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A Journey of Faith

*But God showed His great love for us
by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.
Romans 5:8*



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A Journey of Faith contents

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Editorial

Rev. Vijayesh Lal04

Love One Another

Rev. Dr. David Mende09

To love God and to be loved by God - Valentines day special

Tejaswi Ravinder14

When God Is Good Why...?

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy19

The Joy of Togetherness

Rev. Dr. Samuel Richmond Saxena27

Why can't God heal the world of the corona pandemic instantly?

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj35

Covid Vaccines - Overcoming the Resistance

Dr. Shantanu Dutta39

Unconstitutional Laws

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy43

Prayer

.....55

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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal



Not very social media

Elections are at the root of the thriving democracy in India. There is an election in some state or the other every year, it seems, and of course, there are the general elections every five years, the next scheduled for 2024.

The next six weeks or so will see elections to the state legislative assemblies of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Uttarakhand, all in north India, Manipur in the Northeast, and Goa on the western coast. The rich variety of these regions would anyway have made for memorable and colourful election campaigns. But when Uttar Pradesh is in the mix, one can expect a high-octane politics that comes very close to the all-consuming drama, acrimony,

confrontation, and passion of a general election.

Uttar Pradesh is the biggest, the most populous and the most politically complex, if not fissiparous, state. At stake is not only the colour and composition of the new legislature and the state government, the fortunes of some of the most powerful and important personalities in Indian politics of the present, but indirectly also the contours of national governance.

Political parties were therefore planning massive campaigns, leaving little to chance. The new wave of covid, under a new name, has thrown a wet blanket on the campaign plans.

The Election Commission of India has banned road shows, pad-yatras, or walk-along campaigning through lanes and by lanes of villages, towns and large cities by candidates and their supporters. Also banned are rallies by campaigners on cycles, motorcycles, or motorcades in these five states till the last vote has been cast. There is little chance of the mass meetings that were such a photo opportunity in previous elections, with a covid protocol severely limiting attendance at a public meeting.

Political parties and candidates have however invested heavily in the power of the social media. Ruling groups begin with an obvious advantage, in that the mass media focuses on their lead campaigners and the well-funded campaigns. But social media, ignored till very recent years, seems a more democratic platform for contesting candidates and parties to reach out to potential supporters and voters.

Under the grand heading of "Digital campaigns," people seeking electoral support, are using a motley mix of what can be described as phone marketing,

audio messages with megaphones fitted on cycle rickshaws, videos played on the loop on large screens fitted on the specially designed, and LED screen-mounted trucks, which were called "Video Rathis," or chariots, when they first made their appearance. They are now winding their way through every city, town, and village in the poll-bound states.

The latest to make its appearance in the election campaign and political messaging is the social media, with content put on web-based and mobile platforms and apps such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The bigger groups can afford entire offices with dedicated cadres busy at their computer consoles. But even outliers in the political area can try to get themselves heard.

In terms of social media presence, the Bhartiya Janata Party is the clear leader followed by the Indian National Congress and the rest of the regional players. The Economic Times in its coverage of the campaign in Uttar Pradesh, reported that a senior functionary of the BJP had

said that his party had already conducted at least 85 meetings and workshops for over 9,000 of its social media functionaries in the last six months.

The party, which runs the government in the state as well as in the Centre in New Delhi, says it hopes to disseminate political messaging through over one lakh WhatsApp groups, created right to the level of individual polling booths, each meant for a thousand voters. It has also dedicated over 100 Facebook pages for outreach in different districts. Most of the outreach will be in the Hindi language in Uttar Pradesh. Programming will be in English and the regional language of each state that is going to the polls.

The Economic Times story estimates the BJP has over 28,000 posts on social media, compared to 7,500 of its main challengers, the Samajwadi Party. And there are many weeks to go.

Alas, digital campaigns also alter the character of political campaign, and many would argue, of the very language and

vocabulary of electioneering.

Social scientists and human rights activists have raised red flags that the political idiom and language used can have a negative impact on social harmony and fraternity, with campaigns increasingly exploiting religious and other social divides to woo potential voters, especially the new crop of young women and men who have come of age since the last elections. Indians have the right to vote at 18 years of age.

This generation is very savvy in the use of social media, and also very vulnerable to targeted political messaging.

Recent articles and studies have exposed the way political parties are using social media to sow seeds of discord and suspicion in the minds of people to create polarization that would then translate into votes.

You may read about the Tek Fog investigation by The Wire [here](https://thewire.in/tekfog/en/1.html): <https://thewire.in/tekfog/en/1.html>; about the misinformation and hate on WhatsApp [here](https://scroll.in/magazine/1016145): <https://scroll.in/magazine/1016145>, and an investigation by the

BBC Hindi into hate being promoted through YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/MIZN5c35QnI>.

January 2022 began with the controversy generated by the "Bulli Bai" platform which targets young Muslim women on social media, humiliating them in mock white slavery auctions. Its victims were prominent Muslim women, none of them practicing politicians.

This terrible social media platform was the handiwork of students brainwashed into an extreme right-wing ideology. Neeraj Bishnoi (21), Vishal Kumar Jha (21), Mayank Rawal (21), and Shweta Singh (19), were arrested from various parts of the country for hosting the application on GitHub, a website that lets developers store and manage their code, track, and control changes to it, and share it with others on the platform.

It is a matter of deep concern that young, educated minds can be so radicalised that they are willing to dehumanize and mock other human beings without a care.

However, the online polarization and hatred are only an extension

of the hate that exists in society today. The Election Commission has taken cognizance of this, warning political parties on hate speeches. The Election Commission has however been questioned by civil society for not being alert enough to this menace, and for also not acting with alacrity at other sources of targeted hate in the election period.

An intense controversy surrounds two Dharma Sansads (parliament of religion) that were held in Haridwar and Raipur respectively in December 2021 in which religious and political leaders called for physical violence against Muslims and Christians, the two major religious minorities in the country. After an outcry by civil society and opposition parties, a few of the perpetrators of hate were arrested.

This 'othering' of two communities, which has been visible for some years, seems to be peaking with this round of state elections. Civic discourse has become rare, and civility is seen as a sign of weakness. There is genuine fear that this normalization of hate can eat

away at the very foundations of a nation.

The othering can also extend to the acts of doing away with established traditions in the garb of reclaiming national pride. The Beating Retreat military pageantry marking the conclusion of the Republic Day ceremonies in the national Capital New Delhi saw an unfortunate dropping of the hymn "Abide with me," which was a favourite of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation. The hymn had a pride of place in the programme of martial music for half a century. Apparently, it had become odious for some because it was also a 'Christian' hymn. It was replaced with a patriotic song.

Jesus Christ said that the two greatest commandments were loving God and loving our neighbour. He said that all the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. He taught His followers to love their enemies and do good to those who hate them; to bless those who curse them and to pray for those who mistreat them.

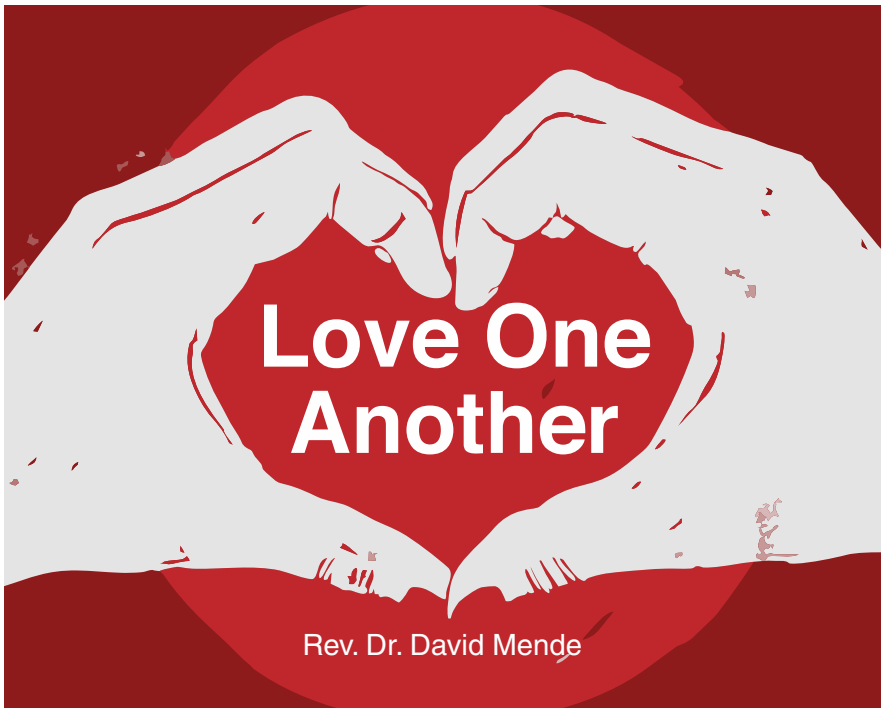
Mahatma Gandhi too was inspired by the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ when he said, "The real love is to love them that hate you, to love your neighbour even though you distrust him."

We as a nation need to recover the love of our neighbour. In an atmosphere when hatred seems to have become the new normal and social discourse poisonous, it is only love that will bring healing and harmony.

Social media is merely a tool. If it has been used to amplify and normalize hate, it can also be used creatively to steer people towards loving our neighbours and fellow citizens and to build bridges.

There will always be an election around the corner, with the din and noise of its campaign. It is for the people of the nation to decide if they want love, or choose hate, to be the core of the political campaigns. On such choice will depend the development and peace of the nation and its people.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal



Introduction

Every year, many people celebrate Valentine's Day without really knowing the meaning of love. When we examine our own hearts, we have to admit that all of us lack love. Thus, we need to ask God to fill our hearts with his love so that we can love one another with his love. First John 4:7-12 text talks about the obligation of mutual love. Based on this verse, I have entitled this article as “**Love One Another.**” In this passage, Apostle John

talks about the obligation of mutual love.

