



**CHRISTIAN
HIGH SCHOOL
RELIGION SERIES**

Choices, Choices, Choices

Managing My Life

Student Book

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To the Student

During the winter of 1975, one of the worst blizzards in history descended without warning upon the upper Midwest. As the icy white winds put entire communities immediately to rest under a thick blanket of snow, most people suddenly found themselves without electrical power. For many, no electrical power meant no heat, no water, no way to prepare food, no electrically operated means of entertainment, and no contact with the outside world. Even the telephones went dead as winds raged on and temperatures plummeted to far below the zero mark. For more than 30 hours in some areas, many lives were drastically changed. Without power they felt helpless. How thankful they were when the electricity was restored!

At all times and in every situation, we, the people of God, have more than electrical power going for us. Through the suffering, death, and resurrection of His Son, God gives us the forgiveness of sins, calls us His very own, and provides us the power to live the new life His Spirit generates within us.

Saint Paul was referring to this power when he wrote to the believers at Ephesus, **“I pray also that**

the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way” (Eph. 1: 18–23).

As you mature into adulthood and throughout your life, you can trust completely upon the power of Jesus your Savior to help you always, even in the midst of life’s greatest problems and challenges. By His Holy Spirit, He will guide, direct, and encourage you in the decisions you make. And He is 100 percent dependable. His power will *never* go out!

Chapter 1

Guidelines for Making God-Pleasing Decisions

How did you decide what you would wear to school today? Did you talk it over with a friend yesterday? Did anyone in your family help you in your choice of clothes for the day? Perhaps you didn't think much about the decisions you made on what to wear. After all, these decisions will only affect you until you undress tonight.

But there are other decisions to face. Which college should you attend? What job should you train for? These decisions will affect you for the rest of your life. As you approach important decisions such as these, remember that you have a God who cares

about you so much that He sent His only Son Jesus into the world to save you. Through Baptism He claimed you for His very own. By the power of His Spirit, this same Jesus will remain in your life to guide and direct you, enabling you to make decisions that allow your life to reflect His glory.

In this introductory unit you will examine how you make decisions and why. May God give you the wisdom that only He can give as you consider your approach to life's decisions in the days and weeks ahead.



Why So Many Choices?

God's First Promise

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.

Genesis 3:15

Choices, Choices, Choices

Choices, Choices! From time to time everyone is faced with difficult ones, and sometimes all of us make wrong ones. Whether difficult or easy, right or wrong, making choices is a part of life.

How many decisions have you made already today? Can you count them? Take a minute right now and try. On a blank sheet of paper, or in your notebook, list all the decisions that you have made since the moment you awoke (including whether or not to get up!).

Some Choices Are Hard!

If you were in a hurry, it probably didn't take long to determine which shirt, blouse, or slacks you were going to wear. You took those that were most convenient. If you were very late, maybe you didn't even concern yourself with whether or not they matched. Soon you were looking at a row of boxed breakfast cereal. Another choice! Should you take the bus, walk, or call a friend for a ride to school? More choices.

These are all routine, relatively harmless decisions. But what about more difficult decisions? As you walk into the lunch room before school, your best friend rushes up to you. She wants you to help her with her math assignment. "I really need your help," she explains, "and I need it tonight!" While you are thinking it over, in walks Sam. You have promised to go with him tonight to a special program at his church. What will you say to Sam? to your best friend? Life is so complicated!

So your day progresses. And you haven't even gotten to your first hour class!

Do Choices Wear You Out?

So many choices! It's almost enough to wear a person out. Just deciding between three or four breakfast cereals, for example, sometimes involves many considerations. Although you really like the one with a sugary coating, you *know* that the one with oats and wheat is better for you. Besides, you've got a dentist appointment after school. You had better choose the one *without* sugar.

Then there are the choices that are affected by other people. For instance, your parents may want

you to eat a certain food for breakfast or wear certain clothes to school. Your school principal or your boss at work has certain rules regarding when you arrive and what clothing you wear. If you drive, you may need to choose whether to obey the speed limit or arrive late.

