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A Journey of Faith

Repentance





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A Journey of Faith

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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

Say **NO** to **WAR**

The focus in India is, understandably, on the medical students trapped in Ukraine where they had gone to study, taking advantage of its European location and Asian pricing for professional education. Their evacuation from Ukraine has called into service India's enormous goodwill with Russia which has been a major provider of its tanks, warships, and military aircraft for more than five decades.

Ukrainian government data from 2020 shows that the nation was home to at least 76000 students from all over the world with Indian students being the overwhelming majority at 20,000 plus.

There are heart rendering stories

on media about the plight of these students as they attempt to cross borders to seek safety and shelter facing hunger, racism, physical violence, neglect, and apathy of the authorities in the host country as well as from their own nation, and uncertainty in general. They will be back home soon, but their medical careers may go through several hurdles.

The second half of the 20th century encompassed the super-heated years of the Cold War, the auto-destruct of the once mighty Communist Soviet Union, and the expansion of the North Atlantic [Military] Treaty Organisation and of the European Union.

Both NATO and EU were formed after the Second World War – as was the United nations – to ensure there would be no future conflicts of that scale, and to

ensure economic development which is the best safeguard against war in the argument that a happy and prosperous people are not very likely to follow a dictator feeding off their anger and frustrations.

Ironically, EU and NATO have at their core Germany, which was the common enemy in the first half of the 20th century as an Axis power, and the United States which has not seen a war on its own soil since its Civil war between states of the Confederacy who defended slavery and other states of the Union who said that man should not enslave a fellow human being.

The Union won in the United States of America, the Allied Powers beat the Axis in Europe [and Japan, using two nuclear bombs] in the second world war. Russia, a member of the winning alliance against Adolf Hitler has been the new enemy since the 1950s.

Both the winners and losers of the world war lost much – in human dignity, the life of their young men, and the devastation of most signs of their culture, the places, castles, and cathedrals, museums, and academies. From Britain through Europe, Russia,

China, Japan and southeast Asia, war and its aftermath are etched deep in the people's memory.

India had a peaceful transition from colonialism to independence, but the one million dead in Hindu-Muslim massacres following the Partition have left religious cleavage, and a xenophobic hatred called communalism which tarnishes contemporary politics especially in north India's Hindi speaking states.

India has had a major war with China in which it tasted defeat, and several skirmishes, and has had four major wars and numerous border confrontations with Pakistan. There were casualties, and barring a few civilians, most of the dead were professional soldiers. The Indian landmass has not felt the human loss and economic tragedy of war. We treat war casually, it often seems, and popular culture glamourises militarisation, particularly cinema and TV.

The people of Ukraine are facing starvation, injury, and displacement. Soldiers die, entire populations of border towns become refugees hoping other neighbours would be more welcoming. The economy will, for

years, be dependent on European doles. The gains for the aggressor, Russia, are ephemeral. An international villain at present, it also faces economic crisis because of the boycott of the West that seriously impacts its own economic progress, and its political consequences. Both sides must be reliving the memories of past wars.

Videos of newly born babies being cared for in bomb shelters, children fighting cancer who must contend now with missiles too and the visuals of destroyed multi-storeyed apartment buildings where families were living only a few weeks ago, seem to come right out of a dystopian movie. Only this is reality.

The human cost of war far outweighs its financial cost. According to estimates, at least 929,000 people have died directly because of war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Pakistan. The number of people injured or ill by violence is far higher, as is the number of people indirectly killed because of these conflicts.

What role does any religion have in modern times in helping prevent such catastrophic strife? What must, in particular, the

Church do in the face of war and the human suffering that follows in its wake?

And, for many who look to The Book for guidance in life, what does the Word of God have to say about war?

The Bible does not give a direct answer to the question. God's word does uphold the sanctity of life and speaks volumes about justice and being peace makers who resolve conflict.

We can be encouraged by the fact that Church leaders the world over have responded with compassion and with appeals to end the invasion of Ukraine and to pray for the victims as well as extend help.

Breaking protocol, in an extraordinary move, Pope Francis visited the Russian embassy on 25th February to "express his concern about the war". Interestingly his visit came on the same day that the Vatican announced he was cancelling other upcoming events because of an "acute" flareup of knee pain. Not only this he also urged Christians around the world to make use of "prayer, charity and fasting" this Lent as a spiritual means of opposing war and the "roar of weapons".

The World Council of Churches appealed to the churches around the world to "...pray for a change of hearts and minds, for de-escalation, and for dialogue instead of threats." And the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) called for an immediate end to the attacks on Ukraine and requested the churches to pray for restoration of peace.

In India, the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, National Council of Churches in India, and the Evangelical Fellowship of India, jointly called for an unconditional ceasefire and encouraged the faithful to observe 2nd March 2022 (Ash Wednesday) as a day of prayer and fasting.

Churches and Christian organizations have reached out with aid and relief to provide some respite and hope in this grim situation. The World Evangelical Alliance is responding to the crisis by raising funds for much needed relief for internally displaced people in Ukraine. The campaign will work through trusted ministry partners and with national church alliances in bordering countries to provide emergency relief for refugees crossing borders.

The war has exposed

disagreements among Orthodox Christians in East Europe and Russia. But hundreds of Pastors from Russia have written an open letter opposing the war, this at great risk of their lives and safety. Their letter calls for repentance and appeals to the Russian authorities to stop the bloodshed. It reminds the nation the Scriptural call to "keep our hands from evil and seek the ways of peace" and warns that "the one who sows evil will reap it." It calls the nation of Russia to harken the words of Jesus: "Put your sword back in its place ... for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matt. 26:52).

The letter also refers to Cain and Able and says, "Our army is conducting full-scale military operations in another country, dropping bombs and rockets on the cities of our neighbouring Ukraine. As believers, we assess what is happening as a grave sin of fratricide - the sin of Cain, who raised his hand against his brother Abel!" [Translated by Google]

Bloodshed was first recorded in the Bible in Cain slaying his brother Able out of jealousy. Cain perceived that God had not just rejected his gift of the fruit of the earth but, in a way, had rejected him (Genesis 4:5). It became a

question of his identity for him.

He had an option of changing himself and so to be accepted by God, but he refused. In turning away from God, he also turned away from the very human sense of fraternity. Murder, seemingly, became inevitable.

Had Cain heeded the warning of God about sin crouching at his door (vs 7), he could have chosen to master it. But Cain succumbed to sin. He became a slave to his ego.

God questions him but finds him arrogant in his response. God judges him and pronounces the sentence: a curse.

Cain complains of the severity of his punishment. God puts a mark on him to halt the cycle of violence. In doing this God protects Cain who although a wrongdoer is also likely to be a target of the anger of others. With the mark of God on him, even though Cain went out of from the Lord's presence (vs 16), he remained protected by Him.

After many years, on the cross, Cain is 'embraced by the Crucified'. Cain, who murdered his brother, can be healed of his jealousy, animosity and craving

to murder, if he learns to love the one who laid down his life for him, if he allows himself to be redeemed.

The cycle of violence can only be halted by a love that is self-giving; a love that will go the last mile even if it costs everything. Not condoning or covering up the violence or the offence but overcoming it through love and sacrifice. That is God's way.

As Christians we must see the attack on Ukraine for what it is: an evil act. But so is every act of war and systematic violence against any people, in any country.

As people of God, we must respond rooted firmly in prayer, knowing that healing and peace can only come from God and through a community whose heart is set after God's own. We must in turn abandon violence and vengeance. Instead, we must pray and bind the wounds of the afflicted. And as the guns fall silent, we must continue to strive for justice, for reconciliation, promoting dialogue . That is God's way bringing mankind to a just world, with mercy, and lasting peace.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal



When did I last preach about repentance? Mostly I preach about receiving Jesus as Saviour, and about submitting to His lordship by committing one's life to Him. I have talked about being born again – that it is for all, not just those who belong to certain denominations. While I have said that people need to turn away from sin, I haven't used the words "repentance" and/or "repent" for a very long time.

It is important to remember that when our Lord started to preach His gospel – His good news, He started by calling people to repentance: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15, NASB). Clearly, there can be no good

news about being welcomed into the Kingdom of God without repentance from sin. It is essential – absolutely essential – for entry into God's kingdom.

What Jesus preached was in line with the prophets of Jewry:

- For thus the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has said, 'In repentance and rest you will be saved, In quietness and trust is your strength' (Isa. 30:15).
- Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Repent and turn away from your idols and turn your faces away from all your abominations" (Eze. 14:6).
- "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away

from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord God. "Therefore, repent and live" (Eze. 18:30-32).

A v e r t i n g I m m e d i a t e P u n i s h m e n t

At the dedication of the temple, Solomon prayed, "When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and deliver them to an enemy...if they take thought...and repent and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, 'We have sinned, we have committed iniquity and have acted wickedly'; if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul...then hear from heaven, from Your dwelling place, their prayer and supplications, and maintain their cause and forgive Your people who have sinned against You" (2 Chron 6:36-39). The Old Testament has a few examples of people being repentant and being able to avert the punishments of this life. God reduced Ahab's punishment

when he walked "softly" before God (1 Kings 21:27-29, ASV). Manasseh was one of the most wicked kings of Judah but was shown mercy because he repented (2 Chron 33:12, 13). Even pagan Nineveh was able to escape the wrath of God through repentance (Jonah 3:9, 10), though this annoyed Jonah that God would do that for Israel's enemy. Because of this thrust of prophetic teachings, later rabbis asserted that if the nation was repentant, the Messiah would come.

It was in this context that John the Baptist arrived to "prepare the way of the Lord" (Matt. 3:3). He stood in line with the ancient prophets and called for people to show by the actions of their lives that they were repentant: "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (Lk. 3:7-8). He told them that claiming to have a pure Abrahamic bloodline wouldn't make them acceptable to God. To the haves, he said that they needed to share with the have-nots. To tax collectors, he said that they should collect only the correct amount. To soldiers or law-enforcers, he said that they

should not abuse their office and extort money by implicating people in false charges (vv.8-14).

Repentant David

While the modern usage of “repentant” conveys the notion of feeling sorry or remorseful, the way the Bible uses the words “repent” and “repentance” they are all about responding to God’s call to turn away from acts of wickedness, especially idolatry which is rejection of God, and to return to God. Yes, there is the sorrow of penitence, but it doesn’t stop there. Steps are taken away from sins and evil, and steps are taken toward God and holiness of life.

For instance, when David was confronted by the prophet Nathan about his sin of having abused his kingly authority and exploited people under him, David made no attempt to justify himself of not having done anything kings didn’t do. He confessed, “I have sinned against the LORD” (2 Sam. 12:1-13). In his penitential psalm, David acknowledged that what God wanted was purity of heart (Ps. 51:6). He didn’t make any promises to make amends by

doing good on his own. Instead, he asked God to clean him up: “Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit” (vv.7-12). He told God that the new purpose of his life would be to show others the way to leave their transgressions and get back to God: “I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You” v.13). David clearly said to God that he wouldn’t try to buy forgiveness with blood sacrifices because they were not pleasing to God. Instead, he offered God his brokenness: “For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise” (Ps. 51:16-17).

