Holy Spirit dwells in each one of us and helps us to identify the will of God.

Conclusion

St Paul himself is a perfect example for this verse. He had all luxuries and the best education in his life but God's will for him was hardships, trials and persecutions and he always used to praise God in all his difficulties. Acts 16 shows that St Paul was imprisoned but started thanking God and miraculously escaped from there. God has a perfect will for each one of us and nobody can escape from it. The challenge each one of us has is to discern God's will in our lives and to be thankful in all circumstances. When we pray for God's will to permeate in our lives, our decision will be full of wisdom and our lives will be greatly enriched. This action will also increase unity within our church, and we will become one as Christ and the Father (St. John 17:21).



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Activities

Group Discussion

Read Ephesians 5:15-17

Why do we tend to think that God's will is something difficult to discern? What does God want us to understand here?

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Chapter 2

Discern the will of God: Theological aspects

With the invention of various electronic gadgets and technological innovations, our modern, fast-paced world can be stressful, where we often tend to use our own free will instead of discerning God's will.

The holy bible, traditions and teachings of our church fathers give directions to discern God's will in every situation. With busy life and everyday chores, we forget to embrace these lessons in our life. We need to cultivate a habit of humbly submitting ourselves to God before making any decisions in our lives.

In his pride the wicked man does not seek Him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God

Psalms 10:4

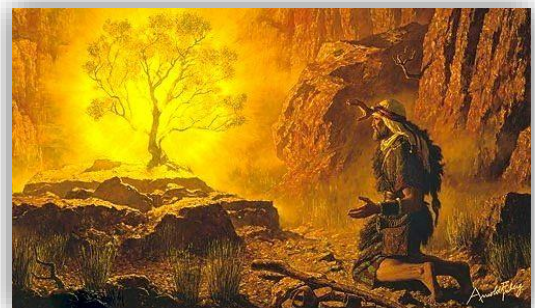
Pride is the opposite of humility. Your life feels happier and peaceful when you surrender yourselves to Lord, since in adversities of life such as illness and poverty, one can find refuge in Lord. As human beings, we regularly face afflictions of this world, however, when we put our faith in God, He will find ways to return that trust. He will guide us and protect us. Psalmist says in Psalms 28:7

*"The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped:
therefore, my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him"*

Here David the great not only buries his pain by remembering God but is also gladdened (St. Gregory of Nazianzus's letters). Holy Bible also lay witness to our ancestors who discerned the will of God and surrendered their life before Lord.

The call of Moses

The Holy Bible says, "Now Moses was the humblest man on earth" (Numbers 12:3). Moses was called by Lord to become the leader of Israel to deliver them from Egyptians bondage. The Israelites were enslaved for around 400 years and God heard their plea by appointing



Moses and the burning bush
Painting by Arnold Friberg

Moses as their leader. In the form of burning bushes, God revealed himself to Moses as he was tending his sheep and ordained him to deliver His people. Moses expressed his inability with humility before God, as he feared that people will not accept him. Moreover, he had a speech impediment. But Lord

strengthened Moses for His work as he finally accepted God's call. Moses is known as the head of Prophets.

The Call of Abraham

The book of Genesis describes how Abraham, the father of faithful adhered to God's will in its 12th chapter. God commanded Abraham to leave his country, family and relatives to go to a land that He showed. God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants into a great nation and that everyone on earth to receive blessings because of Abraham.

Abraham faithfully discerns the will of God. St. Paul describes Abraham's plight in Hebrews 11:8-10 as, "when he was called out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise"; and in verse 17 "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son."

It is indeed the faith in God that help to understand His will when one needs to take important decisions during confusion. This is particularly important in today's world with so many distractions around us.

Remembrance: A habit of remembrance of God in our lives, is a way to discern His will. What is the remembrance of God? We should always try to acknowledge that God is present everywhere, constantly with us and knowing our every deed, words and desires.

I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Psalms 16:8

We always allow ourselves to worry about many things by forgetting about the presence of God. The more we are aware about God's presence, our thoughts are calmed, and we have less chance of being distracted.