This general letter to congregations across Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) was probably written by the Apostle John in the late first century A.D. Verse 7 begins with the exhortation that we must love one another. Back at 3:11, John exhorts the Christian community to love one another. The big idea of this article is simple: We must love one another. But why must we love one another? First John

4:7-12 presents three arguments for mutual love:

1. Mutual Love Is Based on God's Eternal Nature (1 Jn 4:7-8).

John writes, “*agap toi agap men*” meaning “Beloved, let us love one another” (v. 7). Not only does John exhort his readers to love one another, but in verses 7 and 11, he practices what he preaches by addressing them as “beloved.” He says that we must love one another “for love is from God.” He repeats this statement in different words in verse 8: “God is love.”

All human love is only a reflection of God's love. Since God is the source of love, those who are born of God and know God will love others. It's not just our righteousness (cf. 2:29), but even our love demonstrates that we are truly born of God. Note that John doesn't say that love is God, but God is love. The assertion that “God is love” is repeated in verse 16. God has always been loving and he will continue to be loving for all eternity. However, that doesn't rule out other attributes of God. God is light as

well (1 Jn 1:5). He is also referred to as a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). So, when God judges, he judges in love.

John is straightforward in claiming that “Anyone who does not love does not know God” (v. 8). It's that simple. Commenting on this verse, John Stott says, “The argument is plain and compelling. For the loveless Christian to profess to know God and to have been born of God is like claiming to be intimate with a foreigner whose language we cannot speak, or to have been born of parents whom we do not in any way resemble. It is to fail to manifest the nature of him whom we claim as our Father ('born of God') and our Friend ('knows God').”¹

William Barclay says, “We are never nearer to God than when we love.”² As we know, humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). Since God is love, when we love one another, we reflect God's image. So, we must love one another.

2. Mutual Love Is Based on God's Gift (1 Jn 4:9-11).

God demonstrated his love by sending his Son to this world (v. 9). So, John tells us that we must love God not just because that's his nature. But we must love God because he demonstrated his love by sending his Son for our sins. The love of God is emphasized by the phrase "his only Son." The Greek word is *monogenēs*, which means one and only or unique. This Greek word is also used to refer to Abraham's only son Isaac (Heb. 11:17) and the only son of the widow of Nain (Lk. 7:12).

So, when it is used of Jesus, it communicates the idea that God gave his unique, one and only Son for us. James E. Smith says, "No greater gift of God is conceivable because no greater gift was possible."³ That's why Paul could say, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15). The Bible says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Also, Apostle Paul writes, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will

he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Jesus died so that we can live and experience eternal life.

Love is not about us loving God, but it's about God taking the initiative in demonstrating his love towards us by sending his Son (v. 10). God loved us so much that he gave his Son as the propitiation for our sins. Propitiation means that Jesus as the perfect sacrifice turned away God's wrath. Apart from Jesus, we are "dead in the trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). The costly sacrifice of his Son demonstrates God's amazing love for us. We don't deserve this amazing love, but God is so loving that he gave us what we never deserved.

After experiencing the unmerited love of God, we cannot continue to live a life of selfishness. Since God loved us, we also ought to love one another (v. 11). Dear brothers and sisters, we must not have cold hearts. Since God loves us, let's love one another.

3. Mutual Love Is Based on God's Present Activity of Love (1 Jn 4:12).

The fact that God is invisible is reiterated in 1 John 4:20; John 1:18; 4:24; and 1 Timothy 1:17. Even if God makes himself visible, no person can see him and still live (cf. Exod. 33:20). Whenever God appeared in the Old Testament (theophanies), he displayed his glory, but no human could literally see him. We cannot see this glorious, awesome, and holy God. But we can see him in those who love. God works in us even as we love one another.

God's love flows in and through us. Mutual love means that God lives in us and that his love abides in us (or made complete in us). Apostle John is probably thinking of crucifixion as he says that God's love is "perfected" in us. The word translated as "perfected" is the term *teteleiomene*. The last words of Christ on the cross were "It is finished" (*tetelestai*; Jn 19:30). In his Farewell Discourse, Jesus loved his disciples "to the end" (*telos*; Jn 13:1). All these words are derived from the same root

word in Greek. The love required of disciples is a love that imitates the sacrifice of the Lord (3:16-18). We must love one another because God abides in us and his love is perfected (or made complete) as we love one another. God works in us right now even as we love one another!

Conclusion

So, the big idea of this article is: **We must love one another.**

The church father, Jerome, said that when the apostle John was in his extreme old age, he was so weak that he had to be carried into the church meetings. At the end of the meeting he would be helped to his feet to give a word of exhortation to the church. Invariably, he would repeat, "Little children, let us love one another." The disciples began to grow weary of the same words every time, and they finally asked him why he always said the same thing over and over. He replied, "Because it is the Lord's commandment, and if this only is done, it is enough."⁴

Let's love God and love one another with God's love. Let's demonstrate our love towards others in practical ways—pray for them, invite them for dinner, help them in their need, encourage them, visit them when they are sick, and in any other way. Let's love one another!

P.S. This article is adapted from Dr. David Mende's book, *Powerful Sermons for Special Occasions*. You may contact him for copies of this book.



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1. John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 161.

2. StudyLight.org, "William Barclay's Daily Study Bible," <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/1-john-4.html> (accessed 15 February 2018).

3. James E. Smith, *Epistles of John Revisited* (N.A.: lulu.com, 2018), 107.

4. John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 49.



*Give thanks to the Lord,
for he is good;
his love endures forever.
1 Chronicles 16:34*





To love God and to be loved by God

Ms. Tejaswi Ravinder

It is a common sight to find the painting of the last supper hanging on a wall by the dining, in Christian homes. In between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, Giotto, Pietro Lorenzetti, Duccio, Taddeo Gaddi, Fra Angelico, Ghirlandaio, Leonardo da Vinci and a few other famous artists of those time strided their hands at painting the last supper, the most important event ahead of the crucifixion of Christ.

The last supper was a Passover meal Jesus had with His disciples. Passover celebrates the exodus of Israelites from slavery in Egypt. When the disciples came to Lord Jesus on the first day of the festival of the

unleavened bread to enquire about where He wants them to make preparations for the Passover meal, He sends them into the city with instructions. As Lord Jesus instructed, Peter and John go into the city and meet a man carrying a jar of water. They follow him to the house he enters, and tell the owner of the house that Jesus is going to celebrate the Passover with His disciples at your house.

The owner shows the disciples a large room upstairs, all furnished, just as the Lord told them. There, the preparations for the Passover were made. In Luke 22, the Last Supper is recorded in detail. Lord Jesus and his disciples gather around the table and there He

expresses that He had eagerly desired to have the Passover meal with them before He suffers. By then, Judas Iscariot had already met the chief priests and locked a deal to hand Lord Jesus over to them for thirty pieces of silver. Judas was waiting for his opportunity to make big bucks.

Lord Jesus had already had meals with His disciples on several occasions before. At the wedding in Cana, on the mount with the multitude, at Zacchaeus' home and the breakfast by the lake to recollect a few such occasions that are written in the New Testament. But the Last Supper has unique significance and direct correlation with the grand purpose why Lord Jesus had left the Father's throne. He had already shown His utmost love in the most humble way by washing the feet of His disciples just the day before. The Amplified Bible in John 13:1 says, "[Now] before the Passover Feast began, Jesus knew (was fully aware) that the time had come for Him to leave this world and return to the Father. And as He had loved those who were His own in the world, He loved them to the

last and to the highest degree."

Acts of love

The highest degree of love was expressed in this form that despite knowing the thoughts of betrayal brewing up in Judas Iscariot's heart, Lord Jesus washed the feet of His disciples including those of Judas. Can words describe His vast love? Let's take a moment to be there as mere audiences of these monumental events in history when the King of the kings in the human form humbled Himself to the lowest as a servant. It is overwhelming!

In John chapter 13, 4 and 5 verses (Amplified Bible), we read, "(Jesus) Got up from supper, took off His garments, and taking a [servant's] towel, He fastened it around His waist. Then, He poured water into the washbasin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the [servant's] towel with which He was girded."

The following day, the disciples have gathered around him for the Passover meal and the Lord shares with them the new

covenant of His flesh and blood. There, the Lord also reveals to the disciples a glimpse into the depths of His sacrificial love which they were about to witness and about the redemption of the mankind. Although as mere humans, they could not fully grasp His words, at the same time, they could not bear the fact that one among them will betray their Master.

The room was filled with concoction of various emotions expressed in both verbal and non-verbal; the great love in Christ's eyes, the betrayal in Judas' eyes and the disciples in a state of shock, despair, helplessness, and confusion, disputing among themselves. In that hour, the Lord was preparing them for their ministry ahead, for a time when He would be present with them in Spirit but not in body.

I wonder...how can an artist squeeze all this into a painting? During the renaissance in Italy, the last supper was a subject touched only by artists who reached the brink of their artistic expertise. And, these paintings were popularly called statement pieces. Today, we find many

replicated copies available in the market.

These paintings in glorious bright colors show the Lord Jesus and His disciples seated around the table. When observed closely, one may notice the disciple, Apostle John clinging on to Jesus. He is seen either resting on Jesus' shoulder or holding on to his hand, right by his side. He chose the right spot!

To be loved by God

Five times in the New Testament, Apostle John calls himself as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' Does that mean Lord Jesus did not love the other disciples? NO! But that John felt so loved by the Lord that he prefers to identify himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. At the Last Supper, John was sitting by Jesus' side neither because his rank or position is next to Jesus nor because he is to be honored and respected after Jesus but because he felt so deeply loved by the Lord that He wanted to enjoy His love by just being there seated by His side.

