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A Journey of Faith



I will create new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create



One in God; Together for Good.

Introduction

Evangelical Fellowship of India, founded in 1951, is the national alliance of Evangelicals in India. As a central network of evangelicals and a service organization, it is the custodian of Evangelical faith, movement and values in India, representing the Evangelical voice, building capacity and promoting participation in nation building.

EFI is a charter member of the World Evangelical Alliance. Its membership includes over 65,000 Churches, over 150 Church related mission agencies and organisations and thousands of individual members.

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To see evangelical Churches, institutions and individuals effectively witnessing the good news of Jesus Christ in word, deed and transforming nation.

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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

2021 in review and hope for 2022

The 365 days that mark every year are sufficient to pack in many memories, incidents, events, moments of great tragedy and torment, but also memorable occasions of joy, and opportunities to be grateful for the mercy and steadfastness of God, the Almighty. But 2021 that just crossed the finish line, will remain in man's historical memory right there with the dropping of the nuclear bombs marking the end of the second world war. Even the great plagues that ravaged Europe in medieval times, or the earthquakes that razed, Japan, China, Iran or California.

In fact, it may become a marker of time. There was the age before the Covid pandemic ravaged the world, bringing mighty nations

such as the United States to their knees; and the age after mankind could either conquer the virus in a triumph of science, or learn to live with it in the manner that we have coped with our environment since Biblical times.

The fear of the unknown, issues of social distancing, and lockdowns changed the nature of human relationships, psychology, and the practice of faith, especially in Christian countries where often congregational services became impossible.

In India, even Christmas celebrations were all but banned by the authorities. But then, understanding, and worshipping, God became an even more

personal interactive phenomenon. And again, in India, pastors, priests and nuns, and the ordinary believers dared conquer their fear to become frontline workers assisting the afflicted, comforting the bereaved, and bringing food and provisions to those locked in their own homes.

The months of April till June were filled with the noise of ambulance sirens every 10 minutes or so. We saw people die for lack of basic medical infrastructure like oxygen, long queues at the crematoriums. Government fudged figures or stood in denial. The mighty and holy river Ganges swelled with corpses, as people too poor to offer a decent cremation to their loved ones just consigned the dead to the river.

The New York Times estimated around the end of May 2021, that the total number of deaths in India could possibly be around 1.6 million with the possibility of 4.2 million in a worst-case scenario. The government figures at that point of time only counted 300,000 dead.

And yet, a mere six months after the colossal tragedy, an amnesia

was setting in. Or so, it seemed. Kenneth Galbraith famously said that “nothing is so admirable in politics as a short memory”. Government’s mind manipulators worked on the media concentrated in the hands of the government or its crony capitalists. Spin doctors moved in to alter the narrative.

2021 also saw the repealing of the three farm laws that were passed in September 2020 as Ordinances rather than following the procedure of introducing the proposed laws in the lower and upper houses of the parliament.

Protests soon followed in Punjab and Haryana with calls of ‘Dilli Chalo’, a march to the national capital of New Delhi. In November 2020, the farmers braved tear gas and water cannons in Haryana as they marched to Delhi. November 2020 end saw the farmers sitting in protests in border areas of the national capital. By the time 2021 began, seven rounds of talks between the farmers and the government had remained inconclusive and in January, the Supreme Court stayed the implementation of the three laws.

During their year long struggle, over 750 lives were lost as the farmers also battled the powerful propaganda machinery unleashed against them, seeking to paint them as anti-national secessionists and militant insurrectionists. But the farmers won. The government capitulated. With possible defeat for the ruling establishment in coming elections to the legislatures of several states, the Prime minister announced the withdrawal of the laws. Parliament rescinded the laws with a discussion, exactly as it had a year earlier, legislated them without a discussion. Democracy does have such phases.

But as it sought to overwhelm the farmers, the government was more successful in silencing civil society, social protests and dissident media and independent voices. Federal and provincial governments cracked down on reporters, activists and social media platforms. Many journalists and activists were arrested as the government charged political parties and outside enemies of “trying to rake up anti-India sentiments and

misusing social media as a battleground.”

India continued sliding down towards the tail in various social indices, including the World Freedom Index. It was in the short list of the “most dangerous countries for journalists.”

Religious polarization also kept pace, with powerful political parties further exploiting divisions for electoral benefits.

For religious minorities, particularly Christians and Muslims, it is a matter of grave concern that hate is being normalized in India. In the holy city of Haridwar, religious elements close to those in political power gave an open call to massacre Muslims and Christians. The call for a genocide, alarmingly, has not really been countered so far by any major political party. A group of former heads of the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy have, to their credit, denounced the provocation for a genocide.

Christians continued to face the wrath of Hindutva right-wingers particularly in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya

Pradesh, Karnataka, and Jharkhand. The state of Karnataka passed the anti-conversion law ignoring the protests and concerns of the civil society as well as the increasing attacks against Christians in the state. The Religious Liberty Commission of EFI (EFIRLC) got information of over 15 attacks on Christmas Day alone.

The spike of attacks against the Christian community started mid-June onwards and many incidents were reported in October – December. The EFIRLC has so far documented close to 400 incidents which is the highest documented so far. Other agencies who are documenting these incidents too have reported figures as high as 450 plus.

The Christmas present of the non-approval of the FCRA renewal application of the Missionaries of Charity (MoC) also created waves particularly on social media. The treatment that the Missionaries of Charity, founded by Mother Teresa, the Nobel Laureate and Catholic Saint, received was unfortunate. And so, was a similar hounding of

major NGOs working in child welfare, education, and civil society empowerment.

The timing of the MoC matter is significant. The fact that the Christmas season was chosen to communicate to the MoC that their FCRA renewal application has been not approved, speaks volumes. Mother St. Teresa is perhaps the most famous icon of the Indian Church in recent times. Add to this, her near constant vilification by Hindutva right-wing leaders as part of their social discourse and one gets a sense of where this all is coming from. Some who have used derogatory language against her are now constitutional authorities.

FCRA, a law to regulate foreign donations, has long been used by various governments since Mrs. Indira Gandhi's time to further their agenda and to target those that it deems troublesome, but the FCRA had not been as weaponized as it has been now first by the erstwhile UPA II government and also by this government. It is common knowledge that the voluntary sector as a whole has been looked with suspicion by the

present dispensation. In 2020, Amnesty closed its India operations citing “constant harassment”. The government must demonstrate that it will not use the FCRA provisions to reduce the space for some civil society organizations.

Elsewhere, 2021 will also be remembered for Taliban takeover of Afghanistan almost two decades after they were ousted by a US-led coalition. This time, tens of thousands of Afghans had to flee, often resorting to desperate measures. According to the United Nations, half a million Afghans were expected to flee the country in addition to the “2.2 million Afghan refugees already in neighbouring countries and 3.5 million people forced to flee their homes within Afghanistan's borders.”

So, where does that rather depressing commentary about 2021 leave us as we step into 2022? Surprisingly, in a place of hope.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the anti-apartheid champion and a

tall spiritual leader who finished his earthly race just a few days ago once said, “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”

In this world that can be dark and frail, we long for light and strength. The world can be evil but we long for goodness, and amid despair, we long for hope. But we do not find this hope in our circumstances, for we do not know what they will be. And we certainly do not find hope in our leaders, for we know how frail and flawed they are. No, hope is only found in God. He is the light that dispels all darkness.

