The background of the entire page is a dense, close-up photograph of autumn leaves. The leaves are primarily in shades of orange, with some yellow and a few hints of red. They are scattered and overlapping, creating a textured, naturalistic pattern.

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A Journey of Faith

**"Give thanks to the Lord
because he is good, because
his faithful Love endures
forever."**

1 Chronicles 16:34



*“The Lord appeared to us
in the past, saying:
I have loved you with an
everlasting love; I have
drawn you with unfailing
kindness.”*

—Jeremiah 31:3

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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

***Gratitude is the music of the heart
when its chords are swept by
the breeze of kindness.***

Kindness seems to be a lost virtue in the world today. I remember an exchange a friend of mine had when he first arrived in Delhi, some two and a half decades ago, with a shopkeeper who was taken aback when my friend politely thanked him after buying goods from his shop. "You are not from Delhi, are you?" he questioned. My friend replied in affirmative and asked how did the shopkeeper figure that out. He responded that my friend was too kind, both in his mannerisms and language.

The small-town disposition may have seemed refreshing to the shopkeeper who was probably

used to the somewhat rugged behaviour of people in a large metropolis, and I hope time hasn't changed my friend but has made him kinder still; however, kindness is a virtue that seems to be slipping away from our society. One only has to look at the news on TV or browse social media for that reality to sink in.

And yet we, as human beings, like when people are kind to us, in fact we long for it. We tend to remember the kind people for the longest time, for their kindness makes us feel good. It is almost contagious too. I once read somewhere: "In a world where you can choose to be anything,

choose to be kind."

Aristotle defined kindness as "helpfulness towards someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself, but for that of the person helped." While Nietzsche, ascribed medicinal properties to it. He called it as "the most curative herb and agent in human intercourse".

A comprehensive definition that I came across defined kindness in this way: "Kindness is the sincere and voluntary use of one's time, talent, and resources to better the lives of others, one's own life, and the world through genuine acts of love, compassion, generosity, and service."

The Bible tells us that God is kind. "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works." (Psalm 145:17). Creation reveals the kindness of God and His providence. "Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." (Acts 14:17)

The Bible records God's kindness and His love towards His people. "You gave me life and showed me kindness, and in your providence watched over my spirit." (Job 10:12)

"I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us—yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses." (Isaiah 63:7)

The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." (Jeremiah 31:3)

Yes, suffering, and hard times can sometimes cloud our understanding of the kindness of God. At those times, it is helpful to remember that God is present with us in our suffering and walks with us. Like Job, we may never get the answer to our 'why', but we can be encouraged that we are always in God's hand. Charles Spurgeon famously said that when we cannot trace the hand of God, we can always trust his heart.

The high point of God's kindness towards us was the coming of Jesus Christ, His son, who reconciled us to God through his sacrificial death and resurrection. "But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy." (Titus 3:4-5). We can be encouraged by the fact that "He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will He not with Him also give us everything else?" (Romans 8:31)

God's kindness indeed leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) and His Spirit transforms our character in His likeness as we bear the wonderful fruit of the Spirit that includes among other virtues – Kindness. (Galatians 5:22&23) We are commanded in His Word to follow His example and "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

In His kindness, God draws us to Himself and transforms us. He does not only do works of kindness. He IS kind. That is the very essence of who He is and

because of this, Jesus tells us, that He is kind even to the ungrateful and wicked and so should we be. "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil." (Luke 6:35)

Biblical kindness is personified in Jesus Christ who was full of compassion, healed the sick, fed the hungry, took time for the outcasts and the children, and in kindness asked God to forgive the very people who crucified him. We are called to follow our Saviour in His example.

When we as Christians extend kindness to those who take us for granted, harm us, or oppose us, we unleash a powerful resource that can bring peace and healing in difficult and seemingly impossible situations. The many testimonies of persecuted Christians around the world testify to this fact that they were able to overcome evil through love and kindness. But even in day-to-day life, whenever there is conflict, even if not armed, and even within the Church, kindness

is a great resource to mend relationships and bring healing. Ultimately, kindness is an act of will. Intentional and sustained kindness can be costly and demands our time, money, and energy, but most of all the will to be kind. Kindness is love in action.

So, may our lives reflect the kindness of God as we live gratefully for His kindness towards us. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." (Colossians 3:12)

Rev. Vijayesh Lal

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Thankfulness & Triumphant Over Satan Are Connected

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj



That we be thankful is God's Will for us. Apostle Paul wrote, 'Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus' (1 Thess. 5:18). He also warned that in the 'last days' the gang of the 'ungrateful' will grow big and we must not join that gang (2 Tim. 3:1-5). The writer to the Hebrews writes that we must be thankful (Heb. 12:28). This thankful attitude will result in our worship of God with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:28-29).

The command to be thankful is repeated in various ways in the Old Testament. I counted that it is repeated a total of 47 times! In the book of Psalms alone, we are told to give thanks to God, 37 times! In Chronicles 16 alone, we are told

to give thanks four times! When we cross over to the New Testament, this command is repeated through various ways another 16 times at least! I am trying to think hard which other biblical command is given so much of emphasis!

When we give thanks, we copy Jesus who gave thanks to the Father regularly during his earthly ministry. I counted that he did that at least three times during his earthly ministry (Matt. 15:36; 26:27; Jn. 6:11,23). And to become more and more like Jesus is the ultimate goal of our life (2 Cor. 3:18).

It is easy to give thanks when everything is fine in our life. But Job in the Old Testament (Job

1:20-21) and Anna in the New Testament (Luke 2:36-38) gave thanks, praised God, and worshipped Him even during difficult times such as the loss of a loved one.

The sin of not acknowledging God or thanking Him can put us in a place where we are in the danger of being judged by God! Romans 1 warns us about this! Romans 1:21 talks about the sin of not giving thanks to God with the consequence being mentioned in Romans 1:24 and Romans 1:28 - a consequence of the work of the Spirit being effectively withdrawn from the lives of thankless people eventually, so that they would further slide into unprintable sin and finally, into the place of unimaginable torment, hell!

We must specifically thank God for the people he has placed in our life - our spouses, our children, our pastors, our ministry team members, etc. Paul did that (Rom. 16:4; 1 Thess. 1:2).

In the above paragraphs, I have combed through what the Bible mentions about thankfulness. But I am not done yet. The most important thing about

thankfulness, I believe, comes in Revelation 12:11, though the word is not specifically mentioned. There, it is written that through the blood of the Lamb and by the Word of their testimony, a group of people overcame the Devil. Through the blood of the Lamb, we are forgiven of sin. So, when Satan reminds us of our sin, we defeat him and his plans for us by saying, 'I am already forgiven - thanks to the Blood!' But there is another way to overcome Satan this passage speaks about. This way is called the 'Word of their testimony'! What is that? We can overcome Satan when we testify about God's goodness upon our life. We can defeat Satan when we start to thank God daily, say for the blessings we receive from him. Mention the five or ten or fifteen or how many ever blessings God has graciously blessed you with, to God and thank Him profusely! Not just that - acknowledge to the people around you, the blessings he has given you! This way, the Devil will be defeated!

I know this way of beating the Devil works! Every month, a small group of people from different parts of India and

beyond, join my wife and I on Zoom at 11:45 pm on the last day of the month. And we take time to praise God for the blessings he gave us that month before everyone. The Devil is put to shame that way. And we enter the new month with praise on our lips. While the new month is never problem-free, we experience unusual victories over Satan! Yes, we have to deal with Satan till the return of Christ or till our death! But this praise method of putting Satan on the back foot really works, I can tell you that!

On the other hand, grumbling or complaining is like inviting the Devil to keep working in our life even more! And what is more, grumbling angers God. He sent death before the Promise Land entry for people of Israel who were stubbornly into the sin of grumbling (Num. 14:26-30). Paul reminds New Testament believers of this incident so that it serves as a stern warning, even during the post-Cross era (1 Cor. 10:10).

So, let us keep thanking God daily! Let us win over the Devil that way!



Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

is the founder of Grabbing the Google Generation from Gehenna Mission. As an itinerant evangelist Dr. Duke has preached God's Word by invitation in over 20 Indian States and in a few other nations. His book, Straight Talk, brings frank Bible Teaching wrapped around contemporary events, on taboo topics like sex, love, marriage, porn, phone-addiction, sexting, masturbation, homosexuality, sex inside marriage questions, etc. His book, Daniel in Dell, makes the book of Daniel very practical for modern young working professionals. His third book, Goodnews for the Google Generation, has gospel messages for present day people. WhatsApp him at +918886040605 if you want to buy copies. Or you may email him at emailduke@gmail.com Dr. Duke lives in Chennai with his wife, Evangelin, a trained youth/young professionals counsellor. This couple is blessed with two children, Dale (a college student at St. Stephen's Delhi) and Datasha (in class X)



Dr. Shantanu Dutta

As we enter into the holiday season and also observe the World Kindness Day later this month, it would be a great time to reflect on the importance of kindness. Kindness in the office, at school, in traffic, or at home, can change a bad situation into a tolerable one. In a world that moves so fast, and is digitally driven, ironically, we are less connected with one another on a deeper level than ever before. Since we only see the surface (or the highlight reel), we have no idea what another person is going through in their lives. They may have just lost a loved one, or a job, or may be dealing with pain or an illness. Those who treat others poorly or fly off the handle, are more likely to need our kindness than we can possibly imagine. In this fast-paced world, kindness and compassion takes

a back seat to selfies, self-interest and expendable human interactions.