Differing from the other three

Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, John speaks more about God's love. The Gospel by John encompasses the beginning as written in the first book Genesis about the creation. And, in the very first chapter of John's Gospel, John clears his position that he is only a man bearing witness and sets himself aside by these words, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light." John 1:6-8 (NIV).

He testifies about God's love in John 3:16 (NIV), "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life," and clears his position again in the same chapter that, "He must become greater; I must become less." John 3:30 (NIV).

John felt so touched by the Lord's love that he boldly made a case for why one must believe in Christ and be saved. The same love he could feel in his nerves even through his old age at Patmos

revealed to him much more of the Lord Jesus Christ than what he must have seen in his youth. Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation when he was near the end of his life. The book of Revelation also called Apokalypsis in Greek contains the vision he received of the coming day of the Lord.

Apostle John loved Jesus and felt so loved by Him. Does that mean God never took him through trials, tribulation or suffering? NO! He loved Jesus and was beloved of His Master yet Lord took him through imprisonment in his old age. We read about angels breaking open the prison doors to deliver the saints of the Lord from imprisonment. But God chose Apostle John to go through exile and loneliness. It was there in that barren island of Patmos, in that quietness, John heard the voice of God.

It is an alarming fact that in this age of consumption, we tend to incline to God to be blessed by Him. We get sold away to the preaching that minimizes and shows God as genie in a bottle whose duty is to grant wishes. If we draw ourselves

closer and recline on to Lord Jesus as Apostle John did, we would be utterly flabbergasted by Lord's love. God's love is so great that it is humanly impossible to write it down in words or squeeze it into a painting. He loves us in million different ways every single day. God never gets tired of loving us.

As it is written in Romans chapter 8 and verses 38 and 39 "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Let's take a test to see if we know God loves us?

Theologian John Piper challenges the current

generation's way of defining God's love as "to be loved by God is to be made much of," and asks to take a test to see if we can conceive of another definition of love than to be made much of.

Do you feel more loved by God when he makes much of you, or do you feel more loved by God when He undertakes through the cross in the Holy Spirit to enable you to experience a kind of inner revolution that you enjoy making much of them forever?



Ms. Tejaswi Ravinder

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*I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.
Jeremiah 31:3*



WHEN GOD IS GOOD, WHY...?

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy

At the very beginning of human history, God placed Adam and Eve in Eden. It was a garden full of light. Everything God had made was good. There was no evil in the garden. The place was full of fruit-bearing trees. In the middle of the garden, God put two special trees – the tree of life and the tree that gives the knowledge of good and evil. God told the couple that they could eat the fruit of any of the trees in the garden, except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9, 16-17). They were not forbidden to eat from the tree of life.

One day when they were at the centre of the garden, instead of

standing under the tree of life, they stood before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That was when the Tempter could mess with their minds. He told them that eating from the tree they were in front of would expand their minds and their lives. They could become just like the Creator (3:4). That is how Adam and Eve were tempted to explore the dark side, leaving the light and the goodness of God. They had a choice. They could have eaten the fruit of the tree of life. But they wanted what God had kept from them to protect them as their Creator Father. “Secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those that are revealed belong to us and our

descendants forever, so that we might obey” (Deut. 29:29, NET).

When Adam and Eve explored the dark side, they opened the door to evil. Their punishment was that they had to leave the safe place God had created for them. They went out into the world that was cursed because of them. God told Adam and Eve that there would be hard labour and pain in their lives from then on. We live in a fallen world, and that is why there is sickness. It comes with the curse on humanity (Gen. 3:16-19). All creation groans and all wait for the redemption of our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:20-23).

The hardship and pain never go away. The thorns keep on coming back. The sickness of the world is the fallout of what transpired in Eden. Theologically that event is called the Fall. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they had a fall and they took their world along, because they had been given the role of ruling the rest of creation. Think about it: today environmentalists blame all our problems of climate change, global warming, and the

extinction of species on humans doing wrong. What Adam and Eve started, their descendants did and keep on doing.

God's Plan to Save

However, God is good – all the time. He is light and love personified (1 Jn. 1:5; 4:8). He would not let fallen humans go. He put a plan of redemption in place (Gen. 3:15) and instituted the way for Adam and Eve to experience redemption (v.21).

When the whole world was going against God, He chose a man and his family to be a channel of blessing to the world (12:1-3). God gave them laws for healthy living. God identified what foods would be good for them. All grains and fruit were permitted, but meats that would harm them were prohibited. Today we eat pork and rabbit meat, but we know that they have to be cooked well to prevent parasitic infections. Scavenger fish and scavenger birds were also not to be consumed. Apart from dietary laws, God also instituted sanitary practices. Excreta was not to be left uncovered (Deut. 23:12-14), and isolation was to be practised

to stop the spread of infectious skin diseases (Lev 13:1-46).

God told His people, "If you listen carefully to the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you" (Ex. 15:26).

Note that conditions apply: "If you listen carefully to the LORD...if you pay attention to his commands and keep all His decrees..." Note also that the word "Lord" is in caps. That's because in the Hebrew text instead of the word "Lord", the covenant name Yahweh is used in the passage. If we are in covenant with God we can ask God for healing, but if we are not in covenant with God, we don't have any right to appeal to God.

A covenant is not at all like a legal contract. It's a two-way relationship of intimacy, involvement, and interaction. If we get into relationship with God then we have the confidence that allows us to approach the throne

of grace – not because we are worthy to approach, but because we are assured of grace. This is what Jesus meant when He said that we are to pray in His Name. We approach God because Jesus has entered us into a covenant with God and we tell God that we do not come to Him claiming rights, but are just begging for grace in the Name of Jesus. We cannot be like the boastful Pharisee who was full of himself, but we need to be like the tax collector, asking only for mercy (Lk. 18:9-14). We can be sure of God's mercy. We will not be denied.

While the Bible does not assert that infirmity and sickness come to people because they are individually guilty of some specific wrongdoing, sinful living does have physical consequences. The Bible talks of God smiting people in punishment (Ex. 12:29; Num. 11:33; 1 Sam 25:38; 2 Ki. 15:5; 2 Chron. 21:18; Acts 12:23). Jesus told one man whom He healed to "sin no more so that something worse doesn't happen" (Jn. 5:14).

On the other hand, we must not

conclude that anyone who is sick is under the judgment of God. When the disciples asked Jesus whether a man's blindness was caused by sin, His response was that no one had sinned, but that God would manifest His glory through the man's healing (Jn. 9:1-3).

Job's Troubles

At times illnesses and troubles come to try our faith. Job discovered that. He was an exceptionally righteous man. He even took precautionary steps in the likelihood that his children could have unwittingly affronted the glory of God by sinning against Him (1:1-5).

One day Satan “turned up” in the Lord's court. It would appear that Satan came to give an account of what he had done and achieved among the people of the earth. Since pride was Satan's primary sin, he must have boasted about the many he had turned against God. The Lord challenged Satan to consider Job, that he was faithfully righteous. Satan rebutted God saying that Job was righteous only because it was profitable. “If he wasn't so

blessed, he wouldn't be righteous”, Satan said (vv.6-11).

God was so sure of Job that He gave Satan permission to strip Job of all his blessings. In just one day Job lost his wealth and all his children. Job grieved, but didn't give up being faithful (vv.12-22).

When God confronted Satan with Job's integrity again, Satan said that a man would give up everything if he himself was spared of all harm (2:1-5). God then allowed Satan to touch the person of Job and he came down with an obnoxious skin disease. Still Job remained faithfully committed to God (vv.6-8). From Job's experience we learn that the Lord doesn't allow us to be tested beyond our strength. If trial follows trial, it is only because God Himself has assessed us to have the strength to withstand the new trial having overcome the earlier one.

At this point Job's wife told him to just curse God and die (v.9). Job's response was that she was a fool: “If I receive good from God, should I not accept trouble too?” (v.10).

In other words, Job asked, “Why not me?” Usually, people ask this question only when they think that they have been bypassed for some benefit. Not when trouble comes.

Why Me?

When we receive good from the Lord, we rejoice that we are “so blessed”. However, when trouble comes, we tend to ask, “Why me?” Our question implies that we think that we don't deserve to have trouble in our lives. It also means that we subconsciously think or feel that we deserved to receive what we did from God before trouble arrived. When we think that way, we're not thinking “grace” – the unmerited favour of God.

Joseph Stowell wrote: “Sometimes when people ask how I'm doing, I reply, 'Better than I deserve.' I remember a well-meaning person responding, 'Oh no, Joe, you deserve a lot,' to which I replied, 'Not really.' I was thinking about what I truly deserve—God's judgment. We easily forget how sinful we are at the core of our being. Thinking of ourselves more highly than we

should, diminishes our sense of deep indebtedness to God for His grace. It discounts the price He paid to rescue us...As the psalmist reminds us, God 'has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities' (Ps. 103:10...the only thing we truly deserve is hell...If God never does anything more than redeem us, He has already done far more than we deserve...He gives us so much more than we deserve...If God never does anything more than redeem us, He has already done far more than we deserve” (Our Daily Bread, May 23, 2014)

Arthur Ashe, the legendary Wimbledon player, was stricken with AIDS because of an infected blood transfusion during a heart surgery in 1983. While he was dying, he received letters from fans around the world. One asked, “Why did GOD have to select you for such a bad disease?” Arthur Ashe replied: “The world over — 50 million children start playing tennis... 50 reach Wimbledon, 4 to semi-finals, 2 to the finals. When I was the one holding the cup I never asked God, 'Why me?' and today

in pain I should not be asking God 'Why me?'"