Lost and Found

In the New Testament, metanoia is the Greek word translated "repentance". It is a word that suggests a change of direction in one's life. The same idea is conveyed by the word "conversion". Jesus said that people need to convert and become like children to enter God's kingdom (Matt. 18:3). Jesus had time for the repentant, but not for the self-righteous. He said plainly that He didn't come for them (Matt. 9:13).

Jesus told three stories to illustrate that repentance is what makes God and all heaven happy (Lk. 15:7,10). However, the first two stories, are about the sinner being found and rescued entirely without any effort on the part of the sinner. All the action is on God's part. The shepherd searches for the lost sheep that makes no effort to return to the fold (vv.4-6). The woman searches for the lost coin that is lifelessly powerless to be found (vv.8-9). In the third story, the father waits for the son to repent and start back, but before the son can reach the father, it is the father who runs to him. When the son declares himself unworthy to

be treated like a son, and desires only to be a servant, the father embraces him and declares that he is the son who was lost but has been found (vv.11-32). All the stories are to illustrate the fact that those who are unworthy will find acceptance with God. The first two stories emphasise that God doesn't need any help to save us. We are saved because God chooses to do so. The third story says that God will not save us against our own will. We have to choose to want God in our lives. We have to turn back from our rejection of God and turn our lives around to make our way back to God.

While the Gospel according to John does not talk of repentance, Matthew, Mark and Luke do, and so does Acts. They recorded the commands of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus and the apostles telling their listeners to repent. Though there are a few references to believers experiencing repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:25), there is no command to repent in the epistles, because the letters were addressed to those who were walking in the Lord as committed believers.

Time to Repent

But when we come to the book of Revelation, the commands to repent reappear in the Lord's letters to the seven churches: the church that had lost its love was in danger of being removed completely (2:1-7); churches that were tolerant toward those who embraced wrong teaching and immoral conduct would find the Lord fighting with the sword of His Word (vv.12-17) and fighting and executing the wicked (vv.18-20); the church that was living on its reputation of being alive would not be ready for the Lord's return (3:1-6); the church that was lukewarm and complacent, would experience the Lord's chastisement but be given an opportunity to fellowship with the Lord (vv.14-22). All such churches are commanded to repent.

Though the Lord wrote those letters to churches of that period, they do apply to succeeding generations of churches, don't they? When we read the Lord's letters, we do see churches today still caught in the same sort of situations. We need to repent in order to be prepared for the Lord's return.

If we read the signs of the times as our Lord gave them, then we know that we are very definitely nearing the end. Long ago, Paul wrote, "the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11). That first generation of Christians lived with the thought that Jesus was returning soon during their lifetime. They were not wrong to think that way, because Jesus had told them to be watchful as they didn't know when He would return. The point is that what Paul wrote then, is truer now.

Here's the context of what Paul wrote:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law...Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time: the hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So, let us put aside the deeds of darkness

and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh (vv.8-14).

Repentance is basic to the Christian faith. It is listening to God and responding by turning toward Him in faith. Paul “declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21). Repenting and having faith happen simultaneously – as two

facets of one event. Repentance is a deep change. From being self-centred in sin we turn to the Lord Jesus to live life in the way God wants us to. Yes, it's time to change, time to turn around completely. It's time to repent.



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The Repentance we neglect

Dr. Shantanu Dutta



"Repent," urged Peter, "and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). These divinely inspired words, spoken on the Day of Pentecost, the annual holy day that became the "birthday" of the New Testament church, show that repentance is the first prerequisite for receiving the Holy Spirit. "Repent" was the first command issued on the day the church was "born," the first word used to answer the all-important question, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (2:37).

The importance of this essential doctrine is underscored by the fact that New Testament narratives specifically mention

repentance in their summaries of the preaching of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:2), Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:7), and the apostle Paul (Acts 20:21). Paul informs us that "these times of [past] ignorance God has overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Repentance, then, is a subject deserving of careful study. The admonition to repent is for all man of all races and nationalities and is an essential component of the good news of the Kingdom of God.

In evangelical circles, while we tend to over-emphasize individual moral responsibility and rightly highlight the need for personal responsibility, we forget that collective judgment runs

through the whole narrative of the Bible and human history. Repentance is presented as an aspect of piety rather than an ethical imperative for doing justice. We speak, write, preach, and sing about repentance as part of a personal relationship with God, but seldom (and then only reluctantly) treat repentance as necessary for healing broken relationships because people abuse power and harm others. That pietistic view of repentance does not square with the Bible.

The Christian posture of collective repentance in times of disaster has its roots in the Hebrew prophets, such as the prophet Amos. Commenting on an earthquake that struck Palestine in the mid-eighth century BCE, Amos chastises his rich and powerful audience, "orienting" them toward the poor and disenfranchised:

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy,
And bring the poor of the land to an end...
Shall not the land tremble on this account,
and everyone mourn who dwells in it,
and all of it rise like the Nile,

and be tossed about and sink again, like the Nile of Egypt?
(Amos 8: 4, 8 RSV)

The story of the flood also is a story of collective judgment on a large group of people... all people everywhere! All men, women, children, and property without distinction are destroyed. (Gen 6:5-7). The Levitical law outlines instructions for individuals to bring sacrifice to the tabernacle to atone for their personal sins of various kinds (e.g. Lev 1:2ff). But certain individual's sin can also bring judgment upon all the people (e.g. Lev 4:3ff). All of this leads to the climactic Day of Atonement (Lev 16) wherein the Aaronic priest makes atonement for himself, his household, and finally for all of the people. If individuals and individual households neglected to bring sacrifice for their sins, this one sacrifice made by one man (the high priest) makes atonement for all the people of Israel. Without a doubt, collective sin and collective judgment run throughout the story of God's people.

In the modern church, some believe we have lost our sense

of corporate responsibility. This is not a new struggle; asking "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a familiar question to God's people. But perhaps, especially in a context where individuality reigns, and where people identify themselves essentially by their independence, this struggle manifests itself anew in a real and sometimes challenging way. Believers typically have a strong grasp of individual culpability and are usually grateful for the opportunity, in worship, to confess. Though they know that Christ atoned for their sins once and for all on the cross, the experience of confession is still a healing balm.

We never repair harm or undo the oppression of sin committed against others by merely making an apology and feeling remorseful. Acknowledging guilt and expressing remorse does not restore what has been wrongfully taken, does not rebuild what has been destroyed and does not heal what has been wounded.

Healing what has been wounded, righting what has been wronged and restoring what has been stolen or destroyed involves justice (righteousness). That requires us to ponder the ethical imperatives surrounding reparations, restitution and restoration if we are to truly and faithfully reflect about repentance.



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Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.

Isaiah 55:6

Extravagant Devotion to Jesus

Rev. Dr. David Mende



Introduction

In 2001, while I was doing my Masters in Computer Science, the Lord radically transformed my life and I was on fire for God! I would be very vocal about my faith and share the gospel with my non-Christian friends. However, some of my Christian friends would criticize me for my passion and devotion to Christ. They would ask me to calm down and be normal. If you show extravagant devotion to God, even fellow Christians will often criticize you. They'll say things like, "You don't have to be so holy. You don't have to act so godly. I know how you were earlier. You don't have to be so sacrificial." Even in Mark 14:1-11, a woman is reprimanded for demonstrating extravagant devotion to Christ. I've entitled this article as

"Extravagant Devotion to Jesus."

In Mark 3:6; 11:18; 12:12, we see that the religious leaders vehemently opposed Jesus. But in Mark 14, we see that they begin to execute their plans to kill Jesus. In Mark 14:1-11, we see that a woman demonstrates her devotion to Jesus, though the chief priests and the scribes seek to destroy him and Judas seeks to betray him. When you look at this passage, Mark has deliberately sandwiched the story of this unnamed woman's devotion in between the conspiracy of the Pharisees and the scribes in 14:1-2 and Judas' plan to betray Jesus in 14:10-11.

In Mark's sandwiching method, the middle story provides the

main point of the story. Mark contrasts the devotion of an unnamed woman with the betrayal of one of the twelve disciples. The woman was willing to spend all her money to show her devotion to the Lord, while Judas was willing to betray Jesus to gain some money. Even as we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8th, let's see how this woman disciple demonstrated her devotion towards Christ and learn from her.

1. The Chief Priests and the Scribes Seek to Arrest and Kill Jesus (Mk 14:1-2).

Beginning with Mark 14:1, Mark talks about the events that eventually led to the crucifixion of Christ.

a. The Setting: Two days before the Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (14:1a).

Now many people were keen to go to Jerusalem to participate in the Passover feast at least once in their lifetime, just like many Christians today long to go to Israel once in their lifetime. So, the diaspora Jews from different parts of the world came to Jerusalem to participate in the Passover feast. During Passover, lodging was free. Since Jerusalem would be full during

the Passover, some people would stay in Bethphage and Bethany which were near to Jerusalem. So, there were huge crowds in and around Jerusalem during the Passover.

"Two days before the Passover" must probably be understood as "the day before" according to the Jewish reckoning of a day. So, the religious leaders conspired to arrest Jesus and kill him on Wednesday, the day before the Passover.

b. The Chief Priests and the Scribes were seeking to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him (14:1b-2).

Since there were huge crowds in Jerusalem during the Passover, the chief priests and the scribes sought to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. But why? In order to avoid uproar from the people (v. 2). Many Jews believed that the Messiah would come and deliver them from Rome's rule during the Passover. So, the Romans were on guard during the Passover. They were on the edge of their seat as they expected trouble at any time. The chief priests and the scribes knew that arresting Jesus during this time can cause a riot in Jerusalem. So, they sought to arrest him secretly and kill him. Instead of fearing God, they feared people.

As the Jews went to Jerusalem to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt, God was preparing his Son to die on the cross to deliver us from our sins. Though the religious leaders didn't plan to kill Jesus during Passover, they eventually ended up killing him during Passover. They probably changed their minds when Judas offered to betray Jesus.

2. A Woman Demonstrates Her Complete Devotion to Jesus (Mk 14:3-9).

In this section, we read about an unnamed woman who demonstrates her devotion to Jesus.

a. A woman anoints Jesus' head with pure nard (14:3).

Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper. He was probably healed by Jesus. Jesus had been staying at Bethany ever since he arrived at Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. And a woman anoints Jesus at Simon's house. This woman's tenderness stands in striking contrast to the treachery of the Jewish leaders and Judas.

