

CHURCH.

LESSON 43

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray and commit your group and this course on building Christ's Church to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] REVELATION 1 - 3
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Take turns and *share* (or *read* from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times with God out of the assigned Bible passages (Revelation 1 - 3).

Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares. Take notes.

3	MEMORISATION (5 minutes) [KEY VERSES IN JOHN] (16) JOHN 16:8
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Review two by two.

(16) John 16:8. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement.

4	TEACHING (85 minutes) [CHURCH RESTORING MINISTRY] SICKNESS AND HEALING
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Introduce. This teaching is about sickness and healing. We will discover the various reasons why people get sick and the biblical view concerning healing. We will consider the means of healing and especially the place of faith in healing.

A. THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SICKNESS AND HEALING

1. The origin of all sickness.

(1) The original cause of sickness.

Read Genesis 3:1-19; Romans 5:12-19.

Discover and discuss. What is the original cause of all sickness and death in the world today?

Notes. The Bible clearly teaches that all sickness is due to the fall of man in sin. *Sickness* is but the breakdown of the physical body, which may include the breakdown of the mind, the will and the emotions. *Death* is the culmination of this breakdown.

In Genesis 3 we read how the human race fell into sin after Satan instigated man to sin.

- God punished the human race by cursing Satan and making him to be man's continual enemy.
- God punished the woman by greatly increasing her pain at childbirth and by making her husband rule over her (Genesis 3:16), because she led her husband into sin (1 Timothy 2:14).
- God punished the man by cursing the soil (Romans 8:21-22) and causing man to need to toil hard all the days of his life in order to make a living, because he had listened to the temptation of his wife.
- Finally, God punished the sin of the human race by physical death (Romans 5:12).

From this fall of man into sin after the creation and throughout this present history, all men and women will die. Their bodies will return to the dust (Genesis 3:19). Physical death is the final end of the breakdown of the physical body due to sin. Thus the general reason of sickness in the world is due to the fall of man into sin.

(2) The various different causes of sickness.

Read the Bible passages.

Discover and discuss. What are the ongoing causes of sickness in the world?

Notes.

- A person may suffer from any one of the very many contagious sicknesses in the world (Mark 1:40) or have inherited a sickness or defect from his birth (Job 14:4-6; John 9:1-3) due to *the fall of mankind into sin* (Romans 5:12).
- A person may suffer a sickness or a defect due to *personal sin* (Mark 2:5).
- A person may suffer a sickness or a defect due to *demonic oppression* (Mark 5:15; 9:17-18,21-22).
- A person may suffer a sickness or a defect due to *bad care by a doctor or quack* (Mark 5:26).
- A person may suffer a sickness or a defect due to *an unhealthy life-style* (Daniel 1:8,15-16).
- And a person may suffer a sickness or a defect due to *God's judgement* (Ezekiel 14:21).

2. The origin of all healing.

Discover and discuss. Where do all good things, especially healing, come from? Read the Bible passages.

Notes. The Bible clearly teaches that all healing is divine healing!

(1) All good gifts come from God.

James 1:17 teaches that “every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, from God the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows”. “God is Light, in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5; cf. James 1:13). He created light and the heavenly lights, but himself remains the forever Unchangeable!

Christians should not approach the special things, like God’s miracles and gifts of healing in such a way as to think little or less of his general and providential blessings. Not only the special and remarkable, the unique and the miraculous, are the works of God, but every good endowment and every perfect gift comes from God the Father in heaven! All *sun, rain and food for enjoyment* come from God (Acts 14:17; cf. Isaiah 28:23-28). All *artistic skills of craftsmen* come from God (Exodus 31:1-11). All *spiritual blessings* are from God (Ephesians 1:3). All *opportunities to make something of life* are from God (Matthew 25:14-15). There is *nothing that we have* that we did not receive from God (1 Corinthians 4:7)!

James insists that Christians should deliberately refer all of life’s experiences to God, from whom they come (cf. Romans 11:36). Christians should praise God in a time of well-being (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18) and they should pray in a time of difficulty (Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18; James 5:13). When Christians do this, they acknowledge that God’s sovereign hand is over all and everything on earth.

(2) All healing is divine healing.

In Jeremiah 17:14 the prophet prays, “Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved”. He realises that all healing only comes from God. In Hosea 11:3 God says, “It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realise it was I who healed them”. All the medical and surgical techniques of today are part of God’s providential goodness and care of people on earth. Therefore, when Christians go to the doctor, their eyes should be on God. God alone can heal. When the medicines work, it is because God made them work. When the surgeon sets the broken limb and the bone knits, it is because God made it knit. God has created the human body with some wonderful abilities to heal.

God sometimes decides and reveals that someone will not heal (Isaiah 38:1). He can also delay the process of dying (Isaiah 38:2-6). And he can even speed up the process of healing, for example, by instant healing (2 Samuel 5:14). What the world regards as “natural healing”, the Bible regards as “a divine upholding or sustenance of all things” (Hebrews 1:3). All healing on earth is in the last analysis divine healing!

3. The temporality of healing.

Discover and discuss. How temporary or how permanent is healing?

Notes. The Bible clearly teaches that all healing on earth before the second coming of Christ is *temporary healing*.

(1) Before death there is only temporary healing.

Read Isaiah 54:4-5; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that Jesus Christ took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows and that by his wounds we are healed.” Jesus died not only to atone our sins, but also to ultimately heal our sicknesses completely. Therefore Christians may pray for healing and expect to be healed when that is God’s perfect will.

However, “the wages of sin is death”. Because all people have sinned, all people are destined to die. Even the healthiest and fittest people on earth will eventually die. All those, who were healed and even raised from the dead by Jesus and the apostles, eventually died. Therefore, all healing on earth is temporary healing! Only Jesus Christ is the First to be resurrected from the dead never to die again (1 Corinthians 15:20)!

(2) From the second coming there will only be permanent healing.