In the Bible we find people who lived in dark times, and in desperate circumstances where there was no visible sign of hope, and yet, they chose to be hopeful because they knew that the God who sustained them in the past is faithful and will come to their help. They looked forward to their days by looking backward to the faithfulness of God and holding on to it.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal



Hope in Christ Alone

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

The last two years have been very difficult for us. Many people entered 2021 with new hope. Do you know why? Well, millions of people were hoping to take a vaccine in 2021 to prevent corona virus. People were looking forward to putting away their masks and putting an end to social distancing. But that didn't happen. Rather, the second wave of the pandemic snatched away many lives in our country.

Moreover, the new COVID-19 variant, Omicron has created panic all over the world. Though some say that this variant is less severe, WHO has warned that it's too early to come to any conclusion. Many people are

saying that medical science is our only hope. However, let me remind you that our ultimate hope is in Christ, not in anything else.

Corona virus may disappear after a few years. But we know that we have to face several other diseases, trials, and difficulties in this life. Our hope must be in Christ alone. Many times, we place our hope on people or things of this world rather than God. But apostle Paul reminds us that Jesus alone is our hope (1 Tim. 1:1). Based on this verse, I have entitled this article as **"Hope in Christ Alone."**

1. Misplaced Hope Leads to Disappointment.

What is hope? Hope is the forward-looking aspect of faith (cf.

Gal. 5:5; 1 Pet. 1:21). Hope is very precious. Writing about the need for hope, A. W. Tozer writes, "Without it, life in a fallen world would be unbearable; without it the zest for living would disappear almost at once; without it one hour of adversity would break our spirits and drive millions to suicide. It is not too much to say that if all hope were destroyed within the human breast, the race of mankind would die out altogether in a very few years."

Tozer goes on to write, "Hope has sustained the spirit of a shipwrecked sailor and given him strength to stay alive through the long days that seemed years till help and rescue came; hope has steeled the patriot to fight on and win at last against overwhelming odds; hope has saved from insanity or suicide the prisoner in his lonely cell as he checked off the years and months and days on his homemade calendar; hope has enabled the sick or injured man to wait out the pain and the nausea till health returned and the suffering ended."¹

Hope keeps us going. But we often place our hope on people and things of this world. Psalm 33:16-17 says that "The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue." Since God is sovereign, he alone can save us. In Jeremiah 17:5-6, Yahweh says "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land." When we depend on humans, we will be like a shrub in the desert which is not refreshed by rain. As a result, it stops growing. Eventually, it dies.

In Job 31:24-28, Job says "If I have made gold my trust or called fine gold my confidence, if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant or because my hand had found much, if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the

1. Cmalliance.org, "Hope Keeps Us Going,"
<https://www.cmalliance.org/devotions/tozer?id=942> (accessed 29 December 2020).

moon moving in splendor, and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand, this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above.” Here, Job says that he didn't put his hope in gold and didn't worship the sun or moon. He didn't even pay secret homage to them.

Some put their hope in wealth, others in their jobs or businesses, and others in people. If we put our hope in these things, we will be disappointed. That's why the psalmist sings, “Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish” (Ps. 146:3-4). It's useless to put our trust in powerful people because once they die, all their power will perish.

To quote Tozer again: “Hope is unique in being at once the most precious and the most treacherous of all our treasures.” He further writes, “Hope has sustained the spirit of many a shipwrecked sailor by painting for him a tender picture

of rescue and reunion with loved ones, only to leave him at last to die of thirst and exposure on the vast bosom of the sea. Hope has kept many a prisoner believing he could not hang, that a pardon would surely come, and then stood calmly by and watched him die at the end of a rope. Hope has cheered a thousand victims of cancer and tuberculosis with whispered promises of returning health who were never again to know one single day of health till they died. Hope has told the mother that her son missing in action was surely alive, and kept her watching till the end of her days for the letter that never came and that never could come because the boy that might have written it had long been sleeping in an unmarked grave on a foreign shore. Surely for the fallen sons of men, the Hindu proverb is true: 'There is no disease like hope.' Hope that has no guarantee of fulfillment is a false friend that comforts us a while with flattery and leaves us to our enemies. Expectation of a bright tomorrow when no such tomorrow can be ours will be bitterness compounded by despair in the day of the great

reckoning.”² Isn't this true?

Psalm 118:8-9 says, “It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.” If we don't have God, there's no hope. Hoping in anything else apart from God is to cling to bubbles that will burst soon. People and things of this world have limited power. Doctors, scientists, and political leaders are often powerless and weak. They are not sovereign or all-powerful like God. Today, millions of people have a sense of false hope and think that “all is well” although they didn't receive forgiveness for their sins through Christ. That's foolishness! Yes, we must put our hope in people or things to a certain extent. But we must not make the mistake of putting our ultimate hope in them. We are bound to be disappointed if we hope in people or things of the world. Misplaced hope leads to disappointment.

2. We Must Put Our Hope in Christ Alone.

Much of our hope is often wishful thinking. We say things like: “I

hope I'll get a job.” “I hope I'll get married soon.” “I hope I'll get a promotion.” “I hope I don't contract COVID-19.” “I hope I'll be healed.” But biblical hope is not just wishful thinking. It is rooted in the character and promises of God. It is a confident expectation of what God promised.

Earlier, in Jeremiah 17:5-6, we saw the results of trusting in man. In the following verses, we see the blessings of trusting in God: “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit” (Jer. 17:7-8). Those who trust in the Lord are blessed. We will be like a tree planted by the water (cf. Ps. 1:3). No matter what the circumstances are, we will not fear them. We will always be fruitful.

In Psalm 42:5, the psalmist preaches to himself, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and

2. Cmalliance.org, “Hope Keeps Us Going,” <https://www.cmalliance.org/devotions/tozer?id=945> (accessed 30 December 2020).

why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation.” When the psalmist was in turmoil, he hopes in God. That hope leads him to praise God. Like the psalmist, we must often preach to ourselves. In the Bible, we see that God's saints endured terrible sufferings because they hoped in God. In fact, their hope in God enabled them to even rejoice in their sufferings.

Hebrews 10:23 says, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” Here, the author is asking his readers to have a firm grip on “the confession of our hope.” We must hope in God because he is faithful. He keeps his promises. In Psalm 146:5-7, the psalmist writes, “Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry.” We are blessed to hope in the God of Jacob because he is the one who

made heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them!

Writing to the Christians in Rome, apostle Paul says, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom. 15:13). Our God is the God of hope. He gives hope to his children. When we are filled with hope, we will be filled with joy and peace. Peter calls our hope “a living hope” (1 Pet. 1:3). We have a living hope because the Father raised his Son from the dead. Our hope is a living hope, not a wishful hope or false hope. Tozer writes, “Earth is bearable because there is hope. Hell is unendurable because all hope has fled. Heaven is eternal beatitude because hope is there in radiant fulfillment.”

In 1 Timothy 1:1 and Colossians 1:27, Paul says that Jesus himself is our hope. We can put our hope in Christ for this life and the life to come. So, redirect your hope on Christ today.

Conclusion

Even as we have entered into a new year, this is the main

3. Cmalliance.org, “Hope Keeps Us Going,” <https://www.cmalliance.org/devotions/tozer?id=946> (accessed 30 December 2020).

message I want to convey through this article: **Put your hope in Christ alone.** If you are still not saved, you are living without hope and God (Eph. 2:12). But there's no hope for you if you repent of your sins and receive Christ into your life today.



Saved brothers and sisters, our hope is not in a political leader, people, money, or health. Our hope is in Christ alone! As there is confusion and fear all around us, let's put our hope in Christ alone. Even when you go through trials and sufferings, put your hope in Christ. If Christ is your hope, no matter what happens, you will be filled with confidence, joy, and peace! Christ is our hope in life and death. Put your hope in Christ alone!