Mark tells us that this woman brought an "alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard" which was "very costly." Nard was an expensive aromatic oil extracted from the root of an Indian herb

named "nard." In Jesus' time, such spices and ointments were used as investments (just as we invest in gold) as it was portable and could be easily sold. Mary broke the flask and poured the nard over Jesus' head. John adds, "[she] anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (Jn 12:3).

b. Some became indignant at the woman's act (14:4-5).

But why were they indignant?

1) They became indignant because the woman was "wasting" the ointment (14:4).

Mark tells that "some" became indignant. Matthew 26:8 tells us that it was the disciples who were indignant, while John 12:4-5 mentions that Judas became indignant. Probably, Judas was more vocal than the rest of the disciples. They felt that this woman wasted the ointment. The disciples felt that this woman's costly devotion was a waste. In one sense, they don't regard Jesus as worthy of such extravagant devotion.

2) They said that the ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor (14:5).

They, especially the treasurer, Judas, estimated the ointment to be sold for more than three hundred denarii. A denarius was a day's wage in Israel. So, three hundred denarii were a year's wages! I've seen some Christians giving away a month's salary to the Lord, but I didn't hear anyone giving a year's salary. They scolded the woman for "wasting" the ointment. The Greek word for this phrase is *embrimaesthai*, which means "to flare the nostrils [in anger]."

During Jesus' time, when guests arrived at a house, the hosts would anoint the head of the guests with a little bit of oil. But this woman poured out all the ointment from the jar. Mary didn't just pour out the ointment but broke the alabaster flask which meant that the flask couldn't be used again. This symbolizes the completeness of the gift offered to Christ. The woman pouring out of costly oil prefigures Christ pouring out his precious blood for our sins.

c. Jesus commends the woman's act (14:6-9).

Jesus commends the woman for her costly act of devotion.

1) *She had done a beautiful thing to Jesus (14:6).*

Jesus defends the woman and

says, "Leave her alone." In the disciples' evaluation, the woman had wasted the ointment. But in Jesus' assessment, "She has done a beautiful thing" to him.

2) *They would always have the poor, but not Jesus (14:7).*

Jesus is not being indifferent to the poor while alluding to Deuteronomy 15:11. On other occasions, he expresses his concern for the poor (Mt. 5:3; 6:2-4; 19:21; Lk. 6:20, 36-38; 21:1-4; Jn 13:29). Rather, Jesus explains how worthy he is! Jesus places himself above the poor. The value of a gift demonstrates the value of a person. This woman's gift demonstrates that Jesus is worthy! The disciples fail to understand Jesus' worth, but this woman understood that Jesus is worthy of costly devotion.

3) *The woman did what she could (14:8).*

This woman did "what she could." We too must do what we can. Even in Mark 12:44, Jesus affirms the poor widow who gave all she could (12:44). The poor widow gave very little compared to the woman in Mark 14, but Jesus commends both for their giving and devotion. Our motives matter to Jesus more than the material value of our gifts. When we demonstrate our devotion to Jesus, even two small copper

coins are not insignificant and even a year's salary is not a waste. But we must be careful that we don't lower our standards so much that we claim that doing nothing is what we can do!

4) She prepared Jesus' body beforehand for burial (14:8).

On several occasions, Jesus told his disciples about his impending death (Mk 8:31-33; 9:31-32; 10:32-34). But they didn't respond to the prophecy about his death and none of them took pains to honor Jesus before he would die. But this woman honored Jesus by pouring out expensive oil over his head. By anointing Jesus' head, this woman unknowingly anointed his body beforehand for burial.

5) Her actions would be told wherever the gospel is proclaimed (14:9).

Jesus' words, "And truly, I say to you," match the indignant attitude of the disciples. Since this woman expressed her devotion to Christ and prepared his body for burial without being fully aware that she was doing so, Jesus says that "wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." That's what we are doing today.

It is ironic that Jesus' disciples

desired fame and popularity and didn't get it then. However, this unnamed disciple of Christ demonstrated her devotion to Jesus and her act of devotion receives recognition wherever the gospel is proclaimed. Our faithful and loving actions toward Jesus will not be forgotten; the Lord records them. Here, we see that Jesus anticipated his resurrection and the subsequent preaching of the gospel to the whole world.

3. Judas Plans to Betray Jesus (Mk 14:10-11).

Luke 22:3 and John 13:2, 27 say that Satan caused Judas to betray Jesus. But Mark focuses on the moral responsibility of Judas.

a. Judas goes to the Chief Priests to betray him (14:10).

The phrase "one of the twelve" highlights the treachery of Judas. There is a Judas within us. Just because you are intimate with Jesus today, it doesn't necessarily mean that you will be faithful tomorrow. We must be careful that we will not fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

b. The Chief Priests were glad and promised to give him money (14:11).

It's a sad commentary that the chief priests were glad that someone was ready to betray

Jesus. John 12:6 and 13:29 say that Judas was the treasurer and a thief. This thief was ready to betray his Master for mere money.

c. Judas sought an opportunity to betray Jesus (14:11).

Judas was eagerly looking for an opportunity to betray his Master. Sometimes, we wonder how Judas betrayed Jesus even though he was one of the twelve. Now, some scholars suggest that Judas probably acted as a spy for the Sanhedrin. Others suggest that he was disappointed that Jesus didn't overthrow the Roman government and thus handed over Jesus. We can't be sure about these things because the Bible is silent regarding his actual motives. Mark holds Judas fully responsible for his act of betrayal. The chief priests didn't come to him, but he went to them. However, God would use Judas' evil intent to fulfill his saving purposes. Judas will be judged by God for his treachery.

Conclusion

The main message of this article is: Be completely devoted to Jesus because he is infinitely worthy.

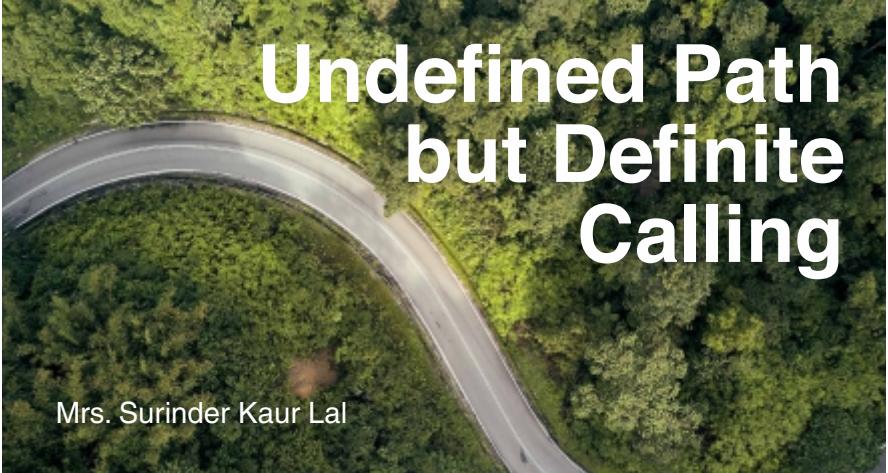
Jesus is infinitely worthy. He is the greatest treasure! My prayer is

that all of us will dedicate ourselves to the Lord and be completely devoted to him. Our Lord is infinitely worthy. Let's be completely devoted to Jesus!

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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Undefined Path but Definite Calling

Mrs. Surinder Kaur Lal

Introduction

Women in 'leadership position' are rare as compared to men. And in Christian circles they perhaps remain rarer. Struggles that are largely hidden, plenty of hard work and overcoming extraordinary challenges is what often makes a woman leader. Even though the need for gender equality is widely recognised and the same is encouraged, yet much is still desired. One does not normally witness gender equality in day-to-day life in India. Women still suffer underrepresentation in leadership positions in various facets of life.

Women face barriers that are often invisible; challenges that

can be prominent, and yet subtle and most have a root in cultural beliefs about gender. There are practices, patterns and structures that inadvertently favour men. Deborah L. Rhode in her book, *Women and leadership* rightly says, "Gender stereotype play a well-documented, often unconscious role. These stereotypes subject women to double standards and a double bind."

Unlike the present-day leadership roles, the earlier positions were taken by male leaders since their inception. But the contemporary leadership has witnessed a rapid growth in the number of women leaders. The face of India has changed rapidly,

but the need for 'Women Empowerment' remains.

The Present-Day Challenges

Though the thick walls of gender bias are thinning down, the variety of Indian cultures continue to remain largely conservative and tightly hold on to their age-old traditions and their set definition about women identity. This is also true of the Church in India.

For instance, the ordination of women for priesthood has been a topic of much contention within the Indian Church. However, several Churches particularly the Church of South India, followed by the Church of North India as well as the Methodist Church in India, have led in the ordination of women as far as the 'mainline denominations' are concerned. Women's ordination and Pastoral role is much more common in evangelical and independent congregations and more so in the recent years. It is appropriate that we speak of it briefly here.

The Church of South India (CSI) leads as far as ordination of women is concerned. The

Diocese of Madras particularly has the largest number of women priests, around 20. Though the CSI ordained Florence Deendayal in 1972 and the altar has since been open to women, yet the debate and opposition to it continued. It is only recently that women pastors have had independent charge of congregations, otherwise they were only given subsidiary roles in assisting male priests.

The Church of North India (CNI) accepted women ordination in principle in 1974 and the same was approved in 1977. The first woman to be ordained was Ms. Pearl Prasad who served for a good time in Punjab. By 1986 the CNI had 20 ordained women pastors and today has around 55 women pastors according to Ms. Sushma Ramswamy, the Communications Secretary of the CNI.

The Methodist Church in India first ordained women in 1986. Women have been ordained in the Baptist and Presbyterian denominations in the North-East part of India as well especially in the states of Nagaland and Mizoram. But all these are

exceptional cases only. There is much to be done and the Church needs to give breathing space to women in the ministry.

In other Asian countries, for instance Pakistan, even the Reformed churches do not allow the ordination of women. On the other hand, women enjoy leadership positions and considerable freedom in Sri Lanka but defer to men in all walks of life.

Even as women face challenges at home, in church or at the workplace, strength and courage can be derived, from the women of the Bible to whom leadership was not served in a platter, but they had to make their way to reach the position that they were able to attain and were empowered and honored by God.

The Biblical Women Leaders

We find stories of extraordinary leadership and courage, both in the Old as well as the New Testament. Let us briefly examine the lives of three extraordinary women of faith who were used by God to help change the course of history.

Deborah:

Deborah was the only woman in the Bible to be elevated to a high position of political power. However, even though she was a distinguished judge and leader of Israel, she had no aristocratic lineage. She is identified simply by the name of her husband "Lappidoth" in the Bible. But the Bible does make clear that she was a prophet and was leading Israel. (Judges 4:4). Before she becomes a judge, she described herself as "a mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7). At a time when the army was too weak to defend the national borders, civil court was incompetent and priesthood was ineffectual, Deborah displayed her leadership, first by suggesting solutions to the problems of people, and then became a judge. She ultimately delivered her people. (Judges 4:8).