Prayer: Our forefathers always believed prayers to be essential for spiritual growth. The Jesus Prayer proclaims our faith and humbles us by asking mercy for our sins. When we acknowledge God's presence through our prayers, it helps focus our minds with the thought of God and with the concentration attained, we discover a very personal and direct relationship with Him.

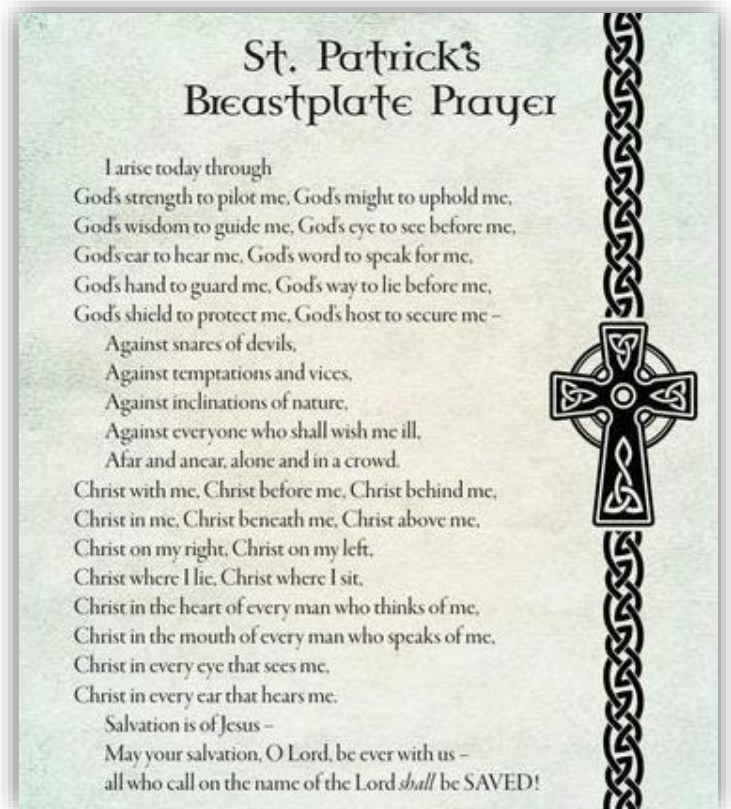
Saint Gregorios of Parumala, the first declared saint of Malankara, always stress about the importance of prayer. Here are some of the quotes from Parumala Thirumeni about prayer.

"When we pray with a heart full of devotion, God accepts it and we receive it back in the form of a blessing."

"He who prays to God everyday would never be without truth, morality, faith and devotion, and would never turn against his master or society".

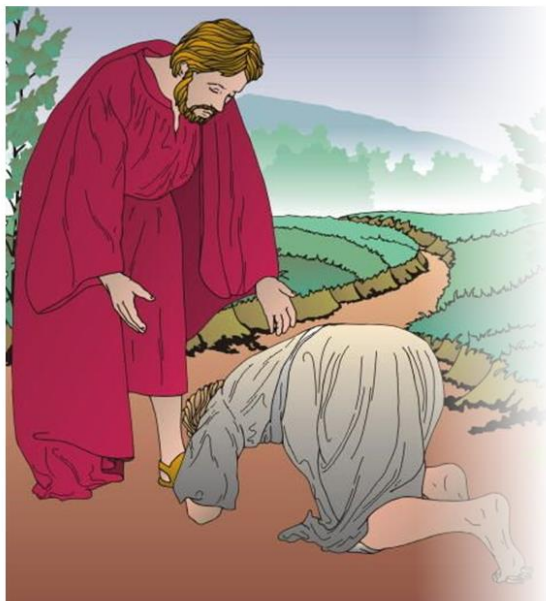
"If man does not raise his hands in prayer for himself and for the sake of his people, even after knowing God, how can we say man is better than animals that are not wise and cannot think about their future".

St. Patrick's Breastplate is a popular prayer attributed to one of Ireland's most beloved patron saint. Legends say that around 433 A.D., St. Patrick wrote this for divine protection before he converted Irish Kings and their subjects from paganism to Christianity. A breastplate is a piece of armour worn in battle.



Give Thanks in all Situations

Healing of the Ten Lepers



Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!"

So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan.