Choices come in all sizes and shapes. Some really aren't all that important, because they don't affect you for that long. Others will affect the rest of your life!

Some choices are generally easier when you make them daily as part of a routine, or when their effects are short term. Other choices are just as difficult every time you make them!

Do You Learn By Choosing?

Making a decision to speed to school today may encourage you to make a different choice about bedtime tonight! If the right clothing isn't hanging in your closet, you learn to make other plans, or arrange for other clothes beforehand. If your dentist says you have a cavity, you may learn to avoid foods like your favorite breakfast cereal!

The Bible gives us many examples of God-pleasing decisions for our benefit. What lesson can be learned from the decisions made by each of the following?

1. Daniel and his friends (**Dan. 3**)
2. Jonathan (**1 Sam. 20**)
3. Joseph (**Gen. 39:7-12**)
4. Mary and Martha (**Luke 10:38-42**)

God Keeps His Promises

Before their first sin in the Garden, choices were simple for Adam and Eve. God had invited them to take the fruit of any of the trees of the garden, except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There was only one wrong choice they could make!

After Satan enticed them to choose the wrong option, and they ate of the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve faced an endless series of wrong choices. The chain of wrong choices would have gone on forever, unbroken, had God not interrupted with a means of escape. He promised them a Savior who would come to make all the right choices for them. The Savior came as a substitute. He suffered and died to deliver them and their descendants from the endless cycle of sin and the hopelessness of an eternal death.

Making decisions is difficult because of sin, but God has promised to forgive the wrong choices of all

who trust in the suffering and death of His Son, Jesus Christ. In addition He has promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to move those who love Him to choose decisions that are pleasing to Him. In His Holy Word God reveals the guidelines for Christian living from which we may draw in making decisions. Choices that are according to His will are also those that benefit us and others most and allow us to enjoy life most.

What do each of the following Bible references tell us about decision-making?

1. **Ps. 119:105**
2. **1 Thess. 4:3**
3. **2 Cor. 5:17**
4. **John 15:5**
5. **1 Cor. 10:31**

Get the Picture?

Can you see the big picture? As Satan tempted Adam and Eve, he tempted (and tempts) us, too. He encourages us to choose his way, and sometimes, in our sinful weakness, we willingly go along. But our gracious heavenly Father stands ready, waiting for us to look to Him as He points us through His Word to His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who is patiently waiting with the message, "I have defeated Satan. I love you. I have chosen you. I forgive you. Come to Me. Follow Me."

Imagine that you take a step into the brightest, most comforting light you have ever known. Suddenly you see stretched before you the Savior's hand, beckoning you along a long winding road. There are many turnoffs along the road. Many choices must be made. It is comforting to know that He is walking right beside you. He directs you, never forcing you. And when you make a wrong choice, He stands ready to take you by the hand and lead you back onto the road.

At the end of the road is a city whose streets are paved with gold. It is huge and magnificent. Jesus invites you to stay inside, where you will be safe, forever.

1. How does the scenario above illustrate our relationship with Jesus?
2. Why can't you take a step *toward* Jesus? See **Eph. 2:1**.
3. Why is it that our first step brings us into the light? See **1 John 1:5**.

The New Eden!

Because through faith we are the *chosen ones* of God, we have a wonderful inheritance awaiting us where we will enjoy the bliss enjoyed by Adam and Eve long ago before the fall into sin.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Revelation 21:1-4.

How Do You Handle Choices?

Freedom in Christ

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. . . . You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love.

Galatians 5:1, 13

If You Are Free, Why Fight It?

Some people believe that the best things in life are free. Others believe that literally *everything* is free, and that their freedom *in Christ* frees them to do anything and everything. It's just too bad if what they want belongs to someone else! They do not have time to be concerned if what they do or say steps on

someone's toes, occasionally. As these people see it, they have the freedom to ignore the concerns of others.

■ Do you know people who think freedom includes the right to take something that doesn't belong to them? Have you ever tried to convince these persons otherwise? Did it work?