Before we exercise our leadership and decision-making skills, we are like Deborah - a wife and a mother in Israel. Her compassion was awakened when she saw the atrocities suffered by her people. She chose to make herself available

and was successful as a leader because she trusted God. Her name continues to be recounted throughout history. Do we recognise God's calling and feel the pull, as Deborah felt? And if we do, do we respond as Deborah did?

Huldah:

Huldah - the prophet, played an important part in the history of the nation of Israel. She is identified as the wife of Shallum "son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe." She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter. What is interesting is that while Israel had important prophets such as Jeremiah and Zephaniah at that time, the priest Hilkiah and the king's advisors turned to a woman (Huldah) for a word from God. Huldah was consulted when the king instructed the priest to "inquire of the LORD" and God used Huldah to testify and deliver God's message to the High Priest and the king (2 Kings 22:14–20).

The story of Huldah invalidates the flawed argument given by some people who believe that God uses women in leadership positions only when men are not

available. Huldah was sensitive to hearing God's voice and was not laidback presuming that God has powerful prophets like Jeremiah and Zephaniah to do God's work. She, as a godly and empowered woman, understood her responsibility and made her God-given spiritual gifts available to be a channel through whom God delivered His Word (2 Kings 22:15–17, 19).

Rahab:

Rahab distinguished herself because of her perspicacity and courage. She did not belong to the nation of Israel but displayed great understanding of what was happening with the Israelites in the light of the recent events. She knew that Israel was favoured by God and that they were God's people. She proved her bravery and intelligence in protecting the spies even though it meant a great personal risk for her and her family. It was disloyalty towards her own people, but she knew better and had spiritual insight to know that Israel's God was God. (Joshua 2:11)

She is exemplary because she

made the right choices and stood steadfast even in the face of pressure. God honoured her by placing her in the lineage of not only King David (Matthew 1:6) but also the Lord Jesus. (Matthew 1:1) and granting her a son, Boaz, who is one of the godliest and gentlest men in the Bible.

There are several more women like Miriam (Micah 6:4, Exodus 15:20, Numbers 12:2-16) and Noadiah, a prophetess (Nehemiah 6) in the Old Testament. And in the New Testament we find Anna – an exceptionally holy woman, Philip's four prophesying daughters (Acts 21:9 cf. 1 Cor. 11:5), Priscilla, who provided leadership along with her husband (Paul calls them both as his fellow workers in Rom. 16:3), Aquila in Acts 18:24-26 and many more.

It is evident that God does not discriminate based on class, caste, or gender. For Him there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but all are equal (Galatians 3:28). And He has gifted us all equally too.

These stories of faith and leadership can speak to us today. So be encouraged through the life stories of these godly women as you seek to lead in the areas of influence that God has placed you in. Women need to be convinced about their individual responsibility and part in God's plan of building His kingdom. Women must realize that God has entrusted them with many different gifts and should use them responsibly in God's mission to glorify Him.



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is a freelance journalist and a woman leader based in New Delhi. She has been writing on religion, politics and spirituality for the past 17 years and travels as a women speaker within India and abroad. She is the wife of Rev. Vijayesh Lal, General Secretary of EFI and a mother of three lovely sons.



GOD - THE LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

Rev. Richard Masih

Introduction:

We have seen about Lord Jesus Christ as the Man from Heaven. We have seen about the Holy Spirit as the Spirit sent from heaven. Now, we will see God as the Lord of heaven and earth. He is called so in Luke 10:21 in the words of our Lord, "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth...." He is called so in Acts 17:24 in the words of Apostle Paul, "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man...". So, God is the LORD of heaven and earth.

This God- the LORD of heaven-

is infinite. So, a study of him will also have to be infinite. It can't be covered in a few instalments of a magazine or the few chapters of a book or a few teaching sessions. The finite human mind also cannot fathom/comprehend the height, the depth and the width of God. Apostle Paul exclaimed, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways (Romans 11:33)! King Solomon confessed the infiniteness of God, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built" (1Kings 8:27). Further, "But who is able to build him a house, since heaven, even highest

heaven, cannot contain him? Who am I to build a house for him, except as a place to make offerings before him" (2Chronicles 2:6)? Still further, "But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built" (2Chronicles 6:18)!

But we can make a humble beginning. Westminster's book 'Shorter Catechism' answers the question, 'What is the chief end of man?' as, "The chief end of man is to know God, and enjoy him forever." So let us know God and keep pressing on knowing him. Hosea 6:3 exhorts us, "Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD."

- **The existence of God:**

The Bible never tries to prove the existence of God. It simply declares, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). According to the Bible those who do not believe in the existence of God are fools. "The fool says in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1). What makes them fools? It's because the proof of the

existence of God abound all around us-

- The Ontological (study of existence) proof- God must exist because humans universally believe that there is some supreme being or power in nature.
- The Cosmological (study of the origin and evolution of the universe) proof- Every effect must have sufficient cause and, therefore, universe which is an effect, must have a Creator as its cause. Cf. the orderliness of the universe.
- The Teleological (study of design and purpose in the material world) proof- Every design must have its designer, and as the whole creation is intricately designed and interrelated, creation must have a great designer. The fact that all things work together indicate that the designer must be of infinite power and wisdom.
- The anthropological (study of human societies and cultures and their development) proof- The nature and existence of humans remain unexplained apart from creation by God who has a nature to, but greater than humans'- intellect

(capacity to think), emotions (capacity of feel) and will (capacity to make moral choices).

- **The revelation of God:**

- We can't know God on our own unless God chooses to reveal himself to us. God hides himself from the wise and the learned, the proud. At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children...." (Matthew 11:25). We read the truth of God hiding himself in Isaiah 45:15, "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior." That means, we have to come to him in the spirit of humility and hunger, not in the spirit of pride and arrogance.
- God has revealed himself in nature. It is called the general revelation. "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place" (Psalm 8:3). "The heavens declare the glory of

God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Romans 1:19,20). Humans have no excuse to disbelieve in the existence of God. God has not left himself without witnesses in nature. "Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17).

- God has revealed himself in Scripture. It is called God's special revelation.
- God has revealed himself *through the prophets*. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets...." (Hebrews 1:1).
- God has revealed himself *through the great events*. E.g.,

Creation, Flood, Exodus, Return of the captives.

- God has revealed himself *through his words*. "I am who I am." (Exodus 3:14). He has revealed himself in his words that he is holy, jealous and merciful, etc.
- God has revealed himself in and *through his moral laws*. E.g., the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5).
- God has finally revealed himself in his Son. It's called God's final revelation.
- Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:1-3).
- No one has ever seen God;

the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:18).

- Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father' (John 14:9)?

(III) The goodness of God:

- The goodness of God is seen in the facts that he loves us. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so

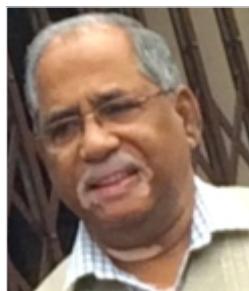
loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1John 4:8-11).

- The goodness of God is seen in the fact that he cares for us. "...casting all your anxieties on him, because he *cares for you*" (1Peter 5:7).
- The goodness of God is seen in the fact that he protects us. "The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore" Psalm 121:5-8).
- The goodness of God is seen in the fact that he *provides for us*. "These all look to you, to give them their food in due season" (Psalm 104:27). "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due

season" (Psalm 145:15). "He gives to the beasts their food, and to the young ravens that cry" (Psalm 147:9). "The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing" (Psalm 34:10). And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

So, let's trust him and rest in him, praise and pray to him, honor him and glorify him.

(To be continued)...



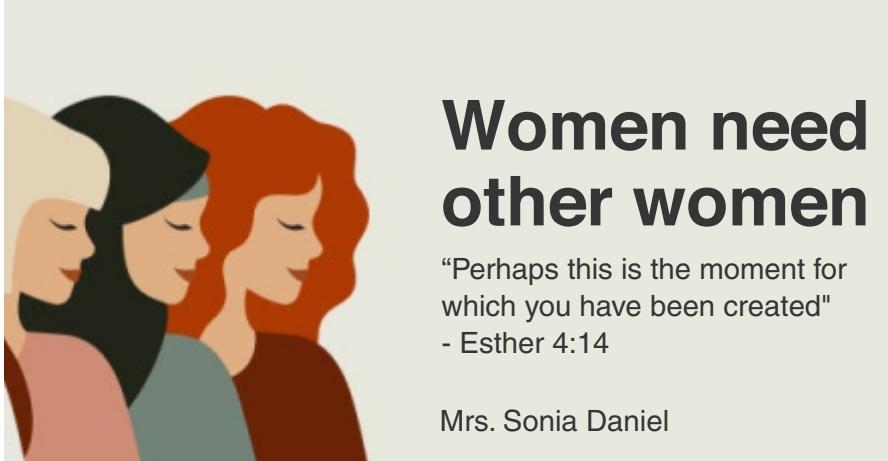
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Do not let your hearts be troubled.
You believe in God; believe also in me.
John 14:1



Women need other women

"Perhaps this is the moment for which you have been created"

- Esther 4:14

Mrs. Sonia Daniel

As a woman, it surely sounds good to hear that, "Behind every successful man, there is a woman". However, "Behind every successful woman, is another woman", sounds even better.

In a world rife with competitiveness, it is heartening to know that there are abounding and encouraging stories of women uplifting, building and empowering other women. The Bible is witness to one such bond, which is of Mary, mother of Jesus, with Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist.

Selene Kinder, the founder of Empowering Women Now, a platform that empowers women to live authentically, has said, "

wish more women realized that helping another woman win, cheering her on, praying for her, or sharing a resource with her, does not take away from the blessings coming to them. In fact, the more you give, the more you receive. Empowering women doesn't come from selfishness but rather from selflessness.

The relationship of Mary and Elizabeth is one to be understood and followed. Luke chapter 1 tells us that the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah to inform him that Elizabeth has found favour with God and will be blessed with a child in her old age. The same angel Gabriel visited Mary to share the good news of her being blessed with

the Holy spirit and becoming the mother of the Son of God and reveals about Elizabeth's pregnancy with Mary. On knowing this, Mary hurried to visit her cousin Elizabeth and was greeted joyfully and blessed by Elizabeth. The Bible says that on hearing the greeting, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was full of Holy Spirit, she exclaimed to Mary, "*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!*"

There are a few main attributes that stand out from this beautiful bond between Mary and Elizabeth:

We need understanding women

"Be humble and gentle in every way. Be patient with each other and lovingly accept each other."

Ephesians 4:2

It is comforting when we hear someone else say, "You too!" The knowledge that someone else is facing or is going through the same situation / struggles being faced by us, gives us an assurance that there is someone who we can look up to for help, assistance, or guidance.