Read Acts 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:22-23; Philippians 3:20-21; Revelation 21:3-5. “The restoration of everything” will only take place at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Our lowly bodies will only be transformed to be like Christ’s glorious body at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Only then will the bodies of Christians no more fall sick or die. Only *then* will God wipe every tear from the eyes of people. Only *then* will there be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain. Only *then* will “the old order of things” (the period of living on this present earth) have passed away and will God make all things new! Christians may be healed temporary on earth now, but only at the second coming of Christ will the body (including mind, will and emotions) be completely and permanently healed!

4. The mystery of healing.

Read Deuteronomy 29:29; Luke 22:42; Ephesians 1:11; Philippians 4:6-7; Hebrews 4:16.

Teach.

(1) Two unbiblical methods of healing.

There are certain laws and methods of healing, but none of them are universal. Any particular method or experience may not be expanded into a universal method or experience. For example, the following two methods are unbiblical:

- The view that every sickness is a demonic oppression.

There is a tendency with some Christians to treat all sicknesses as cases of demonic oppression and to treat them by casting out a demon. This is a wrong view of the origin of all sicknesses. This causes intelligent onlookers to become sceptical about Christian prayers for healing. The Bible clearly teaches that only some sicknesses are the result of demonic oppression.

- The view that healing must be claimed.

There is also a practice among other Christians to claim your healing, that is, to believe the fact that you have been healed after people have prayed for your healing, even when you know or feel that you have not been healed! Such Christians are expected to act as if they were healed. This is a wrong view of "faith". This kind of behaviour fosters insincerity, doubt and even rebellion against God.

These two unbiblical methods of healing turn the legitimate ministry of healing of the Church into a ministry of wounding and condemnation. People, who continue to do this, have changed God's grace into human *laws*. But God's grace remains his undeserved mercy and cannot be changed into religious laws. God's grace remains his undeserved mercy. Healing will in the last analysis remain a mystery of God's sovereign will that he has not revealed to us, but nevertheless gives to us.

(2) God's sovereign will concerning healing has not been revealed.

The Bible clearly teaches that all healing is a mystery. Every form of healing is dependent on God's sovereign will, which he has not revealed to people. God's sovereign will consists of his revealed will and his hidden (secret) will (Deuteronomy 29:29). It consists of his active will as well as his divine permission that certain things happen or do not happen. God has sovereign reasons why he *heals* one person and does *not heal* another person; or why he heals one person by means of a doctor and another not; or why he heals one person *immediately* and another not or why he needs a long process to heal one person and heals another immediately. Therefore, Christians cannot and may not demand or command God to do what they as humans so ardently desire. Instead, Jesus taught us to pray, "Not my will, but your will be done" (Luke 22:42)! God's will is always the most perfect thing that could happen!

5. The approach towards healing.

Discover and discuss. Which approach should Christians have towards prayer for healing?

Notes. The Bible clearly teaches that Christians should approach God *with confidence* when they pray for anything, including healing.

(1) Pray only through the Mediator Christ for healing.

Read Isaiah 53:5; John 16:24. Christians are only healed because Jesus Christ died on the cross in order to make atonement for their sins! That is why Christians are taught to pray "in the name of" Jesus Christ. To pray in the name of Jesus Christ means to pray in harmony with all that Jesus Christ has revealed concerning himself and it rests on the merit of his completed work of salvation. God hears the prayers of Christians only because Jesus Christ is their Mediator.

(2) Pray confidently for healing.

Read Philippians 4:6-7; Hebrews 4:16. Christians may present *all their requests* to God when they pray. And God will answer their prayers in such a way that the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard their thoughts and feelings (mind and heart) in Christ Jesus. Christians may approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that they may receive mercy and find grace to help them in their time of need. In his infinite wisdom, love, faithfulness and power, God knows the best time, the best place and the best way in which he will answer their prayers.

Therefore, if a person seems not to be healed after prayer, Christians should not be alarmed, provided they have done what they could in following the Bible and have prayed in childlike faith to God.

After we have made our ardent desire for healing known to God (Philippians 4:6), we submit our human will to his sovereign divine, yet unrevealed will (Luke 22:42), in complete confidence that he has heard our prayer (Hebrews 4:16; 1 John 5:14) and that in the last analysis his sovereign divine will is the best possible answer to our prayer and the best possible thing that can happen to us (Romans 8:28,38-39)!

Whatever his answer: healing or no healing, by means of prayer or by means of people, immediately or after a long period, - his peace about the matter we prayed for will flood our thoughts and feelings (Philippians 4:7)! We will be able to accept his answer completely!

B. THE REASONS WHY SOME PEOPLE DO NOT GET HEALED

Introduce. There is more than one reason why people do not get healed!

Discover and discuss. What are some of the reasons why people do not get healed?

1. Personal sin.

Read Genesis 12:17; 20:17-18; Psalm 32:1-5; Psalm 66:18; John 5:14.

Personal sin may be a reason why some people are not healed. For example, in John 5:14, Jesus says to the man who was an invalid for 38 years, "Stop sinning, or something worse may happen to you." Sometimes, a person is not healed,

because God is punishing him for some sin with which he does not want to break. A bad habit (for example: smoking) may also be the cause of sickness. Thus, God may allow sickness as a punishment or a warning against a particular sin.

2. Unhealthy life-style.

Read Matthew 6:27; 1 Peter 4:3

Neglecting to live in a healthy and balanced way may be a reason why some people are not healed. Some people do not care for their bodies. They get severe headaches, because they worry too much. Or they get hypertension (or a burnout), because they work up to their breaking point. Or they get stomach troubles, because they eat unbalanced meals or too little or too much food. The prophet Daniel resolved not to eat the royal food, but to eat vegetables and drink water instead. As a result, he and his friends became the healthiest of all the king's servants (Daniel 1:12-16). Often a person needs to first change his life-style before healing will take place.

3. Bad relationships.

Read Hebrews 12:15.