■ What problems have you had with people who do their own thing, regardless of whether or not they step on other people's toes? What is their concept of freedom? How does Paul describe their kind of behavior in **Gal. 5:13**?

The Parable of the Pine Tree

Have you ever seen Japanese bonsai trees? They are also called *character* trees. Those who work with these trees are the successors of a long line of Japanese gardeners. They have learned the ancient art of pruning, bending, tying, and bracing these tiny trees in order to grow them into beautiful shapes. Although the trees are small, it may require many years to grow a completed tree.

These trained gardeners carefully cut the roots of a tree, just enough to stunt its growth, but not enough to kill it. Then they alternately wire branches down to certain roots, and tie straight braces to the trunk and certain branches, to create the very twisted, but beautiful shape they intend. A tree limb can break just as easily as it was bent. The location and the sharpness of the bend are critical.



Bonsai gardeners have to work very carefully since the work of many years can be destroyed in a few moments if the bending or straightening is done too quickly!

The life of each believer is like a bonsai tree. Using the choices which lie before us, our Heavenly Father shapes us into a beautiful creation, which gives Him glory, and finds happiness in Him.

Look up the Bible passages given below. How does our Gardener, the heavenly Father, work with us?

1. **Rom. 8:28**
2. **1 Cor. 10:13**

How Do You Choose, Anyway?

■ Exactly how do you make choices? Try writing a series of two or three simple guidelines which you use in making choices or decisions. Briefly describe these processes in your notebook. Try to be brief, yet complete!

What Do I Do Next?

Now apply your own guidelines to situations you may encounter in your everyday life.

- Read the story or article that follows.
- List all the options or choices you see.
- Decide on a course of action.
- Respond to the questions at the end.
- Discuss your conclusions. Do you agree with the others in your class? If not, why?

Create a Budget

Assume that you are married, with a home, and two children, and that you earn \$2000 per month.

■ First list all the things you think you would need/want to pay for during any one month. Separately, list those incidental items which you would need/want, but which would require an expenditure to be made less frequently.

■ Now assign a dollar value to each of these monthly items, including a reasonable monthly amount for the incidentals.

■ Explain why you included each item in your budget and your thinking behind the dollar amount you designated for each!

1. Do you think that others have expenses/needs/wants that you don't have? Why or why not? See **1 Cor. 10:13**.

2. In what ways does your *budget* reflect your

needs? Your priorities? See **Luke 18:22, John 13:8, and Matt. 4:3-4.**

3. How is this process much like the one you go through with the money or resources you already have at your disposal?

4. What did you learn about spending money by talking with others?

5. Describe situations of which you are aware in which people have chosen to steal in order to supply their needs/wants. Explain why God's Seventh Commandment is such a good idea.

A Savage Mugging

The July 9, 1978 *Miami News* carried a story in which reporter Gary Matera recalled the facts of a robbery and the savage mugging of cafe co-owner, Harvey Green. But reporter Matera also recalled his feelings of personal guilt.

"There were fifty people in the crowd. At first we all watched and did nothing. It looked like a one-man robbery attempt, so I backed away and waited for the police."

Shortly after Matera thought everything was over, he stood at the cafe counter and interviewed Green. Suddenly another youth burst from the back of the store, clutching a handful of bills, forced from Alan Porter, the other co-owner. When Porter grabbed the second youth, the first youth came back and screamed at Green that Porter should free his brother. The first youth grabbed a two-by-four which he used to beat Green. "I walked closer, to within fifteen feet of Green and the youth," recalls Matera. "I felt twinges of fear. Would I join in and try to save Green if he were attacked (again)? Would I fight and risk my life for a man I hardly know?"

The first youth apparently wrestled himself free from Porter, because soon a third youth joined the two brothers, who were now viciously kicking Green in the face. Green, by this time motionless, lay on the floor of his cafe, in a pool of blood.

"I was struck with shock, fear, hate—then compassion for Green. I made up my mind the instant I saw the blood. It was instinct that moved me forward. No one would touch Green again," Matera reported.