Every person is waiting to be discovered or become rich, believing it holds the key to their happiness. Yet when they attain success, they long for their former life having underestimated the trappings of fame and celebrity.

Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics, David W. Orr has an interesting thought on this : "The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers and lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage willing to join the fight to

make the world habitable and humane. And these qualities have little to do with success as we have defined it."

Kindness is fundamental to the human existence. We are thrust into the world as newborns and enriched with the kindness of our parents' nurturing for the ensuing years. Kindness is sewn into the framework of our DNA. We are literally wired for kindness. Kindness is not something that demands hard work. It originates from the simple act of doing no harm to others. It involves judging less, however compelled you might be to do so. The ego is quick to judge when it is victimised and hurt, so it retaliates in revenge. Kindness, however, bites its tongue. It does not seek to be right but to preserve peace of mind.

Kindness is a lifestyle. It is a daily practice. It is a choice. As Christians we are to grow in the fruit of the spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and kindness – and growth takes time. A seed does not transform into a tree overnight, but with careful watering, tending, and patience, a seed will slowly grow day-by-day into a strong towering tree. It is the same with kindness. We must be faithful every day to

bear the good fruit of kindness. Being kind should be our default mode, a habit of goodwill, a heart of continual service every day of the year.

If kindness needs faithful practice every day, kindness also requires intentionality. Now, this is not to say that that we should never do random acts of kindness. Oftentimes, kind acts are on-the-spot, in the moment, and unplanned. However, we must learn to be intentional. Either plan specific acts of kindness, or plan for the random; be ready to do good on-the-spot. Kindness is not when we feel like it or a random act here or there when we happen to think of it. Kindness requires a seeking out, a looking for the needs of others. During his life on earth, Jesus was a perfect emblem of this fruit of the spirit. For three years of ministry, he looked toward the needs of others, never turning them away. He could be counted on. How often today do we miss opportunities to show God's love to others because we are too busy? We rush here and there, leaving the needs of others in a blur as we whiz past. Jesus took the time, and we should too. So, we need to slow down, make the time, and look for the needs of others. Be intentional in showing kindness; be consistent.

Love your neighbour as yourself," – the second greatest commandment. But, Lord, "who is my neighbour?" With this question, the Parable of the Good Samaritan was born. Here, a Jewish man was robbed and beaten, left to die. The Jewish priest and Levite passed by, but the Samaritan saved him. The point of Jesus' story was this: everyone is your neighbour – the foreigner, the widow, the orphan, and even your enemy. We are to show merciful kindness to everyone. "The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless;" "Love your enemies...do good to them that hate you;" "he who does not love his brother, how is it possible for him to love God who is invisible?"

Time and again, God looks out for the cause of the widows and orphans; he cares deeply for the strangers in the land; he emphasizes love for family; he requires mercy and compassion for even your enemies. Oftentimes, we want to choose to whom we show kindness. Left to our own, we would limit kind acts to friends and people in authority above us, people from whom we can attain something in return. But Christ calls us to lower our eyes and look at those who are below, who have nothing, can

offer nothing, have no defender. He calls us to welcome the foreigner, the rejected in our land.

So, what does Biblical kindness look like? It looks like Christ. Not for just a season or one day of the year, kindness is for every moment of every day; it's a habit, a lifestyle, a continual practice. It is intentional, taking time and patience, a giving of ourselves in "the busy," even when we are "too tired." And lastly, kindness is for absolutely everyone. As we intentionally show kindness each day, may we shine the light of Christ to a dying world in need of a saviour, a generation in need of love and grace. Be Jesus to someone today and every day; make Him our role model and kindness our lifestyle.



Dr Shantanu Dutta

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Leadership in the local Church – some thoughts

Rev. Vijayesh Lal

The importance of the local Church as the instrument of God's grace and love to the world cannot be overstated. The local Church is the means of bringing hope that is found in Jesus Christ to a world that needs it sorely. It is the local Church that God uses to realize His mission in the world and because the local Church is important for God, it should be for us as well. It is where a new Christian receives discipleship and grows in his / her faith and the local Church is the best forum for spiritual accountability and encouragement.

John Maxwell famously said, "Everything rises and falls on leadership," and the local Church is not an exception. Leadership of the local Church matters because if the leadership fails, the Body of Christ will suffer. But if

leadership is godly and good, then all the parts of the Church will be able to grow and become what God intends them to be.

The pandemic has impacted the Church worldwide and many leaders have now gone to be with the Lord creating a leadership vacuum in the Church. In India alone, it is estimated that over 2500 influential leaders succumbed to the pandemic. The count is much higher in local Church situations. It will take a herculean effort to rebuild leadership in countries where the death toll has been severe. Leadership is, after all, not built in a day.

In the Indian and Asian Church generally, leadership was already a priority area even before the pandemic as there is much

Church growth but little leadership development comparatively. Intentional discipleship and leadership development has been a felt need for long. And the pandemic has only intensified it.

It is difficult to define who or what is a leader. Different people have different definitions. It is also not easy to agree on whether leaders are born or made. Perhaps both are true – leaders are born and made. Their personality traits and gifts help them excel but experience refines them, and exposure gives them an edge.

We read a lot about leadership in the Word of God. 1 Timothy 3:1 tells us, "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." (ESV)

We find that the Bible is full of leaders who had different backgrounds, ethnicities, gender, ages, and personality. However, the one common thread is character, capability, and the call to be a tool in the hands of God to fulfill His plans.

Character is a perhaps the most important foundation for leadership. Charm and personal charisma can only take you so

far, but one cannot be a leader without character and integrity. The character of godly leaders is shaped by their faith and revealed by their integrity, their acting with respect, and their ethical behavior. When leaders treat and affirm everyone with respect, even the ones who disagree with them, they show themselves people of character. When leaders do the right things in the right way, even when it hurts or is tough, they inspire the confidence of the people they lead.

Saul was rejected by God because he lacked integrity, even though he had the talent and the abilities plus the looks. He thought it was okay to disobey God to get work done, so that he could win the hearts of the people. But God rejected him and chose David instead who was said to be "a man after God's own heart." In the same way, godly leaders in the local Church must first be people after God's own heart, people who demonstrate integrity, character, indeed Christlikeness in their lives.

Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses notices the trouble and exhaustion of Moses and recommends that he appoints

leaders – people with good character and integrity. Titus 1:5-9, paints the picture of elders that can be appointed to serve the Church. They are to be people who are holy, gentle, faithful to their spouse, blameless, people who show hospitality, are upright and disciplined.

This seems like a tall order but as someone has said, it is not about perfection, but direction. It takes a lifetime to walk this road but what matters is that one consistently chooses to walk it.

If local Church leadership is groomed to embrace right character and not compromise, the Church will flourish.

Capability or Competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience that is applied wisely for effective leadership in a particular context. Local Church leaders must be able to study and lead others in the study of the Word of God, their lives must display the gifts of the Spirit and their relationships must exhibit Christlikeness.

People in the Church must have the confidence that their local leaders are not only the right

people but also know the right way to do things. An attitude of learning and having an open mind is equally important.

Competence can always be developed; capacity can always be built, and leaders can always be equipped. A local Church must have training programs to build not only existing leaders but also the second and even the third line of leadership. This is especially a must in countries like India where many pastors who are leading congregations especially in the grassroots are pastors and shepherds simply because they were the first ones to come to faith in Christ in their village or area and thus are naturally expected to lead those who follow them in faith.

As far as Calling is concerned, every Christian has been called by God to participate in His Mission. All who belong to Christ have been endowed with spiritual gifts and have been entrusted with a marvelous duty. What we should be asking is how does God want an individual Christian to fulfill his or her calling for every believer is called to build the Kingdom of God and to participate in the life of God and

His people but each one has a specific role. While the goal is the same, the roles differ.

The task of the local Church leaders then, is to guide individual Christians according to their gifts and talents to discover the specific role that they can play in the kingdom following the call of God in their lives.