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**Behold, I make
all things new.**

Revelation 21:5

EASY HOLY LAND TRAVEL

Rev. Kuruville Chandy



Many Christians dream of going to the Holy Land. Though I never dreamt about it as such, I went to the Holy Land when I was eight years old. It was a secret journey. I sneaked into the land because I didn't have a passport to travel abroad or a visa for entry into Israel. I travelled all over the place and even went to Egypt and Babylon.

Here's how it happened. For my eighth birthday my parents got me a "big people's Bible". That was my description because I didn't want them to get me a Bible story book. It had a black artificial leather cover. From the day I got the Bible, I started to read it from page one and read it in my spare time instead of reading any other

story books. Since my birthday falls in the last week of April, when my school closed for the summer vacation, I had all of the holidays for my travel. Even after school reopened, when homework was over, I spent all of my leisure time on my journey. In about six months, I had plodded through the entire Bible and all the lands described in it.

Sitting in a chair, I went to Egypt where the Israelites were enslaved. I entered the Promised Land and saw the fall of the walls of Jericho. I stood where David faced Goliath and took him down armed with the Name of the Lord. In Babylon, I was with Daniel in the lions' den. Then I was in Bethlehem at the birth of Christ

and later, watched Him perform miracles in Judea and Galilee. After that there was the moving story of His death by crucifixion, and the wonderful resurrection that followed. As I read on, I came to the second account of crucifixion and resurrection, and then another story of the birth of Jesus, followed by another crucifixion and resurrection story and then there was one more. In all, there were four crucifixion and resurrections stories. Since I was reading it like a story book, my conclusion as an eight-year old was that Jesus was born four times, and was crucified and rose from the dead four times. I didn't think there was a problem with my view of what had happened to Jesus. It was all there in the Bible. By reading the Bible, I travelled everywhere witnessing historical events as they happened.

There were hard and boring passages too. But that was okay, because I was determined to read it all. It was God's story book, and I was committed to read everything from the first to the last page, just like I had done with other story books. It was a

memorable journey. That first reading gave me a good grasp of all the stories in the Bible.

No Holy Land

To tell you the truth, I have never felt a need to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The reason for that is that I read no such requirement in the Bible. Having gone to a few places abroad, if the Lord wills, I would certainly like to go to Israel and see the places of historical interest. I would also like to visit the countries where the Reformation was birthed. But going to Israel and these other places is not on my bucket list. If it doesn't happen, I wouldn't feel unfulfilled or heartbroken.

If the Lord enables you to visit the Holy Land, good for you. But if it doesn't happen, you would not be falling short in your spiritual life because Christians don't actually have holy places. You see, God is not native to Israel. He is the Lord of the whole world. God said, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool" (Isa. 66:1). The entire earth is holy. God's Word says, "The God who made

the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands" (Acts 17:24). In other words, there really are no holy places on earth. There is no Holy Land rendering all other lands unholy. Uganda is just as much holy as Israel. Calcutta is just as much a holy city as Jerusalem. Africa, America, Australia, China and India are as much God's lands as Israel.

Jesus did not take His disciples on pilgrimages to Bethlehem, His birthplace. The Apostles did not ask new believers to trek to Calvary to demonstrate their commitment to the Crucified Saviour, nor visit the tomb where His body lay to prove that they believed in His Resurrection. Muslims are urged to go on hajj and Hindus earn merit through pilgrimages. But there is no such obligatory requirement for Christians because God has not reserved any holy places for them.

God's Heartland

God is stateless. "He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did

not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him" (Jn. 1:10-11). Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now, my kingdom is from another place" (18:36). He said that His kingdom was in the hearts of people, not in this or that location. The holy land that God wants is your heart. That is why Jesus stands at the door of every heart to seek admission and start a companionship of faith: "Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

The Bible is sufficient for the people of God to be trained in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17). It is the Christian's rule of faith. With the Bible in hand, we can travel to places that are connected to what God has done among people on earth. No passports or visas needed. No travel and hotel costs. All you need is a quiet place to get alone with God. When you read His Word, as His Word, God will talk to you. Don't

be in a hurry to talk back and place your demands. Let Him do the talking. Aim to finish the journey in one year. Four chapters a day will get you through the entire Bible in one year. If you read four chapters a day starting on January 1st, you would finish the entire Bible by October. This means that if you are unable to read the required four chapters on some days, you would still be able to finish in a year. Or, you could download a one year Bible reading plan https://calvarysac.org/images/docs/reading_plans/straightthrough.pdf. The site <https://www.bible.com/> has several reading plans: <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans-collection/11477-whole-bible-badge>

If you are an English reader, another way to read the Bible in one year is to get a One Year Bible. There are One Year Bibles available in NIV, NLT, ESV and probably other versions too. There are also editions of a One Year Chronological Bible that synchronises Old Testament history with the psalms and prophets of particular periods,

and Acts with the epistles. A One Year Bible that has been published just recently is the Daily Reader's Bible. Its description says "rather than providing a canonical progression through the Old Testament, the New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs, each day's reading includes three passages one selected from the Stories of the Bible, another from the Teachings of the Bible, and the final passage selected from the Wisdom of the Bible. The three readings for each day flow from the day's theme. This thematic approach to devotional Bible reading helps the reader understand how all the genres of Scripture fit together to convey God's truth."

Lots of moderns have given up the devotional habits of their upbringing. There was a time when people reached for their Bibles first. Nowadays, the first thing a lot of people do is to check their phones and/or tablets for messages, emails, and social media posts. Engrossed in them, they lose track of time and then, they are in a rush to get to school/college or work. They

resolve to get to reading the Bible later on, maybe at the end of the day. But once they are back from whatever preoccupied them in terms of studies or work, once again their curiosity about electronic messages and posts on social media platforms takes over and they get lost in their phones and gadgets.

It is time to get back to systematically reading the Bible. The advantage of having a plan like reading the Bible in its entirety is that we will not pick only passages that are part of our comfort zone: stories of Bible heroes, psalms that encourage, wise proverbs, gospel stories, leaving out all the passages that teach God's commandments, the voices of prophets calling people back to God, the hard sayings of Jesus, and the epistles that emphasise doctrinal truths. Christians need to be people who listen to the voice of God and sense the promptings of the Holy Spirit. There is just one way to achieve that: read the Bible consistently and regularly – like being on a diet, a diet of wholeness.

The Bible is God's instruction manual for humans to know how to live lives that please Him. When we don't read the Bible, we just don't know how to conduct ourselves in life. Without checking the guide map, we have been given for our life's journey, we blunder and flounder, and lose our way in the world.

Like the prodigal son, we have ended up in the far country. We are feeding on pigs' food. It is time to come to our senses and say, "I will go back to my Father's house. I am not worthy. But I can go back and be a servant." But when we go back, we are restored to being God's children and our Heavenly Father throws a party to celebrate our return.



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When the New Year doesn't look New

Dr. Shantanu Dutta

Nations use different calendars, but the passing of one year to the next is universally marked by a deliberate period of reflection concerning the year that has passed by and a pledge to begin anew, to change, in the year to come. I suppose that this is because we all hunger to be made new and, intuitively, we all know that means we must change within if we want to experience change around us. The celebrations are obviously staggered around the globe due to the different time zones, but we all have this in common, no matter where we live geographically. The manner of celebrating again may differ, but we also share a common hope, that we can begin again. In India with our regional diversity and

calendars, the New Year that begins on January 1 is not the only one there is. There are many variants of the Indian New Year, mostly beginning in Spring and centering around the harvest. In fact, outside urban India, these regional observances of New Year will be more observed. Be as it may, the aim and purpose remain the same. The New Year is always a celebration.