The article continued, "Two of the youths ran off. The third backed away, then started coming forward like a place kicker ready to kick a field goal. I thought he wanted to get one final crushing blow at Green's face—a kick that I felt could have killed the man. I looked at the attacker. I didn't say anything. He just looked up at me, stopped, then ran into the crowd."

Toward the end of his article, Matera recalls screaming in anger at the crowd, asking why they didn't help sooner. Then, in guilt, and shame, he asked himself the same question. "I know I stopped

the last kick. But I don't feel good about it. I could have tried harder to stop the first."

(Adapted from a story from The Associated Press and reprinted with permission.)

1. What do you think Matera would do if this same situation confronted him again?
2. Why do you think the crowd, and at first Matera, just stood there and did nothing?
3. Who do you think was *most* responsible for Green's injuries?

- the boy who at first attacked him
 - Green himself for refusing to hand over his money
 - Matera for not stepping in and helping sooner
 - the crowd, who just stood by and watched?
- Or, does it matter? See **Rom. 3:23** and **James 2:10.**

4. Describe a situation in which you have stood by while someone else was unjustly picked on or abused.

5. What do you think Jesus would say to those who choose to do nothing? See **Matt. 12:30.**

The Lifeboat

The following court case actually occurred in England.

Two sailors, Dudley and Stephens, and a young boy were somehow cast adrift in a rowboat 1,000 miles or so from any land. Their small supply of food ran out after eleven days, and their meager water supply lasted only two days longer. After another week without either food or water and no hopes of immediate rescue, all three were in an extremely weakened condition. Death seemed certain. The young boy was the worst off. He did not have the strength to move, could hardly talk, and was becoming increasingly delirious.

Dudley and Stephens discussed their situation and decided that, if they did nothing, all three of them would die. But, if they killed the boy and used his flesh and blood for food and drink, then at least the two of them, being stronger and in better physical condition than the boy, might possibly survive until they could be rescued. They knew it was their only chance for survival.

Consequently, the two sailors killed the boy and used his body to sustain their own. Four days later they were rescued by a passing merchant ship.

The doctors who nursed the two men back to health agreed they probably would not have lived to see their rescue if they had not carried out their plan.

Once back in England, however, Dudley and Stephens were put on trial for murder (*Regian v. Dudley and Stephens*).

(From *Cases on Criminal Law and Its Enforcement*, by Livingston Hall and Sheldon Glueck, 2d ed., American Casebook series, ed. by Erwin N. Griwwold [St. Paul: West Publishing Co., 1958], pp. 285–86. Cited in McCarty, op. cit., p. 17.)

1. Do you think what Dudley and Stephens did was right? See **Ex. 20:13**.
2. Do you think the men should have been put on trial?
3. Does the fact that they were the only witnesses to the murder alter their guilt or ability to be tried? See **Matt. 6:4**.
4. In what ways does God's Fifth Commandment affect your decision-making process?
5. Countries and armies operate on the principle *Might is always right*. See **Luke 6:29**. How did Jesus respond to power and might?
6. Do you think the age, size, and/or health of the boy had anything to do with his death? What if the two hadn't been rescued so soon—what do you think would have happened next? How would they have made a decision?

God's Guidelines

Washing machine manufacturers sometimes pack a certain brand of laundry detergent inside their machines. Some furniture manufacturers include a sample of furniture polish with their furniture. Some automobile dealers *recommend* a certain brand of oil, suggesting that decreased performance will result if their guidelines aren't followed.

Occasionally when trying out a new appliance or toy, people say in jest, "When in doubt, read the directions." God has provided a set of Manufacturer's guidelines and instructions for us too. Within His Holy Bible, God has provided commandments, which are His absolutes.

- Review these commandments in **Ex. 20:1–20**.
- Compare them with those which you wrote down previously. Make any additions or corrections to your list. Ask yourself, "Do these guidelines cover just about any situation?"

God Is Faithful

God never leaves His children. Even when our choices lead us to sin against Him, He stands by waiting to forgive, strengthen, and renew us for the sake of Jesus, His Son and our Savior.