Churches must develop a leadership culture so that every member of the Body of Christ is confident that they can discover their calling and truly develop themselves to serve effectively within the setting of their local Church. The leadership culture needs to be people centric rather than program centric for that is how impact is multiplied. Local Churches need to create space for volunteers for this makes way for identifying and equipping leaders.

The leadership culture of the local Church also needs to develop a leadership structure that fits the needs of the congregation and the context in which they find themselves. There is no one perfect structure, no one size fits all. But there must be a structure so that leadership

can flourish and develop, and boundaries respected.

Is your local Church striving to be a leader centric Church or one that has shared responsibility among many leaders? Which is more suitable to your local context? These are questions that must be deliberated upon and answered.

The ultimate test of leadership is the kind of legacy that is left behind. If one is heavily into programs and goes from one event to another, all that will be left is a busy and hurried life with little impact. But if the leaders intentionally invest themselves into developing other leaders, the legacy that they leave will be rich and a blessing not only for the Body of Christ but for a world that truly needs God's touch.



Rev. Vijayesh Lal
*is the General Secretary of
Evangelical Fellowship of India.*



INDEBTED, NOT ENTITLED

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy

It's a bad thing to be in debt. That's the message we get in Christian homes. Generally, it's not with chapter and verse from the Bible, but by deplorable anecdotes about people who wrecked their families by getting into serious debt.

When I was to be ordained, one of the questions I was asked was whether I had any debts, and I answered, "No". But come to think of it, I should have answered affirmatively. And I'm still in debt. I owe Father God for my entire life and all His provision for my sustenance. I owe Him for my salvation. He saved me reaching out to me when I wasn't considering salvation. I was saved when I didn't love God at all. He loved me first. He has continued to love me even though

I can't say I love Him very much.

I owe God for calling me to His service. He called me when I wasn't at all worthy. And He kept me on when I gave Him plenty of reason to be dismissed from service.

Oh, yes, I owe Father God, and I will never be able to get myself out of debt. When I stand before the Father's throne of grace, it is not with any sense of entitlement. I have been preaching and writing for a very, very long time, but I am not entitled to grace because of what I have done. I am still unworthy and there's nothing I can do to change who or what I am. So, I can only stand before God's throne of grace with profound and deep gratitude. It's not a momentary feeling or

periodic programmes done in public. Gratitude, to be gratitude, must change the course of my life. I must live gratefully. I can't repay the Lord God for all His marvellous bounty, but I can live with gratitude to Him.

Children are schooled to say "thank you" for gifts they receive. That's because it doesn't come to them naturally. Nor does being grateful come to us naturally, at least when it comes to God's grace in our lives. With other people, we have learnt to do the polite thing and say our thank you-s. When a young lad was near death, he was saved through medical intervention. The father appealed for prayer to be made on behalf of his son. When the son came through, the only people the father thanked were the doctors and nurses. He never said anything about being thankful to God whom he turned to in prayer.

During our Lord's time on earth, He encountered the ingratitude of people whom He had healed. There were ten who suffered from leprosy, a disease that rendered them socially outcast. When they needed healing, they cried out forcefully. He told them they were healed and sent them

off to get clearance from the priest so that they could re-enter society. On their way to the priest, they discovered that they had been healed. While nine continued on their way in a hurry to get cleared to re-enter society, one turned back to thank Jesus. He fell face down at Jesus' feet to express his gratefulness (Lk. 17:11-19). Earlier on, when he was plagued by the disease, he had kept company with those who shared his plight and were his comrades in misery. When all of them were healed, and they continued on their journey without wanting to show any gratitude to their benefactor, this one man left their company. He separated himself from people who were not grateful to Jesus.

When we are grateful, this is the first thing we need to do. We need to leave the company of the ungrateful. We need to leave them in order to be grateful to the Lord. Our world is full of people who are ungrateful to God. Almost everybody thinks that whatever they have is deserved – either because they were born to it or because they have worked for it. They don't believe that whatever they have is undeserved and is entirely and only, because of the grace of

God, given freely. This world is not conducive to living gratefully. We can easily fall into the pattern of the world and take the grace of God for granted. If you are grateful, the first thing to do is to be unlike the ungrateful, because you know that nothing you have is deserved by birth or achievement. "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Instead, keep company with people who are grateful.

When the Samaritan was healed of leprosy, he didn't call Jesus aside to have a word with Him alone. He approached Jesus while He was with His disciples. It was in their company, that the man worshipped Jesus gratefully.

Jesus had taught another Samaritan, that those who would worship God would do so in spirit and in truth not bothering to look for special places to worship God in. It wasn't happening at the time, but Jesus said it would happen when the time was right (Jn. 4:21, 23). That time came when the newly formed body of believers began to worship from house to house (Acts 2:46). And so, it continued for decades. As newcomers joined the fellowship

of believers, their worship spread from house to house.

Writing to a church, Paul said that the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit would come as they worshipped together: "be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:18-20). All the singing and exhorting was to be done in Jesus' name to give thanks to God for everything. No prayer was to rise up without the essential ingredient of thanksgiving: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!...The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:4-7).

Trouble with those who live ungratefully is that they are unable to accept that things come from God and so they institute all sorts of prohibitions to pretend that they are holier than others.

"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:1-5).

Those who want to live gratefully must simply "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:16-19). They don't pick and choose the times when they will be grateful. Because they see the hand of God in their lives, they are always grateful that God is there for them in their lives. They have cause to be glad and so they don't just rejoice in their hearts, they give thanks.

Offering God praise is the calling of those who are saved: "As you come to him, the living Stone –

rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him –you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:4-10).

We are entitled to neither bounty nor mercy from God, oh, but we are indebted. Those who are indebted, acknowledge their debt of gratitude and live gratefully.



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World Kindness Day:

13th November

Mr. Chacko Thomas

“If someone were to pay you 10 cents for every kind word you ever spoke and collect 5 cents for every unkind word, would you be rich or poor?” (“Quote Unquote”, compiled by Lloyd Cory.)

World Kindness Day is “to highlight good deeds in the community focusing on the positive power and the common thread of kindness for good which binds us.

“Kindness is a fundamental part of the human condition which bridges the divides of race, religion, politics, gender, and location.

Kindness Cards are also an ongoing activity which can either be passed on to recognize an act

of kindness and or ask that an act of kindness be done.”

“The purpose of this day, celebrated on November 13 of each year, is to help everyone understand that compassion for others is what binds us all together. This understanding has the power to bridge the gap between nations.” (The internet).

Mother Theresa would have welcomed “World Kindness Day” and compared it to “lighting a candle in the darkness rather than cursing it.” It is a great day to spread some kindness all around. Our cruel world is in dire need of kindness.

“Kindness is more than deeds. It is an attitude, an expression, a

look, a touch. It is anything that lifts another person up.” (Quote Unquote)

The Bible has much to say about kindness in the world. Most people are familiar with the Lord’s parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal son. It is exceptional kindness.

God wants us to extend kindness beyond people, to animals and trees too. “A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel.” (Proverbs 12:10 NIV). “The Lord is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation” Psalm 145: 9. Please see Deuteronomy 20:19-20.

We have a good example in Jacob on how to treat animals in Genesis 33:13-14. God cares for them. The Noahic covenant, or the covenant God made with Noah, includes blessings on all animals and birds. See Genesis 6-9. It is heart breaking to see the cruel way working animals are treated on the Indian roads, buffalos, horses, donkeys, oxes, and elephants. In contrast, what an amazing image we have of Christ, our Good Shepherd!

The Kindness of God: A whole chapter is given in 2nd Samuel to a kind act of David to a lame young man who is of no value but a burden to him. It is the story of David adopting Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, Saul’s grandson, as one of his own sons. He did not know him personally. His grandfather, Saul, dedicated much of his life to eradicate David and his possible dynasty. But King David showed exceptional kindness to Mephibosheth. David was indeed “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam.13:14; Acts 13:22).

II Samuel 9:1-3 reads; Then David said, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul, so that I could show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” 2 Now there was a servant of the house of Saul whose name was Ziba, and they summoned him to David; and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” And he said, “I am your servant.” 3 Then the king said, “Is there no one remaining of the house of Saul to whom I could show the kindness of God?” And Ziba said to the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan, one who is disabled in both feet.” Ziba seems to be saying, “don’t bother, he is a lame man.”

It is called “the kindness of God” (9:3). The “kindness of God” means “the mercy and favour of the Lord to underserving people” (Warren Wiersbe). The word “kindness” comes three times in this chapter (9:1, 3, 7). David’s motive in adopting Mephibosheth was his kindness, not pity on a cripple. As one of his sons, Mephibosheth was to eat at David’s table. The phrase “eat at my table” comes up four times in the chapter (2 Samuel 9:7, 10, 11, 13.) A great example of God’s kindness to the undeserving.