So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

Luke. 17:12-19

Here Jesus shows the importance of thanksgiving. In many ways, we are like the lepers. Everyone has something that troubles them. It is Christ who provides healing, comfort and strength to deal with our weaknesses and sickness.

Jesus shows us an example of thanksgiving when He feeds the 5,000 people in the wilderness. He took seven loaves of bread and fish and gave **thanks**, broke them and gave them to His disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitude (St. Matthew 15:36; St. Mark 8:6; St. John 6:11). This event was a foreshadowing of the Eucharistic when Jesus did the same thing at Mark's Mansion.

The word Eucharist comes from the Greek "*eucharistia*" which means 'thanksgiving.' Consequently, the most profound way to show gratitude to God, is by humbly preparing for the receiving of the Holy Eucharist, the Body and Blood of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ. In old testaments too, we see the leaders of the tribes of Israel were blessed and healed by God and they remembered to show their gratitude. King David begins many of his Psalms with an expression of thanksgiving and shows us the importance of giving thanks to God before asking anything in prayer.

Research studies also show us that people of faith are more contented and those who are thankful are more cheerful and optimistic. Because we live in a sinful world in which humanity is corrupted by evil, giving thanks does not come naturally or organically. It needs to be cultivated and exercised as a habit in order to flourish and grow. On the contrary, we tend to murmur and complain, instead of being thankful. Do we recognize those small blessings in our everyday life? How many of us even bother to go back to thank God for our blessings? If we do not understand our blessings we will always walk around with a sense of entitlement, supposing somebody always owes us something. St. Paul encourages us in Colossians 3:17 "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him"

Being in Jesus Christ for you

In the 12th chapter of his letter to Romans, St. Paul appeals not to be conformed by this world but to be transformed by the renewal of mind and by doing so we discern what is good and acceptable in the will of God. What exactly is good, acceptable and perfect in the eye of God?

Children are rewards.

"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb".

Psalm 139:13

We see similar commitment by Lord in the prophetic books of Isaiah (44:24) and Jeremiah (1:5). Throughout the Holy Bible we see many instances that children are represented as reward from our Lord and how they are valued individuals of the church. Jesus demonstrates their importance through verses such as Matthew 19. Jesus also entrust us with their protection by commanding to disciples “See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:10). As we see and enjoy the concern, love and care of our God for children, in return, is the Lord expecting anything from us? If so, what is our Lord expecting from us?

A faithful and dedicated childhood

We all know the wonderful story of Prophet Samuel, his childhood at the temple with his teacher, priest Eli. Samuel while serving God, exhibited a high sense of dedication and obedience. We all should remember the event when Yahweh was pleased with Samuel, called him by his name and entrusted him with prophetic responsibility. (1 Samuel Chapter 3 1-11). We are expected to live our childhood in faith and that Lord will care for us just like Samuel as we grow (1 Samuel Chapter 3 :19).

Discern to the voice of God

Being deliberate and intentional in seeking God will enable us to hear His call. Holy Scripture says, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13). Parumala Thirumeni through his life, in the 20th century left a very exceptional witness discerning to the voice of God. “Prayer is the inspiration of childhood, the refuge of youth and peace during old age”, are words from Thirumeni for us to abide.

We build a strong relationship with God through prayers. We can request God to reveal his will as David (psalm 25:4) pleads “Make me know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths”.

Mature in the word of God

St. Paul through his many writings have shown us that the word of God not only teaches us righteousness but also directs our growth and our paths. The story of Apollos of Alexandria that we learn in our Sunday school classes how we can grow spiritually by heeding to the word of God and advice of elders.

Prepare to Serve

Going back to the story of Jesus feeding five thousand men, we see that when the boy realised the difficulties of those who were hungry, he was prepared to give up what he had. Likewise, are we prepared to see around us to be at the service of the needful?

Praying for others is highly regarded. Prophet Samuel believed that he was committing a sin, if he does not pray for others (1 Samuel 12:23). By serving and fulfilling the will of God, we are in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Enhance discernment

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Proverbs 1:7

Being wise lets us to pursue what is good in life while avoiding what is evil. Holy Scripture emphasis “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). We can achieve this through Meditation, being mindful, with a preparedness to sacrifice and submission to will of God.