Despite their age differences, Mary and Elizabeth had each other as friends and co-travellers in their journey of motherhood. Elizabeth lovingly and joyfully welcomes Mary in her home, and they share the three months together.

It is astounding to see the way in which God works, His ways are wondrous and beyond our comprehension and imagination.

As we journey through our lives, let us keep our eyes open and look around ourselves, God would have placed a Mary or Elizabeth near us. *On the other hand, be understanding, listen to what other women have to say, and who knows, God would have chosen you to be a Mary or Elizabeth to other women around.*

We need women who complement and not compete

"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" Luke 1:45 (NIV)

The knowledge of Mary being pregnant, did not bitter or invoke jealousy in Elizabeth's heart, rather she welcomed Mary with

joy and blessed her lovingly. Elizabeth recognised that the mission of Mary was to bear the Son of God and that she was chosen for a ministry of bearing John the Baptist.

In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "*Comparison is the thief of joy*". Elizabeth refrained from comparing the ministries of their off-springs and with humility and love accepted the will of God, believing that the Lord had fulfilled his promises.

We all have different lives and each one of us grows at a different pace. We are chosen for a purpose, and when He chooses us, be assured that He will build us accordingly. Let us keep our hearts open to welcome others in our lives lovingly. God has blessed each one of us with unique gifts and He has chosen us based on these gifts.

A quote that I personally love is, "*Be the woman who fixes another woman's crown without telling the world it was crooked.*" Become such a woman, helping and assisting other women in love and compassion. We need to stop comparing ourselves with

others, rather unite with each other, build each other, complement each other and be a source of encouragement and joy to other women around us.

We need women who strengthen our faith

"But a woman who fears the Lord will be greatly praised." – Proverbs 31:30

With the mighty task ahead, both Mary and Elizabeth continued to enrich each other in faith. It would be right to believe that Elizabeth strengthened Mary's faith. There might be people in your life right now who need more of your time. God has strategically placed you in their life to encourage, strengthen their faith, invest in their lives deeply and to empower them personally and professionally.

It becomes imperative for the elder women to nurture and develop the younger generation to become stronger in their faith. We need to pass on the baton and in order to be able to leave a legacy, we need to imbibe and personify the life that God wants us to lead. We need to exemplify

these traits in us, and only when the younger generation witness us living the life that we speak, will they be encouraged and strengthened in their faith.

Let us uphold all the women in our prayers, be it a mother, a daughter, a sister, a friend, a colleague, anyone around you, who is in need of prayers. We need to be their cheerleaders in their times of need and be the support that is expected of us.

Let us not withhold ourselves but selflessly spread the love and joy that Christ wants from us. Let each one of us become a woman who fears the Lord and a source of blessing and spiritual

nourishment to other women around us. May we uplift and guide other women through the word of God.

We are created to encourage, uplift, and empower just like Esther.



Mrs. Sonia Daniel

works with EFI as Director - Internal Communications & Project Relations.

A large, semi-transparent rectangular overlay containing a quote. The background of the overlay shows a sunset over ocean waves.

Cast all your
anxiety on him
because he cares
for you.
1 Peter 5:7

Lasting Lessons from The Last Bible Reference To Money

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj



The last Bible reference of Money according to the ESV version of the Bible comes from Hebrews 13:5. It reads this way: Keep your life from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

What a glorious promise comes at the end of that verse: I will never leave you nor forsake you! The presence of God is the best blessing we can have! The Bible often talks about the blessings that the presence of God brings. It brings into our life a joy which the world cannot give. David writes in the Psalms: "In your presence is fullness of joy" (Psa. 16:11). Lasting joy does not come from presents we receive – that

gadget, that device – but from His presence!

The Presence of God in our lives distinguishes us from other people. That was Moses' point. He said, "For how then can it be known that your people and I have found favor in your sight unless you go with us? How else will we be distinguished from all other people on the face of the earth!" (Ex. 33:15-16). You may be working in a company with thousands of employees. But the presence of Jesus in your life distinguishes you, sets you apart from others!

We are talking about the blessings of having God's presence in our lives. King David

penned a moving Psalm after he sinned with Bathsheba – Psalm 51. In that Psalm he refers to the Presence of God often. He writes, "Do not cast me from your Presence or take your Holy Spirit from me" (Psa. 51:11). Stubborn sin would take away God's sweet joy-giving presence from His life, David knew. So, the loss of the sense of the presence of God when we indulge in stiff-necked sinful behavior motivates us to live Holy.

Another Psalm by David leads us to yet another angle to the blessing of God's presence. David writes, "You hide them in the protection of your presence. Your presence can conceal them in a shelter from the schemes of men from quarrelsome tongues" (Psa. 31:20). In David's life, the presence of God protected him from the repeated assassination attempts which King Saul launched onto him under the influence of an evil spirit (I Sam. 18:10; 19:9). The presence of God in our lives serves as a shield against the evil schemes of cunning co-workers in our offices.

The book of Jonah revealed to

me something about the presence of God, something which I had not noticed before. God's presence is already there in the location that God wants us to be present preaching and living the Gospel in the one life we have. Why do I say that? I say that because Jonah 1:3 says Jonah fled from the presence of God as he disobeyed God to go to Tarshish. That means God's presence was already in Nineveh waiting for Jonah to do his missionary work! God's presence waits to empower us to do what he has called us to do in the one life we have. I have witnessed that when I have executed his calling upon my life – grabbing the Google Generation from going to Gehenna (the word Jesus used for hell).

So, the promise of Hebrews 13:5 is the promise of God's presence which brings in a bag full of blessings as the above paragraphs show!

But as it is true with every promise in the Bible, there is a condition for this promise as well. What is the condition. Let me copy paste the same verse under discussion here again: Keep your

life from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

The first condition for this promise is COOPERATION. This verse reads this way, "Keep yourself..." It is talking about your cooperation with God's already available power! The Bible is full of things that God does for us. I call these things as our privileges! But don't forget that the same Bible is also full of things that we must do in response, having received those wow privileges from God! I call these our responsibilities! The Scripture is full of both God's Charis and God's Commands.

The New Testament is dotted with "keep yourself" commands. Here is a sample: keep yourself in God's Love.... (Jude 21); keep yourself pure (recorded twice – I Tim. 5:22 and 2 Tim. 2:21); keep yourself from 'such things' and one such thing is sexual immorality (Acts 15:29). Keep yourself united in Spirit (Eph. 4:3). Let us cooperate with the Holy Spirit and life that is pleasing to the Lord. Then, the promise of his presence is ours!

The second condition for this glorious, 'I will be with you' promise comes from this phrase found in Hebrews 13:5: 'and be content with what you have....' CONTENTMENT is the second condition found in Hebrew 13:5 for the Hebrews 13:5 promise of "I will never leave you nor forsake you".

There is a reason why contentment is the focus of the book of Hebrews. It was written at a time when Jewish believers were backsliding from their newfound Christian faith and wanting to become Jews again. It was easier to be a Jew than being a Christian during that time because the Roman government recognized the Jews but not the Christians. This government of that time started persecuting the Christians. The properties of Christians were being "plundered" after Government orders (Heb. 10:34). It was quite possible that Christians lost out on a job promotion and increase in salary because of their faith during those times when persecution against them was slowly but surely increasing. So, Christians had to learn to live

contented lives managing with what they had.

Such times are already upon us. If they are not, they are bound to come! We could be persecuted for our Christian faith by the State Government as well as the Central Government. This persecution could lead to loss of income. But we need to learn to live with contentment. And when we do that, we have this glorious promise: I will never leave you, nor forsake you! What else matters?

Mulk Raj Anand, senior journalist wrote, 'We buy things we don't need, to impress people we don't like!' How true! Let's inculcate contentment in our lives. If we have to buy an iphone because that does the job well for us, let us see if we can be content with a smaller size screen and lesser memory!

Let us Cooperate and be content! Then, the glorious promise of Hebrews 13:15, I will never leave you nor forsake you, will be ours!



Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

is an itinerant preacher and writer. His book, Straight Talk, covers 50 taboo topics including porn, sexual temptation, masturbation, homosexuality, boy-girl physical intimacy boundaries, wise life-partner choice, sex inside marriage, and much more. You can get this book by WhatsApping 91-8886040605 following which you will get a payment link

**DO EVERYTHING IN
love**

1 CORINTHIANS 16:14



God has no favourites, only intimates!

Ms. Tejaswi Ravinder

Last week, I was browsing for some career-related advice and happened to stumble upon an article titled, "how small talk can increase your pay-check." Yes, it is true! Mastering this art of starting light, informal conversations at the workplace can help one appear as the liveliest and coolest person around. Like magnetic forces, they attract everybody in the room. They become the favourite of all!

It sounds like an easier way to climb that ladder to become 'the successful one!'. As you begin becoming everybody's favourite, there would be lesser and lesser opposing forces. And, who does not like to be treated as that one important person? But, but, let us

stop here, take a breath, and see if these kinds of tricks help us win the heart of God.

By virtue of their descent, the society considered Jews as those extra-special ones, who seem to be getting all the attention. Often, we too struggle to fight back the lie that God loves others more than He loves us. Any such voice in our heads or minds that speak against the Word of God is a trickster and a liar. Because, from the New Testament, we clearly understand that God does not play favourites!

When the apostles and believers across Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the Word of God, they criticized

Peter's actions of visiting Cornelius's house. Peter then tells them the whole story of the vision he saw. It is the turning point in the life of the early church. God revealed to Peter that He does not show favouritism and that He accepts everyone as His own. The faith journey of Cornelius is right before him to believe and grasp the truth that it is the Will of God to draw every nation, every race, and sect towards Him. As it is written in Psalm 85: 9 (AMPC), "Surely His salvation is near to those who reverently and worshipfully fear Him, [and is ready to be appropriated] that [the manifest presence of God, His] glory may tabernacle and abide in our land."

The expansion of the early church

God heard the prayers of a Gentile who drew closer to Him. Cornelius, a man who lived in Caesarea, was a centurion. He and all of his family had put faith in Christ, were devoted to helping those in need, and prayed to God regularly. One afternoon, he saw an angel of God call out his name, in a vision. The angel told him, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial

offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter." A classic example of God hearing a non-Jew's prayer and answering it, defying all the lies. At that point in time, Peter was at a tanner's house by the sea. As instructed by the angel, Cornelius called two of his servants and one of his soldiers, who also worshipped God, and told them about his vision. He sent them off to Joppa to bring the apostle to his house.

Apostle Peter was a Jew known by his birth name Simon or Simeon. His family followed the old traditions of Jews by giving the names of the famous old-testament patriarchs to their male children. Peter lived in a village by the coast of the Sea of Galilee. As Lord Jesus walked by the Sea, he saw Peter and his brother, Andrew, casting a net into the waters. There, the Lord called His first disciples. He told the brothers, "Come, follow me....I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). At once, they left their nets and followed Him. The fishermen who never had any formal education obeyed the voice of the Lord and followed Him.