1. Does God ever tempt us to sin? See **James 1:13**.
2. Aside from our own well-being, why does God help His people resist temptations? See **Dan. 12:3**.

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

Have You Ever Been Seasick?

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

James 1:5–8

From Faith to Doubt!

Many who admire the faith of Peter, which moved him to walk on the water with Jesus, think that miracles just don't happen anymore. They would like to believe that God is present and can do great things in their lives, but they just don't seem to have the trusting faith of Jesus' first disciples. "After all," they complain, "Jesus' first disciples could see Him face to face!"

Read the story of Peter walking on the water in **Matt. 14:22–36**.

1. What encouragement do you get from this account?
2. Why did Jesus walk on water? Why did Peter want to walk on water? Do you think Peter had thought about walking on water before this incident? What impresses you about the way Peter got out of the boat?
3. How did the disciples react when Jesus appeared to them? What sometimes causes us to fear the presence of Jesus?
4. What caused Peter to sink? Describe Peter's faith at the moment he began to sink.

5. Why do you think Jesus allowed Peter to sink?

6. Write a reminder for yourself to read this passage the next time you are discouraged and having difficulties making choices.

And Back Again!

Another well-known incident in Peter's life occurred when Jesus predicted that he would deny Him. Read **Matt. 27:31–35**.

1. Why do you think Peter was so certain that he would not deny Jesus?

2. Has anyone ever quoted this verse, warning that you might also deny Jesus? Who and when?

3. Why do you think Peter contradicted Jesus?

4. Why did Peter claim his faithfulness especially in contrast to the faith of others?

5. Like Peter, have you ever promised to die, rather than deny Jesus? If you choose, share an incident with the class, in which you denied Jesus and your Christian faith.

6. How do you feel when, after a time of strong faith, you *fall* to a weaker faith?

7. What conclusions can you draw about faith and doubts from these two stories?

Encourage One Another

Have you ever heard someone quote the Bible verse, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (**Mark 9:24**)? What do you think it means?

■ Rewrite **Mark 9:24** in your own words.

■ In order to better understand the man who originally said these words, read them in the context of the section from which they are taken, **Mark 9:14–32**.

1. Why do you think people were *overwhelmed* when they ran to greet Jesus (**Mark 9:15**)?

2. While Jesus was on the mountain with three of his disciples, this man approached the other nine and asked them to heal his son. Why weren't the disciples able to cast the demon out?

3. What causes our faith in Jesus to waver from time to time?

4. What do you think the man meant when in **v. 24** he said, "**I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!**"? Did his unbelief have to do with Jesus' identity, or Jesus' ability, or both? Which of these two affects your faith more, and why?

Seeing Is Believing, or Is It?

You have probably also heard people say, "Seeing is believing." What do you think this statement means? Do you believe it is true? Is it always true? Read the discussion between Jesus and Thomas, which concludes with Jesus' statement in **John 20:29**.

1. In this case, how is it true, that "believing is seeing"?

2. What does it mean to believe?

3. In the midst of all the confusion and doubts of life, how can our faith in Jesus help us, especially in difficult choices?

4. As when Peter walked on water, what happens when we look at the wind and waves, instead of at Jesus?

Motto/Prayer for Life

"I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief!" (**Mark 9:24**.)

■ Write and underline the words *certainties* and *doubts* as column headings on one page of your notebook.

■ After thinking about your life, write down as many certainties and doubts as you can.

■ Make **Mark 9:24** a motto or prayer for your life. When the storms of life send waves of doubt crashing down upon the ship of your life, remember to keep your eyes on Jesus, and not on you or your boat.

**My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand!**

Lutheran Worship 368

Put Away Childish Things

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

1 Corinthians 13:11

Why Don't You Just Grow Up?

Has anyone ever said to you, "Why don't you just grow up?" Perhaps you were doing something they thought particularly childish. Perhaps you were bothering them, and in frustration they wished you would act more *grown up!*

But what does it mean to grow up? In some societies or cultures you are considered grown up when you get married. In other cultures, you can't be grown up as long as your father is still alive. In the Jewish faith, a youngster becomes a man or woman through the ceremony known as *bar mitzvah* or *bas mitzvah*. At this point they become *sons* or *daughters of the Covenant*, and are regarded as grown up, because they have completed a certain

amount of education, and passed through the prescribed ceremony.

