

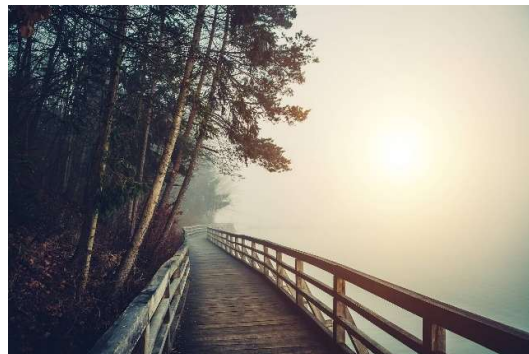


Guarding the avenues of our souls

Week 1	7 September	Fostering a positive mindset
Week 2	4 September	Handling socials- Don't be a slave to likes
Week 3	21 September	Resisting the pressure to conform by listening to conscience and God's guidance
Week 4	28 September	Dysfunctional families can still have righteous children

Welcome to another series: September 2025

The years of youth are years full of challenges as young people try to figure out who they are and where they fit in. And so, the series for this month is intended to help young people understand that their identity comes from being a follower of Christ, rather than conforming to the world's standards. This series seeks to encourage youth to develop spiritual disciplines that will lead to a deeper understanding of God's word and His will for their lives and help them grow in their relationship with God. In the end this will encourage them to live boldly for Christ.



Genesis 2:7 *"The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"*. The way Old Testament uses the word "soul" – a human being becomes alive (that is, "a living being" or "soul") only when the 'breath of God' is breathed into him. The soul then is seen as the life possessing quality of humans, and it is that which makes them living beings. We can say the "soul" is the life-principle, or simply, life. The soul is the self or person. It is said to be the seat of spiritual as well as physical needs and cravings, including one's need for God's presence. It is the state of consciousness itself. The soul can be sad, grieved, weep, rejoice, bless the Lord, be distressed, be anxious and troubled, hate and love. It can stand for the full range of human needs, desires and feelings, including thought, memory and consciousness. The soul is integral to life itself.

The death of the soul then results in the loss of personhood. The soul is not something we possess as such as though the person existed as a person outside the soul. The soul is the person. The soul is what each person is as a human being. So, the word soul stands for the living person as a human being in this life.

Matthew 16:26 *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

The soul in Scripture is really the person as human being, who has been created by God.

A philosopher by the name of Irenaeus viewed “soul” as the “*seat of knowledge, working in conjunction with the body’s senses to gather information, which it then evaluates and uses to form beliefs and understanding*”. He imagines the process by which the soul arrives at knowledge: First, the soul ‘perceives’ external phenomena through the bodily organs of sense perception – the eyes, ears, and so on. Then, the soul may form a “belief” – *pistis*, the biblical word for “faith” – “judgment,” “conception” or “apprehension” of a given aspect of reality. Furthermore, Irenaeus believed the soul, in its interaction with the Holy Spirit, plays a crucial role in humanity’s journey towards spiritual perfection.

Guarding the soul, therefore, means recognizing God’s presence with and for his people and actively fighting against the forces that dehumanizes and marginalize them. Guarding the soul means resisting forces that dehumanizes and diminish the worth of individuals and communities. It means facing the realities of life by drawing strength from scripture and people’s experiences and working towards a future where all people can experience grace and wholeness.

This emphasizes the significance of the soul as a valuable and vulnerable entity that needs careful attention and protection from negative influences. Our souls are vulnerable they need to be protected from harmful influences. This topic suggests avoiding exposure to anything that could corrupt our minds or lead to negative thoughts and desires. It speaks to the importance of the inner world as the source of our actions and words. It is about mindfulness, right speech and right action. We are encouraged to be discerning about the content we consume through our eyes, whether its media, images, or the actions of others. By guarding our souls, we can cultivate inner peace and reduce negativity in our lives and build stronger and more positive relationships with others.

HOME GROUPS AND CLASSES GUIDE:

1. *Open in Worship and Prayer: this is to invite God into the meeting. For example, you can light a candle, sing together, or use a YouTube Hymn or song.*
2. *Open your Bibles and read the Bible verses for this week (take turns?) see below.*
3. *Reflect on the Bible verses and the reflection written by a Minister or Lay Preacher.*
4. *Connect with each other and take the reflection deeper by answering the Questions.*
5. *Works out: What have we learned that we can apply in our lives in this session? Keep each other accountable for promises made or important steps taken. Pray for and over each other (after taking prayer requests).*

Week 1 - 7 September - Fostering a positive mindset

READINGS:

Isaiah 33:15-18(a)

Ephesians 4: 29-30

Matthew 12: 33-37

WORSHIP SONG: *“No longer Slaves” by Jonathan David and Melissa Hesler*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8TkUMJtK5k>

FOSTERING A POSITIVE MINDSET

Theologically speaking, fostering a positive mindset refers to cultivating a mindset rooted in faith, gratitude, and trust in God’s plan, while also actively working to replace negative

thoughts with positive ones based on biblical principles. It is about choosing to focus on what is good and true, shifting focus from circumstances to God's perspective, recognizing His sovereignty and power, even in challenging situations. It is about viewing challenges as opportunities for learning and growth, rather than setbacks. It is to choose optimism, hope and courage, even in the face of adversity.