Beneath the gaiety and laughter though, there is often a feeling that January 1 'merely means that unrolling a new calendar on the wall ; beyond that nothing has really changed'. If anything, New Year in many parts of the world comes in the season of dark, cold, bleak midwinter, and this

only makes the emptiness worse, the depression deeper. Many of us feel personal pains or anxieties at this time. Some of us wrestle with important decisions regarding a relationship or a task to be done; some will know firsthand the powerful effects of a worrying disease or other health issues in the coming months; some with a major loss; some wonder if we can make it in the coming year. Some of us will feel very lonely, in spite of people all around us; some of us will fear growing older, or fret about what the future may hold; wonder if dreams will ever be realised, or whether the new year will be even more frustrating and filled with more feelings of futility than the last.

When we feel this way, the temptation is to stay with the familiar and the comfortable. The temptation is to stay where we are – in the dark crevices of depression or defeat, of fear or foreboding, in the deep ruts of sameness, boredom, or lethargy. Fear, by whatever name we call it, can prevent us from doing so much. Cautiously, timidly, tremblingly, we have to learn to venture forth upon God's promises, as though the

lightness of our step might make the promises more secure, yet at the same time, we doubt that they are true. God has promised to be with us, but every day we need to learn to believe this promise.

Each of us has a new road ahead of us in the new year. It will be another road, a different road than any we've traveled on before. As we step down that road, not knowing what we may find, not knowing exactly where we're going, we can be comforted in knowing that for sure, the light goes with us, leading us, guiding us, showing us the way. God will be with us on our journeys down that new road ahead. Even now God is calling to each of us, whoever we are, whatever our circumstance, calling us to get up off our hands and knees, to stop creeping, and rise and shine, and continue on the journey, giving God our praise, and sharing the Good News with others along the way.

Some of us may be thinking, "Well that's fine for the younger folks, but I'm too old to be thinking about starting off on any new roads. It may be more difficult to imagine such grace and newness when we are well beyond that

time of life, when the future is no longer so open or full of promise as it once seemed. All the more reason then to receive the gift of this part of the story, the promise of grace and new life, not only for the young, but for no-longer-young [as well]. Grace happens, surprise and new life can come, no matter what our age. We need to look, no, I need to look today for the surprise of God's grace in my life, and you need to look in yours.

The New Year is ripe with anticipation and expectations. It invites a spiritually cathartic time of reflection, offers us hope for change and invites us to make new choices. Resolutions can become reality, when we turn to the One who makes it possible,

the One who truly makes all things new, Jesus Christ the Lord.



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LESS KNOWN PEOPLE OF THE CHRISTMAS STORY AND THE HOPE THEY HAD.

Dr. Sanjay Avinash Mall

The Christmas story is full of people who had a close walk with God. They were devout and feared God. We know that Mary and Joseph were God fearing people. Elizabeth and Zechariah were God fearing people whose prayer was heard by God. The Wisemen came from far and worshipped Jesus before giving Him their gifts.

There are two God fearing people who are mentioned in the Gospel of Luke. They are as follows:

1. Simeon
2. Anna.

We read that the Holy Spirit of God was associated with Simeon in three ways. In Luke 2:25 it is written that the Spirit of God was

upon him. The spirit rested on him. In a way, the Holy Spirit covered Simeon. In v26, it is mentioned that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the LORD'S Christ. This shows that Simeon was in very close communion with God as God reveals Himself to people who are close to Him.

Simeon was a man led by the Spirit of God. There were no communication facilities in those days where by people could inform someone of their arrival. Simeon was informed and led by the Spirit that Mary and Joseph had brought in the baby Jesus for presenting Him in the temple. Thus, Simeon went to meet them.

In v 29, Simeon asks God to relieve him of his earthly and priestly duties according to His promise. Thus, it is now confirmed that Simeon had a very close walk with God. The walk was so close that God had told him that he would not die till he had seen God's only begotten Son. Jesus only would bring Salvation to the world. Thus, we see that our God reveals Himself to people He chooses. He is also a promise keeping God as mentioned by Simeon. Our God is also a secret keeping God. The things that He reveals to His children belong to them forever. God chose to reveal Himself to Simeon. He chose to reveal Himself to the Magi who saw His Star in the East and travelled thousands of kilometres to worship Him. In the continuing verses 34-35, Simeon also mentions the kind of life Jesus would lead and of His ultimate journey to the cross at Calvary. According to Simeon, Jesus would be the light to bring the revelation of God to the Gentiles. He was the hope of the world. He would continue to be the Hope for a broken world.

Anna was a widow who had spent her time fasting and praying in the temple. Her widowhood had not made her bitter towards life. She spent her time praying and praising God in the temple. On reaching the temple, she too thanked God for Jesus and told others about Him.

Thus, we see that these two old people had also been waiting for the birth of the Messiah. They were people of prayer and so, God communicated with them. They would have also witnessed the cruelty of the Roman government of those days. However, they remained in close communion with God and were very hopeful of the arrival of the Messiah.

During December, we are all extremely busy celebrating Christmas. In January, as we recover from the celebration, we find that all the joy and excitement has disappeared. The New Year looms large ahead of us. It is then that all sorts of doubts start coming into our minds as to what the year will hold for us.

Where are we during this time

when the country is going through troubled times. We have witnessed how the social and moral fabric of the country has changed almost irreversibly in the last seven years. The pandemic which has wreaked havoc in the lives of the people in our country and all over the world is still around. With the emergence of the Omicron, we do not know what the New Year will hold for us.

How faithful have we been in our relationship with God, is something that we need to reflect on as the year comes to a close. Have we spent enough time in prayer thanking God for His mercies? As a community of faith, have we prayed for God to change things in our country? Have we gone back to our respective churches once they reopened? I feel that attending online church service through Facebook has been taken too far. While it has ministered to the spiritual needs of the people, it has also contributed to the absence of people in the pews. No wonder, we are going through a very hopeless situation.

In the gospel of Luke, we read

that both Simeon and Anna were looking forward to the consolation of Israel. As the people of God, are we looking forward to better conditions of our country ushered in by God? We should not be overwhelmed with the ostentatious display of power, belligerence and extravaganza which we have been witnessing all around us. If we want that change to take place, are we praying for it. Or have we become hopeless. Simeon and Anna did not stop praying and saw that Fountain in their day.

Let us come together and pray for God's mercies on our country. Our God is a God of Hope and with Him we cannot be disappointed.



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INAUGURATION OF NEW HUMANITY

Rev. Dr. Samuel Richmond Saxena



We live in a broken world that is surrounded by uncertainties. With the coming of the Omicron virus (a variant of COVID19), the world is still gripped with fear and anxiety. Families who lost their loved ones in 2021 due to COVID19 are having some horrific memories as they enter in New Year. The dramatic loss of human life due to COVID19 brought enormous stress to our people. Financial crises, unemployment, work pressure, extreme poverty are the result of the ongoing pandemic. Physical distancing has created social distancing among the people. Paradoxically, the persecution against Christians in India and other countries have increased at

a high pace. Injustices, inequality, hatred, violence, atrocities towards the poor, the marginalized and the women have been increased. Despite having several educational institutions, the morals and values in society are declining. Although the advancements in technology have given us comfort, at the same time it has forced people to depend on materialistic things. The spirit of discontentment is prevailing among youths. Many are worried about what will happen next?

During the early days of the late World War, a group of Christian students were led by one of the great "liberal" Rabbis in America.

The Rabbi had been asked to speak on the subject of the atrocities which his people were at that moment experiencing in Germany at the hands of their Nazi oppressors. But he never touched the subject, rather, he was consumed his allotted time on the topic—"The Three Things Our World Needs."