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Activity

Roleplay: There are many admirable people in the Bible, and we can learn many things from them. Create a list of Bible heroes from the old testaments (for e.g. Abraham, Moses, Noah, Isaac, Jacob etc) and let children sit in a circle. Pass around an object, a ball perhaps, and as each person gets the object, they will stand up, choose their hero and describe what they admire about them that they would love to bring their life .

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Chapter 3

Practical Aspects of the Theme

"As for me, being on the way, the Lord led me . . ."

Genesis 24:27

Introduction

We live in a time of uncertainties. Although we have established ways of governance, education, church and other systems, we still are unsure of what would come next in our lives. Will it be a state of political unrest? Will there be a pandemic? Can we face the challenges of climate change? All such questions do not have an exact answer.

We have limits in our reasonings. Even with the advances in science, technology and studies related to human behaviour, we face limitations to understand what comes ahead of us. Maybe we are good at predicting something that could happen very soon, but there are many factors that are beyond to comprehend.

Reasoning has limits, so does following the scripture word by word. We would have come across many instances where people have taken course of action that seem to have been interpreted as fulfilling God's will. People often get emotionally upset when such actions turn out to be errors in judgement. More often, when someone being over-enthusiastic about a cause, imposes their own understanding in the name of God's will. Such incidents can often lead people beginning to see God's will to be unchanging and unyielding, in a way that it would be seen by many as a stumbling block in their path. It is for this reason that we should start seeking our relationship with God to be interactive.

We also should be aware that our personal understandings have limits. It is very easy for our judgements to be shaped by our prior experiences. We should be ready to listen to God's spirit that acts at the deepest level of human understanding. This is through the wisdom and guidance of elder members of our community. Their experiences with our faith and understanding of its mysteries can indeed guide us.

When we look further, we will see that we face many such limitations in most aspects of our personal and social life. This is more evident when we make decisions and then we will see many limits are set by laws and rules. We will also see that to arrive at some decisions following insights, consensus,

authority or majority, the process itself comes up with limits. When our judgements are limited, we will feel our life to be out of tune, but when our spiritual perceptions are in unison with God's will, we feel our life in harmony. So how do we really understand what God wants from us?

How do we discern the will of God?

Before we get to understand how we could discern the will of God, we should know why we should do so. As children of faith, we believe God's presence in all human experiences. We seek God's guidance and yearn to listen to His voice. Among many voices that surround us, how would we differentiate between what is true and what is false? What is good and what is evil? We cannot test each voice looking out for the best, some may even put us in danger.

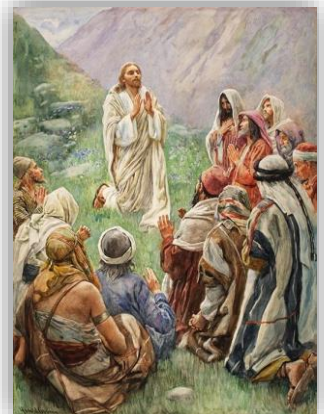
Although our discernments are personal, they are not just limited to us. We should understand that our actions have an effect not only on us and our immediate family but also our entire community.

Throughout the Holy Bible we will see God chose people, prophets and kings as agents of his will. Through them he counselled the powerful on political, social, economic and military matters.

We can now form an understanding on how to seek God's will if we truly accept to choose the only thing that matters, that 'His will' is the most important thing for us to do. We can discern His will in two ways. First and the obvious way is in understanding Him and next, to surrender ourselves to His will. Indeed, God speaks to us through the Bible and the sermons we hear in church, but more obviously He speaks to us by means of what happens to us, our job here is to understand this.



"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths" (Psalm 25:4).
King David's Prayer. Image source :
christianimagesource.com



"Thy will be done." (Luke 11:2).
Image : The Lord's Prayer by Harold
Copping

Walking with God

"The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you"

2 Chronicles 15:2

We know that for having a good life, it is important for us to be with good company and live in a good environment. We absorb the influences around us. There are various ways in which we associate ourselves with God through various activities of our church. But associating with God only through such activities would be like receiving a full meal only on a Sunday to nourish your body for the whole

week. We must understand that living in the world today drains our energies both physically and spiritually, and we need constant nourishment to face everyday challenges. Accordingly, we need a lifestyle that has a constant relationship with God.