Neglecting to change the family or social setting may be a reason why some people are not healed. As long as hatred and bad relationships are allowed to continue, healing is often delayed. The bad relationships in the family, congregation and society (bitterness, unwillingness to forgive), need to be changed before healing can take place. A healing of relationships (inner healing) often brings about physical healing as well!

4. Not dealing with root problems.

Read Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13.

Not understanding their own problems may be a reason why some people are not healed. Human beings are very complicated beings. There is sometimes a deeply hidden cause for a problem, of which the sick person may not even be conscious. This root problem in the sub-conscious of a person should be brought into conscious light before a person can ask God to deal with it. Often when people pray for *the symptoms of a problem*, there may be initial progress, but afterwards the person may regress into his old sickness, because *the root problem* has not been dealt with. A Christian psychologist or psychiatrist may help to uncover root problems. (See "the discernment of problems" in manual 8, lesson 39, point D).

5. Making a wrong diagnosis.

Making the wrong diagnosis may be a reason why some people are not healed. Christians can make a wrong diagnosis in three ways:

- When Christians think that inner healing or deliverance from evil spirits is necessary, when in reality physical healing is the basic need.
- When Christians pray for deliverance from evil spirits or treat the person with physical healing, when in reality inner healing is the basic need.
- When Christians think that physical healing or inner healing is the problem, while in reality deliverance from evil spirits is the basic need.

6. Lack of faith.

Read Matthew 17:14-20.

The lack of faith may be a reason why some people are not healed. Once when the disciples were unable to heal a boy who suffered much when he had seizures, Jesus said that the disciples could not heal him because they had so little faith. In the time of Jesus, there was a general *scepticism* about healing. This is also true today. People question if God can heal. Or Christians are more inclined to concentrate on the reasons why God does not heal than on the reasons why God would want to heal!

7. Scepticism against doctors and medicines.

Refusal to accept the help of a doctor or medicines may be a reason why some people are not healed. Doctors and medicines are God's ordinary instruments to bring about the healing of people. Of course, we must reject quacks, witch doctors, medicine men, their magic spells, wrong medicines, potions and charms, etc.

8. Impatience.

Impatience is often a reason why some people are not healed. God does not always heal instantaneously. Sometimes healing is immediate, but at other times healing takes place after a long delay or through a long gradual process.

9. Suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

Suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ and his kingdom may be a reason why some people are not healed. Sometimes God calls certain Christians to participate in the sufferings of Christ! In Colossians 1:24, Paul says, "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church." 1 Peter 4:13 says, "Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ." These sufferings or afflictions were social persecutions (cf. Acts 13:50; 14:5,6,19; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28), physical illnesses or defects (John 9:1-3; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10;

Galatians 4:13-14) or spiritual sufferings (Luke 15:11-24; 1 Corinthians 5:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:10). The Bible thus teaches that in some circumstances suffering in body or in spirit is unavoidable and that suffering is a part of the Christian experience. God calls some Christians to suffer in body or in spirit for the sake of his kingdom, for preaching the gospel or for supporting the poor and the oppressed.

10. A higher sovereign purpose of God.

Read John 9:3; John 11:4; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

Jesus said, “This happened so that the work of God may be displayed in his life”. And, “This sickness is for God’s glory, so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”

The fact that God has another higher sovereign purpose for the lives of some people may be the reason why some people are not healed. Paul prayed three times to God to remove some “thorn in his flesh”. The Bible does not tell us what this thorn in his flesh was, but it does tell us that it was a sickness or difficulty that tormented Paul. He called it “a messenger (angel) of Satan to torment me.” It was so severe that people could have treated him with contempt or scorn (Galatians 4:13-14).

The Bible does tell us the reason why God did not heal Paul. God did not heal Paul, because he wanted to reveal his grace and power through Paul’s weakness! God said to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” And Paul accepted God’s holy reason. He said, “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

C. THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO SICKNESS

1. Acknowledge sickness and express your pain and emotions.

Read John 11:35; Matthew 27:46.

Consider and discuss. How do Christians cope with all kinds of feelings they have when they are sick?

Notes. Often sickness is accompanied by real pain and suffering. Should a Christian deny or acknowledge that he is sick and suffers? Denial could cause more severe problems. Therefore, it is better to acknowledge sickness and pain.

Often sickness causes all kinds of emotions. Should a Christian always be joyful, or is there room for feeling sad and mourning? Jesus expressed emotions - he cried.

Should a Christian never question the reason of his sickness, or may he express his disappointment and ask, “Why doesn’t God do something?” On the cross, Jesus once cried, “My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Many sicknesses can end in the death. How can a Christian, who is seriously ill, cope with his anxiety for death? Should Christians not teach more about the Christian hope in the face of death?

2. Examine your own life and confess sin.

Read James 5:13-15.

Consider and discuss. According to James, how should a Christian respond to his sickness?

Notes. *Summon help.* A Christian should summon the elders of the congregation. James seems to describe a very sick person, a weary and worn out person. Instead of praying to God himself, the sick person summons the elders to pray over him.

Confess sin. The passage says that there *may have been some sin or neglect* on the part of the sick person, which God wants to bring to his attention. If so, the sick person should use his sickness as a time of quiet self-examination and of quietly confessing his sin to God. God will forgive him (1 John 1:9)! James 5:16 does not teach confessing sins to people who have nothing to do with it, but confessing sins only to the person you may have offended.

Review life. The purpose of his sickness might not be to deal with any specific sin, but simply to give the sick person *an opportunity to review his life and goals and to rededicate himself to God*. The sick person ought to realise that healing involves his whole personality, all his relationships (with God, with his family members and with his neighbours) and his goals, activities and priorities. In this case, the purpose of his sickness is to make him grow to greater spiritual maturity.

D. THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF HEALING

Discover and discuss. About which different kinds of healing does the Bible teach? Read the Bible passages.

Notes. Generally speaking, Christians may distinguish between five different kinds of healing in the Bible.