The Apostle Paul saw “the kindness of God” in the coming of Jesus Christ to earth and His work on the cross. Titus 3:1-7 says “... But the kindness and the love of God our Saviour appeared. He saved us. It wasn’t because of the good things we have done. It was because of His mercy. He saved us by washing away our sins. We were born again. The Holy Spirit gave us new life. God poured out the Spirit on us freely. That’s because of what Jesus Christ our Saviour has done. His grace made us right with God. So, now we have received the hope of eternal life as God’s children.” (NIV reader’s version).

Kindness is needed more than miracles or rituals in the church: I once interviewed a lady who had turned to our Faith from a Jain family. Manjula Shah was born in 1949, in Nairobi, Kenya to Gujarati Parents who were businesspeople.

When Manjula was about two years of age she became a victim of Polio, crippled in one leg. Her mother took her to all places, medical and religious, even to witchdoctors for help. No help came. As she grew up, Manju realised what the Indian community thought of such tragedies and her relegated place in society.

What turned the tide for Manju was the kindness Christians showed her, especially western missionaries. They did not regard her as rejected or cursed of God. They wanted to help her walk and improve her life. They welcomed, appreciated, and treated her with dignity.

Manju wanted to be among these people. She began to attend Sunday school classes and enjoyed Bible stories. She was an avid reader and read all the books in the church library,

including the biography of Pandita Ramabai. Finally, in her late teens, Manju committed her life to the Lord, was baptised (secretly) and began to be a witness for the Lord.

In due course, her sisters turned to the Lord. Her father, although initially offended that Jesus ate fish (John 21), committed himself to follow the Lord. Another decade later, the mother, after reading the Bible several times, fully committed to the Lord. This brought remarkable changes in the home. Just recently, Manju's older brother, a Civil Engineer, made an all-out commitment to the Lord in baptism.

The "miracle" that the Church in India needs today, more than raising the dead, is the miracle of kindness to all, especially to the "undeserving" people, which in India is most of its population; women, disabled, poor and the so called "untouchables". Our Lord showed no discrimination against them.

The Holy Spirit is a kind person: The Apostle Paul writes to the Galatians and contrasts "the works of the flesh" that comes to us naturally and "the

fruit of the Spirit" which the Holy Spirit imparts into those who "walk by the Spirit". (Please note that the Apostle wrote more about the destructive works of the flesh, our worst enemy that we walk around with, than he did about the devil and his demons.)

Galatians 5:19-23 reads: "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are ... enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, ... and things like these, ... But the fruit of the Spirit is ... kindness, goodness, ... gentleness."

Kindness is one of the attitudes that makes Christians salt and light to the earth. Let us lift others up. Not as an annual event, but like the Lord Jesus we are to be kind at all times, in all places, to all people and animals, especially to what India considers "undeserving". Our Lord came "to seek and to save that which was lost" Luke 19:10.

Practical ways of showing kindness

The Bible teacher Jack Selfridge says, "We should be kind to our church and its leaders because it

is Christ's bride! We should not only give cheerfully of our money as the Lord prospers us, but we should find ways of servicing our church. There are opportunities for cleaning, gardening, repairing, painting etc. in many cases. Then there are opportunities for teaching in Sunday School, youth work, visiting the sick, bringing others to the services.

"There are many opportunities to show kindness in the home. We can volunteer to help one another with jobs that have to be done. We can express thanks when things are done for us, instead of taking them for granted. Also in the office, factory, or shop where we work, there are many opportunities to show kindness to fellow-workers. By taking an interest in the welfare of their families, going out of our way to assist them in any problems they have, will allow us to practice the fruit of the Spirit in the kindness we show."

Our Lord said that He will say at the end of the world to those who

practiced kindness in His name, "Whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me!" (Matthew 25:40 GNB) Jesus said that even a cup of cold water will not lose its reward if given in the name of a disciple. May the Lord, live out "the kindness of God" through us His people.



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Be kind to one another
Ephesians 4:32



Who Will Not?

David asked, "Lord who will dwell in your sanctuary?
Who will live in your holy hill?" (Ps 15:1)

Prof. Henry Shepherd

There are numerous best-selling books, popular sermons and other communicable biblical materials which have been guiding seekers to know – How, why and who will be saved? The fifteenth Psalm of David also gives an answer to this query by relating salvation directly with good deeds of man. Even Jesus' disciples were astonished on hearing his concluding remarks on richman: How hard it is for rich to enter the kingdom of God. Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Lk 18:24-25). Since the remark was shocking for disciples, therefore, they tossed the most important issue, related to all of us, in the form of a

query; "Who then can be saved?" Jesus answered, then, "With man this is impossible but with God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26). Why it is impossible? For our best deeds are like filthy rags compared to the righteousness of God, yet He made it possible what was impossible for man out of love (Jn 3:16). He justifies the forgiven sinners by grace through faith. In this article, let us ponder upon – Who will not? Based on only what the Lord has explicitly taught in the Synoptic Gospels. They who are:-

- **BLASPHEMER**

Jesus said, "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against

the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Mt 12:32).

The one who is saved is because their sins are forgiven as they have believed that Jesus has already taken the punishment of their sins along with the sins of the world on himself, on the cross. But here, he is warning the blasphemers of the Holy Spirit that this particular sin is unforgiveable, for he has not taken its punishment (eternal death) on the cross. So, for the unforgiveable sin they shall face eternal death in the hell. There are other sins which Jesus Christ forgives if one repents and promises to lead righteous life until the end, as per Jesus' dos and don'ts. We should also pray for each other by confessing our sins for forgiveness (1Jn 5:16-17). And be respectful when speaking about the Holy Spirit of Almighty God (1Jn 5:16-17).

- **RICH**

Jesus said to his disciples, **"I tell you the truth it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than rich man to enter the**

kingdom of God" (Mt 19:23).

Jesus added in the list of 'who will not', a class of the society, yet he uses here a milder term- 'hard'. But with the help of an allegory, he illustrates how difficult it is for them to enter the kingdom. If one takes the simile literally, then, the use of word hard will be justified. The best interpretation of the allegory is understood when one sees the huge gates of the walled cities and inns in the outskirts of Palestine. They had a huge main gate and also another small gate through one of the gate leaf. During night-time, the main gates are locked for the safety. But, if a caravan or traveller is reaching late and requests for accommodation for night halt, then only the small gates were opened for the entry. Put it, needed good practice to make the camel also enter through the small gates for their safety. The small gate was called 'needle's eye: it is not impossible for rich, as we know many God's chosen people are rich there were saints who remained free from the ill effects of wealth e.g. Zacchaeus, Abraham, Nicodemus and Job etc. Rich are likely to become proud, unjust, cruel, insensitive, and selfish. They fall in love with

money thinking that God's favours can also be purchased with money. They love the world more than God and, in the process, forfeit the love of God. Rich people conveniently forget that friendship with the world is hatred towards God. The rich man here also chose riches by rejecting eternal life. Though rich is a relative term, but those whose financial status is above the fifty percent of the population of their country may be called rich.

• NOT BORN AGAIN

Nicodemus who came to Jesus with the quest for truth was told, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (Jn 3:3). The Lord coined the phrase 'Born Again', which left Nicodemus clueless. So, he queried further like a school boy seeking clarification from the teacher, for it was very difficult for him to perceive the truth. Being a theologian, yet he could not fathom the meaning of the phrase at all. Even today after two thousand years, a good number of Christian believers do not understand it properly and some relate it with Pentecostal groups.

Another term 'kingdom of heaven', often used by Jesus, also falls in the same category for nominal Christians. W. Barclay has defined it based on its use in Lord's prayer, which makes the phrase easy to understand.

He defined: "the kingdom of heaven is a society where God's will is perfectly done on earth as it is in heaven." He also defines eternal life (for it is not the same as everlasting life): "Eternal life is the new life that God gives; it is God's life." The Lord then explained it to Nicodemus using two terms, 'born of flesh' and 'born of water and Spirit.' We all are born of flesh but every believer is also born of water and Spirit. When a sinner confesses his sins and truly repents, his repentance is accepted by the Lord who has shed his blood on the cross for the sinners. He washes with his blood and gives him the Spirit to empower him to be victor over sinful desires of flesh. Such a person is – 'Born Again'. A born again joyfully accepts the will of God as His child and qualifies to enter the kingdom of heaven, to live righteous life in God. Jesus explained to Nicodemus the way

he could fathom and told him not to surprise. But it appears, he understood it later and then accepted Jesus as Messiah. He offered his own grave to bury the body of Jesus, which shows love for him.