Peter obeyed the voice of the Lord, left the nets, and followed Him for he recognized that He is the Messiah. According to Jewish eschatology, Messiah will be enthroned as the King. In the Gospel written by Matthew, the predecessors of Jesus are listed out, in the beginning, to show that Jesus is from the bloodline of King David and Abraham, to make it clear that He is the Messiah.

Apostle Peter 'The rock'

When Lord Jesus was with His disciples travelling to a city, Caesarea Philippi, north of the sea of Galilee, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" The disciples answered, "Some say you are John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then Jesus asked His disciples, "What about you?" "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter, in his confident tone, since he was fully aware of the voice that called him to be His disciple, answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Lord Jesus immediately blessed him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed

to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church" Matthew 16:16, 17.

The prophecy of the Lord came true as He prepared and used Apostle Peter to welcome the Gentiles into the Church. While the men Cornelius sent had set off to Joppa, the Lord began his work in Peter's heart. Peter went to the top of the roof in the house where he was to pray, and he fell asleep. He had a vision in which he saw the heaven open and something like a large sheet held by its four corners came down. It contained all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds. A voice said to him, "Peter, get up! Kill these and eat them." Peter, a traditional Jew, said, "Lord, I can't do that! I've never eaten anything that is unclean and not fit to eat."

The voice responded, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Cornelius and Peter both received visions. The vision helped Peter understand that the old Law had come to an end. In His holy precious blood, Lord Jesus can cleanse the sins of everyone. There is no sin in this world which He can't clean.

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Isaiah 1:18. The Lord can make everything clean, and what He made clean cannot be called impure.

Earlier to the vision, Apostle Peter's association was limited to Jews, and the Lord opened doors to new possibilities of serving and taking part in the communion with new Christians from different traditions and cultures, whom the Lord Jesus Christ had Himself drawn closer. This marks the growth of the Church and that everybody is equally entitled to be cleansed by Him. An American missionary, Stephen W. Owen said, "Repentance is always positive." He added, "We are all prodigals. We all have to 'come to ourselves' — usually more than once — and choose the path that leads back home. It's a choice we make daily, t h r o u g h o u t o u r lives...Repentance is for everyone...It is for those who are just beginning to believe, those who have believed all along and those who need to begin again to believe."

Tug of war between free will and Sovereign Will

In the Old Testament too, the Lord tried to draw those who went astray closer to Him. As humans, we are so self-absorbed that we tend to view God's faithfulness from the lenses of our perspective. On several occasions, He showed His mercy when the people least deserved it. One such event is recorded in the book of Jonah. There was a tug of war between free will and God's will in Jonah's life. The Lord told Prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh, the capital city of Israel's enemy Assyria and say to the people that the city's wickedness had come up before Him.

Assyria was an aggressive and destructive kingdom that caused the bloodshed of Israel. By sending Jonah, God was willing to reveal His love and mercy to the people of Nineveh. But Jonah, a Hebrew, the proud Israelite who hated their enemy Assyria, went to an extent of disobeying the Lord. He ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. Jonah's rebellious actions reflect how jealous Israel was about its special relationship with God,

and its unwillingness to share the Lord's love and mercy with others, especially those who plot against them and had been enemies of God. Jonah forgot that God had chosen Israel to be a blessing and a light to everyone on the earth. "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:3 and in Isaiah 49:6, God bestowed a special blessing upon Israel. It is written, "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

After Jonah ran from the Lord, a terrible storm struck the ship he was travelling in, and it was wrecking into pieces. Jonah knew that it was the Lord who caused the storm and asked the sailors to throw him into the sea. They threw Jonah overboard, and the sea calmed down. But Jonah was not safe even in the depths of the sea. The Lord sent a big fish to swallow Jonah, and he was inside the fish for three days and three nights. From inside the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed to the Lord. There, he repented for disobeying the Lord. The Lord

rescued Jonah, saved him from death by drowning, made him go through the experience of repentance to reveal His love and mercy. Through this, Lord was preparing Jonah to deliver His message to the people of Nineveh, to draw them towards Him in repentance so that He can extend His mercy to them.

True repentance

According to evangelist JC Ryle, true repentance moves in five ways.

Firstly, true repentance begins with knowledge of sin. In Romans 3:9-12, it is written that all have gone astray from the Lord. It speaks of equality before God and before the Law. "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

Secondly, true repentance goes on to work sorrow for sin. Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthian

Church said, "As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us," 2 Corinthians 7:9 reveals Godly grief is good, it is for gain and not loss.

Thirdly, true repentance proceeds, further, to produce confession of sin. The Bible says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness," 1 John 1:10.

Fourthly, true repentance, furthermore, shows itself in a thorough breaking off from sin, As noted in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Fifthly, true repentance shows itself by producing in the heart a settled habit of a deep hatred of all sin. As it is written in Psalm

97:10, "Hate evil, you who love the Lord, who preserves the souls of His godly ones; He delivers them from the hand of the wicked."

Hence, dear friend, God has no favorites. But when we realize and repent for our wrongs, He is all-loving and merciful to forgive us and draw us closer that we can become His intimates. And, we must be willing to extend the same love, mercy, and grace to everybody by which we obey His commandment to love others.



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Salvation is found in no one else,
for there is no other name under heaven
given to mankind by which we must be saved.

Acts 4:12

WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT OF US?

Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj

What does God expect of us as His people? What I am going to share is what God has taught me over the years from His Word, from my observations as I related myself to people of in different situations, and as I search my own life

I. Aiming at Godliness

In II Peter 1:3-11, we read that our Heavenly Father has given us His divine power and promises so that we may take part in His divine nature. More than once, the word Godliness occurs in this passage. Godliness is the Christian character that embraces holiness, righteousness and love. What is needed in our church today is

leaders of godliness. We may be bishops, pastors, seminary teachers, church planters or lay leaders; what is expected of us is godliness.

The author of the book of Hebrews reminds us that we are in a race and that we should "throw off everything that hinders us and the sin that so easily entangles" and that we should run with perseverance, fixing our eyes on Jesus, "the author and perfecter of our faith." Fixing our eyes on Jesus and keeping Him as our goal is growing in holiness, righteousness and love, and that is, allowing the Holy Spirit to mould us to be godly. "Godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life

and the life to come" (I Tim. 4:8).

II. Giving importance to the Word of God

In Psalm 19: 7, 8, 10 and 11, we read, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making the wise simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes...they are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey than honey from the comb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward."

In the first meeting of the Evangelical Fellowship of India in 1951, Dr. Frank Kline, the Founder-Principal of Union Biblical Seminary, made a clarion call: it is in the Word we must centre. The deed must lead to Word, never take the place of the Word. He said, "The top priority is revival in our churches. One such special revival emphasis concerns our pastors. Our long-range training involves the training of future ministers. They

must have a true evangelical faith, a profound confidence in the Bible as the Word of God, a real knowledge of the Bible, an ability to apply it to life, a deep and growing personal spiritual life, an understanding of the needs of their parishioners."

In his book Christian Handbook, Peter Jeffery, rightly points out, "The Reformation would have been impossible if God had not turned men back to the Bible to see it the only authority for Christian doctrine and church order. Because the church had become so interwoven with the state and politics, it was inevitable that any reformation would come into conflict with politics. But the Reformation was not a political movement; it was a great movement of the Holy Spirit."

How true it is that the Word of God has the power to transform people and societies! One of the outstanding Indian missionaries was Godhula from Assam. Burdened by the need to take the Gospel to North-East India and constrained by the love of Christ, he went to a village in Ao area up on the hills and first proclaimed

the Word of God through singing the Gospel hymns in Assamese. As days went by, he learnt the Ao dialect and preached the Word to the Ao people. God rewarded his faithfulness to Him and to His Word. In November 1872, he took six new Ao converts with him to Assam where E. W. Clark, an American missionary, baptised them. That was the beginning of the spread of the Church in that area. We must preach and teach the Word with the conviction that it will accomplish God's purpose for humankind.

III. Reconciliation

II Corinthians 5: 18 & 19 says, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation." James Packer explains reconciliation as, "bringing together again persons who had previously fallen out; to replace alienation, hostility and opposition by a new relationship of favour, goodwill and peace; and so, to transform the attitude

of the persons reconciled towards each other and to set their subsequent mutual dealings on a wholly new footing."

The Christian faith is relational. If there is no proper relationship in our midst, we ridicule our faith. All our talk on salvation, justification, regeneration, sanctification is vain. There is so much of fragmentation and hostility in many families, churches and organisations. We divide ourselves on the basis of caste and language.

There was a time when the Kukis and the Nagas in Manipur were in violent conflict with each other in Manipur. A few of us from the Evangelical Fellowship of India went there to organise a Seminar on Reconciliation in Christ. About one hundred pastors from both sides attended the Seminar. It was a moving experience to see the participants, two by two, a Naga and a Kuki, standing and holding hands together and praying to God to forgive them and to give them grace to live in right relationship with each other. Whatever the gifts and ministries God has given us, our primary ministry is the ministry of

reconciliation. We are reconcilers in Christ.

IV. Building up the Body of Christ

The Word of God makes it very clear that "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men....The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; though all its parts are many, they form one body. So, it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we are all given the one Spirit to drink" (I Cor. 12: 4,5,6,12,13).

See what happens today? We have divided ourselves into various denominations and organisations, and we keep dividing. We recognise certain gifts and ministries, and make much of them, and ignore other gifts and ministries. Partnership has become one sided. Those who have money power have more to say and do. We adopt any means in our evangelism and

missions to achieve the end. We talk on unity and networking at the top level and are in unhealthy competition at the ground level. There is lack of accountability and transparency in our midst.

Be sure, on the basis of the Word of God, each one of us is unique in Christ, and our ministry in Him is of great importance. Some are in limelight, and many are unknown. But all of us are His 'treasured possession' and all of us are equally important to Him.

All of us need each other and all of us must work together in harmony to make the body to function as a whole and effectively. Before He went to the Cross--Jesus poured out His concern for His followers in relation to the spread and fruitfulness of His Kingdom. He prayed to His Father, "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved them" (Jn 17:23).

Thank God that there are some among us who are deeply concerned about the disunity in the Church and work steadfastly for unity.