1. Healing from sin and the brokenness it causes.

Read Hosea 14:4; James 5:16.

Healing from sin takes place through repentance of sin. In Hosea 14:4, God says, “I will heal their waywardness”. James 5:16 teaches, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed”.

(1) Confession of sin in the Bible.

The biblical position regarding the confession of sin is the following.

- There is *secret confession* to God, because there are secret sins committed against God alone (Psalm 90:8).
- There is *private confession*, because some of our sins are committed against God as well as against one or more people, and this sin must be confessed to the offended party (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15).
- And there is *public confession*, because some sins are committed against a group, a community or the whole local congregation, and must therefore be confessed publicly (cf. 1 Timothy 5:20).

(2) Confession of sin in the presence of another believer.

Some Christians think that James 5:16 teaches that a Christian, who is burdened with some sin, should seek out a close friend and tell his problem to this friend, so that in prayer together they may bear one another's burdens, and pray through to the place of deliverance, cleansing and healing.

But the wording of James 5:16 does not allow this interpretation! In the Bible, the verb does not mean "to admit sorrowfully" or "to confide" one's (secret) sins to a friend, but literally "to say the same thing what God says". In Romans 10:9-10 it means "to say with your mouth what you believe with your heart". In Luke 17:3-4 and James 5:16 it means "to say the same thing God says about the sin", but only to the person you offended.

This Bible passage does not speak about gathering of groups, or holding a meeting in which believers tell one another about their sins. Such practices cannot be justified on the ground of James 5:16, because it does not even say, "Confess your sins to God in each other's presence", but "confess your sins to one another", that is to the one you offended. Confessing sins in a group only leads to gossip and evil talk. (See manual 2, supplement 10).

(3) Confession of sin to the person against whom you have sinned.

The only correct understanding of James 5:16 is that you confess the sin you committed only to the one offended and receive forgiveness from him. Believers do not meet together to engage in mutual confession of secret sins and abhor one another's sins, but rather to declare in their own language the wonders of God (Acts 2:11).

If applicable, the sick person could first confess his sin only to God and later, when he has the opportunity, also to the person he offended.

2. Healing from inner brokenness.

Read Psalm 147:3; Proverbs 12:18; 15:30.

Healing from inner emotional problems takes place through realising the root problem and then allowing God to deal with it. Psalm 147:3 says, "The Lord heals the broken-hearted."

3. Healing from physical sickness.

Read Matthew 4:23; Philippians 3:20-21.

In the context of salvation history, Jesus healed many sick people. Matthew 4:23 says, "Jesus went around Galilee ... and healed every disease and sickness among the people." But Matthew 13:58 says, "He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."

After death of the body. Only after we have died and see Jesus, will complete and permanent healing of our spirits take place. Then we will be as Jesus Christ is (1 John 3:1-3)!

After the second coming. And only at the resurrection of the body at the second coming of Jesus Christ, will our mortal bodies also be transformed so that they will be like Christ's glorious resurrected body (Philippians 3:20-21). Our perishable dust (the elements of our bodies) in the earth will be raised imperishable in glory and power to a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)! Then only will we Christians be completely and permanently healed!

4. Healing from the oppression of evil spirits.

Read Matthew 17:14-18; Acts 10:38.

Healing from the bondage of evil spirits takes place through prayer. In Acts 10:38 we read, "Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil." It is better not to develop theories around the text Matthew 17:21, "But this kind does not go out except by prayer *and fasting*", because the best Greek texts and earliest translations of the Bible do not have this text. It is a later addition to some manuscripts of the Bible somewhere around the fourth century A.D. when some Christians withdrew to monasteries and engaged in ascetics.

5. Healing of the land.

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14.

Healing of the land takes place when God takes away drought and plagues and instead sends rains and gives good harvests. In 2 Chronicles 7:14, the Lord promises, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

E. THE MEANS OF HEALING

1. God uses different means of healing.

Teach.

(1) Spontaneous healing.

In spite of the consequences of the fall of man into sin, God has created in the human body a wonderful power of recovery of physical disorders. Many sicknesses, infections and wounds recover spontaneously, even if it takes time. God is nevertheless the Author of spontaneous healing (Hebrews 1:3). Spontaneous healing is therefore also divine healing and not natural healing.

(2) Doctors and medicines as means of healing.

Some extreme *faith healers* sometimes say that people they have prayed for must “claim their healing”. They say, “Now that we have prayed for you, you must believe that your prayer has been answered and that you are now already healed”. And, “You can disregard any of the symptoms of your sickness that you may still have”. And, “As a sign of your faith, stop taking your medicines”, or: “Throw away your crutches”, etc. These faith healers are not speaking according to God’s Word, because according to the Bible, medicine and prayer are not opposed.

According to Mark 6:12-13 and Luke 10:33-34, the anointing of sick people with oil was *the basic medical treatment* in the days of Jesus Christ. In the Bible, medicines as we know them today were just in the beginning stage of their development. The disciples anointed sick people with oil and healed them. The Good Samaritan bandaged his patient’s wounds, pouring on oil and wine. The oil was used to soothe the open wound (Isaiah 1:6) and the wine was used to cleanse the wound (cf. 1 Timothy 5:23). Then he put the man on his donkey and took him to an inn where he took care of him. Jesus praised him for the medical care he gave to his neighbour at the inn.

Paul and many other people must have enjoyed the medical services provided by Luke, because in Colossians 4:14, Paul calls him “the beloved doctor”! Although Paul had healing powers, he left Trophimus sick behind in Miletus, presumably to give him a chance to recuperate (2 Timothy 4:20).

(3) Miraculous healing.

1 Corinthians 12:28 says that God has given to certain Christians “a variety of spiritual gifts of healing”. These are abilities to promote the healing of either the body or the spirit of people. God uses people as his instruments to bring healing to others. *The plural “gifts of healing”* shows that God uses different kinds of means to heal people. God heals people by means of medical doctors and therapeutics, or by means of pastors and counsellors, or by means of the prayers of faith of Christians. All forms of healing is therefore *divine healing*. And all healing is essentially *miraculous healing*!