- **DEFIANT**

Jesus revealed to the crowd, **"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 7:21).**

Jesus warns to the overconfident who in vain call him Lord but do not mean it (Mt 15:8). All through the biblical history, we read about false teachers, and prophets (Is 29:13) who may perform rituals to impress others, but in their private lives they rather do their own will i.e., they neither care for God's general will nor the specific will. The warning was strong and shocking for the guilty, as their response shows. They were sure that as they have succeeded in deceiving the people with falsehood, the same way they can please God. They forget that God cannot be impressed by our outward deeds, but He judges the heart. People often believe and say that credit of good works can

qualify them to enter the kingdom of heaven. They claim credit for three things- they prophesied, drove out demons, and performed miracles in his name. Even if that is true, on the basis of these things, one cannot claim entry in the kingdom of heaven, for salvation is by grace through faith. The one who bears good fruits are the one who are doing God's will. Such pretenders use the Name under pretense, sincerity, demands, practicing the Word, and obeying Him willfully; He has told us His general will (Mic 6:8). We say in the Lord's prayer- "Thy will be done" only in words, but Jesus practiced it, even during the most crucial hour he prayed, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Mt 26:39). Do His will on earth and you will lack nothing. Stubbornness will not work there but yielding will do.

- **AVOID NARROW DOOR**

Someone asked Jesus: **"Lord are only a few people going to be saved? He said to them; Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to" (Lk 13:23-24).** Entering the kingdom of God is not a cake

walk and Jesus confirms here that not all shall enter it, but only those who will choose to follow the narrow road shall enter through the narrow door. Christian walk of life is a lifetime commitment, and one has to remain faithful up to the end. Jesus said, "I am the Gate for the sheep, whoever enters through me shall be saved. But he also said, 'broad is the road that leads to destruction,' and broad road is being followed by the majority, which means by worldly people. Jesus said, "I am the Way.....", this helps in extrapolating that broad are ways other than Jesus. On broad roadsides, one can find and enjoy all kinds of desires to fulfill the quench of the flesh. But on narrow road, the Lord leads and it reaches the narrow door which has been suggested by the Lord. People do not choose it for it is full of hardship, demands sacrifice of desires of flesh, and requires to carry own cross.

• UNFORGIVING

Jesus said, **"But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Mt 6:14).** Jesus taught us the Lord's prayer which is recited by every Christian, at least once a

day. Yet many are found lacking or reluctant (Mt13:8) in forgiving the sins of their offenders. Most of us are quite good in lip service but when it comes to practicing the word, we shrink. The Lord has used a parable also to teach us forgiveness and consequence of not practicing it. Consequence of forgiveness is apparent as it has been made a part of the Lord's prayer. There is none who does not need or desires forgiveness of God for we all have sinned either by using words or through acts or in thoughts in life. But mostly, people by categorizing the sin do not consider the so-called small sins serious, and even do not pray for forgiveness. But there is nothing like big or small sin, a sin is just sin and to keep our conscience clean, we need to be forgiven by God. We repent and ask to forgive us our sins as we forgive our debtors, but when it comes to forgiving others, we forget what we have committed to the Lord. One cannot forgive until willing to love others and softens the heart. Love covers many sins, and it is lack of love that makes us stubborn and inconsiderate. If one forgives but does not forget it is as bad as being unforgiving.

The Lord forgives us and never remembers our sin again, the scripture says so (Heb 8:12). Thus, our forgiving others trespasses and God's forgiveness are interdependent. Also, by forgiving others, we do not favour but help our own selves making our mind free from bitterness, anger, and hatred etc. Peter asked, "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" The answer was: 'seventy times seven'. The Lord did not only teach, but he showed how it can be practiced ; from the cross he prayed, "Father forgive them as they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34). He even died a substitutive death for offenders, the biggest proof of forgiveness.

• CURSED

The King said. 'Depart from me you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Mt 25:41). Jesus depicted a scenario at the time of final judgement, to warn them who are cursed for they had never accepted him as their saviour, and had been rejecting Jesus, who took the sins of the humankind on himself and died

on the cross for the forgiveness of sins of the world. Disciples of Jesus, who preach the Good News should be accepted, served, and taken care for they are commissioned by Lord to preach, teach, make disciples, and baptize them who believe. He told them, "He who listen to you listens to me and who rejects you rejects me, but he who rejects me rejects Him who sent me" (Lk10:16). So, goats represent them who have thus rejected God and Jesus and are called here 'cursed' So, let us be careful how we treat God's anointed ones. They have dedicated their lives to minister the word of God facing hardship, rejection, violence, and even death threats every now and then. It is our duty to take care of the needy, for God blesses us without measure so that we could share with them and other needy fellow brothers. Please note, the sheep as well as goats showed their ignorance as to when they did not offer water to thirsty and food to hungry etc. It shows lack of mercy and kindness in such situations, by nature, people in general remain insensitive, but genuine believers serve the needy because of their new nature in Christ, and not for

the reward they have been promised. Any act, good or bad, toward his servants is for the Lord. Jesus told Paul, "Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?", though Paul had never met him before this encounter.

- **UNLIKE LITTLE CHILDREN**

Jesus said, **"Truly I say to you unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3)**. It shows how disciples were under a wrong impression that kingdom of heaven is similar to the earthly kingdoms. Therefore, they wanted to outsmart other disciples in terms of rank, power, authority, and every now and then exalted themselves. Whereas there is no self-glorification in the kingdom of heaven, but we need to offer selfless service to each other. Jesus chose the generic mentality found in children to make them understand the principles of the kingdom of heaven. Children, as long as they are children, are not conscience of their status, financial background and power, self-prestige, and other such issues as they are innocent i.e., free from cunningness (Mt 10:16) and

evil desires which come with age as they observe and learn from adults who behave with others differently in public, and discriminate between rich and poor, weak and strong, powerful and powerless etc. The attitudinal characteristics of children are very much similar to the attitude of citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Children forgive and forget easily even when treated unjustly, are humble, loving, sharing, trust, and believe their parents without any doubt, depend on parents for all needs, don't doubt and are totally free from worries. Jesus asked disciples to shun pride, selfishness and change their self-projecting attitude to enter the kingdom they were inspiring for. Most of us do not take this serious issue as seriously as one should take.

- **UNCOMMITTED**

Jesus said, "Whoever acknowledges me before men I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven" (Mt 10:32-33). This statement of Jesus is very plain and a

straightforward warning. We are saved by confessing with our mouth, "Jesus is Lord" and by believing in our heart that God raised him from dead. The word also promises that anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame. So, if anyone is ashamed to confess his Lordship means: he does not believe from heart the sovereignty and saving grace of Christ. Denial is done by them who fear persecution and rejection or fear death, or lack in commitment, unfaithfulness, and lack of love (Mt 10:28). Resurrection is the most important part of our faith and those who do not believe it are wasting their time and deceiving others. After resurrection, Jesus lived on earth for forty days to help disciples believe. Paul says, "If Christ is not risen, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1Cor 15:14). Rather one should be proud of the living faith and sacrifice of our Lord out of love for the world which was perishing due to sinful desires of the flesh who are enemies of God. As warned, if one disowns the Lord before men the same cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus never forced us to accept him as our Savior, but he

said, "Count the cost," and "Rejoice" when persecuted (Mt 5:10-11).

- **UNFAITHFUL**

Jesus also said, "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Mt 10:22). When a sinner receives forgiveness on believing and receiving the Lord, he is on the top of the world, full of joy, with praises, and thanksgiving. But gradually, with time, people become cold, backslide and with time, go far away from commitments, and join them who are on broad road and walking in darkness. There are others who run well in the beginning but get tired soon because of lack of power (Spirit). The third type remain committed as long as there is no persecution but fail to remain committed when persecution is continual strong, and wild. Jesus has called them blessed who endure and stand persecution but do not deny the Lord even at the cost of losing life. They who remain faithful and committed until death, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Persecution is not a new phenomenon from Abel to prophets, millions of believers in

different part of word have faced insult, false accusations, and execution till date. But those who deny Jesus to save the earthly life will lose the eternal life and the Lord (Mt 10:28,16:25). He has clearly told all that this may happen and cautioned that those who after putting hand on plough look back, are not worthy for calling themselves disciple (Mt 10:16-23).

- **DISBELIEVE IN SON**

Jesus said, **"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believes, stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him"** (Jn 3:36). As we know, we are saved by grace through faith when we believe in Jesus, the Son of God and Christ. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my words and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, he has crossed from death to life" (Jn 5:24). God, out of love, sent his only begotten Son to save and take us in His

kingdom to live eternal life. God has given men free will, but prophets and disciples have been advised to choose life not death, and he cautioned not to love the world. Those who reject the Son or deny him, bring God's wrath upon themselves. Jesus has said, "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins" (Jn 8-24). He also said – "I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I sent, accepts me; and whoever accepts me, accepts the one who sent me" (Jn 13:20). So, the choice is open; but Jesus also warned and asked to estimate the cost before constructing a house. (Lk 14:28-29)

- **HOODWINK THE WORD**

The word of God also cautions not to take the Word casually or try to change it by taking away a part, or by adding anything extra from your side, saying- **"And if anyone adds anything to them (words of the prophecy), God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes word away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share**

in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book" (Rev 22:18-19).