Can we imagine any relationship that do not involve any communication? God has created us for an intimate relation with Him, which is not just to simply believe and obey Him, but to know Him. As Jesus mentions in John 17:3, eternal life is in knowing Him. But how do we know God? The obvious answer we all have is about reading the Bible and regular prayers.

Indeed, understanding anything involves hearing, sight, and communication. Reading scriptures and prayers are all part of this. Understanding God however also involves our recognition of the presence of God in our life, which we call as faith and second, a boldness in our communication with God, which is to not have any doubts in our prayers. As Jesus tells us through the gospel of St. John, 7:17, to recognize the truth of Christ, our wills need to be aligned with that of God's without any doubt.

We can also feel God's presence in every service we do to help people around us who needs our attention, love and care. This is because, best way to walk with Jesus is trying to follow his actions. Jesus through his ministry has shown us that 'love' for our fellow beings is what he wants from us.

But do you think God speaks to us only this way? Sometimes God puts us through experiences that are hard and dark. It is natural for us to feel grumpy and sulk when we have bad experiences. But Jesus says in Matthew 10:27, "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light", which means God has given us a message through our misfortune and we probably will only realise it when the darkness is removed. We may not fully comprehend the meaning of the experience when our heart is in the wrong state of mind. Therefore, it is a very human tendency to blame our circumstances or even God when we go through a bad phase. Hence, it is better to stay silent through a bad phase and only talk about it when we fully understand God's message through it. Once we comprehend the message, we receive his gift and that softens our heart.

Surrendering our will to God's Will

Having chosen to walk with God, how would we really understand if we are indeed discerning his will? Our prayers are often full of our wants and needs, and our prayers are requests to fulfil our desires. Do we pray, "Lord let this happen to me" or "Lord, if it is Your will, let my actions work for your greater plans"?

Surrender is a process that shows our willingness to hand over authority and submission to this authority. God never intends it to be an act of defeat, but our submission would be a means to be guided

by the one who knows and have seen the truth. When our desires take precedence, it creates a barrier in our communication with God. We need to learn to “*let go and Let God*”.



“Behold the maidservant of the Lord!
Let it be to me according to your
word.” (Luke 1:38).
Illustration by Walter Rane

The best example of surrender in the Bible is that of our Mother of God. Mary knew in her heart that God’s will seems obscure and far from expectations, but it did not stop her from embracing it whole-heartedly. From Mary we learn to surrender to God’s will in all ways.

Surrendering to God’s will gets easier with practice. It works for us when we try honestly. When we begin everyday with a prayer “Take my will and my life, guide me through and show me how to live”, we surrender ourselves to God’s plans and thereby to a Power greater than ourselves.

We then start seeing a change for the better, reduced fear and anxiety, and a clearer path ahead of us.

Conclusion

We are all blessed children of God by means of our traditions and sacraments. By nature, as children of God we are obedient until we choose disobedience. Once we make that choice, something within us stirs and we have an inner conflict. We can see this as a warning from the Spirit of God that resides in each one of us. We can see this as a guidance from God and stop being disobedient to his will. Discernment is the capacity to see, in a manner that helps to understand the essence of a matter.

Do not expect God to speak to us in dramatic ways. Isaiah talk about Lord talking to him “with a strong hand” (Isaiah 8:11). With this what Isaiah means is that God communicated with him by means of his circumstances. It takes a lot of experience and spiritual discipline to identify God’s presence in our day to day activities. We need to train ourselves to discover His divine designs in all events of our life. Consider ourselves being in the boat of life and Christ being our anchor. We should expect waves, unexpected events, that will come to rock this boat. If we remain consistently faithful to our God, we will gather the capacity to identify his blessings, anywhere and everywhere.