(4) Ultimate healing.

1 Corinthians 15:50 says that “flesh and blood (mortal man) cannot inherit the kingdom of God”. On earth all healing is *temporary healing*. *Ultimate and permanent healing of our soul or spirit* takes place after we have died and are taken into the presence of Jesus Christ (1 John 3:1-3). *Ultimate and permanent healing of our body* takes place only at the resurrection of the body at the second coming of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:50-57; Philippians 3:20-21). Only in the new heaven and new earth will there be complete, ultimate and permanent healing of the total man. Then only will sickness, disabilities and death be destroyed forever (Revelation 21:4)!

2. People with special gifts as a means of healing.

Discover and discuss. In which periods of God’s history of salvation do miracles especially occur?

Notes. As a general rule, the Bible is more concerned with the providential acts of God (every second God maintains the whole creation) than with the exceptional acts (miracles) of God. The Bible reserves miracles for the great turning points of God’s salvation history! The great turning points of God’s history of salvation were the following:

(1) The Exodus (The Law).

Read Exodus 15:22-27; Numbers 21:4-9.

Miracles were concentrated around Moses, that is, during the time of Israel’s redemption and exodus from Egypt.

(2) The prophets (The Prophets)

Read 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 5:1-16.

Miracles occurred around the prophets Elijah and Elisha, that is, during the beginning of the period of the great prophets of Israel.

(3) Jesus Christ (The Gospels).

Read Matthew 4:23-24; Acts 10:38.

Miracles occurred around Jesus Christ, that is, during the period God took on the nature of Man and entered his creation and the history of man through Jesus Christ.

(4) The apostles (The Letters of the apostles).

Read Mark 16:20; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:3-4.

And finally miracles occurred in association with Jesus Christ around the apostles of Jesus Christ, that is, during the time of founding the Christian Church (1 Corinthians 12:9). According to 2 Corinthians 12:12, miracles clustered around the apostles of Jesus Christ as a God-given sign to authenticate the unique ministry of the apostles.

This agrees with the general pattern of the Bible, as mentioned above. In Mark 16:20 and Acts 14:3 we read that the Lord confirmed the message of the gospel by enabling his apostles to do miraculous signs that accompanied it. According Hebrews 2:3-4, the reason why God distributed the gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his will, was to confirm the message of salvation as preached by the apostles of Christ in the early Church) and was recorded in the New Testament.

(5) Turning points in Christian history today.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:28; 14:12. Miracles do occur today! They occur everywhere, but especially during the turning points of the history of the Christian Church in particular countries and places. The spiritual gifts of miracles and healing are *for the purpose of building up the Church*.

Christians, who claim that they have the spiritual gift of healing or of faith may exercise their spiritual gift today, but only within the limits of God's Word and under the direction of the elders of the congregation. However, whether a person with the gift of healing is present or not, the ministry to the sick should not be made dependent on it. James 5:14 teaches that the ministry to the sick should always be available in every congregation through the elders of the congregation, whether they have any spiritual gift of healing or not!

3. Prayer and anointing by the elders as a means of healing.

Read James 5:13-16. *Teach*.

(1) The healing ministry normally belongs to the elders.

James 5:14-15 teaches, "Is anyone sick? He should call the elders of the church (congregation) to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven."

James does not tell us that prayer and anointing with oil should replace the doctor. He does not disapprove of medical doctors or modern medicines. Christians may not assume that James disapproves of something he simply does not mention! There is always a spiritual dimension in healing and James emphasises that in this passage. On no occasion should a Christian approach a doctor (dentist, specialist, therapist, etc.) without also approaching God. But there are times when approaching God first or approaching God alone without a doctor is also right.

James associates the healing ministry of prayer and anointing with the local elders of the congregation. The healing ministry does not belong to any specially gifted person - such as a person who claims to have received "the gift of healing" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:30. Nor does it belong to any unique and bygone order that no longer exists, as the apostles of Christ. The healing ministry normally belongs to the elders of a congregation as a group!

(2) The anointing with oil is not a sacrament.

A wrong teaching and practice based on James 5:13-16 developed as a tradition in the Christian Church before the Reformation in 1517.

- By the 3rd century A.D. it was already the custom that *the bishop* of the area consecrated the oil used in the anointing of the sick.
- By the 10th century, it was especially *the priests* who carried out the anointing with oil.
- By the 12th century, the terms "extreme unction" and "sacrament of the dying" are found and the anointing was restricted to those whose imminent death seemed certain.
- In the 13th century, the ceremony of anointing was declared to be one of "the seven sacraments".
- The Council of Trent in 1545 and onwards pronounced an anathema (a curse of the church which excommunicated that person from the church) on anyone who denied that "the sacred unction" was "properly a sacrament instituted by Christ ... and promulgated by the blessed apostle James", or who denied that it conferred grace and remitted sin (forgave sins), ... or who thought that the elders to whom James referred "were not *priests who had been ordained by a bishop*"¹.

It is clear that this is an unbiblical tradition and an ecclesiastical superstition. It has nothing to do with James 5:14-15. James was not an apostle of Jesus Christ, but the brother of Jesus. He was primarily interested in healing the sick, while the forgiveness of sins only played a minor role. The anointing with oil cannot transfer the forgiveness of sins! The passage does not speak of a priest preparing a person on his dying bed, but about an elder helping a sick person to get restored!

(3) The activities associated with the healing ministry of the elders.

- In a house.

James is not speaking of public healing services, but of a ministry in the privacy of the sick person's home. The elders have two specific tasks: to pray over the sick person and to anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

¹ The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, translated by J. Waterworth, 1848, p 110f

- Prayer.