There were people who change the scrolls and have tried to hide the original ones. The Catholic Bible has changed the second commandment (Dt 5:8). There are other denominations who either made changes as per their doctrines or made a new Bible for their church. Catholic's Bible also has extra books which are not in the protestant's Bible. The Bible is word of God written by God's people from all walks of life in different periods but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so one cannot add or delete a portion of their choice.

The warnings and rebukes are there to guide us on the narrow way so that one can remain following the same up to

the end. It is sign of God's love that He rebukes, cautions, disciplines, and issues warnings (Rev 3:19). God only wants us to love and obey him as he loved us, and receive eternal life. He has prepared for them who believe in His Son. False teachers, false prophets, and false preachers often commit this blunder willfully.



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Be still and know that
I am with you.

Psalm 46:10



ELEPHANT IN CHURCH

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy

Russian writer Ivan Krylov (1769-1844) told the fable of how a man missed seeing the elephant while noticing everything small at the Museum of Natural History. The man told his friend, "Nature is certainly wonderful in her rich variety! There are more birds and beasts than I ever dreamed of—not to mention the butterflies, dragonflies and beetles—some green as emeralds and others as

red as coral! And there were tiny little gnats too—why, really, some of them are smaller than the head of a pin!" His friend replied, "And of course you saw the elephant? What did you think of him? I'll wager you felt as though you were looking at a mountain!"

"Elephant? Are you quite sure that they have an elephant?"
"Quite sure."

"Well, old man, don't tell anybody—but the fact is that I didn't notice the elephant!" This is how we got the expression "elephant in the room".

Forget that elephant. We now have an elephant in church. It is not a circus elephant ready to perform tricks to entertain spectators. It is a wild animal. It will cause damage just by its huge presence in the church. No one wants to talk about how to deal with the elephant. People gossip and do some scandalmongering, of course, but otherwise do nothing to actually address the problem or to find ways to rectify the situation.

Here's what's been going on.

- The top bishop of one major Protestant denomination has been jailed for possession of crores of cash in rupees and foreign currency, plus several bank accounts, and grabbing quite a few properties.
- The top bishop of another denomination was prevented from travelling abroad and had to face 30 hours of questioning by the enforcement

directorates of the government.

- One Roman Catholic bishop has been accused of rape and while the man is out on bail, the matter is not yet closed.

A retired bishop deplored what was happening in the church:

In India, among the Protestant Churches, bishopric is becoming more and more a medieval, colonial and feudal practice, which was abandoned by the Reformation in the 16th century. They had a reason to do so as they experienced these things that are happening today, then...episcopacy is a spiritual office. It is an office of teaching and preaching and Pastoral care. It is not an office of self-glorification nor pomp and show.

Truth be told, there's nothing new about what's happening. The history of the papacy is littered with vile and evil characters. The *Bad Popes* (1969) is a book by Jamaican-born historian and author E R Chamberlain giving the history of 8 bad ones. From sexual predators to ambitious conquerors, the Roman Catholic Church has had no shortage of incorrigibly evil popes. However,

each of these popes thought that just because they were popes, they were closer to the grace of God than all others.

Sordid tales of wicked popes is ancient history. About 40 years ago, an internal investigation found a bishop guilty of having syphoned off funds from projects under his chairmanship. The church's highest body punished him by transferring him and prohibiting him from travelling abroad for a period of four years. However, during his punishment posting some heads of institutions catered to his corrupt ways by illegally giving him funds from the institutions they were heading to protect their own interests. When he finished the punishment period, he got himself transferred to his home state where he went on a rampage. Finally, he was booted out of office for maladministration, intimidation of church members, misuse of institutional funds and nepotism. The charge of nepotism was brought because he had appointed his son as principal of a college, though he didn't have the required qualifications and

experience. Guess what? The bishop's other son followed in his steps: he not only became a bishop but copied his father's corrupt practices and he too got booted out.

Of course, not all bishops are guilty of such blatant dishonesty, corruption or sexual immorality. But case after case keeps on coming up again and again and we dare not ignore what is happening.

However, corruption (or any other form of immorality) is not the elephant in the church. Wrongdoing is just the outcome of bishops being bishops and exercising all the power they've been vested with. The elephant in church is the bishopric of bishops, because a bishop holds a position in church that is larger than all its members. A bishop has more power than all the pastors and laypersons combined.

There is a sort of overriding deferential loyalty that is shown to heads of churches. When I served as a minister in the Methodist Church, many times I

heard members of boards and committees talk about "the bishop's prerogative", by which they meant that the bishop simply because he is bishop has administrative and managerial rights that are unquestionable. They have the willy-nilly right to transfer pastors under their charge. They have the right to hire and fire people unilaterally. That is why when they give orders or make demands, individuals and committees fall in line without any resistance whatever.

And don't think that this is true only of churches that have bishops. Others may call their heads general superintendent, president or something similar, but all churches and parachurch bodies believe in the absolute sanctity or legitimacy of hierarchy. It is this blind belief that persons in hierarchical positions of authority have "divine rights" that has allowed corruption and/or immorality to flourish in churches and Christian groups.

H i e r a r c h y , n o t
corruption/immorality, is the
elephant in church, and no one
wants to examine the biblical

validity of hierarchicalism – whether the elephant of hierarchicalism has a right to be in church or a Christian group.

Early Church

The primitive church, as described in the New Testament had no administrative hierarchy. There was no oversight of pastors by bishops. The word "bishop" is used by Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus, and while the Greek word episcopos does have the connotation or notion of superintendency, in his instructions about the conduct of bishops there is no suggestion that episcopal superintendency was over pastors ranked lower than bishops. A bishop had oversight of a particular congregation or local church but could not go to another church and say that he was going to supervise the pastor of that church. Apostles and prophets did have hierarchy because they had a foundational role (Eph. 2:20). Otherwise there just was no hierarchy of office, no ranking of the Lord's servants.

This was in keeping with the teaching of the Lord of the

Church: "you have one teacher, and you are all brothers" (Matt. 23:8). Jesus specifically spelt it out that His followers were not to be like the rulers of the world. "It shall not be so among you" (20:26, KJV). He said that they were not to be like the rulers who "lord it over [people], and their high officials exercise authority over them" (v.25). He commanded them to be servants. He said that they were to be like Him in being servants (vv.27-28). He was servant to His disciples (Jn. 13:5) and He made it a point to draw attention to what He had done. He set an example to follow (vv.13-15; Lk. 22:27).

What Jesus said about being servants certainly has never fitted the "princes of the church". They do lord it over subordinates. They are not paid servants' wages but get disproportionately higher salaries and many extravagant perks. Nothing servant-like about that, is there?

In 1887 in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, historian and moralist Lord Acton (1834–1902) famously said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power

corrupts absolutely." It is true of politicians, and it can be equally true of high-powered clergy.

Church Government

In terms of church government, there are two kinds of churches: connectional and congregational. Denominationalism is a feature of connectionalism. When churches are united by a common polity, they also categorise what peculiar beliefs and ritual practices they hold in common. Their connectionalism thus divides them from other Christians.

In a connectional church, the local church does not control policy. It is subservient to policy laid down by a synod or a general conference.

The second feature of connectionalism is that it structures the denomination hierarchically. There is a top-down structure. Professional clergy therefore tend to discount the local church. It is the whole denomination that they regard as the church, rather than the church they serve. Their loyalties are to bishops, executive boards

and councils that control the terms of appointment for the clergy. Also, their focus is not on serving the local church as much as it is on advancing within the denominational power structure. They see that there is a ladder in the church, and they feel compelled to climb it whatever it takes.

While dividing along the lines of truth can be justified in part, this second aspect of connectionalism is totally unjustifiable. The practice of hierarchy is against all that Christ taught. There is absolutely no way we can reconcile notions of superiority of office and the tyrannical power that accompanies it with the idea that in Christ's Kingdom, the greatest will enjoy the status of a servant and do the work of a servant. A hierarchical church in no way exemplifies the upside-down Kingdom of God. It is not a church made up of brothers and sisters in Christ. Instead, it is a human group consisting of high and low persons. In this group, the high will be abusive and the low will helplessly accept abuse as just the way things are, in much the

same manner as many low caste persons submit without any protest to abuse from high caste persons.

Of course, connectionalism affords a certain security to its employees. As long as they are willing to be servile and do not rock the boat, they are guaranteed a position and a minimum wage. Their job is secure even if they are utterly incompetent.

Congregationalism

In the congregational system of ecclesiastical government, it is the local church that decides both policy and programme. The congregation determines who will be its pastor, and on what terms.

The Church in the New Testament period was not connectional. It was congregational. They were linked by their common faith, but they were certainly not confederated into being a union of churches.