1. First, "the critical mind" – Where we may analyse the situation with the help of the freedom of expression.
2. Secondly, "the merciful heart" – Where we may care and serve others – Paganism is as cold as steel and it robs individuals rights.
3. Thirdly, "the optimistic outlook"- Where we may progress together

From Old to New

The Word of God has a wonderful hope for those who are suffering and lost their view about God and life. God invites us to be part of the New Humanity which He inaugurated two thousand years ago by sending His Son Jesus Christ into this world. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me,

all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." This verse gives assurance of comfort to those who are living in disappointment, grief, alienation, fear and insecurity. Christ liberates humanity from all kinds of discrimination. By creating New Humanity, He destroys the wall of hostility so that people may live in peace and harmony and become one. . Dr. Thomas L. Constable quotes Chrysostom's illustration of the two becoming one "Let us imagine that there are two statues, one of silver and the other of lead, and then that both shall be melted down, and the two shall come out gold. So, thus He has made the two one." "Not only the human race but the whole creation finds peace and comfort in the presence of Lord Jesus Christ who is the 'Prince of Peace.'

St. Paul in Ephesians 2, verse 15 mentions the 'New Humanity' in Christ. It is amazing to know that through the birth, the death and the resurrection of Lord Jesus Christ, a New Humanity is formed. I'm sure that the idea of

New Humanity was there in the mind of God before the foundation of the earth was laid. Probably due to this reason, God created Adam and Eve so that He may have an ideal relationship with them. Alas! It didn't work as God intended and one day they had to leave the Garden of Eden. After the fall of creation, God planned to restore His creation. When God called Abraham and promised him that all peoples on earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3; 26:4; 28:14), it reflected God's salvific plan for His creation with a vision of creating 'New Humanity.' Sometimes I wonder how could Jews missed these promises in the Old Testament where God's concern for the gentiles and the rest of the creation is beautifully reflected. Despite being a Pharisee, Paul was not ashamed to proclaim the integration of the Jews and the gentiles in this New Humanity. For him, in this New Humanity there is neither 'Jew or Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor there male and female' for we all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). Interestingly, in New Humanity we not only connect with the Abrahamic

covenant but also become part of the promised New Covenant through Jesus Christ.

From Sin to Grace

In New Humanity, the wall of sin that existed between God and humans was broken. Before the incarnation, the view of God was very different. Some believed that God was far from a human approach and through great efforts one could reach Him. Through rituals and good works, they tried to please and reach God without realizing that sin is the biggest hindrance between them and God. God in the Old Testament is usually picturised as an angry God by many preachers and is ready to punish those who sin. But thanks be to God for His grace that brought redemption to whole humanity from their sins and gave a real picture of God. God in Jesus Christ became so close to us that no one could ever imagine. "Immanuel"—one of the names given to Jesus—means "God with us", brought a paradigm shift from 'God of Law' to 'God of Grace.' In New Humanity,

believers discovered that God is for them and not against them. He is on our side and desires good for us and not evil. The grace of God helps the believers to find the love of God. By the blood of Christ, we are brought near to God (Eph. 2:13). Sadly, some believers fail to understand the plan of God. They believe in Jesus Christ but they don't know what it means to be part of the family of God. For them, God has not forgiven their sins, they are still under the law and the idea of grace is beyond comprehension. Such people lean on their understanding rather than depending upon God. It is important to share God's grace with these people so that they may be able to get rid of the guilt of sin and have close communion with God. It is by His grace only that we are drawn closer to Him and enjoy all spiritual blessings. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. In him, we find real satisfaction. According to Thomas a Kempis, "Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou must follow; the

truth which thou must believe; the life for which thou must hope."

From Division to Unity

In New Humanity, the wall between Jews and non-Jews is broken. God treats everyone equally. Interestingly, by having faith in Jesus Christ we become the children of God. Jesus was indeed born as a Jew but His sacrifice on the cross is for the redemption of the whole creation. Matthew begins his first chapter with genealogy where he shows the connection of Jesus with Abraham and David. In New Humanity, God identifies Himself with humans and the rest of the creation by giving us a new identity. Further, Matthew includes females in the genealogy which is quite surprising. The four different women in Jesus' genealogy not only represent the gentile community, but three of them (except Ruth) had rough sexual pasts. Of these four, two (Tamar and Rahab) were Canaanites, one (Ruth) a Moabite, and one (Bathsheba) presumably a Hittite. Surely, they exemplify the

principle of the sovereign grace of God. Some scholars feel that the four women from the Old Testament constitute some preparation for the role of Mary, and yet Mary was not a foreigner. In Matthew's genealogy, one could easily see the place of gentiles in the Kingdom of God because of the coming of the Messiah. Jesus on different occasions admired the faith of the gentiles (Syrophenician woman and the Centurion) in the New Testament. He commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creatures.

The manger scene reflects the beautiful picture of the Kingdom of God. In this picture, both the wise men (highly intellectual class people and non-Jews) and the shepherd community (illiterate and poor) worshipped the baby Jesus. Both the groups were equally treated. The gospel of Lord Jesus Christ is for all because Jesus is the Lord of all. Paul mentions in Eph. 1:13, that we were included in the family of God by hearing and believing the Word of truth, the gospel of our

salvation and were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit. We who were once outside the Abrahamic covenant have become part of God's family not by any good deeds but through faith. Through faith in Christ, we enter into God's family, and God becomes our Father and we are all treated equally in the house of God.

From Hatred to Love

The four gospels and the epistles elaborate on the universal character of Jesus' ministry and the Kingdom which is rooted in God's love. In the body of Christ, there is no difference because all the believers are one in Christ Jesus. God does not look at the members of Christ's body and see them as Jews or Gentiles. In New Humanity, hatred has no place because 'God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us' (Romans 5:5). According to the New Testament, a gap is considered to be the highest form of love. It is the sacrificial, unconditional love of God. The genuine love comes

from God and there is no fear. It is courageous, transparent, keeps no record, pure, is not puffed up, thinketh no evil, not irritable or is not easily provoked. It is through this love, we have attained salvation and eternal life and are still receiving all heavenly blessings in Jesus Christ. God's love brings peace where there is violence, joy in sadness, comfort in agony and suffering, hope in despair, light in the darkness. It is through God's love, believers grow and become mature. In New Humanity, we are called to demonstrate the love towards God and our neighbours.

Edward Irving (a Scottish clergyman) went to see a dying boy once, and when he entered the room he just put his hand on the sufferer's head, and said, "My boy, God loves you," and went away. And the boy started from his bed, and called out to the people in the house, "God loves me! God loves me!" It changed that boy. Henry Drummond writes, 'remember Jealousy, anger, pride, un charity, cruelty, self-righteousness, bad temper, doggedness, resentment—these

are the ingredients of this dark and loveless soul.' Since we are partners with the Spirit and live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). As long we will be close to God, His love will flow through our lives. The iron itself has no magnetic power of its own but when it is in constant touch with the magnet in due course of time it also becomes a magnet. It is charged with an attractive force in the mere presence of the original force.

In 1833, Charles Darwin went to the South Sea Islands looking for the so-called "missing link." As he studied the cannibals who lived there, he concluded that no creatures anywhere were more primitive, and he was convinced that nothing on earth could possibly lift them to a higher level. Probably, he had no idea about God's love. He thought he had indeed found a lower stratum of humanity that would fit his theory of evolution. Thirty-four years later, he returned to the same islands. To his amazement, he discovered churches, schools, and homes occupied by some of those former cannibals. In fact,

many of them wore clothes and frequently gathered to sing hymns. The reason was soon learned: Missionary John G. Paton had been there proclaiming the truths of salvation! Darwin was so moved by their transformation that he made a generous contribution to the London Missionary Society. Darwin's "missing link" thus remained missing. It was because of the love of God that was demonstrated by Rev. John Paton which brought transformation in the lives of these people. Unfortunately, Darwin failed to reflect God's love to these people, instead, he landed up in giving the most controversial scientific theory of evolution which is known as Darwinism.