It is important to notice that in this passage the sick person is not called to pray or to exercise faith to be healed. It is the elders who are called to pray and to exercise the faith needed for healing. The whole efficacy of the ministry resides in the prayer of faith and not in the anointing with oil. The Lord promises his own healing and restoring power as a response to the prayer of faith offered by the elders.

- Spitting.

Jesus used his saliva only in his ministry to the deaf and blind (Mark 7:31-37; 8:22-26; John 9:6-7). Because ordinary communication with deaf and blind people was difficult, he used it as a tangible (perceptible by touch) way of assuring the sick person that he intended to heal him.

- Anointing with oil.

In Mark 6:13, Jesus Christ did not actually command the practice of *anointing with oil*, but he surely approved of it. The anointing with oil was the basic medical treatment in the days of Jesus Christ. The anointing with oil was used as a medicine. Likewise, the elders use oil as a tangible and visible expression and token of the descent of the healing authority (power) and efficacy of the Name of Jesus Christ.

- Laying on of hands.

It should be noted that there is no reference to the elders *laying on hands*. The laying on of hands was another visible and tangible expression and token of the descent of the healing power in the name of Jesus Christ (Mark 6:5; Acts 28:8). Surely this is permitted today.

- Confessing sin.

There is also no necessity to think that the sick person should first *confess his sins* publicly in the presence of the elders (see above). It would however be perfectly proper for the elders to ask if there was any sin that needed to be confessed and forgiven. A time of *quiet prayer*, confessing of sin and receiving of forgiveness by everybody would be quite in order.

4. The prayer of faith and its outcome.

(1) The purpose of promises is not to whip up faith or to pretend faith.

Discover and discuss. What is the purpose of the promises concerning prayer in the Bible? Read the Bible passages.

- James 5:15. Faith is never an unwarranted assumption that God must and will heal.

James 5:15 promises that the prayer of faith will save, rescue or restore the sick person to health and the Lord will raise him up. If the phrase “prayer of faith” is taken by itself, then faith is the conviction that it is the will of God to perform this healing under all circumstances. That is not what James intended to say.

- Mark 11:24. Faith needs revelation.

Jesus made similar promises. In Mark 11:24 he says, “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (John 14:13; Matthew 18:19). The statement “the prayer of faith” is obviously an important matter, but also a matter with complications and dangers. Unless God gives Christians a very specific revelation that it is his will to heal this sick person, Christians are often misled by their own convictions of what God will or will not do. Without such a special revelation, praying for the healing of sick people with an attitude that God will and must heal, is an unwarranted assumption and only damages the tender spirit of the sick person (Psalm 56:8).

- Mark 9:21-24. Faith is not always very certain.

The Bible does not say that we can pray only when we possess this special certainty of faith regarding what we ask. In Mark 9:21-24, Jesus responded in power to a faith that was by its own confession far from certain. The man said, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

- Ephesians 3:20. Faith is not the measure of God’s answer to prayer.

The Bible does not intend to say that God’s response to our prayers will go only as far as our faith stretches. In Ephesians 3:20, Paul says that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine!

- 1 Corinthians 12:9a,11. Faith is a divine gift, not whipped-up or pretended by man.

The Bible certainly does not say that we should try to whip up our faith, or pretend (feign) that we have this faith when we do not. God does not seek pretenders, but people who are upright. God seeks people who worship him in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). What Jesus, Paul and James seem to teach is that we should always be alert in our prayers to the fact that God may wish to give us a particular gift of faith in relation to something we ask. Such faith is always a sovereign gift from God (1 Corinthians 12:9a,11).

- Matthew 6:8. Faith is trustful and patient waiting to see what the sovereign God plans to do.

These Bible passages about “the prayer of faith” (Matthew 18:19; Mark 11:22-24; John 14:13; James 5:14) are not the whole truth about prayer. The majority of Christian prayers are prayers of trustful rest; and rightly so, because we often do not know what to ask either for ourselves or for others. We often lack wisdom to know what is right or lack knowledge to know what is needed and therefore we pray, “Lord, please bless this person or situation”. When we ask the Lord “to bless”, we consciously admit that we do not know what to ask specifically, but that the Lord knows what is

needed. Before we pray, God already knows what we really need (Matthew 6:7-10). Prayer is therefore a commitment and submission to the sovereign will of God. All true prayer exercises its truest faith by patiently waiting to see what the sovereign God has determined to do.

(2) The purpose of promises is to spur Christians on to pray with courage and confidence.

Read Mark 1:17; 2:20-22; 3:33-35; 5:39; 7:27; 8:15; 9:12-13; 9:43,45; 10:38-39; Mark 11:22-24.

Discover and discuss. In the light of the figurative language, which Jesus uses, how should we understand Mark 11:22-24?

• Pray in faith.

Faith is the soul's window through which God's love comes pouring in. *Faith* is the open hand whereby man reaches out to God, the Giver. *Faith* is the coupling that links man's train to God's engine. *Faith* is man's whole life that hooks on to or clings to God's initiatives. *Faith* is the trunk of salvation's tree, whose root is grace, and whose fruit is good works (Romans 5:1,5; John 1:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Faith also was the means of Abraham's justification (Genesis 15:6). *Faith* was the magnet that drew Moses away from the pleasures of Egypt, so that he threw in his lot with God's sorely afflicted people (Hebrews 11:24-27). *Faith* was the force that overthrew Jericho's wall (Joshua 6:20). *Faith* was the secret that enabled Ruth to make her stirring confession (Ruth 1:16). *Faith* was the weapon that killed Goliath and destroyed Sennacherib's army (1 Samuel 17:45-47 and 2 Kings 19:14-37). *Faith* was the deciding factor in the contest between Elijah and the false prophets at Carmel (1 Kings 18:30-40). *Faith* was the shield that protected Job in the midst of his trials (Job 19:23-27). *Faith* was the muzzle that closed the mouths of Daniel's lions (Daniel 6:19-23). *Faith* was the remedy that cured the centurion's servant and many others in the New Testament (Matthew 8:10,13).