Of course, it is possible for a denomination to impart a sense of identity and power to its

congregations, if it chooses so to do. This is essential for the health of the Church in India.

The Local Church

Only the local church can be the Body of Christ, function as a body, and evidence the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit. A denomination cannot demonstrate the redemptive power of the Gospel because it lacks real presence in society. It exists only for ecclesiastical purposes. It cannot manifest any spiritual power or proclaim salvation in Christ. The power it can exert is either hierarchical over those who are beneficiaries of the system or in relation to other power structures in society, as when there is a gathering of high-powered people or when an official statement needs to be issued.

Only the local church functions as a body that gathers ordinarily and routinely. The special assemblies that meet occasionally have high profile and visibility but are no different than other groups. They have no relevance to the spiritual lives of ordinary members, nor impact at the grassroots level. It is

when the locals meet regularly that there is presence that is ordinary enough to have a continuous, natural and unobtrusive localised impact on society.

Denominations, especially mainline churches, need to decentralise enough to restore significance and power to the local church for it is the local expression of the Body of Christ.

Body of Christ

Without a body of believers functioning as the Body of Christ, the witness of the Church is compromised. Connectionalism and hierarchicalism are alright if the goal is to wield some political power in society by a show of strength in numbers. However, if the purpose is to manifest a power that is spiritual and to call other people to follow Christ, there must be a community of faith that functions as a support group for new entrants. Without support, seekers find no encouragement. On the other hand, if anyone joins because of the profile of a denomination's hierarchy seeking to join the hierarchy, the newcomer is

already politicised and a new incarnation of the old "rice Christian".

The local church must urgently be recognised as the only expression of the Body of Christ. Only it gathers for worship, edification and fellowship, and has the power to witness ordinarily. The need of the hour is the same ordinariness. That was the secret of the Early Church. Not high-profile persons in hierarchy. They represent themselves. It's impossible for

them to be representative of the one who was Servant.



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How and when can the Church complete the mandate of the 'Great Commission' of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can the job be done in our generation? Let's consider together now.

I. The historical overview of the unfinished task

1. Historically, the book of Acts records how the Gospel spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and to the nooks and corner of Asia; till it crossed into the Greek and the Roman world despite many oppositions and terrible persecutions. With the Edit of Thessalonica in 380 AD, Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the Empire's State religion.

2. Then the Dark Period of the Church came, as the Church headed by the Pope loses its purity and spiritual power until Martin Luther, a theologian, composer, and Bible lover started his Reformation Movement on 31st Oct 1517, when he sent 95 of his theses to his archbishop of Mainz and also nailed a copy on the door post of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

3. Amazingly, the Celtic, Coptic, and Moravian movements appeared on the scene simultaneously which resulted in a new mission movement. The famous Moravian prayer and mission movement headed by Count Zinzendorf, Germany (1739-1813) was birthed as a

result of revival in Hernhut, Germany. The Moravian Mission is the first notable Protestant Mission while Protestant Church in Europe was busy with theological debates for more than 300 years.

4. Another bright star appeared on the horizon with the arrival of William Carey (1781-1834) known as the Father of Modern Mission, followed later by an explosion of what is now called 'Faith Missions' headed by Hudson Taylor (China Inland Mission). The Student Volunteer movement headed by John R. Mott culminating in the great Edinburgh International Mission Conference in 1910 was another great Mission Movement. Interestingly, one Garo pastor from NE India also participated through the American Baptist Mission.

5. A new surge of hope and optimism to complete the unfinished task came again after the two dreadful World Wars. Significantly, 150 mission agencies were formed within 5 years mainly to proclaim the Gospel everywhere by all means. Evangelist Billy Graham, Bill

Bright, Lawrence Cunningham and Bob Pierce were the leading lights in this new scenario (1945-60).

6. The devastation brought about by the war also saw the uprising of a Social gospel focussed on social reform and liberation by transforming social structures and systems. Theology of higher critics and liberation of all kinds reinforced this new movement. However, in the field of Mission, a powerful movement appeared on the scene with 'Church Growth' and 'people movements' propounded by Donald Mac Gavran (1897-1990) and his team from Fuller Seminary in USA. In no time, it became a global phenomena. This is basically 'harvest 'missiology with emphasis on the unreached peoples'. The goal of Mission is church planting' (Mac Gavran).

7. Most recently, the unfinished task has been described by many as a "church planting movement among every people group" mainly by AD 2000 and Beyond Movement with a focus on the 10/40 Window areas and unreached people groups of the world. Concern has been

expressed that our zeal to go wider has not been matched by a commitment to go deeper. (Ref: Analysis of East African Evangelistic Movement - a mile wide and an inch deep). Thus, a strong Prayer Mobilization movement focussing the 10/40 window region came into being. Also, a research wing called Joshua Project was formed to identify the half reached and unreached people of the world to help Churches and mission bodies in planning their outreach efforts.

II.A biblical Overview of the Unfinished Task

1. The Great Commission given by our Lord Jesus to His disciples, form the basis of our mandate to take the Gospel to all the world, Matthew 28:19, 20 and Acts 1:8 being the main basis of mission. Other relevant passages are- Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 20:21-23 and Luke 4: 18-19 which covers healing, deliverance, and liberation from injustice etc. Apostle Peter, Paul, and Barnabas/Silas showed how this could be implemented in the book of Acts (2-26 etc.) and the Epistles.

2. Mechanism in fulfilling the unfinished task is declaring the Good News of the Gospel, baptizing, teaching, discipling the believers and establishing 'ecclesias' or households of believers as found in Acts 2:46; 20:20; Roman 16:5 etc.

Experiencing of Holy Spirit's blessings is described as the priority for outreach and other missionary activities Acts 1:8; Acts 13:2. Equally important is the calling of God for the ministry Acts 9:17; 13:2; Luke 9:1-; Luke 10:1-7 etc. as well as the confirmation by fellow believers or the Church, Acts 13:3.

3. Strategic Overview of the unfinished Task in our generation (Global Outreach).

a. Mobilization of global and local, fervent, focused, and united intercessory prayer movement. Jesus said, 'Pray to the Lord of the Harvest', Math 9:38.

b. Designing of appropriate and contextual training programme for all mobilized personnel to accomplish the goal. (Cross cultural Training urgent need).

c. Initiating intentional partnership or Networks with like-minded churches and networks incorporating existing structures

etc. to achieve your aims and objectives.

d. Empowerment of personnel and staff by leadership and management training to ensure anointing of the Spirit and teaching of the word of God. (Psalm 1:16; Eph 5 etc.)

4. Write the vision and make it plain, so that people may run after they read. Habakkuk 2:2-3.

a. The whole Church must take the whole Gospel to the whole world with a view to transform the world. (Strategy: Identify the unreached and try to reach them as per the early Church method (Acts 2&3:8 & 10)).

b. Look at the harvest fields closely (John 4:35; Math 9:36-38). Look at the 10/40 window -4 billion people; over a billion need cross cultural witness. 83% of the unreached people groups of the world; 85% world's poorest. 35,000 children die every day due to starvation, 10,000,000 children suffering oppression of forced prostitution. PRAY AND MOBILIZE INTERCESSORS.

c. Prioritise the unreached and socially oppressed people (Luke 19:10). Select neglected and sexually abused women and children as their numbers are

increasing everywhere. Flesh trade is increasing even in India. HIV/AIDS/Drugs and alcoholic addiction is another grave concern for NE India.

d. See the urban world. By end of 21st century, 80% of world population would be urban. Pioneer missions urgently needed in world cities. You can Google our cities too.

e. The 40/70 European World calls for re-evangelization of the eastern European world, Russia including. Likewise, the 35/45 Turkic Window has become the most important gateway to the Muslim world.

f. 4/14 Window – embracing young people under 14 years of age also needs to be focused urgently as they are targets of drug users, forced labour, exploitation and yet most open to the Gospel.

g. Primacy of world evangelism to be incorporated in all the curriculum of all theological and mission institutions where theological issues have gained momentum instead of Missions.

THE UNFINISHED TASK OF INDIA & NE INDIA

The census figures will only tell where we are what need to

be done now.

Religious Distribution in India (2011 Census): Hindus: 79.8%, Islam: 14.2% , Christianity- 2.3%, Sikhism – 1.7% , Buddhism- 0.4% . Population-wise: Hindus- 96.62 crores, Muslims-17.22 crores, Christians 2.78 crores , Sikhs- 2.08 crores , Budhists- 84.43 Lacs. Others 79.38 lakhs, No religion- 41.52 Lacs.