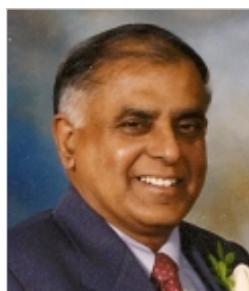
V. Living with incarnational Commitment

"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible....I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all things for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (I Cor. 9: 13). Let us hold on to the content of the Gospel, but be flexible in our approach to reach the people, and be where they are. We must be open to new avenues of evangelism. There is no place for "parachute evangelism" and "five star hotel exclusiveness." They are not of God. We are not marketing executives, promoting a product called "Gospel." In our reaching out to our people, we must love people as they are, familiarise ourselves with our socio-economic and political context, and be sensitive to the receptor culture and point of entry.

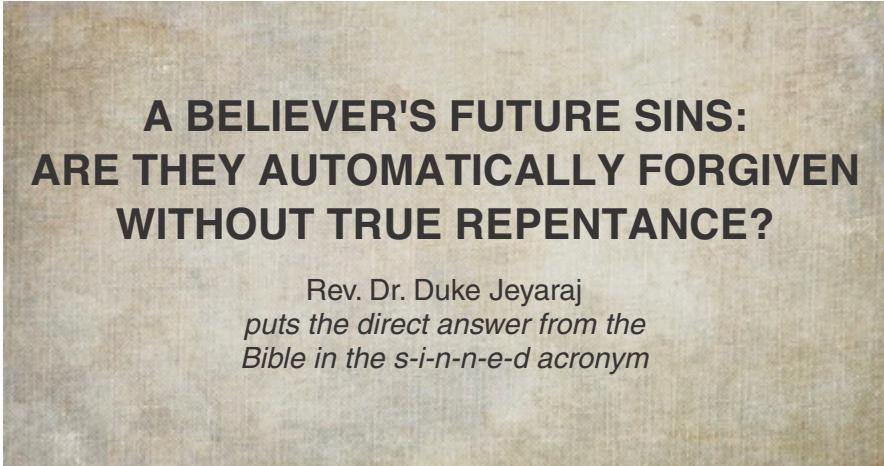
A few months ago, I read a book entitled *World is Flat*, by Thomas Friedman. I am glad to know that this book is a reading requirement in our Seminaries. Friedman points out that we are in the midst of lightning changes

taking place in the areas of information technology and communication. Out-sourcing and off-shoring, and knowledge skills are transforming the world economically. So much so, the world is becoming flat. But at the same time, there is a part of the world, which is un-flat, afflicted with poverty, ignorance, cruel exploitation, and incurable diseases. Those of us, who live in the flat world and enjoy the privileges therein, must reach out to the un-flat world.

In serving the people, there must be acceptance of them with love, and identification and unwavering commitment to holistic ministry in word and deed. All our efforts will be in vain unless we constantly depend on Him for His strength and guidance.



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A BELIEVER'S FUTURE SINS: ARE THEY AUTOMATICALLY FORGIVEN WITHOUT TRUE REPENTANCE?

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj
*puts the direct answer from the
Bible in the s-i-n-n-e-d acronym*

Here is a true-to-life incident: A person, after many years of faithful, full-time ministry, committed suicide. Some of the believers who knew him/her were heard conversing about his/her tragic death this way: "Even though he/she committed suicide, he/she would definitely go to heaven because even a believer's future sins are forgiven, the moment he accepts Jesus." Really? Think of the possible implications of this horrendous teaching. Let me outline a couple of scenarios for you: If a believer's future sins are automatically forgiven, then a believer couples not yet married could also plan for a one-night stand within the confines of a car, say post an half-night prayer they attended together, without thinking too

much about it; If a believer's future sins are already forgiven, the latest porn movie could be watched without a see-saw battle inside that believer's conscience!

Yet, Hyper-grace, false Gospel teachers constantly rattle that a believer's future sins are forgiven, the moment they commit them. Is this true? Is this biblical?

I want to use the acronym S-I-N-N-E-D to give a direct answer:

S stands for the "Savior's Sayings". That Jesus included repentance in the Gospel he preached is obvious. When the Samaritan Woman wanted Jesus to give her the water which will ultimately satisfy all her thirst (John 4:15), Jesus immediately

brought up the case her multiple husbands and her sin of living in through Word of Knowledge (John 4:16-17). What was Jesus' message here? Unless one repents, one cannot be saved! The Samaritan Woman had to repent from sin to drink from the Living Water that will forever quench her thirst. And that Living Water is Jesus himself! Do we preach the Gospel like Jesus did? Do we talk about repentance as the first step for salvation like Jesus did by example in the case of the Samaritan Woman?

We don't need to look beyond the saying of our Savior Jesus to understand that our future sins are NOT auto forgiven when it comes to believers who sin. He said, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15). If we stubbornly refuse to forgive the sins of those who may have hurt us, harmed us – and keep doing that in the future till the time we die – our Father in heaven could choose to withhold his forgiveness towards us.

I stands for the "Instructions

from the Intimate Friend". John, Jesus' most intimate friend, writing under the Spirit's inspiration taught us in-effect, a believer's future sins are NOT automatically forgiven. He taught that "if" we confess our sins, Jesus "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). This implies, if we do not confess our sins with a repentant heart, our sins, they would remain unforgiven. In the Greek language – the language in which this verse was first written – the meaning of this verse is this: if we go on confessing our sins (when we sin), Jesus will go on cleansing us with His blood. Present continuous tense is used for both "confession" and "cleansing". A Bible teacher rightly points out that this specific was written for fully forgiven believers (I John 5:13).

N stands for the "Nabi's example." The word "Nabi" means prophet. The Nabi I refer to here is Prophet Isaiah. He knew Yahweh as his God. He was a believer if we were to use New Testament terms. Yahweh appeared to this believer to commission him for ministry. That

was when this Nabi realized he was a "man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). A realization of his sin gripped Isaiah and called a "woe" on himself. He realized that God was "holy, holy, holy" while he was "holey, holey, holey" (full of sins and holes) (Isa. 6:3,5). It was ONLY AFTER THIS confession and realization that "one of the seraphim flew to Isaiah having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar, and he touched Isaiah's mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for" (Isa. 6:6-7). Though Jesus died two thousand years ago, in God's mind, He was slain before the foundation of the World (Rev. 13:8). Old Testament saints were saved and forgiven of their sin by looking forward to the sacrifice of the Messiah. This was the "Gospel" preached by Yahweh to people who lived right up to the time of Jesus' historic sacrifice of Himself on the Cross (Gen. 15:6; Isa. 53; Gal. 3:8). Indeed, Isaiah's sin was 'atoned for' after he admitted to his sin and confessed them in God's presence. This did not happen automatically.

N stands for yet another Nabi's example. The Nabi Jeremiah.

When the going got tough in his ministry path, he called God, "a deceptive brook" (Jeremiah 15:18). The Lord God immediately issues a call for him to repent this way: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman" (Jeremiah 15:19). Because Jeremiah repented in response to God's rousing call, he was able to later prophetically record the repentance experience of the country of Ephraim: "After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth" (Jer. 31:19). The forgiveness of the sins of the "born-again" Jeremiah or "born-again" Ephraim was not automatic – it was a response of God to their repentance.

E stands for Ezra's confession. Ezra, as the leader of Israel, owned up the sin of marrying unbelievers which his people had horrendously committed and confessed it with a heart of repentance (Ezra 9). The people followed their leader's example and did the same (Ezra 10:1-5). Sins of the people were not

automatically forgiven even in this case.

D stands for the "David's example". King David had already walked with Yahweh for many years when he fell into sin with Bathsheba. After Prophet Nathan confronted him with what I call as the "mutton biryani preparation parable," King David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam.12:13). King David was immediately forgiven of his sin after this confession. That is why he writes in Psalm 32, 'I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin' (Psa 32:5). David's sin-confession example from Psalm 32 is used as an illustration by Apostle Paul when he wanted to show that New Testament believers can be forgiven by confessing their sins with a repentant heart without having to do "works" (the context suggests that these works are animal sacrifices) (Rom. 4:5-8; See Romans 12:1 where Paul writes that New Testament believers have to offer their own bodies as living sacrifices to God, rather

than animals). King David's sins were certainly not auto forgiven without him confessing them and renouncing them.

Yes, God has made the PROVISION for the forgiveness of our future sins. But we do not receive that forgiveness automatically. But, it is up to us to take POSSESSION of them, by truly repenting from them, confessing them and asking the blood of Jesus to cleanse us.



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THE PRODIGALITY OF HEAVENLY FATHER!

Rev. Ashish Hirday

For many years, I could not understand what the parables of Jesus Christ really meant. Most of the time, we understood that parables are just illustrations, which were used to clarify Jesus' teachings. Even I was thinking the same, it took a long time for me to understand that the parables are Jesus' teachings. They are not simple illustrations but are Jesus' essential teachings. Jesus used to teach through storytelling. But, these stories are not simple as we think, because in those days also people could not completely grasp these stories. Often, they misunderstood the parables. The parables are Jesus' encrypted teachings, which need to be

decrypted, they need to be decoded.

In John chapter 15, we read one of the fascinating and familiar parables of a lost son, his misery, repentance and reunion with His father. We find three characters in this story, a father, an older and a younger son. If we dig into it, we find these three figures do represent a group of particular people and their characters.

We see the younger son's rude behaviour, his remorseful response, his undeserved restoration.

In verse 30, the behaviour of the youngest son is depicted. He was asking for his inheritance while

his father is still alive. When we probe into the historical setting of this story, we find that this was rude and unacceptable behavior. It was not appropriate to ask for an inheritance while the father was alive. Even today, it is not acceptable. It almost says, "Father, I wish you were already dead". And he is not even asking rather he is demanding. Look at ver. 12. (Read), it is an imperative he used here "give me". He didn't say "father, please consider", but he says, "give me". We see he gets his inheritance and leaves his father's home. It was disrespectful behaviour. In that culture, one could only take possession when the father was dead. The behaviour of the younger son was as if his father did not exist. So, he leaves his father's home, and he squandered his estate in loose living. Further, we know his remorseful response, ver. 17 (Read). So, he comes to his senses and returns to his father and receives undeserved forgiveness from his father Ver. 22 & 23. We all know this story and what happens. But the question here is who does the

younger son represent, originally and historically? To whom was Jesus addressing this parable.

In the beginning of Luke 15: 1, 2 we read, "*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them".*" So, we see there are two audiences, one is a listening audience and the second is a grumbling audience. We have tax collectors and sinners who are drawn near to Jesus and we have the Pharisees and scribes who were grumbling and accusing Jesus. Now, the younger son represents the tax collectors and the sinners. Jesus came for the people like the younger son. He came for the tax collectors and sinners. He came for those who were lost and needed to be found. Jesus was meeting the sinners; he was eating with them. Eating with someone means accepting a person. Jesus came for the people who were outcasts, condemned by society, those who were looked down on by the religious leaders. However, the

main thing was these people were remarkably responding to Jesus.