Faith is leaning on God, depending on and clinging to him under all circumstances. *Faith* knows that God's everlasting arms are under you (Deuteronomy 33:27). *Faith* is committing one's way to the Lord, trusting in him, knowing that he will do whatever is best (Psalm 37:5). *Faith* is receiving the kingdom (or kingly rule) of God as a little child (Mark 10:15). *Faith* is sure of what we hope for, and being convinced of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). *Faith* is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

• Prayer moves mountains – a figurative expression.

For the Mount of Olives to be literally lifted up and thrown into the sea would mean a sudden plunge of about 1200 metres altogether! Now there would be no sense in even trying, by faith concentration, to dump this mountain into the sea. Jesus is making use of figurative language, as he frequently did.

This well-known figure of speech is found in Isaiah 40:4, "Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain." *The valleys* refer to the depths of discouragement and despair of God's people in exile and *the mountains* to the heights of pride and self-exaltation of the surrounding nations. God said that nothing would be able to hinder his coming to his people!

It is also found in Zechariah 4:7, "What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground." It refers to *a mountain of difficulties* that faced Zerubbabel in building the temple. That mountain of difficulties would disappear!

In the light of its context in Mark 11:24, this dramatic figure of speech refers to faith and prayer. No task in harmony with God's perfect will would be impossible to perform! Those who believe and do not doubt would move such mountains!

• The mountains the apostles moved.

Both in the physical and in the spiritual sphere the apostles had already been doing things that would have been considered just as *impossible* as causing a mountain to be lifted up and thrown into the sea. Had not Peter *by faith* walked on the water (Matthew 11:29)? Had the twelve apostles not driven out demons in Christ's name (Luke 10:17)? A few days later, Jesus said to his disciples, "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

The book of Acts proves that what Jesus said here in Mark 11:24 was true. The apostle Peter healed a cripple, healed the sick and those tormented by evil spirits and raised a dead woman (Acts 3:6-9,16; 5:12-16; 9:32-43). Likewise the apostle Paul cast out a fortune-telling demon, healed the sick and raised a dead boy (Acts 16:16-18; 19:11-12; 20:9-12). These were all temporary healings.

But God also used the apostles to bring much permanent healing: they brought thousands from spiritual darkness to spiritual light (Acts 2:41). They spread the gospel far beyond the region where Jesus ministered (Acts 1:8)! And they ministered much longer than the 3½ years that Jesus ministered! These were some of "the greater things"!

• Characteristics of true prayer.

"Whatever you ask for in prayer" is almost unbelievable, but it should be born in mind that such praying and asking must be in harmony with the characteristics of true prayer that Jesus revealed elsewhere and it must be in line with all the teachings in the Bible. Thus, prayer must be an expression of humble, childlike trust, believing that you have

received it (Matthew 7:11). It must be asking with a sincere heart and mind (Matthew 6:5), with a will to persevere (Matthew 7:7), with a love for all concerned (Matthew 5:43-48), in submission to God's sovereign will (Matthew 6:10b) and in Christ's name (John 16:24). Praying in Christ's name means praying in harmony with all that Jesus has revealed concerning himself and resting on his merits.

- Pray with confidence, but not with stubborn insistence.

Likewise, the unqualified statement in James 5:15, "the prayer of faith will save or heal (Greek: *sózó*) the sick", stands alongside many similar affirmations regarding prayer. In Matthew 18:19 Jesus promises, "If two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you." And in John 14:13 he promises, "I will do whatever you ask in my name."

Such promises are intended to bring Christians with confidence into the place of prayer. Christians need courage and encouragement to pray, especially for healing. These promises speak of a God who hears all our prayers, who can do all things, and who is so generous that he will withhold nothing from us that is good! But the one thing these promises do not encourage or allow, is that we should pray with a stubborn insistence that *we know* what is right and that *our will* must be done!

(3) The essence of faith in prayer is to trustfully rest in God's sovereign will.

Read Matthew 6:9-10; Luke 22:42; James 4:15.

Discover and discuss. What is the essence of *faith* in relation to prayer?

- The essence of faith in prayer is to trustfully rest in God's sovereign will.

When Jesus teaches in the Lord's Prayer that all people should always pray, "Hallowed be your name; Your kingdom come; Your will be done", he teaches that this attitude is essential in all our prayers!

James 4:15 says, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that' ". It teaches that the essence of life and of prayer is "Not my will, but your will be done" (Luke 22:42)!

Therefore, in "the prayer of faith", our faith is not a conviction that God would automatically fulfil his promise to heal the sick person. "The prayer of faith" is rather a trustful rest in the will of a sovereign, faithful and loving God, who only knows what is best for the sick person, whether that be healing or not. Neither the sick person nor any of the elders may insist that his or her will be done. The elders are gathered together to put the sick person within the total, eternal security of the unchangeable and gracious will of God. The perfect will of God may be to restore the sick person's health. This is the lesser benefit! Or the perfect will of God may be to take the sick person into his presence in heaven where he will enjoy fullness of life. This is the supreme benefit!

It is for this reason that Christians must say in all their prayers (and not only in their prayers concerned with healing), "Your (perfect) will be done!" The effect of this petition is to remove all limitations from our prayers! Our knowledge of the sickness, our proposed solutions and our understanding of God's will are always limited (cf. Deuteronomy 29:29)! Sometimes we impose a limitation on our prayers by our knowledge of what needs to be done. Sometimes we impose a limitation on our prayers by our proposals of what will meet our needs. And sometimes we impose a limitation on our prayers by our sense of what is the best for us. To pray, "Your will be done" is not imposing any restriction on our prayer. It rather lifts our prayer above all earthly restrictions! It places us unreservedly into the hands of God and his infinite wisdom, love and power. There is no safer place to leave a sick person than to place him in the hands of God. And there is no solution of his plight that is more fitting, more beneficial and more glorious than the solution God has in mind for the sick person!