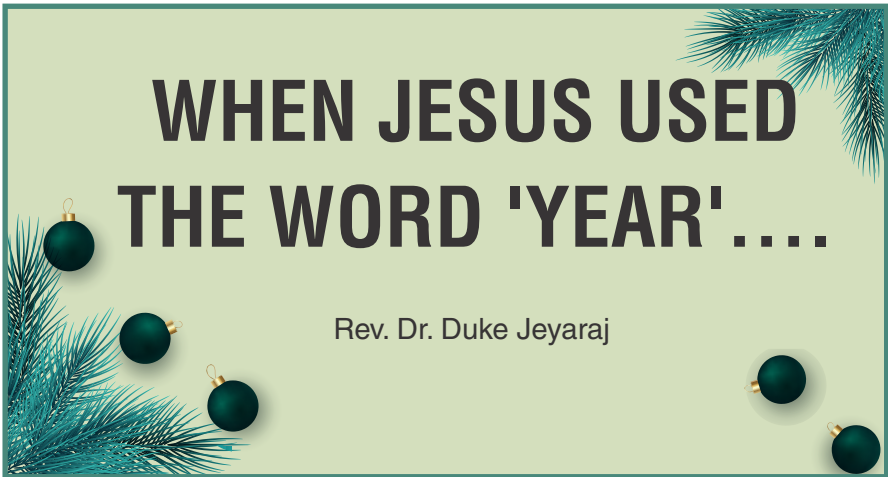
Colossians 1:21-22 says, "you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him." In Greek, "reconcile", means "to be restored to the favour of God" or "to recover God's favour." It is

only because of God's love that we can return to His fold like those cannibals. Only through God's mercy, love and grace we are always protected. The act of repair is already done by God the Father in Jesus Christ on the cross of calvary and by the power of the Holy Spirit which restore and heal the relationship. We are no longer strangers, foreigners but fellow citizens with God's people – Cornerstone is Jesus Christ.



Rev. Dr. Samuel Richmond Saxena

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WHEN JESUS USED THE WORD 'YEAR'

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

A New Year Meditation

Jesus used the word “Year” twice during his earthly ministry.

In a synagogue in Nazareth, he read from the scroll of the book of Isaiah this: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18-19). He particularly chose this passage to read from the Scroll (Luke 4:17).

Jesus' point was this: During his first coming, he came to announce the period of God's favor; at that time, everyone has the opportunity to turn from sin

and trust him as Savior. But when he comes back the second time, he will come as a judge. The writer to the Hebrews explains this further. She writes (I think it is Pricilla): so, Christ was sacrificed once **to take away** the **sins** of many; and he will appear a second time, **not to bear sin**, but **to** bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Heb. 9:28). While Jesus would bring Salvation to those who are waiting for him, he will also bring judgement resulting in Hell for those who spurn 'the year of God's Favor' – the time between his first coming and second coming!

So, let us use the New Year that God has graciously added to our lives to proclaim the year of God's Favor! How do we do that? We do

that by proclaiming Jesus through our life and lips to as many as possible! We do that by building God's Kingdom using our time, talent and treasures! We must also clearly mention that this 'year of God's favor' can come to an end the second Jesus returns to the earth. And the New Testament is clear that Jesus can return any time. It is there in Matthew's Gospel: **'So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him'** (Matt. 24:44). This truth is so important that it is repeated. See Matthew 25:13: 'Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour'. The 'thief in the night' imagery is used by both Paul, Peter, and John to underscore this truth yet again (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 16:15).

We must also take time to mention that the year of God's favor will come to an end if someone dies outside of an ongoing relationship with Jesus. This is so, because there is no salvation after one's death. After death, there is only judgment to look forward to (Heb. 9:27). Also, after death and after the commencement of eternal punishment in the hell, there is no change to cross-over from hell to

heaven. Jesus himself mentions this in an incident he narrates in Luke's gospel where we read, 'And besides all this, a great chasm has been fixed between us and you, so that even those who wish cannot cross from here to you, nor can anyone cross from there to us' (Luke 16:26, the words of heaven-dwelling Abraham to hell-dwelling Rich Man).

So, this understanding – that the year of the Lord's favor can end any second – should motivate us to race to the lost with the Gospel this year!

So, make it a point to join your local church's evangelistic outreaches! Join hands with para-church organisations involved in direct evangelism activities like gospel tract distribution! That's one ministry we in Grabbing the Google Generation from Gehenna Mission (G4 Mission) do each month – the ministry of tracts distribution. We welcome you to join us if you happen to live in Chennai. If you live other cities, please reach out to us and we can supply with gospel tracts which will appeal to the Indian English reader, which we have published.

During your many travels this

year, share the Gospel with the person sitting next to you. I do that by showing the ESV phone app on my smart phone. I read Psalm 119:165 to the person sitting next to me in the flight, train or bus. And finish off with these words, “When I read this book – God’s Word in human words – I have ‘great peace’ which this verse talks about. You too can try it out!”

So, let this be a YEAR of FAVOR-PROCLAMATION.

There was yet another time, that Jesus used the word “Year” as he went about his earthly ministry. He did after talking about two disasters that took place during his time: a building crash that killed 18 people and the butchering done by an evil ruler who sought to mix human blood with his religious sacrifices (Luke 13:1-5). Jesus told this to the people who heard him this: “Just because that building did not fall on you, it does not mean you are better than those it fell on to take their lives! Just because the evil ruler did not kill you and mix your blood in the sacrifice he wanted to offer, it does not mean you are better than his targets. No way! Unless you repent, you too will perish!” (my paraphrase keeping the context in mind).

Let the Voice version of the Bible take over to explain to you what happened after this:

(Following up with this parable) A man has a fig tree planted in his vineyard. One day he comes out looking for fruit on it, but there are no figs. He says to the vineyard keeper, “Look at this tree. For three years, I’ve come hoping to find some fresh figs, but what do I find? Nothing. So, just go ahead and cut it down. Why waste the space with a fruitless tree?” The vineyard keeper replies, “Give it another chance, sir. Give me one more year working with it. I’ll cultivate the soil and heap on some manure to fertilize it. If it surprises us and bears fruit next year, that will be great, but if not, then we’ll cut it down.” (Luke 13:6-9, The Voice).

So, there you have it, the second time Jesus used the word ‘year’ from his mouth! He does so in the context of giving those of us still alive, a fresh opportunity to make up for the times who have goofed up and blown away opportunities to bear fruit for him! So, the new year should be a time of FRUIT-BEARING, and not just FAVOR-PROCLAMATION.

How do we bear Fruit?

For that, we need to send our roots far down below in Christ. Apostle Paul writes, 'Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude' (Col. 2:6-7).

We send our roots deeper into Christ by increasing our times of intimacy with him evidenced through prayer and Bible meditation this new year – thanks to our ever-growing love for him.

Recently, I discovered that the Bible can be divided into ten parts: Genesis through Deuteronomy are the Law Books. From Joshua till 2 Kings are the pre-exilic History books of the Bible. From 2 Chronicles to Esther are the post-exilic History Books of the Bible. From Job till Song of Songs are the Poetry Books of the Bible. From Isaiah to Daniel are the major prophetic books of the Bible. From Hosea to Malachi are the minor prophetic books of the Bible. From Matthew to Luke are the Gospels – we know that. The book of Acts is the lone New Testament History

book. From Romans to Revelations constitute the Letters or Epistles. Why not try and read one chapter each from each of these 10 different sections of the Bible? This way your Bible meditation time will have a 10-fold flavor and boredom will be blown away! We must read from every section of the Bible regularly because “ALL” Scripture is God-breathed and is useful (2 Tim. 3:16).