In the United States, some states automatically consider 18-year-olds to be adults. In other states, the *magic age* is 21. Some young people, because of the absence or disability of their parents, are forced to grow up more quickly. Others, because they aren't forced into adult behavior patterns, may not take the responsibilities of *grown-ups* until several years later. Look around your room. Do you know students who because of circumstances, have *had* to grow up more quickly, accepting responsibilities beyond others of the same age?

■ Pause for a moment and, in your notebook, write down what it means for you to be *grown up*. Include any differences that exist between you and others you know.

■ Now write a more general statement which would apply to everyone. Try completing the statement, "To be *grown up* or *mature* means to: . . ."

■ After everyone in your class has completed this exercise, you may choose to share your definitions with others around you, and react to what others have written.

We're All in the Same Boat

Imagine that everyone in the world were together on a huge boat, floating in the middle of an immense ocean. All of your needs have been provided for. Food, clothing, entertainment, and companionship are all available in abundance.

One day you are walking through one of the inner compartments in the *hold* or bottom of the ship. You are amazed to come upon someone actually *drilling a hole* through the hull of the ship. What would you say to this person? What do you think this person might say back to you?

Me, Wash Someone's Dirty Feet?

■ Do you remember a time when someone took their shoes off, and someone else yelled "Phew! Who's got their shoes off?" Smelly feet aren't the most pleasant thing. But we've all got them. And we all wash our own feet. So why not wash someone else's feet? Have you ever washed someone's feet? Has anyone ever washed your feet?

■ Do you recall the time when Jesus washed the feet of His followers? It was after a meal, probably the Last Supper. Everyone seemed willing for Jesus to do this, until He came to Peter. Peter asked if Jesus was really going to wash his feet, and Jesus said that Peter didn't really understand what He was doing. Peter was firm. "No," said Peter, "You shall never wash my feet" (John 13:8).

■ Everyone has done some form of foot washing. From time to time, we all must do certain, rather unpleasant, but necessary tasks. Sometimes we do

things for others, because they can't do for themselves things that need doing. At other times we perform tasks for others as an expression of our love for them.

What kinds of things have you done, which are comparable to washing someone else's feet? Describe how you felt when you did these things.

Bread for the Breadmaker?

One of the greatest temptations in life is to be selfish and take care only of yourself. There's nothing wrong with taking care of yourself, but none of us is alone in this world. We all exist within a community of people. We may think that we can do our own thing, and disregard what others think or feel. But we can't! It's as if we're all on a boat. Much of what others do affects us, and much of what we do affects others. We are all on the same ship, earth!

Read the account of the temptation of Jesus in **Matt. 4:1–11**. Three times Satan tempted Jesus, and three times Jesus resisted his assaults. How did Jesus do it? Some might say Jesus could resist Satan's attacks because He is God, which is true. But Jesus didn't use anything which we don't also have at our disposal. Each time Satan attacked, he suggested that Jesus wasn't really the Son of God. And each time Jesus was tempted, He turned to God's Word. Each time He was faced with a devilish attack, He considered both His choices and His Father's Word.

The first temptation Satan threw at Jesus was, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matt. 4:3). This might seem like a rather strange temptation to you. Being Almighty God, Jesus *could* have done just that. It would have required very little of His godly abilities. In fact, Jesus could have turned *all* the stones in the world into bread. But Jesus refused to let Satan direct His life. Instead, He glorified His heavenly Father.