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

F. THE ATMOSPHERE OF HEALING

Introduce. When Christians pray for a sick person, they should pray for healing in an atmosphere of faith and love. Our responsibility is to exercise faith and love. God's responsibility is to carry out his will in his own sovereign way.

1. Faith and healing.

(1) Faith is not faith in yourself or in the person who prays for healing.

A sick person, who has faith in himself or in the people praying for his healing, is bound to be disappointed. When people turn inward and struggle with great effort against their own doubts or try to whip up faith in their own faith (that is, try to believe that they have a greater faith than they actually do), they forget that such faith is a gift from God (1 Corinthians 12:9a).

When the person they are praying for does not seem to be healed or changed, they tend to pray louder and faster in order to press the sick person with a stronger and stronger exhortation to have faith. But by doing this, they do not increase the sick person's faith, but instead add to the tension. Moreover, Christians may never say to sick people that they should stop taking medicines and they may never say to sick people that they should disregard the further symptoms of their sickness. Faith may never centre in people or in what people say.

(2) Faith should always be faith in God, in God's faithfulness, wisdom, power and love.

God is faithful. God always listens to the prayers of his children and always answers all their prayers, even when the believer cannot see his answer Ephesians 3:20!

God is wise, because his sovereign plan for my life is absolutely the best plan for my life and he overrules my ignorance and limited motives (Romans 8:28).

God is all-powerful and nothing that I ask is too hard for him (Jeremiah 32:17). "Nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37)!

God is loving and good, and he will answer my prayer in a way that I will benefit the most. Faith is to turn to God in the complete trust that he knows what is the best for me, that he loves me more than anyone else and that he has the power to accomplish whatever I really need. Christians therefore express their faith by actually praying to God for the sick! The responsibility of Christians is to pray for the sick, but they should leave the results to God.

(3) Faith can grow.

After the disciples had failed to heal a boy who suffered from seizures, Jesus said to them that they had been unable to heal him, because they had had so little faith. In Matthew 17:20, Jesus continued to teach, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." A mustard seed is a very small seed. Through contact with good soil, it grows and grows until it becomes a tree so tall that the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches.

Jesus teaches that faith is like this mustard seed. Even though your faith is very small in the beginning, through contact with Jesus Christ, it will grow and grow until it can do great things. Faith as a mustard seed is the kind of faith in God that does not immediately give up in despair when its efforts do not meet with immediate success. It maintains its uninterrupted and vital contact with God. It continues to pray fervently, knowing that God at his own time and in his own way will answer the prayer. Such faith in God links the person who prays with the inexhaustible and infinite resources of God's power, wisdom and love.

(4) Faith operates in harmony with God's revelation in his Word.

Noah and Abraham were able to exercise faith after God had revealed his will to them (Hebrews 11:6-8). If God had not revealed his will to them, they would not have known in what way to exercise their faith. Likewise, when God has revealed his word and will to you in the Bible, you can exercise faith in God and in what God says. Then your faith may also be able to move a mountain. Moving a mountain must not be understood literally, but figuratively, because in Zechariah 4:7 it is the mountain of difficulties facing Zechariah that would disappear. Jesus means that no task assigned by God to you is going to be impossible to perform when you remain in a trustful contact with God (Psalm 18:29; Matthew 19:26; Philippians 4:13). Thus, with faith, which is based on God's assigned task and which grows without giving up, nothing will be impossible for you!

2. Love and healing.

1 Corinthians 13:2 says, "If I have faith that can move mountains, but I have not love, I am nothing." Galatians 5:6 says, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love". When Christians pray for a sick person, they should also pray in an atmosphere of love. The sick person must not be hurt in any way by the healing ministry.

(1) Some Christians emphasise God's power in healing.

They concentrate on God's promises to heal and to do miracles. They stress faith. The sick person *must* have faith in order to receive these promises. They say that God will then honour their faith by acting in power to heal. People, who stress God's power in healing, tend to pray in an authoritative way, with a loud voice and accompanied by a forceful laying on of hands. However, their loud claiming rather indicates an inward insecurity and their forceful words often mask their own fears about being accepted.

This approach may damage the sick person when God in his infinite wisdom does not heal the sick person. The person praying may say that the sick person was not healed, because he did not believe or believe strong enough. The sick person may feel that he himself is the cause why he was not healed and may feel terribly discouraged, a failure, condemned and rejected. Or he may blame God that God had no power to heal or did not care to hear his prayer. He may consequently turn against God.

(2) Some Christians emphasise God's love in healing.

They concentrate on God's promises with regard to his wisdom and love. They stress love. The sick person *should and can* cast out everything opposed to love, especially his hatred, anger, bitterness and bad relationships with other people. They leave the results completely to God. They admit that God's sovereignty is a mystery and that not everybody is healed. People, who stress God's love in healing, do not need to assume an authoritative posture, but do all they can to express love. Love is patient and love is kind. Love does not boast and love is not self-seeking. Love forgives and love rejoices with the truth.

This approach cannot damage the sick person, because the sick person and his praying brothers and sisters have once more submitted themselves to the sovereign and best will of God.

"Not my will, but your will be done!"

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[REACTIONS] PRAYER IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S WORD
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Take turns in the group to pray short to God in response to what you have learned today.
Or divide the group into two's or three's and pray to God in response to what you have learned today.

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(Group leader. Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples and build Christ's Church.
2. Preach, teach or study the teaching of "Sickness and healing" together with another person or group of people.
3. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time with God from half a chapter of **Revelation 4 - 7** each day.
Make use of the favourite truth method or question method. Make notes.
4. Memorisation. Meditate and memorise the new Bible verse. (17) **John 16:13**.
Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
5. Bible study. Prepare the next Bible study at home. **John 20**. Make use of the five steps method.
6. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
7. Update your notebook on building Christ's Church. Include your notes on personal time with God, your memorisation notes, your teaching notes and this preparation.