So, have a blessed New Year of Favor-Proclamation and Fruit-Bearing!



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For two years, the whole world has been in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, and just when everyone thought that the end was in sight, another variant has rewritten the world's timetable. It is estimated that the pandemic will now continue to hold sway till the middle of 2022. That is the optimistic view, however there's no guarantee.

The irony is that this is happening when science and technology are at the zenith of all human achievements. So here, we are at the beginning of another new year. Everyone is hoping it will be totally and truly new and not at all like the past two years. We hope that we can cast aside all the fears that have plagued us.

God Knows

The best most can say is, "Who knows?" Though it is rhetorical, there is an answer to that question: God knows. That was the title Minnie Louise Haskins gave to a poem she wrote in 1908. She was born in 1875 and came to Madras in 1907 with the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to work with women. To raise funds for the work, Haskins published a small volume of poetry *The Desert*, which including her poem "God Knows". The poem would have remained largely unknown, except that King George VI quoted it in his 1939 Christmas broadcast. In September that year, the Second World War

had started and it brought the fearful memories of the earlier world war. Not knowing how long the war would last, the king turned the attention of his people toward God by reading the poem by Haskins:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown".
And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way".
So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.
And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

*So, heart be still:
What need our little life
Our human life to know,
If God hath comprehension?
In all the dizzy strife
Of things both high and low,
God hideth His intention.*

*God knows. His will
Is best. The stretch of years
Which wind ahead, so dim
To our imperfect vision,
Are clear to God. Our fears
Are premature; In Him,
All time hath full provision.*

*Then rest: until
God moves to lift the veil
From our impatient eyes,
When, as the sweeter features
Of Life's stern face we hail,
Fair beyond all surmise
God's thought around His creatures
Our mind shall fill.*

Modern Mantra

However, God-talk doesn't sit well with moderns. In spite of the ravages of the pandemic and other deadly diseases, authoritarianism, tyranny, ethnic cleansing, genocide, exploitation, oppression, flesh

trade, human trafficking, sexual abuse of the young still existing everywhere, humans think that all that is needed to improve things is a positive attitude. "Yes, we can," is the new mantra.

There is no doubt that our world is a broken one. How fractured it is, can be seen in the fact that there is strong reason to suspect that the pandemic was deliberately started by one nation's pursuit of economic advantage. Of course, most won't accept the fact of the world's brokenness.

God had declared that the entry of sin had broken the world and that it has been in a downward spiral from the time of the Fall. God had cursed humankind so that idyllic conditions would be gone and life on planet earth would be thorny (Gen. 3:17-18). However, every generation has gone ahead thinking that it was going to fix the broken world without any help from the Creator or paying attention to the manufacturer's manual for how things ought to work.

Most of the peoples of the world believe in God and largely their philosophy has been "God helps those who help themselves".

Even Christians have this philosophy on their minds. Some imagine that it is a paraphrase of some scriptural watchword or wise counsel. It's not. The idea originates in ancient Greek thought. Sophocles (c. 409 BC) wrote, "No good e'er comes of leisure purposeless; And heaven ne'er helps the men who will not act." Similarly, Euripides (c. 428 BC) wrote, "Try first thyself, and after call in God; For to the worker God himself lends aid." Ovid (c. 43) said it differently, "God himself helps those who dare," or "divinity helps those who dare". The familiar, "God helps those who help themselves", comes to us from Algernon Sidney, an English politician (1623-83).

While there is a reference to God in the saying, it is actually quite casual. The operative part of the slogan is the emphasis on helping ourselves. We have to get up and do something. We cannot take things for granted or take them lying down. The general attitude is that of

activism. The science and technology generation was gung-ho about finding solutions and fixing every known problem, has been brought to a screeching halt and what a screech it has been.

Not Leaning on Yourself

This philosophy of finding answers within ourselves goes against the Bible's message that it is only in God that we will find wisdom for living.

The book of Proverbs says emphatically,

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction (Pro. 1:7).

The fear of God is the basis of all the advice given in the book. It tells us,
Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding (3:5).

Hebrew poetry doesn't have rhyming lines, but parallel thoughts. So, the idea conveyed is that when we put our trust in the Lord, we just cannot lean on our own understanding. Think of it: can a person lean on oneself?

David was one who learned to trust in the Lord as a young shepherd boy. He fought off lions and bears to save the sheep in his charge. When grown men and soldiers were running scared, he faced a giant and conquered him in the name of the Lord. Sometime later, he wrote the following psalm about trusting the Lord who was in covenant with him. The relationship was a two-way street: the Lord had chosen him, and he responded with faithfulness. He offered right sacrifices which were his brokenness of heart, not claims of self-righteousness (51:16-17), and he experienced joy and peace in the safety God gives him:

But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him...

Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD...

You have put gladness in my heart
more than when their grain and wine abound.

I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.

(Ps. 4: 3, 5, 7-8, NRSV)

David was assured that God grants the heart's desires of those who thrill in their relationship with God:

Trust in the LORD and do good;
 dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
Take delight in the LORD,
 and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD;
 trust in him and he will do this (37:3-5)

God Rules

When we were in Sunday School, there was a chorus that we used to sing. It was not the most popular one, because the tune wasn't catchy. But now that I am older, I've learnt to appreciate its significance and it has become a favourite of mine. I fall back on it again and again as though it were a creed to confess and affirm all the time:

*God is still on the throne,
And He will remember His own;
Tho' trials may press us and burdens distress us,
He never will leave us alone;
God is still on the throne,
He never forsaketh His own;
His promise is true, He will not forget you,
God is still on the throne*

It was written by Kittie L Suffield (1884–1972). There are four verses to which the above words are the refrain. The second and fourth verses are relevant to our time:

Burdened soul, is your heart growing weary
With the toil and the heat of the day?
Does it seem that your path is more thorny
As you journey along on life's way?
Go away and in secret before Him
Tell your grief to the Savior alone;
He will lighten your care,
For He still answers prayer;
God is still on the throne.

He is coming again, is the promise
To disciples when He went away;
In like manner as He has gone from you,

You will see Him returning some day;
Does His tarrying cause you to wonder,
Does it seem He's forgotten His own?
His promise is true, He is coming for you;
God is still on the throne.

No, we can't fix 2022 so that it will turn out better than 2020 and 2021. And no, God doesn't need our help at all. We won't know how it's all going to turn out. Maybe, the medical scientists have got it right and the pandemic will go away by midyear. And maybe, they haven't got it right and we will have another year like the last two. Like these old saints Minnie Haskins and Kittie Suffield say, "God knows" and "God is still on the throne". That being so, we can rest easy in trust and hope – no matter what.

Singing We Go

Where there is hope, there will be rejoicing and singing. Circumstances and situations don't matter. One old prophet said that in spite of experiencing deprivation he would rejoice in the Lord because of God's sovereignty over His life giving him strength to climb upwards:

Though the fig-tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
Though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the sheepfold
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.
The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
He enables me to tread on the heights (Hab. 3:17-19).

When Paul and Silas found themselves imprisoned after a severe flogging, instead of being miserable and feeling sorry for themselves, they sang praises to the Lord. The earth shook and prison doors flew open. That happened in Philippi. Much later, Paul wrote a letter to the church there and said, "Rejoice in the Lord and again I say, rejoice"

(Phil. 4:4). The church paid attention because they had been witnesses to Paul's exuberance in the face of adversity and hardship.