Standing before God

When I was diagnosed with cancer, friends came to see me and pray for me. Many of those who prayed told God—reminding Him—that it was His servant who was in need of healing. They seemed to hint that I somehow deserved healing because of my ministry as a preacher.

As our Lord said, "...when you have done everything you were told to do, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'" (Lk. 17:7-10).

Sometimes, people who want to throw their weight around ask, "Do you know who I am?" No one standing before God's throne of grace dare ask that question. Being someone from a prestigious family or the son or daughter of godly parents or claims of having contributed much to God's work won't get anyone any credit in heaven.

When we stand before God, all of us stand on level ground as equals in need of grace and

mercy. I'm not special in any way because I have been a "servant of God". I too need God's grace—like everyone else—no less, but also, no more.

What has happened to me happens to lots of people just because we live in a fallen world. Ills are a consequence of the Fall, not necessarily due to any personal misconduct. At the hospital I saw little kids (one, less than two months old), who didn't "deserve" to be battling cancer. My situation is not so bad, is it? My children are married and settled, and I've enjoyed love and friendship. The suffering infants have had none of my experiences.

God has been marvellously good to me. I have indeed lived a "charmed" life because of God's abundant and lavish grace. All I want now is grace—no more, no less. I don't deserve grace any more than anyone else. In the end, we know God works for good—in all things (Rom. 8:28).

Job's Story

To get back to Job's story, while Job was in mourning, his friends

came to visit and comfort him. They sat with him in silence for days (vv.11-13). That was the only time they acted wisely in the face of Job's tragedies. When Job broke the silence, he wished that he hadn't been born (3:1-26). His foolish friends decided that they needed to correct Job's thinking. All their speeches argue that the bad things that had happened in Job's life pointed to there being some evil in his life and that God's justice and punishment had finally caught up with him.

Job was shocked that his friends, who knew him so well, had condemned him. He protested his innocence. His friends kept up their arguments that there must be some guilt which is why disaster after disaster had struck Job.

While arguing that their judgement was wrong, Job forgot that his friends didn't represent God. He got more and more aggressive in his protests of innocence, and, in a backhanded sort of way, ended up accusing God of injustice. He asked why God was picking on him. He also said that God hadn't given him a

chance to defend himself, not that anyone could withstand God.

Coming Forth as Gold

Even so, Job's underlying faith shines through now and then as he rants against the God projected by his friends. Though he had said there was no one mediating between him and God Almighty (9:33), Job did affirm, "Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man He pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend (16:19-21)...I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (19:25-27). Job asserted that all his troubles were not meaningless, but served God's purpose in his life: "But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (23:10).

That is the point. Our troubles, sufferings and sorrows may

seem to be totally meaningless. God will weave them into a pattern of beauty in our lives.

In the end, when God confronted Job, God didn't answer any of his questions, but challenged him whether he had a right to question God when he hadn't been there when God was creating the world and wasn't able to coordinate and sustain anything God had created (chapters 38-41). This side of death and eternity we may not have all the answers we seek.

“For now, we can only see a dim and blurry picture of things...I realize that everything I know is only part of the big picture. But one day, when Jesus arrives, we

will see clearly, face-to-face. In that day, I will fully know just as I have been wholly known by God. But now faith, hope, and love remain; these three virtues must characterize our lives. The greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:12-13, Voice).



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*As the Father has loved me,
so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.
If you keep my commands,
you will remain in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commands
and remain in his love.
John 15:9-10*





The Joy of Togetherness: Reflection from the Lives of The Magi

Rev. Dr. Samuel Richmond Saxena

Journey

Sometimes life gets boring if travelling is not so exciting. Travelling alone and travelling with our fellow relatives or friends makes a big difference. It all depends on the purpose of the journey as well as who you are travelling with. In the year 1968, the launch of Apollo 8 electrified the world. It was the first manned space-craft journey to orbit the moon by three astronauts: Frank Borman, James Lovell, and William Anders for three days that December. They began to circle the moon and took the first human photos of Earth rising over the moon's surface. On Christmas Eve, the three astronauts broadcast a live

television transmission from their capsule. After commenting on their experiences and the starkness of the lunar landscape, they jointly read to the world the first ten verses of Genesis 1. These three astronauts worked hard, travelled afar, took the risk and circled the moon. It must have been an adventurous experience. Interestingly, this adventurous and challenging experience turned them to worship the living God when they saw the beauty of the moon and the panoramic view of the Earth. They were filled with awe and started to glorify the Creator, God of the Bible, by reading Genesis

1. Their space journey brought the moon and earth so close that

one could have never imagined. It prepared the way for Neil Armstrong to be the first person to walk on the moon in the year 1969. As he stepped on the moon, Neil said, *"That's one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind."* All these events brought joy and unity to the scientific community as well as to the people of the world. Reaching the Moon, discovering new planets or achieving a goal is teamwork which requires unity, dedication, true service and courage. Similarly, two thousand years ago, the three wise men saw the star that led them to the King of kings and brought humanity under one umbrella.

Stargazers

January 6 is considered to be Epiphany Day as per the Christian calendar. It is believed that on this day, wise men visited the baby Jesus in a manger. Epiphany is considered to be the principal feast for many Eastern Christians because God's salvation is revealed to the nations in Bethlehem and Jordan. Interestingly, the theme of the Unity Octave Week of Prayer 2022 'The star that rose in the

east' taken from Matthew 2:2, *'We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him.'* It was proposed by the Christians of the Middle East. The Magi are depicted as Gentiles who received their revelation from nature, from a star. These "wise men" (magi) refer to a group of scholars who studied the stars that allowed them to recognize the star of the east as a guide to the King's birthplace. These men were also wealthy, and scientists in their own right. Although the Magi were engaged in astronomy and astrology, they deeply revered God and depended upon divine help to unveil the mysteries of the universe. Not everyone looking into the sky understands. For example, Herod, the rabbis, and the people of Judea were busy in their affairs but they failed to find Messiah. Priests and rabbis who were the intellectual class of people depended upon their knowledge and experience rather than depending upon divine help. Similarly, science existed even before the fifteenth century but when science was nurtured in the ecclesiastical crucible it brought revolution. Copernicus, Galileo,

Johannes Kepler, Newton etc. who were the pioneers of modern science were not just outstanding astronomers, mathematicians and physicists but they were ardent believers of Jesus Christ. They were wise because they depended upon Him.

Unity & Love

The Magi reveal to us the unity of all nations desired by God. They travel from far-off countries and represent diverse cultures. These Magi saw the Star in the East and together they started journeying. Interestingly, unity happened before they could start the journey. In other words, it was the Star that brought them together. Throughout the journey, they were united because they had one goal i.e., to see and worship the King of the Jews. They travelled afar without any fear i.e., the fear of the dacoits, wild animals, darkness, bad weather. They travelled a long distance, probably experienced tiredness and dullness but they came with confidence and perseverance. They stood before King Herod without any doubt, worshipped Jesus and unitedly left for their country taking another route.

Nothing could divide them and nothing could stop them. When the star took them to the manger, they were not disturbed by the surroundings, they never doubted the ambience where the King of the Jews was born because they knew where the treasure was and that is why they were called wise men. They were of one mind, one Spirit and moved in one accord. They were united to accomplish the task which was given to them with the help of divine guidance.

We are not alone in the journey of faith. Other believers are accompanying us and we are controlled by God's light every day. Remarkably, God calls us individually but makes us part of His family so that we may live and grow in unity. John 17 reflects the deep desire of Jesus in His High Priestly prayer that all believers should live in unity. In vs. 20, Jesus said, *'I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.'* The unity for which

Jesus prays is a unity of love. Our participation in the unity of love allows us to be connected eternally with the triune God. It also reflects that we belong to Him. "All will recognize that you are disciples of mine," Jesus had said to the eleven, "if you have love among one another" (John 13:35). It is a visible unity that happens due to the indwelling of the Spirit and should be reflected through our behaviour. Likewise, Paul urged the Ephesians to *'keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace'* (Ep. 4:3-5).

As we move forward, nothing should bother us, nothing should divert us from the faith that we have in Jesus Christ. We are surrounded by the faith of witnesses who continuously inspire us through their testimonies to be focused on our heavenly call. In the journey of faith, we meet people like Herod who try to divert us from our vision with evil intentions or priests who may not walk or encourage us in the journey of faith but we still need to move on because our guidance is from above. The Third Global

Gathering of Global Christian Forum that took place in South America (Bogota , Colombia, 24-27 April 2018), under the theme, *'Let Mutual Love Continue'*, Hebrews (13:1) emphasized the subject of Unity especially to strengthen the relationship between the 'older' churches (Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant) and 'younger' ones (Evangelical, Independent, Pentecostal) both globally and locally. Dear friends, the time has come to show our visible unity- that we are one. We need to pray that the Spirit of God may bind us together as one family. Despite any traditional or denominational differences, leaders who are wise men and women need to come together and become one voice for our community. We are going through difficult times but our unity will help us to speak boldly before the worldly authorities when it comes to our faith in Jesus. God has not given us the spirit of timidity but of power, love and sound mind. With all humility and strength, we are called to face any challenge to bring unity, justice and peace to the whole world.

Witness & Proclamation

The pastor of a fashionable congregation startled his members one Sunday morning by flinging this question at them: "What have you done today that nobody but a Christian would do?" Ask this question of yourself. What would be your answer?

Witnessing Christ through our lives is an important component of a believer's calling. Unity brings witness. In Matthew 2: 2, when Magi said, *'We saw the star in the East, and we came to worship him'* they not only witnessed their unity but also proclaimed the birth of Christ and the reason for their coming. Since they were wise, they knew whom to witness and whom to worship. Even after meeting Herod, they continued their search for the Messiah. Those who are actively searching for the truth will find it, no matter what their starting point was. In unity, our witness becomes more powerful. We should not be afraid of anyone when it comes to witnessing Jesus Christ. We never know who will come to the knowledge of the truth as we witness the gospel. You can never tell what God may

do with a gospel witness.