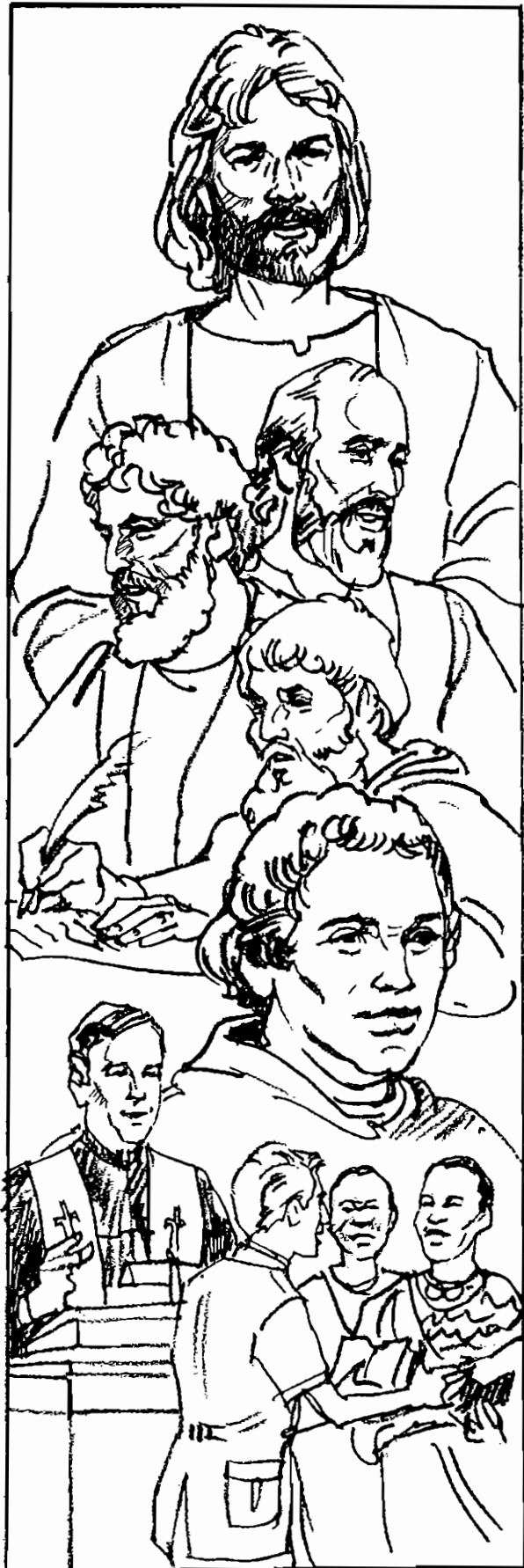
Jesus considered God's Word which says that people are not created simply to fill their bellies. People are created by God to praise and serve Him. More important than eating bread, they are to feed on their Father's Word.

For us, Jesus recognized the treacherous nature of Satan's temptation and overruled it. Jesus had come into the world to serve others, not to simply feed Himself.

Where Are You Going?

The second temptation, "throw yourself down" (Matt. 4:6), was also sneaky. By knowing Satan's very nature, we also know that Satan was trying to turn Jesus away from His appointed tasks here on earth.

Satan wanted somehow to deter Jesus from going to the cross, paying the price for our sins, and



defeating him as promised back in Eden! Similarly, Satan tempts us by seeking to stop us from fulfilling the Father's will for our lives. We may know what Christ wants us to do, but Satan tries to direct our attention elsewhere. And he makes the other choices ever so enticing.

Are the Best Things Really Free?

The third temptation was masterful! **"All this [the kingdoms of the world and their splendor] I will give you, . . . if you will bow down and worship me,"** Satan said. (Matt. 4:8-9). It was masterful because it seemed so simple. Bow down in front of Satan. Is that all I have to do? I could bow down in front of him but keep my fingers crossed. I wouldn't mean it.

Jesus knew what He would have to endure for our salvation. He knew that He was facing severe mockery and punishment at the hands of both the Romans and the Jews. He knew He faced a horrible death on a cross. He knew that in going against Satan, He would experience the untold agonies of separation from His Father. So when Satan said, "Just fall down and worship me," there was a real temptation to bypass all these agonies, and win the world without suffering.

Satan was saying what so many after have said, "The best things in life are free. Look even God says it." But the best things aren't free. Even the best—eternal life with Jesus— isn't free. God paid dearly so that we could be there with Him forever. God sent His only Son to the cross, watched while He was tortured cruelly, and was pierced as His Son died for us.