Annie Johnson Flint (1866-1932) was one who stood in line with saints who suffered pain in life, but lived triumphantly. She was orphaned early in life, but did find the love of adoptive parents a few years later. When she embarked on a career of teaching, she had to give it up very soon because of severe arthritis making it impossible to walk. Soon afterwards, her adoptive parents died, her health deteriorated rapidly and she became a total invalid who needed others to help her. The following, probably her best-known song, is a testimony to her courageous faith:

God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

God hath not promised we shall not know
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden, many a care.

God hath not promised smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain, rocky and steep,
Never a river, turbid and deep.

*But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.*

More recently, Eugene Clark gave us the song "Nothing is Impossible". Once an accomplished pianist, he had crippling arthritis and was also totally blind. But neither the arthritis nor the blindness conquered his mind. With the help of a Dictaphone, he laboriously produced the song which has the triumphant refrain:

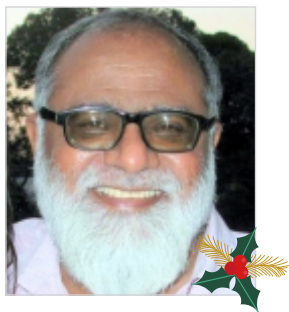
Nothing is impossible when you put your trust in God;
Nothing is impossible when you're trusting in His Word.

Hearken to the voice of God to thee: "Is there anything too hard for Me?
Then put your trust in God alone and rest upon His Word;
For ev'rything, oh ev'rything, yes ev'rything is possible with God!

As the prophet Isaiah said,
But the people who trust the LORD will become strong again.
They will rise up as an eagle in the sky;
they will run and not need rest;
they will walk and not become tired. (Isa. 40:31, NCV)

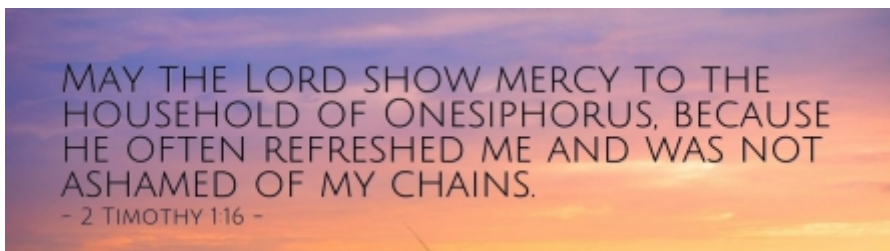
So, in 2022 we can go singing along life's road:
*Singing, I go along life's road,
Praising the Lord, praising the Lord;
Singing, I go along life's road,
For Jesus has lifted my load.*

When to the throne of grace I flee,
I find the promise true,
The mighty arms upholding me
Will bear my burdens too (Eliza E. Hewitt, 1898).



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Intercessory *Prayer* Points



January 2022

1 SATURDAY Thank God for the New Year 2022. Pray that this year would bring blessings, good health and lots of opportunity for growth, both physically and spiritually.

2 SUNDAY Continue to Pray for Covid-19 disease to stop spreading further. Pray for families who have lost their loved ones to start the year by holding on to God as their shield and protection. Pray that God may heal their wounded hearts with His unfailing love.

3 MONDAY Pray for Fusion Church (Jan Milaap Samiti), New Delhi. Pray that God would use this Church to reach out to many unreached and bring them into His fold.

4 TUESDAY Pray for all the schools in your neighborhood. Pray that they would be a place where our children are safe, taught, loved and developed as good human beings.

5 WEDNESDAY Pray for the

homeless who are under the extreme weather. Pray that doors may be opened for them for shelter and food. Pray that God's people would go extra mile to meet their needs.

6 THURSDAY Continue to pray for those who are suffering because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that God may work in their circumstances and as they wait for God's deliverance, they may learn to trust God and wait for His timings and plans.

7 FRIDAY Pray for children who are under the stress of exams. Pray that they would do their best and trust God for the outcome. Pray for good health, clarity in thoughts, good retention power and deep understanding of their subjects. Most of all, pray that they may be hopeful and joyful.

8 SATURDAY Pray for your family today. Pray that God who established family in the beginning,

would continue to strengthen and sustain family relationships.

9 SUNDAY Pray for all the Church leaders in our country. Pray that they would love the Lord with all their hearts, minds and strength. Pray that they would handle the word of God correctly and teach diligently. Thank God for His presence and guidance throughout the month.

10 MONDAY Pray for Christian Education department of EFI (CEEFI). Pray that many more churches would use the curriculum that they have designed and benefit greatly from it. Pray for new creative ideas to make learning God's Word interesting and effective.

11 TUESDAY Pray for Blood of Jesus International, Odisha. Pray that their ministry through printed media would bring many to faith in Christ. Pray that God would continually use them to be the voice for believers.

12 WEDNESDAY National Youth Day. Pray that the youth of our country may know and honor God in the height of their youth. May God give them the desires of their hearts that would bring glory to Him and joy to them. Continue to pray for them that God's Word would be their guiding light.

13 THURSDAY Pray for God's

people to have courage and strength to save many dying souls.

14 FRIDAY Army Forces Veteran Day. Pray for all Indian Army families. Thank God for their sacrificial love and services for the country. Pray for protection and God's abundant blessings upon them and their families.

15 SATURDAY Pray for the Churches in India to continually seek the Lord and His ways despite many challenges.

16 SUNDAY Pray that your Church worship today would bring glory to God and deep satisfaction to all the worshippers. May Jesus be lifted high above all.

17 MONDAY Pray for Episcopal Church in India Council, Madhya Pradesh. Pray that God would use them as a channel of His blessings to the people of Madhya Pradesh and beyond.

18 TUESDAY Pray for your city today. Pray that God would raise more prayer warriors to intercede for the city. May the Holy Spirit actively work in the hearts and minds of His people in your city to obey His commands.

19 WEDNESDAY Pray that God would eradicate Biblical illiteracy among His people. Pray that God would use you as His agent to fulfill

that goal. Let the whole world be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

20 THURSDAY Pray for Evangelical Fellowship of India to serve God with fresh energy and strength. May God equip, strengthen and use EFI to be a channel of blessings to the churches in India and the world.

21 FRIDAY Pray for those who are under the bondage of sin. Pray that God would enable them to have a breakthrough this new year so that they would live a victorious godly life.

22 SATURDAY Let us pray for ourselves again today that God would enable us to keep our self aside and be a friend, a helper and a counsellor to someone whose life is broken.

23 SUNDAY Pray for all the missionaries who are working relentlessly. Pray that God may comfort and rejuvenate them and bless the works of their hands.

24 MONDAY National Girl Child Day. Pray for all the children in your church and your neighbourhood that they would enjoy equal rights.

25 TUESDAY Pray for the God's servants that they may be strengthened to follow the God whom they served faithfully.

26 WEDNESDAY Republic Day. Pray for safety and protection as India celebrates the 73rd Republic Day today. Continue to pray for all the political leaders in your respective states. Pray that they would bring changes in their sphere of influence. Pray they would love the people and would fulfill the purpose that they were elected for.

27 THURSDAY Continue to pray for our nation persistently. Pray that all in the leadership position would be a faithful and caring guardian of the constitution.

28 FRIDAY Pray for the ministry of Heavenly Feast in Kerala. Pray that the members of this church would grow and mature in Christ and as a result serve God and His people without reservation.

29 SATURDAY Pray for your neighbours today that you may love them as yourself. Pray for safety and protection of your neighbourhood.

30 SUNDAY Pray for your children today that they would have saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and would be led by His Spirit.

31 MONDAY Thank God for the meaningful month. Pray that He would lead you to the next month by His mercies that is new every day.

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EFI wishes you and
your family a

Happy New Year



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