Many years ago in St. Louis, Missouri, a Christian man was completing some business with a lawyer. Before leaving the office, the Christian turned to the lawyer and said: "I have often wanted to ask you a question, but I have been a coward." The lawyer was surprised. "I didn't think you were afraid of anything!" he said. "What is the question?" The client replied: "Why aren't you a Christian?" The lawyer hung his head. "You know my weakness," he said. "Isn't there something in the Bible about drunkards having no part in the kingdom of God?" Not to be detoured, the Christian said, "That's not what I'm asking you. I want to know why you aren't a Christian." "Well," said the lawyer, "I can't recall that anybody asked me, and I'm sure nobody ever told me how to become a Christian!" Before long, the two were praying together, and God moved into that lawyer's life. He saved him and immediately broke the shackle of drinking that had bound him. That lawyer was Cyrus. L. Scofield, who later edited the famous Scofield

Reference Bible, the most widely-used study Bible in the World.

Recently, Caleb Institute has published the third edition of *Sharing of Faith Stories: A Methodology for Promoting Unity* edited by Dr Richard Howell, Principal of Caleb Institute and Dr Casely B. Essamuah, the General Secretary of Global Christian Forum. This book contains faith stories of God's people belonging to different traditions, confessions, denominations and countries. It talks about personal faith, witness and commitment to follow Jesus Christ. The Church in Asia and across is facing several challenges but we should not get disturbed but continue to witness Jesus who is the *Way the Truth and the Life*. We need to share the gospel with people who are searching for answers to the difficulties they are facing. Jesus is our Saviour who never fails and He is always there to meet our greatest needs. Amid the challenges coming from the multi-religious context of Asia and the minority status of Christianity in most countries, people are facing persecution,

marginalization and martyrdom. We should move on like the Magi to worship the King of kings. We should have a united voice and credible witness to communicate the gospel in the cultural context. Before ascension, Jesus said to His disciples in Acts 1:8, *'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses...'* The Spirit of the Lord came upon John the Baptist in the wilderness and he witnessed Jesus and the Kingdom of God boldly. Let the Spirit of the Lord continue to fill us and inspire us, so that we may witness the life and ministry of Jesus Christ through our life. According to F. B. Meyer, *'the church which is not a missionary church will be a missing church when Jesus comes.'*

Worship & Service

Our witness leads to true worship. Magi's true worship towards God started when they saw the star and planned to visit the Messiah. They bestowed the gifts to Jesus that they carried safely. According to Fleming Rutledge, 'the magi should be a great comfort to us. They brought all that they had to the Lord, not

just their expensive presents, but their very lives.' In Romans 12:1, Paul appeals the believers *'to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship.'* In the changing circumstances when the world is gripped with the Covid19 pandemic, warlike situations, persecution, environmental crises, injustice – we are called to devote ourselves to serving God and humanity which is part of true worship. According to the Scriptures, Christ in his reign will turn a broken and fragmented world into one justice and peace. He is looking for faithful servants who would carry out the task further. Service demands our prayers for our fellow believers, for the Church and the nation. A story is told of an elderly Christian widow who resided in a lonely cottage high on a cliff overlooking the sea. She was frequently distressed when she saw the debris from wrecked fishing boats that had washed up on the shore. At other times, the piteous cries of perishing crewmen pierced her heart. One stormy night when the howling wind made her more apprehensive

than usual, an idea suddenly occurred to her. Perhaps if she placed a lamp in her front window, it might act as a small beacon to warn unwary seamen of the treacherous coast. She heard later that its light had been seen and had aided some sailors who were lost in the raging tempest. From then on, she kept it burning from dusk to sunrise. Over the years, many endangered fishermen had cause to thank her for her helpfulness. Our small act with the compassion of Jesus Christ may bring a smile to people's faces. Martin Luther once said, 'if we Christians would join the Wise Men, we must close our eyes to all that glitters before the world and look rather on the despised and foolish things, help the poor, comfort the despised, and aid the neighbour in his need.'

Star of the east continued to move till it brought them to the manger. The light of the star that came upon them was the smaller light that drew them towards the greater Light. By the coming of this great Light, the east-west, north-south is now being united. It gives the message to the whole

world that Christ is king not only of the Jews but also of the gentiles. It communicates that every expectation is fulfilled in Christ, not only the expectation of the Old Testament but the expectation of the whole world as He is 'the Light of the world.' When we live in the light, we have nothing to do with darkness and the life of Jesus Christ is manifested in and through us. We no longer live, but Christ lives in us. The joy of Epiphany is catching sight of God where he is not in the stars but on earth in his Son, whose presence is manifest among us. Amid the darkness, God has called us to be the agents of light. It needs confidence as we stand before the principalities of darkness and worship the true and living God. As we worship Him, we need to be obedient to our call. Always ready to listen to what God wants

from us. According to Augustine, 'the Magi didn't return to the Orient by the same route they came from. Learn from the past. If you want to change your life, change your way.' We have a God who guides us, His network never fails. The GPS may fail but God's guidance continues even to that point where the human network fails.



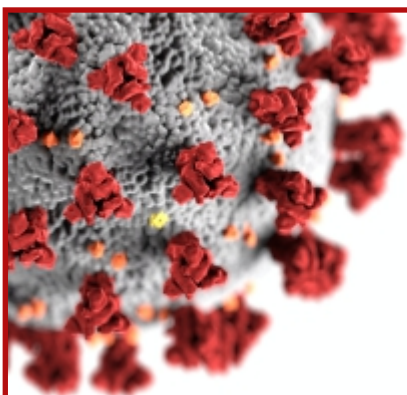
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*See what great love the Father
has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!
/ John 3:1*





WHY CAN'T GOD HEAL THE WORLD OF THE CORONA PANDEMIC INSTANTLY?

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

The Bible is clear about God's ability to heal. Healing is a child's play for him! But there are reasons why he chooses not to heal instantly. I thank Dr. Jack Deere for pointing these reasons to me in one of his books.

The first reason is perhaps backsliding. Read Psalm 74:9,10,11. "We have not been given any miraculous signs and no one knows how long it will be before the healing takes place. There are no more prophets remaining. How long will our God take to act? Has God withdrawn His right hand?" – that is how that passage goes. God is a spirit, but

his right hand is referred to anthropomorphically (how the Bible attributes human traits to God so that we can understand him better). How long will God take to act? This is the question of atheists, agnostics, infidels.

God took the Israelites from Judah located in Southern part of the Promised Land of Israel, as captives to Babylon because of their idolatry, adultery, and stubborn backsliding. During their exile of seventy years, there were no signs of miracles and God disciplined them. So, why won't God take away this pandemic, here and now? This

could be one possible reason: this is a period of divine discipline for us.

The second reason is Loss of First love or Legalism. Read Isaiah 29:8,13. "God has closed the eyes of the prophets and visionaries through whom God's miraculous powers were displayed." If you read the entire chapter, you will find out that the prophets became ineffective. Nothing is happening now, and matters are getting worse. When people honor God with the mouth and not the heart, it is legalism. As the third wave of the pandemic rages, we should reflect on how genuine our relationship with God is. How deep is our love of God?

Dr. Jack Deere says that when Martha made a request to Jesus, He did not oblige. But when Mary asked Him, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Martha liked to work for Jesus and prepare food for Jesus, but Mary enjoyed Jesus' very presence and wanted to stay close to him and latch onto every word that Jesus spoke. When we analyze our lives, we find that we too are more like

Martha than we are like Mary. We like to work for Jesus (preach for Jesus, travel for Jesus, etc) but we do not spend adequate time with Jesus. And what is more, when we work for Jesus, what we do, does not come from the heart. It is all mechanical. It is just part of a routine. We do it to get a salary. God's heart will not be moved when he sees such legalistic work. Let us repent of our legalism. Let us love Jesus with an ever-increasing love. Then, who knows, the miracle for the we are long waiting for (say the complete stopping of this terrible pandemic or any other miracle), may happen without delay (again, needless to say, as per the Divine Will)!

The third reason why God does not instantly heal is that He wants to give us added grace during this time of distress. Read 2 Corinthians 12:8-10. Paul is using the proverbial phrase "thorn in the flesh." Apostle Paul prayed for healing (as seen in this passage). Some say that Paul had poor eyesight and therefore his writing ministry suffered. And still others say that Apostle Paul was married, and his wife was a

thorn in the flesh (humorously). Paul is asking for healing from this mysterious 'thorn'.

This pandemic is like a thorn. Look at what it did to the world economy! See how many people lost their jobs!

But His grace is sufficient for us. God is giving us a supply of spiritual power which is grace, and it comes to us specially during a period of suffering and pain like this. Apostle Paul mentions this in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10. Hyper-supernatural cult preachers say that after Jesus' death for us on the Cross, we should not go through sickness or death. They should pay heed to this Scripture passage and change their wrong teaching which is leading people to hell. Notice that Apostle Paul says here: "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake" (2 Cor. 12:10). If God's plan was that we must not suffer post the Cross of Christ, there is no way Paul would write like this!