Tempting Choices

Satan similarly tempts us in the same ways. He tries to convince us to look to ourselves rather than the many others we have been called to serve. Satan constantly tries to divert us from our appointed life's tasks. And finally, Satan masterfully lays traps which seemingly offer us the world without any suffering!

Consider now the choices which you have in life which roughly parallel these three temptations.

In your notebook, create a heading for each of the three temptations, *Stones into Bread*, *Throw Yourself Down*, and *Fall Down and Worship Me!*

Under each of these, list temptations in which Satan encourages you to make the wrong choice. Leave room to add suggestions and Bible references which can be used to resist the devil. Discuss these with the rest of the class.

We Are the Lord's

For none of us lives to himself alone and

none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Romans 14:7-8

*Take my life, O Lord, renew,
Consecrate my heart to you;
Take my moments and my days;
Let them sing your ceaseless praise.*

Lutheran Worship 404

Press On toward the Mark

What Is the Mission of Your School/Church?

Have you ever had the experience of seeing someone walking quickly down the hall of your school so preoccupied with what she was doing that when you called out to her she didn't hear you? Perhaps then you said, "That looks like someone on a mission!" Do you know what the word *mission* means? Webster's Dictionary defines *mission* as a *specific task with which a person or a group is charged*.

Your church and school also have missions. In some aspects they are the same, and in others, they may be slightly different.

- In your notebook, describe briefly what you believe to be the *main* mission of the Christian church.

- Describe briefly what, in your opinion, is the *main* mission of the Christian school.

Organized around Someone Great

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:18-20

Some buildings are built around a courtyard or around the statue of some great person. Sometimes interior designers decorate rooms in a building according to a style, such as French Provincial or Early American. Books in a library set are often bound in the same color and texture leather with a unifying symbol or title stamped on each. Some schools even require their students to dress alike!

Buildings, rooms, books, and students often have unifying factors. Christians also have several things in common. We read the Bible, we go to church, and we worship God. The most important

thing which unites us as children of God is our faith in Jesus Christ. We believe not only that Jesus Christ is the unifying factor of the Christian Church; we believe that He is the center of the entire Christian Church. And since we believe that He is the only way to heaven, we want as many others as possible to know of His love.

In obedience to His Great Commission, we will do everything we can to spread the great Good News of what God in Christ has done for all people! Read **Rom. 9:3; 10:14;** and **1 Cor. 9:19-23**. What was Paul willing to do so that his fellow Jews could come to know Jesus as their Savior?

Institutional Blight

From time to time, farmers in different parts of the country experience a particularly destructive crop disease called *blight*. Although the term refers to a particular insect which can bore into and destroy many plants, it has come to include any kind of disease or destruction, especially when the destruction is widespread.

People who have studied the structure of many local churches describe a similar disease called *institutional blight*. Lyle Schaller, a popular church researcher, talks about institutional blight in his book *Parish Planning* (Abingdon, 1971). Schaller suggests most Christian churches begin with a genuine concern for both inreach and outreach with the Gospel of Christ. He also suggests that many are afflicted with a widespread disease or blight which blunts and often destroys the mission of the church.

Schaller suggests that this blight takes on several forms, which can be summarized as follows.

1. Church leaders strive to create those circumstances which will assure that the institution will continue to exist.

2. Churches tend to take action without fully considering future consequences of their current actions.

3. Many churches seem to be planning for yesterday!

4. Some church leaders assume that the needs and wants of the entire congregation are the same as theirs.

5. Organizations within the church, formed to assist the larger body in accomplishing the Great Commission of Christ, tend to view their purposes as ends in themselves.

To Think About

- Do these things exist in your church/school?
- Do you agree with Schaller that they are a *blight* which is both widespread and destructive?
- What do you think you as an individual can do about it?
- How could you involve others to combat and perhaps wipe out this disease?

He Died for All

And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.

2 Corinthians 5:15

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Go and make disciples of all nations.

Matthew 28:19