REFLECTION WRITTEN BY: REV ZAMANI SIKUPELA

Isaiah 33:15-18 (a) The Prophet Isaiah asks some questions of conscience. The Israelites must see themselves in the light of God. Outward confession is not enough. This should also characterize us. We should think about this when we watch a movie in which sometimes things are shown and said that conflict with this. That is their reward because they have shut their eyes from looking upon evil. If you haven't focused on taking every thought captive, guarding your heart and mind, and watching what you think and say, now is the time.

Ephesians 24: 29-30 Paul warns us against unwholesome talk - the kind of talk that is distasteful, harmful, and damaging. I think a lot of Christians need to wash out their mouths, for some seem not to be convicted by the words they speak or by how their words may fall on other people's souls. We can bring sorrow to the Holy Spirit by the way we live and talk, and Paul warns us against unwholesome language, bitterness, improper use of anger, harsh words, slander, and bad attitudes towards others. A Christian should come to a place in his life where he speaks absolutely no words of corruption and perversity but only words that encourage and lift others up – wholesome words full of grace. We must always guard against using vulgar and offensive words. However, this is possible only when our speech is seasoned with salt, or kindness.

Matthew 12: 33-37 What's the big deal about our words? According to Jesus, our words indicate the state of our heart, and if that is true, it is enough to stop us all dead in our tracks. In our text our Lord clearly states: *"For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."* A person's words reveal from whence they hail – the Lord's or the adversaries. The context of this passage makes it explicitly clear that the fruit which comes from a person is not the works their life produces, but rather the words that proceed from their mouth. The words of a person reveal what is in their heart. In this context, it is extremely clear that the good fruit of a person's life are the good words that proceed out of their mouth.

"On the day of judgement people will give account for every careless word they speak". We must consider the plethora of the words we speak every day. We must consider the words we write or text or email every day. We must consider the conversations or debates we engage on.

GROUP/CLASS QUESTIONS:

1. Are you living in alignment with Christian values?
2. How do you handle stress and difficult situations more effectively?
3. What are you looking forward to, even in difficult times?
4. What positive decision did you make that made you feel good recently?

MEMORY VERSES FOR THE WEEK:

Monday: Proverbs 3:5-6 *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight".*

Tuesday: Romans 8:28 *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”.*

Wednesday: Psalm 118:24 *“This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it”.*

Thursday: Colossians 3:2 *“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things”.*

Friday: Matthew 6:33 *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”.*

Saturday: Philippians 4:8 *“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things”.*

FAMILY TIME: WRITTEN BY JENNY BLAKE (CHILDREN’S PASTOR)

Week 1: 7 September

Title: *Guarding the Avenues of Our Souls – Fostering a Positive Mindset*

Scripture: Isaiah 33:15–18a (NIV)

“Those who walk righteously and speak what is right, who reject gain from extortion and keep their hands from accepting bribes, who stop their ears against plots of murder and shut their eyes against contemplating evil— they are the ones who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. Their bread will be supplied, and water will not fail them. Your eyes will see the king in his beauty and view a land that stretches afar.”

Introduction: The Avenues to Our Souls

Imagine your soul like a beautiful garden. What we let in through our eyes, ears, and thoughts are like seeds being planted in that garden. If we plant good, healthy seeds—like kindness, truth, and encouragement—we grow a beautiful, peaceful life. But if we plant weeds—like violence, fear, or negative thinking—those grow too and can take over our hearts.

In this passage, God is telling us how to protect that garden. He says we must shut our **eyes against evil, stop our ears from harmful things, and walk righteously**. This is how we guard the *avenues of our souls*—our eyes, ears, thoughts, and hearts.

Key Point: Guarding What Enters

God knows that what we see and hear can shape how we think and feel. Watching or listening to things that are full of hate, fear, or bad behaviour can make us feel anxious, angry, or hopeless. But when we focus on what is good, beautiful, and true, our mindset becomes positive, hopeful, and full of faith.

Illustration: The Gatekeeper

Think of your soul like a castle, and you are the gatekeeper. The eyes and ears are like the castle doors and windows. Would you let someone throw garbage into your beautiful home? Of course not! So, we must be just as careful with what we let into our hearts and minds.

Practical Application

- Choose music, movies, games, and books that lift you up and help you grow closer to God.
- Spend more time with people who speak truth and encouragement.
- Talk to God when your mind starts to feel negative or heavy.
- Speak words of life and truth to yourself and others.

For Older Children (13–18): Discussion Questions

1. What are some things you regularly see or hear (online, in music, shows) that might affect your mindset?
2. Have you noticed a connection between what you watch/listen to and your mood or thoughts?
3. What steps can you take this week to guard your mind and foster a more positive, God-honouring outlook?
4. How can we speak life into the lives of our friends when they are surrounded by negativity?

For Younger Children (5–12): Discussion Questions

1. What kind of things make your heart feel happy and peaceful?
2. Are there shows, songs, or games that make you feel scared or sad?
3. What does it mean to let good things into your heart? Can you give an example?
4. How can we ask Jesus to help us think about good things?

Closing Thought

When we protect our hearts by watching, listening to, and thinking about what is good, we are honouring God. And the promise in Isaiah 33 is that we will see *the King in His beauty*—we'll see more of God's goodness in our lives.

Prayer

Dear Jesus, thank You for giving us eyes to see and ears to hear. Help us to guard what we let into our hearts. Teach us to focus on what is good and true. When our minds feel heavy or full of bad thoughts, help us to come to You and fill our hearts with peace. Amen.