The fourth reason why God has

perhaps allowed this pandemic and did not take it away in hurry is this reason which will come out as we read John 5:1-15. The scene is the pool of Bethesda. How many paralytics were around the pool? There were many sick people waiting for an angel to come and stir the water just like we stir the coffee in the morning. Just when the paralytic tries to reach the pool at that time, someone else gets in ahead of him. (verse 7) The paralytic was sick for 38 years (verse 5). But Jesus healed him. God healed the paralytic at a particular time, hour, day. Jesus healed one among the many sick folks near that pool. From a pool of sick people near the pool, Jesus chose to heal one person. God has a time to stop the pandemic. The miracle depends on God's sovereign will (Heb. 2:4). Miracles do not depend on what we say or command. God is the potter, and we are the clay. It seems that God wants to give this pandemic more time before he may choose to miraculously intervene and stop this. Or he can even choose to keep this pandemic on till his soon-to-come return! Some false teachers say that the miracle is in

our mouth. No, only foul odor, is in our mouth!

So, what should we do now? Luke 18:1 says that “men ought always to pray and not faint.”

Let us pray right now!

“Lord, help us to pray without giving up. Let there be no fresh infection of corona virus anywhere in the world for the believer or the non-believer. You are able to do that, and we believe it, Lord. We pray for those who have symptoms right now like coughing or those who feel something has gone wrong with their body. Heal us by your stripes. Right now, Lord! Please Lord! You died on the cross and shed your blood. Healing virtue flows still from the cross of Calvary. We receive that. I pray you will perform a miracle. Lord! Please give wisdom to our government authorities and law enforcement officers across the globe to curtail the spread of the virus. During this time, we pray that we will spread the gospel exponentially – much like how the virus is spreading – through online medias. Via Zoom, let us zoom with the Gospel and the

Word of God! Lord, we want to be involved in discipling others. Let 1 disciple of Jesus become 2. And 2 disciples of Jesus – may they become 4. Let 4 become 16! And so on and so forth. Let there be exponential multiplication of disciples of Jesus. Bless us as we spend family time together – talking, painting and doing other planned activities. Bless each one who is watching. We give you honor, glory, and praise. We ask all this with thanksgiving in Jesus' name. Amen.”



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Covid Vaccines - Overcoming the Resistance

Dr. Shantanu Dutta



The story of Novak Djokovic, the Serbian tennis star has been in the news recently. He arrived to participate in the Australian Open Tennis tournament unvaccinated and almost faced deportation under Australia's strict Covid protocols which require all visitors to be vaccinated or produce satisfactory medical evidence outlining why they should not be vaccinated, which he was not able to produce to the satisfaction of the immigration authorities. From all that is reported, Djokovic is an anti vaccine proponent, at least when it comes to Covid vaccines. On arrival, he was held in an immigration detention centre as his lawyers appealed against a decision by Australia's federal

government to cancel his visa.

The article reminded me of a young lady who stayed with us at our home briefly a few weeks ago. Smart articulate and educated, and also deeply religious, she had not taken the covid vaccination. On my enquiry, she replied that she believed herself to be immune from the Novel Corona virus and that God would keep watch over her and keep her safe. This is although not too long ago, her father, an equally devout man had been sick with Covid. My advice to the young lady was along the lines I have given on other occasions and to other people.

The Covid vaccine has

undoubtedly been produced in a hurry and the years of trials and research had no doubt been condensed into months. However even so, some basic precautions had been taken by the scientific community and millions since then have placed their faith in the vaccine. The data available so far indicates that breakthrough infections among those who have completed the full schedule of vaccination are rare and hospitalisations and deaths are rarer still.

While we on a larger canvas fight to preserve our faith and beliefs, to me it is debatable if the right to faith and belief is absolute, when it infringes on the rights of others. In the name of God's protection, can one deny themselves of whatever benefits the vaccine has to offer and possibly infect others? After all, no one lives on an island. Since the government has not made vaccination compulsory in India; whether for Covid or anything else, the matter can be debated ad nauseam. However I hold that if faith in God and His protection is the reason cited by someone to avoid vaccination, they should be

prepared to carry forward their faith all the way and not run to hospital expecting treatment from already overworked and vulnerable health care staff, if and when things get out of hand.

The word vaccination does not occur in the Bible, as is the case with many other important health terms like vitamins, transfusion, high blood pressure, kidney transplant, injection, pills, and so on. So we need godly thinking to guide us as to whether to be vaccinated or not. Biblical teaching can help to counter mis- and dis-information on health issues, even though it is not a medical textbook on health. The importance of vaccinations from the biblical-theological perspective can be demonstrated from multiple angles. Our spiritual health is closely connected to our physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. Neither God nor we always need a "thus says the Lord" to know what to do or not to do, because He can show, and we can see, the benefits or disadvantages of many of our decisions and actions. The various Covid vaccines have

come about as a result of capacities God has given to humans to think and be creative, in producing a life-saving product. We can thank God for the wisdom He gives for research and invention. And we can thank Him and His human agents for the good they do in preserving and restoring life (Dan. 12:4). We are not to expect that God will work for us when we overlook basic principles of life and are negligent, biased, or lazy about implementing them.

God wants us to preserve health—ours and everyone else's—in the best possible shape and conditions (3 John 1:2), not only to live longer, but to be able to serve others and be useful for as long as possible. Why die prematurely simply because we neglect remedies that are available to protect and prolong our lives, thus enabling us to be a blessing to others? Prayers for healing and vitality do not annul the use of different remedies, surgeries, medicines, or vaccinations. Knowing how to apply them all depends on life's situations. Several examples come to mind from the biblical

material. God could have miraculously and instantaneously healed the dying King Hezekiah by His power, but instead He chose to heal him through the remedy of a fig poultice (2 Kings 20:5-7; Isa. 38:21). God promised to heal him, yet the very prophet who brought the good news directed that the bandage of figs be applied to his wound. Jesus could have healed a blind man by His word, but He used mud mixed with His saliva for this purpose, and had the man also go and wash his eyes in order to receive his sight (John 9:1, 6, 7). Naaman had to go and wash in the River Jordan seven times to be healed of his leprosy (2 Kgs 5:10–14). In all these instances, the God of miracles chose to give lessons of collaborating closely between Himself and humans by using available remedies. Vaccines preserve health and stop the spread of disease, and “It is no denial of faith to use rational remedies judiciously.”

Prevention is always more important than actual healing. To avoid being sick is a biblical mandate (John 10:10; 1 Cor 6:20;

3 John 2). Bodies in good health and physical condition are a glory to the Creator. Medical science and faith work closely together and must be applied hand in hand. They are complementary. It is a gross misuse of Scripture to claim that taking a vaccination against COVID-19 is receiving the book of Revelation's mark of the beast, and that it will change your DNA. Such misinformation is connected to confusion about the mRNA basis of vaccinations against the coronavirus and SARS. Various conspiracy theories terribly misapply biblical texts to create fear. Vaccines save lives by stopping the spread of disease, but waiting too long has often made it too late. Vaccines prevent complications of health

deterioration. Prayerful application of God's provisions preserves our life and protects others from being harmed.



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*Humble yourselves, therefore,
under God's mighty hand,
that he may lift you up in due time.
Cast all your anxiety on him because
he cares for you.
1 Peter 5:6-7*



UNCONSTITUTIONAL LAWS

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy



In 1981, mass conversions of Harijans to Islam projected an otherwise unknown village called Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu into the news.

When conversion is motivated by inducement, it is described as "proselytization." Originally, the verbs "proselytise" and "convert" were synonymous. However, now the former has come to be associated with converting people by means of material incentives. Increasingly, there has been a tendency to ascribe all religious conversions to such causes.

There were allegations that the Meenakshipuram Harijans were offered Rs. 500 each for turning to Islam. Some who supposedly repented of such a mercenary

attitude towards matters of faith were the only witnesses to testify to such motives. The veracity of confessedly purchasable people should at least have been suspect. How much did they take to make these accusations? Come to think of it, did they even get converted in the first place? Were they simply claiming to have been converted, for a price?

Dr. Subramaniam Swamy, known for his Hindu nationalist views, investigated matters and was unable to establish any malpractice. He described the conversions as a "vote against Hindu Society." He was not alone in thinking this way. One editor described the move as an act of "social rebellion."

Long before all this, when

modern India was being birthed, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who was primarily responsible for drafting India's Constitution, fought economic and social discrimination against those classified as untouchables in India. He felt that it was the caste system that crippled the nation, more than the British. Ambedkar fully supported the Independence movement, but opposed the reformist liberalism of Gandhi and Congress leaders, who believed that barring untouchability, the caste system should remain the social backbone of India. In the end, Ambedkar gave up on Hinduism, and led half a million into Buddhism on October 14, 1956. Buddhism is an increasingly popular option for Dalits because converting from Hinduism to Islam or Christianity is now illegal in several states, while Buddhism is categorised as a sub-sect of Hinduism according to Article 25 of the Constitution, despite the Buddhists disagreeing with this notion.

Any Genuine Conversions?

Instead of admitting the possibility of there being genuine conversions and searching for the causes thereof, Hindus with a majoritarian outlook seek to force people to stay. This is a cussed

refusal to see the issue in proper perspective.

The Hindu religion, as it works out in practice, is unmerciful toward people who suffer from its impositions. Given the notions of karma and casteism, there is no hope for the downtrodden (dalit) and oppressed. There is no way of escape from the "fate" they were born to. They must only be resigned to it. However, modern education has opened the door to critical thought and the down trodden are unwilling to submit to an apparently unjust classification of peoples. But opting out of the Hindu system of castes, is at once to reject Hinduism itself because one cannot be a Hindu and casteless.

It is for this reason that Hinduism itself cannot have any converts, except in the case of modern movements in Hinduism, such as the Ramakrishna group and those centred around the godmen of today. But people cannot be converted to traditional Hinduism because belonging to a caste is integral to being Hindu.

Evangelism and conversion are regarded by some as manifestations of religious intolerance. These activities are judged to indicate an attitude that

the propagated faith is superior to the one that is to be given up. Such "triumphalism" is viewed as obnoxious intolerance. However, rejecting the validity of propagation of religious persuasions is in itself intolerance. It denies the right of free expression.