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Activities

Complete the crossword about human character traits and find the ones that can be attributed to people who discern God’s will

Across

- 2. Quick to understand
- 3. Giving someone support
- 5. Domineering
- 7. Showing willingness
- 14. being courageous
- 17. showing appreciation
- 18. unpleasantly rough
- 19. showing a desire to succeed
- 21. showing envy
- 23. humorous

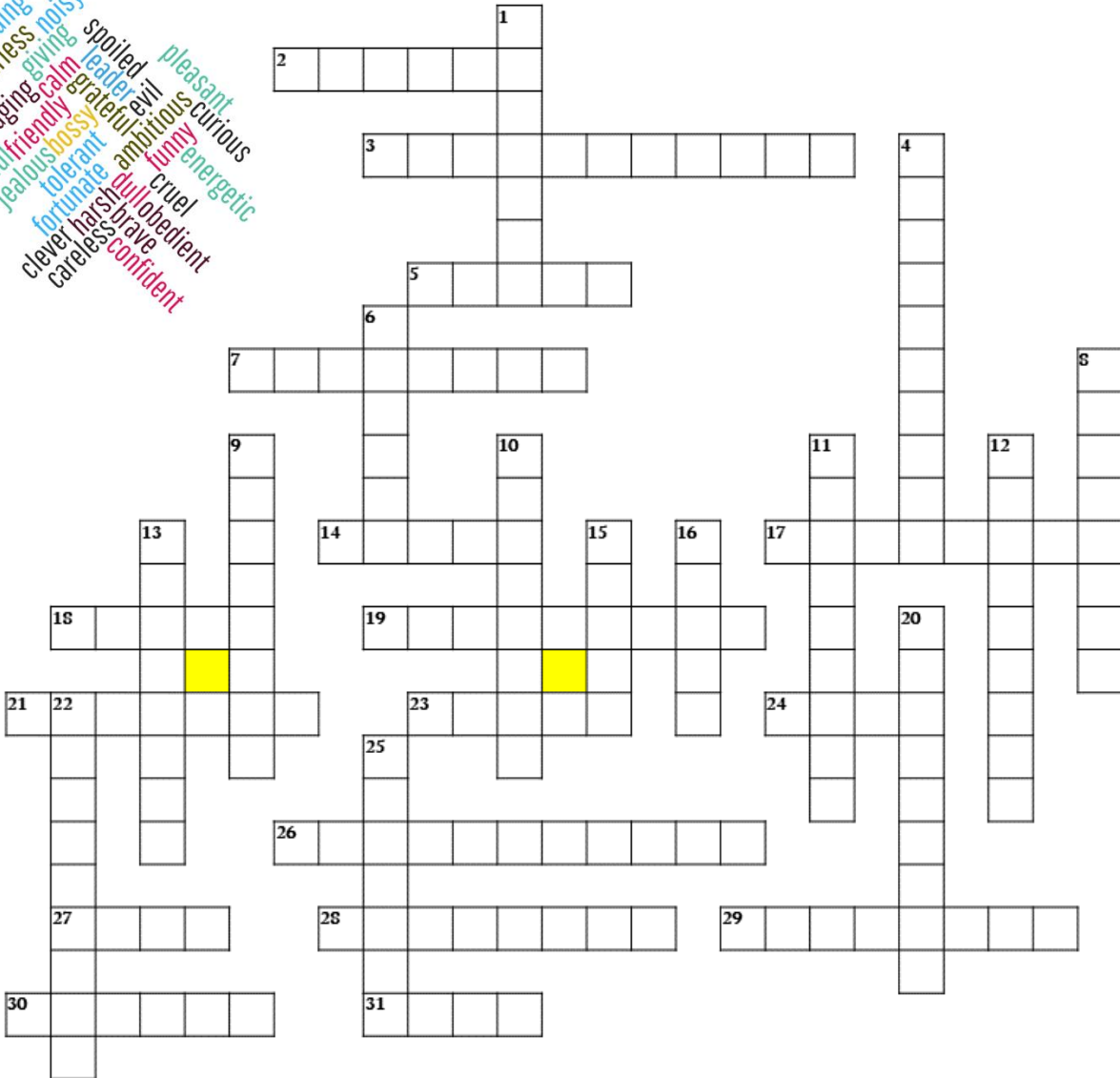
- 26. able to work with others
- 27. Immoral
- 28. Easy to be around, comforting
- 29. Someone easy to be with
- 30. Charitable
- 31. Lacking excitement