In Luke 5:27-32, we read, *"After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."*

Here, Jesus is calling his first four disciples. This is a very important passage. It is also considered as the problematic passage where Jesus gel up with the underserved people. However, this passage sets the whole agenda of the gospel. Here,

Jesus tells his agenda that his very purpose of coming is to heal the people who were spiritually sick. He did not come for the self-proclaimed righteous but the sinners. There are many self-proclaimed righteous who considers themselves better than others. But whom the world looks down have found favour in God's sight. In Luke 15: 27, there is a hint to this passage, the older son comes home finds that his younger brother has come, and his father arranged a big celebration. It says the father found the younger son is safe and sound. If we read this verse against Luke 5:31, we see the connection, that Jesus came for the sick. And the youngest son was restored to good health.

In Luke 7:36-39, Jesus goes to a Pharisee house for eating and there comes a woman who lived a sinful life she visits Jesus. And there we see Jesus accepts her. Read ver. 39, *When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a*

sinner." Here, the Pharisee missed the point of Jesus' coming. Another instance we see in Luke's gospel is where Zacchaeus responds to Jesus. He was so overwhelmed that he was willing to give his half of possession to others. Ironically, we see in Luke's gospel, the tax collectors and sinners were remarkably well responding to the Jesus. In the same way, the younger son comes to his senses and returns to his father. Therefore, the younger son represents the tax collectors and sinners.

Let's turn to the father, who does he represent? We have seen the young has been rude and disrespectful to his father. Yet, the father does not object, does not correct, he does not discipline his son. Without uttering a word, he does what his son demands. We read in ver. 12. "*The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.'*" So, he divided his property between them. He divides his property without any objection. Why didn't the father correct his son? Whereas Proverb 29, says

discipline your children and they will give you rest. But the father doesn't do so but simply gives in. Here, the father behaves out of character. It is contrary to the expectations of society. Whatever he did doesn't make any sense. The son goes, squanders his inheritance, and gets into trouble.

However, the father starts his search for his son. Verse 20 is the key to this parable, *So, he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.* The implication of this verse is that every day father had been on the lookout for the son. There were no emails, no WhatsApp, no mobiles. The father didn't know when his son is going to come. He was waiting for him every day. For how long had he been waiting. The text doesn't say anything. Son needed time to squander his inheritance. How long that would have taken? Weeks, months maybe longer. But every day, the father had been waiting for his lost son. Everyday! look at the father's

gestures. Father was not concerned about his image and dignity. Father was the authoritative figure in the family, as he was head of the family. They did not run but he ran, without thinking about his image. Because, his own son was coming to him, his son was returning home. He went to his son, kissed and embraced his son. Then came the restoration of younger son. The ver. 20 is important because before the son's repentance, the father embraces his. Father was not seeking an apology but he ran, embraced and kissed him. Before the son finishes his confession, ver. 22-23, father said to the servant "bring". Everything here is about expense, extravagance and restoration. Robe and the ring and sandals signify restored dignity and banquet indicates the celebration. The sonship of the prodigal was restored. Here the father's behaviour is outrageous and ridiculous. The son receives the very best from the one whom he wounded most. In all this extravagance, the father is more prodigal than his son.

But the father's search was not over, he had to search for his older son. The older son was angry. The celebration was inside but for the sake of his angry son, he goes out, and pleads with his older son to come in. Again, the father doesn't correct or discipline his son. He behaves in the same way how he behaved with his younger son. He gives in to the disrespectful behavior of his older son. Again, father is being lenient, compassionate, patient to his son. Yet, reckless in order to maintain his relationship with his sons.

The father always takes the initiative. Always search for the lost. You see, the father doesn't behave according to the social conventions of that time. And that is the exact issue in this parable. The issue is the father's excessive behaviour. The real crux of this story is father's reckless generosity. His extravagant love, compassion and mercy. And this behaviour becomes the stumbling block as we see. This is not the only story in the gospel of Luke. Luke has another example of

wastefulness, of prodigality. We see the sinful woman, she washed Jesus' feet with her tears, dried Jesus' feet with her hair, kissed Jesus' feet. Anointed them with expensive perfume. We see the extravagance, extraordinary act of devotion, on behalf of this lady. Again, we have the story of a good Samaritan who goes one step ahead to help the beaten-up guy. Zacchaeus gave half of his possession to the poor. What an extravagance! It all shows the extravagant generosity of God. This shows how compassionate and loving our heavenly Father is!

Today, no matter how messed up we are in our lives, if we come to our senses and repent for our sins, our extravagant father will extend His arm to forgive and restore us back. This is a perfect reminder for the youth today, repentance is the key to getting

back to our Lord who has been patiently waiting for us. The world may leave us but our heavenly father will never leave nor forsake us.



Rev. Ashish Hirday

Serves at Evangelical Fellowship of India as National Director for Youth Commission. He is also serving at Asia Evangelical Alliance Youth Commission as the Executive Director. He holds post graduate degree in Missiology and Family Life Education. He is married to Rachana and has two lovely kids Anugrah & Aradhana.

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*Master of Theology (Mission, OT)	English	2 years	M.Div/BD
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- ❖ Prospective students will have a personal interview with a member of admission committee.
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March 2022

1 TUESDAY Thank God for His protection over us and our families. Thank God for His goodness, His mercies that are new every morning.

2 WEDNESDAY Pray that believers would spend more time in self-evaluation and reflection. Pray that there would be repentance and change of hearts during this Lent.

3 THURSDAY Pray for peace between Ukraine and Russia. Pray for those suffering especially the elderly, the sick and children for God's protection over them. Pray for change of hearts for leaders in both countries.

4 FRIDAY Pray for students who are writing board exams. Pray that the Lord would protect them, encourage them, and strengthen them. Pray that God would replace hopelessness and anxiety with peace, comfort, and hard work.

5 SATURDAY Pray for the

emotional and physical strength of the children. Pray for safety and protection. Pray for diligence and hard work in studies. Above all, pray that they would be dependent on God and remain calm, composed, and joyful.

6 SUNDAY Pray that you may live out the Gospel and share it with someone today. Pray for right words at the right time. Pray that the Holy Spirit would take the Word of God and work in the person's heart and mind and bring forth changes.

7 MONDAY Pray for parents whose children are writing board exams. Pray that they would cautiously care and encourage their children with Christ's love during this difficult time.

8 TUESDAY International Women's Day. Pray for women in our country to live a life confidently as they are equally created by God. Pray that they would be strong and know that they are worthy of respect. Pray that

they would meet God personally and respond positively to His calling.

9 WEDNESDAY Pray for people who are struggling with their faith. Pray that the good Lord would reveal Himself to them at their level of understanding.

10 THURSDAY Continue to pray that God would heal our land and make us a source of blessing to people around us.

11 FRIDAY Pray for safety and protection of our country. Pray for peaceful relationship with our neighbouring countries.

12 SATURDAY Pray for hunger and thirst for righteousness among the people of your state. Pray that God would fill their spiritual desire with His Words and His presence.

13 SUNDAY Continue to pursue personal holiness and close relationship with the Lord. Pray that your life would be a good example of personal holiness.

14 MONDAY Pray that all the Group members, Life members and Individual members of Evangelical Fellowship of India would glorify God through words and deeds.

15 TUESDAY Pray that the Lord

would give renewed strength and commitment to all the EFI staff at HO and different parts of the country. Pray for deep joy and peace as they serve God in their respective capacities.

16 WEDNESDAY Pray that every believer would trust God in the difficult seasons of life and hold fast to Him. Pray for joyful corporate worship at Church physically or online today.

17 THURSDAY Pray for Christian lawyers in our country who are actively involved in the wellbeing of believers and their fundamental rights. Pray for courage as they give counsel or represent them in the courtrooms.

18 FRIDAY Pray for religious liberty in our country. Pray that every individual would have the freedom to worship without fear. Pray for strength and God's comfort for those persecuted because of their faith.

19 SATURDAY Pray for EFI Children At Risk (EFICAR). Pray that they would tirelessly work to rescue, rebuild and restore the lives of children who were the victims of human trafficking. Pray for strength and wisdom as they carry out their work.

20 SUNDAY Pray for the elderly people in your neighbourhood today. Pray that each one of them would be provided and cared for. Pray that the people who provide and care for them will have a compassionate heart.

21 MONDAY Pray that all the churches in India would be renewed so that they would be godly influence to people around them.

22 TUESDAY Let us pray for all the orphans in our country. May God hear their cries and envelop them with His unconditional love. May we know God's heart and support the cause of the orphans.

23 WEDNESDAY Pray for all the Sunday School Teachers in your church that they may love the Word of God and pass it on to the children.

24 THURSDAY Continue to pray for EFI AIM magazine as we have decided to start printing the magazine from next month. Pray for resources, increased subscribers, and also pray that it will impact more people and strengthen their relationship with the Lord.

25 FRIDAY Pray for having a teachable heart and willingness to obey His commands for yourself.

Pray that you would be a blessing to many people.

26 SATURDAY Pray for yourself that your love for the Lord would grow more. Pray that you may be a strong and active witness of God's love manifested in Christ.

27 SUNDAY Pray for your pastor as he/she prepares for Good Friday and Easter Sunday services. Pray that he/she would listen to God attentively and share the Word of God with clarity and authority.

28 MONDAY Pray for the leaders of our nation. Pray that they would understand the needs of the people and sacrificially serve them.

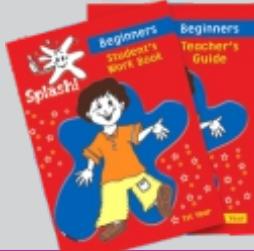
29 TUESDAY Pray for Covid19 cases to decrease and that those who are infected would recover fully and enjoy good health.

30 WEDNESDAY Pray for your city today that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ would shine bright, and people may enjoy His abundant blessings. Pray that the presence of God would be felt by many.

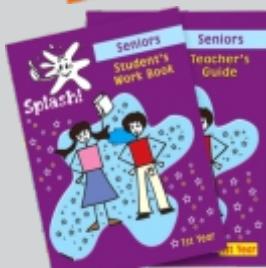
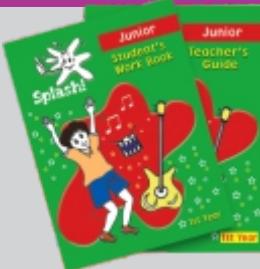
31 THURSDAY Thank God for being with us throughout the month of March 2022. Submit yourself to His care for the new month.

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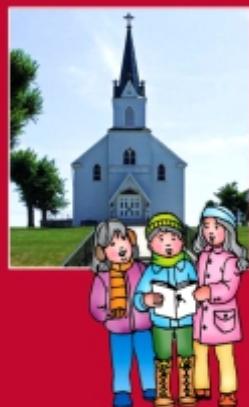


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keeping his promise, as
some understand
slowness. Instead he is
patient with you, not
wanting anyone to perish,
but everyone to come to
repentance.**

2 Peter 2:9