Another liberty that is taken away by this intolerance of religious propagation is the freedom of people to have a change of convictions. My friend Robert Clements, famous for his column Bob's Banter, wrote a brilliant piece, which I quote in its entirety:

C O N V E R S I O N B Y INDUCEMENT: RELIGION vs. POLITICAL PARTY

As state governments in India pass laws on religious conversion, and political leaders create disharmony by talking about allurements and inducements in changing religions -- a poor man who had converted from the religion of his forefathers to that of a so-called foreign god, stood in front of a judge in a courtroom somewhere in India wearing a dhoti and a torn, worn out discarded shirt from someone else's wardrobe.

The judge looked at him sternly and asked, "Did you change your

religion out of your own free will?"

"Yes, your honor."

"Was there any allurements or inducement that made you do so?"

"Yes, your honor!" said the poor man and the courtroom buzzed with excitement.

"What was the inducement offered?" asked the judge peering at the poor villager and getting ready to close the case.

"The promise of an attractive spiritual life and of a God who listens to me!"

"Was there no other inducement?"

"No, your honour, I was not offered any money to change my God, as I was offered by all the candidates in the last elections to change my vote! And your honour?"

"Yes?" asked the judge.

"When political parties offer free TV's, free electricity, cheap rice, free housing and money in the bank..."

"Yes, yes I know!" said the judge.

"Isn't that allurements and inducement?"

"I am the one asking the questions!" said the judge.

"I am sorry your honour. And your honour?"

"I told you I am the one..."

"I am a poor man..."

"Yes, I know," said the judge.

"Poor and uneducated!"
"I know that!"
"Starving and hungry!"
"What are you leading up to?"
asked the impatient judge.
"Despite being all this, you have
still given me the freedom to
vote!"

"That is the right of every citizen
of this country!" said the judge
proudly, "and it is my duty to see
that no one stops you from
exercising this right!"

"Thank you your honour!," said
the poor man and there was a
hush in the courtroom as he drew
himself to his full height of five
feet four inches and said, "If I,
your honour, can be trusted with
the right to vote a government out
of power, then why your honour
can't I the same poor man be
trusted to change my religion and
my God when I want to, without
having to give an explanation to
you or any officer in this country?
Let me test another god as much
as I test a new government! If I
am good enough to vote then
your honour, I am good enough to
choose my faith, isn't it?"

There was silence in the
courtroom as the poor man sat
d o w n .
[https://bobsbanter.com/good-
enough-to-vote-but/](https://bobsbanter.com/good-enough-to-vote-but/)

Bob wrote the above as a
response to Karnataka's 'anti-
conversion bill'. It is similar to
several recent laws brought by
the BJP in states like Uttar
Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh,
Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.
However, even before the BJP
governments ushered in the
much-criticised enactments,
states like Arunachal Pradesh,
Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand,
Odisha and Uttarakhand had
laws restricting religious
conversion.

Propagation of Religion

To get the right perspective on the
matter of propagating religion we
must look to the Constitution of
India. The "Fundamental Rights"
of all Indians are found in Part III.
The word "fundamental" is a
loaded one. It implies that the
given rights are basic, essential
and foundational. That is the way
the Founding Fathers understood
the significance of the rights.

Jurist B.N. Rau, who was
Constitutional Advisor to the
Constituent Assembly,
specifically asked that the
Fundamental Rights should be
subordinate to the Directive
Principles. Jawaharlal Nehru
countered saying, "A
fundamental right would be
looked upon, not from the point of

view of any particular difficulty of the moment, but as something that you want to make permanent in the Constitution. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan said, "We must safeguard the liberty of the human spirit against the encroachments of the State. While State regulation is necessary to improve economic conditions, it should not be done at the expense of the human spirit...This declaration, which we make today, is of the nature of pledge to our own people and a pact with the civilised world." In no uncertain terms, Rau's plea was rejected and the Constituent Assembly voted that the rights were permanent and inalienable (*N.A. Palkhivala, We, The People, pp.200,214*).

Of particular interest to minorities are the rights pertaining to freedom of conscience. Again, they must be seen as rights enjoyed equally by minorities just as they are by the majority community. The Constitution does not discriminate against the minorities, but guarantees equality in profession, practise, and propagation of religion (Article 25), freedom in management of religious affairs, including establishing and maintaining religious and

charitable institutions (Article 26), and freedom from taxation that promotes any particular religion (Article 27). In practice, while the government does not collect any religious taxes, it is a fact that the majority community often conducts forced collections for the observance of poojas and celebration of festivals. The attitude of the majority community is that if the minorities want to live among them, they must pay. This taxation by society goes on with the cognisance of the government.

The article that generated controversy from the very beginning is Article 25. When the Constitution was being adopted, the word "propagate" was at issue. A submission had been made to the Sub-Committee on Minorities that the right to "preach and propagate" was an important one that needed to be safeguarded for the minorities. However, K. M. Munshi, who drafted the article on behalf of the Fundamental Rights Sub-Committee, left out the words. Objections were raised to the omission. It was then pointed out that "certain religions such as Christianity and Islam, were essentially proselytising religions, and provision should be

made to permit them to propagate their faith in accordance with their tenets." The Advisory Committee, the Drafting Committee and finally, the Constituent Assembly favoured the retention of the word "propagate."

Munshi had hesitated to include the word "propagate" because, if it were not defined, it could grant protection to forced conversions. He recognised though, that even if the word was dropped, the Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech and therefore, permits the persuasion of others to join one's religion. He observed that Christians had stressed the word because propagation was a "fundamental part of their tenet...So long as religion is religion, conversion by free exercise of the conscience has to be recognised." It was after this speech that Article 25 became a part of the Constitution on December 6, 1948.

Continuing Controversy

But the apprehensions about "undue influence" never remained buried. From time to time they would surface. In 1968 the Orissa Government promulgated its Freedom of Religion Act banning conversion by "use of force or by inducement

or by any fraudulent means." In the case of Yulitha Hyde vs. State of Orissa, delivering the judgment, the judges admitted "the religious duty of every Christian to propagate his religion." The Court agreed with the defence that the meaning of the word "inducement" was too vague.

The Madhya Pradesh Government also passed a Freedom of Religion Act in 1968. It was on the same lines as the Orissa Act, except that the Madhya Pradesh Law required that district authorities be notified of conversions. On March 14, 1969, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bhopal issued a statement on behalf of Christians regarding the compulsory registration of conversions. "These requirements contain measures which will cause great psychological and practical harassment to the people concerned and thus, curtail the full exercise of religious freedom guaranteed by the Constitution. Furthermore, the Act implies a false assumption as to the motivation of religious conversions." In conclusion, it was asserted that "on the ground of conscientious objection, they are not obliged to comply with the

M.P. Freedom of Religion Act and Rules framed there under in the matter of ministers of religion and the faithful having to report conversions 'We must obey God rather than man' (Acts 5:29)."

Anyway, the Orissa and Madhya Pradesh laws were upheld by the Supreme Court. The five-member bench made more far-reaching statements on the issues involved. Chief Justice A.N. Ray, delivering the judgment, observed that "there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one's own religion." He defined the constitutional right of propagation in terms of transmission of ideas.

In his book Conversion and Indian Civil Law Julian Saldanha, S.J., observed that while the definition agrees with the meaning of the word as given in dictionaries, "this general definition must be further specified by the sense in which the term was used in the Constituent Assembly. That the term was there understood to include conversion is borne out in the Constituent Assembly debates. This is the reason why the word 'propagate' aroused such a heated exchange in the

Assembly; it would not have met with opposition if it were understood to exclude conversion." Saldanha also noted that the Constitution not only guarantees propagation but also the practice of religion, which for Christians includes engaging in converting others.

Saldanha observed further that the denial of a "fundamental right to convert" another contradicts a basic principle of democracy. It would disallow many other forms of change in society. The same should then be applicable to converting politicians of one party to another, more so when benefits and allurements are more prevalent in this field than in any other.

Noting the agitated feelings of the minorities, Ram Jethmalani introduced a Freedom of Religion Bill for the "Removal of Restrictions." Jethmalani observed in his preamble that "the right to propagate is incomplete without winning adherents to the religion." He admitted further as fact that in practice such laws have been abused and have simply "led to persecution and inhibition of legitimate religious activity."

All of the reservations about

conversions point to the fact of there being concomitants to conversion that are not necessarily spiritual in character. When Harijan Hindus became Muslims, their new-found Islamic brethren, came to their aid. For instance, it was reported by Jawahar Raj of the then Minorities Commission, that a Muslim businessman had provided a new bore-well fitted with a one horsepower motor pump. While they had been Harijans, they had been required to go one mile away to collect their drinking water. The Islamic Cultural Centre, London, aided 50 Hindu families that had secretly embraced Islam, by setting up an agricultural project to facilitate livelihood.

Plight of Converts

It must first be noted that there are some negative concomitants to conversion. A convert can be socially ostracised. Legally, he can also be deprived of maintenance and lose the right of inheritance. E. D. Devadason in the preface of his book *Christian Law in India* has argued that there should be no punitive measure against conversion since legal consequences in matters of religion have no justification in a secular State.

Julian Saldanha also made the same point when he said that "many Hindus are prevented from changing their religion due to force understood as including the threat of social ex-communication" (as defined by the Orissa and Madhya Pradesh Acts).

"Converts from the Scheduled Castes are deprived of their special rights. In other words, a shortcoming of the said Acts is that, while they purport to safeguard the liberty of one who does not wish to change his religion, in the case of a person, who decides, to change his religion, they do not protect from the unjust vexations of his coreligionists."