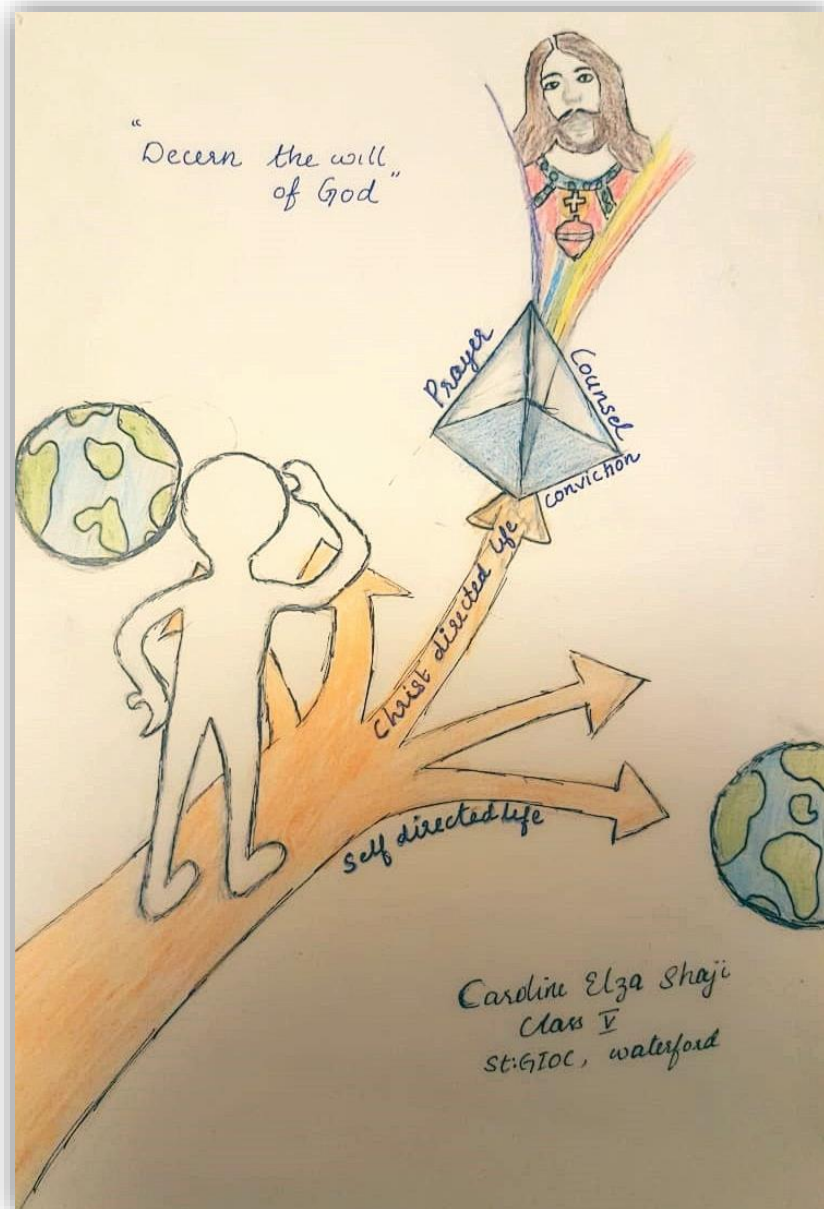
- 9. Someone who sees upsides in life
- 10. able to obey or listen
- 11. lucky
- 12. competent
- 13. not giving enough attention
- 15. loud
- 16. showing no mercy
- 20. wanting your way
- 22. full of energy
- 25. getting what you want all the time

Down

- 1. Eager to learn
- 4. someone who isn’t afraid
- 6. someone who takes charge
- 8. confident

cooperative demanding fearless giving noisy spoiled pleasant
 efficient encouraging calm leader evil
 faithful friendly grateful ambitious funny energetic
 jealous bossy tolerant arrogant cruel
 fortunate dull obedient
 clever harsh brave
 careless confident





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May God Almighty continue to shower His Blessings in all our activities in future and help us to work together for His Glory and spiritual growth of our students!

Yours in Christ

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