It is because of the deprivations which converts suffer that their new brethren need to come to their aid. In fact, for the Christian community it is a matter of practising faith. Such succour of brethren is commanded. It is not optional for disciples of Christ. Such caring concern and charitable aid therefore actually, has the protection of the constitutionally guaranteed right of practising one's religion.

M. P. Syed Shahabuddin argued that the provision of concessions

to depressed classes is by the same token tantamount to offering inducements for the prevention of conversion. Shahabuddin deplored the fact that "...the official machinery is being used and official promises are being dangled like carrots to prevent conversions to Islam or to encourage reconversion. One would like to ask, if it is wrong to promote conversion to a religion, is it not equally wrong to prevent conversion? And does it not amount to a clear violation of Article 27 which forbids taxation for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion?" (Onlooker, August 16-31, 1981).

Jawaharlal Nehru addressed the Lok Sabha on December 3, 1955, when there was talk of imposing regulations on conversions. He said, "There should be no regulations of religious conversions. Such curbs will only lead to other evils...There could be no doubt that in the name of conversion, or religious activity much evil was done. This was not confined however to the votaries of any one particular religion. Votaries of every religion sometimes overstepped the limits of decency...No one wanted coercion and deception to be practised, but in practice this

attempt to prevent them might give rise to other forms of coercion."

Recognising that the regulations were aimed at Christian missionaries, he went on to say, "Christianity is as old in India as Christianity itself. Christianity found its roots in India before it went to countries like England, Portugal and Spain. Christianity is as much a religion of Indian soil as any other religion in India."

State-sponsored Injustice

In December 1992, the 450+ years old Babri Masjid was demolished by people connected with the Sangh Parivar including the Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political arm of the RSS. It has been observed that whenever the party came to power at the centre, Hindu nationalists were able to mount attacks on Christians in rural and tribal areas. It continues to be the trend in the country.

Harsh Mander, a secular journalist wrote that the widespread hatred of the Christian community is "...manufactured systematically against bitterly demonised communities. The campaigns of hate that target the populous

Muslim community are better known than those mounted against the tiny Christian minority who peacefully inhabit most corners of this diverse land." Mander pointed out that unlike the mass clashes between Hindus and Muslims, the attacks on Christians largely take the form of intimidation of the community by three means:

- Violent attacks on priests, rape of nuns, desecration/destruction of chapels, Bibles
- Attacking the converts, their homes destroyed, socially boycotting them
- Orchestrated ghar wapasi rituals (reconversion) of those supposed to be Hindus

"Some claimed falsely that they had been given inducement to convert to Christianity because they had been bribed. Most of those whom they 'reconvert' are tribal people (not Hindus, but animists) bribed to convert to Hinduism while claiming that they had been forced/induced to convert to Christianity. They justify the attacks as 'righteous expressions of mass popular resistance' by an angry Hindu majority against allegedly 'anti-national activities of Christian missionaries'. It is claimed that the missionaries through their

educational and health services funded by foreign money coerce and/or bribe poor tribal people and Dalits (the 'downtrodden'—the new politically loaded word identifying the outcaste/the untouchable) into the 'foreign' Christian faith (*The Hindustan Times*, 27 June 2007).

Former Prime Minister Vajpayee was notorious for doublespeak. At first, he deplored the atrocities inflicted on poor low caste Christians in Gujarat and later the burning alive of Australian missionary Graham Staines with his two young boys. When his party high command objected, Vajpayee called for a "national debate on conversions" and more than implied that whatever physical torture or loss of property and life that Christians suffered was well deserved. They brought it on themselves. Until then Christians (including myself) had deluded ourselves, thinking that Vajpayee was a good man in the wrong party.

Such accusations find sympathy among many middle-class folks. Secular journalist and author Arun Shourie wrote a book about missionaries with the give-away title *Harvesting Our Souls*. The by-line on the cover says

"Missionaries their design, their claims" making it clear that in his opinion the whole missionary effort was nothing but a plot to subjugate the nation.

There is another reason which is not as easily discernible. Most of the attacks on Christians take place in rural India. Often it is the service institution rather than the community that is attacked. The reason is that Christian work is changing the social makeup of the country. When Christian schools admit untouchables/outcaste people to learning or treat them with as much dignity as the upper caste people, it changes everything.

Upper caste Hindus don't care about outcaste people. Outcaste means that they really are not Hindus but those cast out of Hindu society. Why should they care whether such lowly creatures that they treat with less care than their cows or other farm animals and birds leave their confinement to the realm of the cast out? The number of Hindus will not go down if they leave, will it? The question that forces itself to be asked is whether there are vested interests in keeping "untouchables" at that level of despair and hopelessness. In rural India people are needed for

cleaning dry toilets and carrying out the night soil. And in our cities, they are needed to go down into septic tanks. If the untouchables begin to have notions of equality and refuse to do anything that demeans them, the burden of these tasks will have to be borne equally by all.

It is not the religious conversion of the outcaste that upsets upper caste Hindus. It is their social conversion that rankles. If the untouchable persons in a village (where there are no toilets connected to a municipal sewage system) acquire a sense of self-worth and refuse to manually carry the fecal sludge out of upper caste homes, who will do it? Remember Pharaoh and his Egyptians? Their only concern was that they had lost their slave labour (Ex.14:5).



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Intercessory Prayer Points



February 2022

1 TUESDAY Thank God for bringing us to the second month of the year. May God enable us to spend the days well and work productively for his kingdom.

2 WEDNESDAY Pray for Adonai Ministries in Karnataka. Pray that God would bless their initiatives and also bless our partnership.

3 THURSDAY Pray for all the leaders and elders of the church that they become a source of blessing to their congregations. Pray that the God will give them spiritual wisdom and understanding as they lead others to Christ.

4 FRIDAY Pray for Nagaland Bible College in Mokokchung, Nagaland. Pray that they would be able to effectively teach and train leaders who would serve God's kingdom wholeheartedly and in God's way.

5 SATURDAY Pray for the youth of

our nation that they would encounter the Living God and experience transformation in their personal lives and influence others around them. Pray that God would bless them with wisdom and discernment to choose the right path in life.

6 SUNDAY Pray that all the churches in India would take measures to make the study of God's Word essential. Pray that God's word would enlighten and empower every believer.

7 MONDAY Continue to pray for those who are persecuted for their faith. Pray that their suffering would produce Christlike characters that would glorify God. Pray for nearness of God and His guidance as they go through this difficult phase.

8 TUESDAY Let us pray for children who are preparing to write their final

exams. Pray that God would enable them to bear their heavy burden and help them as they study. Pray also for uninterrupted internet service and ability to use technical facilities well.

9 WEDNESDAY Continue to pray for the ministry of EFI. Pray for all the staff in different parts of the country to be used by God as they carry out their responsibilities. Pray also for the finances of EFI that God's works may not be hindered.

10 THURSDAY Pray for Berachah Prophetic Ministries in Tamil Nadu. Pray that God would use the ministry to be an instrument for Biblical prophecies in such a time as this.

11 FRIDAY Pray for the CEEFI department. Pray that the biblical literatures produced by them would bless and impact many children and guide their path as they take their little steps of faith.

12 SATURDAY Pray for Religious freedom in our country. Pray that every individual would be able to freely practice and propagate their choice of religion.

13 SUNDAY Pray that our relationship with the Lord would grow deeper than ever. Also pray

that we may love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds and strength.

14 MONDAY Valentine Day. Pray that God's love manifested through Christ reaches all. Pray that people would respond positively to His love. Pray also that love would grow and bind people together irrespective of who they are.

15 TUESDAY Pray for ministries who are spreading the Gospel through Social Media, including Radio transmitter. Pray that God would give wisdom and fresh ideas to reach the unreached through them.

16 WEDNESDAY Pray for the problem of unemployment in our country. Pray that the youth would not lose hope and determination. Pray that the government would find means and ways to create job opportunities.

17 THURSDAY Pray for peace and prosperity in our nation. Pray that God would give us good god-fearing leaders as there are elections this year in some states.

18 FRIDAY Pray for strength, endurance and healing for those going through various medical treatments.

19 SATURDAY Continue to pray for those affected by Covid19. Pray for healing for the body, mind and soul. May their experiences lead them to meet God and to a deeper relationship with God our Heavenly loving Father.

20 SUNDAY Pray for Christian parents to actively and diligently train and teach their children. Pray that they would be able to pass on Christian beliefs and values to their children.

21 MONDAY Continue to pray for all the EFI Group members, Individual members and life members today. Pray that the Lord would place them in a position and authority that they would offer God's gifts of love, hope, truth, unity and grace.

22 TUESDAY Pray that everyone would enjoy equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. Pray for workers who are involved to make this possible.

23 WEDNESDAY Pray for the poor that many would step up to share resources with them and that they would see God's love and

providence through their kind acts.

24 THURSDAY Pray for the people of India that they would respect, value and pursue unity in diversity. Pray that people from different ethnic backgrounds would cohabitate peacefully and harmoniously.

25 FRIDAY Continue to pray for all the political leaders in our country. Pray that they would come to know the truth and rule with truth and justice.

26 SATURDAY Pray that God would heal the nations and let His kingdom come.

27 SUNDAY Pray for all the missionaries serving God in India and abroad. Pray that they may not be discouraged but be strengthened and rejuvenated by the power of God's Word daily. Pray that they would bear many spiritual fruits.

28 MONDAY Thank God for the fruitful month that has just gone by. Pray that we would not be forgetful of His goodness and kindness to us.



*We love because he first loved us
1 John 4:19*



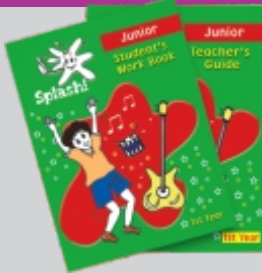
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