Analysis of Indian Population by Pew Research 2015: Little change in India's religious make up in 70 years since 1971. India is neither a melting pot nor a salad bowl. Growth analysis - There is an increase in all major religions. Hindus from 304 million (1951) to 966 million in 2011. Muslims 35 million (51) to 172 million. Christians 8 Million (51) to 28 million in 2011. Interestingly ,India has 30,000 Atheists and 8 million no religion. The myth about population explosion in India. Present growth rate is 1 milion a month. But fertility rate declined from average 3.4 (1990) to 2.2 (2015). Muslims from 4.4 to 2.6. UP, the most populous state in India, is expected to decline its growth rate considerably since the government adopted 2 child policy. Violation means, no

employment and no elected post. Now, 12 states in India have also adopted two-child policy and hence, childbirth rate is expected to decline. Plus, every year some kind of birth control law is being pushed even in the Parliament. But Supreme Court refused to entertain such laws so far.

North East India is diverse and complex. Here is the religious demographic scenario for our purpose Percentage-wise. Hindus 57.2%; Muslims 22.8%; Christians 16.1%; Budhists 1.3%: Analysis of Census 2011 shows Muslims gain in numbers while Hindus are decreasing a bit. Growth among Christians is only by 1%. Christians are mostly confined to the tribals and in rural areas and hence, slow growth. Another reason for slow growth could be growing opposition and open discrimination in due to political pressure. Migration from outside to NE region could be another factor.

Why should we share the Gospel to others like the disciples of Christ? Here are a few reasons.

- A. We are commanded to go and preach to all nations (Math 28:19,20; Marka 16:15-

18; Luka 24:46-49; Johana 20:21; Tirh 1:8 etc.

- B. Like Paul, we owe sharing the Gospel to the Greeks, Gentiles, the wise and unwise people, including those who are in Rome (Rom 1:14). Because the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe (Roman 1:16).
- C. We have been reconciled to God through the sacrificial love of Christ and therefore, we are appointed to be His ambassadors to the world so that others will be reconciled to God (2Kor 5:20).
- D. As God's children, we are to love our neighbours as ourselves. The best way to show that love is to share the Gospel and pull them out of hell's fire (Jude 22,23).
- E. Hell is there (Math 10:28; Revelation 21) and today, those in hell are calling us to tell their relatives and friends and tell them to receive Christ so that they will not face eternal fire. (Luka 16:27,28).
- F. Knowing the truth and not doing it is sin (Jakoba 4:17). Neglect is a greater sin (Heb 10.26,27). The lepers outside the wall of Samaria city

understood this and said, "If we are silent till morning, we will surely face judgement" (2Lalte 7:9).

Recently, I read an article of an Indian missionary walking along the Ganga river who met a woman who stood there crying in agony. The woman was in tears. The missionary came closer "Lady what happened. Jesus died for all your sins and salvation. You need not cry". This lady then replied in a louder voice, 'Then why didn't you tell me earlier? I just threw my baby into this holy river for my salvation!!! Missionary got a shock of his life. Today thousands and thousands are dying because no one told them about God's salvation. The book of Wisdom said, 'If you say that I do not know them, will not the judge of the whole world judge you'? Proverb 24:12

God is not only unhappy with our lethargy and inaction, He will judge all those who know the needs and heard the call, but failed to join the battle and refused to obey Him. In the book of Judges, when the armies of Deborah and Baraak march on to

wipe out the armies of Jabin, who had enslaved Israel for so long, one village called Meroz refused to cooperate in this crucial battle. God was not amused. Here is the judgment he announced.

'Curse ye Meroz, 'saith the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty'.

Judges 5:23

Today, the royal battle is raging. God is mobilizing His armies to build up His kingdom in so many lands including India. You and I are expected to be God's warriors to take Satan's strongholds everywhere even in so called Christian majority states. The issue is urgent. It's now or never. Here is my last story.

Sometime ago, one woman was attacked in the by-lane as she was returning from her work in New York City. It was night-time and the lady screamed as she was being assaulted. Few houses near that place put on their lights and shouted, 'who is there?'. The attacker then ran a

little distance and hid himself thinking somebody would come. When he saw nobody came out, he returned to his victim and knifed her to death. The next day when the police brought witnesses in the court, the judge asked, "Since you heard the cry of the lady, why didn't you try to help?" Sadly, these people said, 'they did not want to be involved'. So, the lady was robbed and left bleeding to die such a cruel death.

Friends, will you be involved or uninvolved? This is the issue today.



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How Can I Repay the Lord?

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

Many of us find reasons to complain and to be unhappy. We find it difficult to be thankful. But even in our complaints, we can be thankful to the Lord. In Psalm 116:12, the psalmist writes that the Lord has granted us several benefits. Based on this scripture, I've entitled this article "**How Can I Repay the Lord?**" The Lord truly deserves our praise and thanksgiving for all that he has done for us.

In Psalm 116:12, the psalmist could have focused on all the problems that he had. Instead, he focuses on how good the Lord had been to him. All of us do have problems. But our blessings outweigh our problems. We must learn to focus on the Lord's goodness and what he has given

us instead of focusing on what we don't have. We must heed the psalmist's call, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (Ps. 103:2).

The simple answer to the question in our text is that we just can't repay the Lord for all that he has done for us. But we can acknowledge God's blessings in certain ways. Some of those ways are mentioned in Psalm 116:13-14, 17-19. But I'm not going to focus on this psalm in this article. I would like to share how we can acknowledge God's amazing benefits in our lives from several passages of Scripture.

The big idea of this article is: **Acknowledge the great benefits the Lord has granted you.**

So, how must we acknowledge the Lord's great benefits?

1. We Must Acknowledge the Lord's Great Benefits by Praising Him.

We can acknowledge the Lord's blessings by praising him. We can praise God in several ways:

a. We can praise God verbally.

The writer to the Hebrews exhorts them to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb. 13:15). In the Old Testament, sacrifices were offered at a particular time. But under the New Testament, we are called to continually offer a sacrifice consisting of praises. Since we have received great spiritual blessings from the Lord, we must offer greater thanksgiving!

Even Psalm 34 teaches that we must continually praise the Lord: “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Ps. 34:1). David says that he cannot be quiet about what the Lord has done: “I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord” (Ps. 40:9). Many people come to the church,

but they don't sing. It seems as if they seal their lips with Fevicol!

We must keep saying, “Thank you, Lord. Praise you, Lord” throughout the day. When you are alone, don't let the devil talk to you. Rather, allow the Holy Spirit to talk to you and talk back to the Lord and praise him. We should thank God verbally.

b. We can praise God through singing.

Psalm 146:1-2 says “Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.” The psalmist makes a commitment to praise the Lord as long as he lives. We must make that same commitment. In Psalm 13:6, the psalmist says “I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.” Further, in Psalm 33:1, the psalmist writes “Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him” (NIV).

Many Christians sing with virtually no emotion. On Sunday mornings, some sing as if they are singing at a funeral. Some go one step backward, and do not sing at all! The Bible says that we need to sing joyfully to the Lord.

Hallelujah! Even in the New Testament, we are exhorted to praise God through singing. In Colossians 3:16, apostle Paul writes “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

Unfortunately, many of us don't give priority to praise and worship. We lose out on experiencing the power of praising God through singing and music. If we are truly grateful to the Lord for all his blessings, we will make it a priority to worship the Lord corporately. You don't have to be a great singer to sing. The Lord can be glorified through your singing when you sing from your heart.

2. We Must Acknowledge the Lord's Great Benefits by Living a Godly Life.

We can never repay the Lord for what he has given us, but we can glorify him by how we live. In Romans 12:1, the apostle Paul writes “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual

worship.” People of other faiths offer sacrifices to obtain mercy. But we offer our lives as a living sacrifice because we obtained mercy! This worship is not merely confined to Sunday morning, but we worship him every day of our life.

The best worship that you can offer to the Lord is your consecrated life! In Leviticus 11:44, Yahweh commands, “Be holy, for I am holy.” In 1 Samuel 15:22, Samuel says, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.” Samuel is not saying that offering sacrifices is unimportant, but that our sacrifices are pleasing and acceptable to God only when we offer them with an obedient heart.

In John 14:15, Jesus tells his disciples, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” If we are truly grateful to the Lord, we will obey his commandments and his commands will not be burdensome (cf. 1 Jn 5:3).

If we have truly received God's mercy, we will seek to please him by living a godly life.

3. We Must Acknowledge the Lord's Great Benefits by Serving Him.

In 1 Corinthians 15:58, the apostle Paul says, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." Paul says that we must always abound in the work of the Lord. The best thing is that our work for the Lord will never be futile. So, we must always labor for the Lord.

The principle behind Paul's instructions to the slaves in Colossae applies to us today. He writes, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23-24). Paul tells the slaves at Colossae that when they work for their masters they must work heartily as unto the Lord. How much more passionately must we serve the Lord when we get direct opportunities to serve him!

As Psalm 100:2, we must "Serve the Lord with gladness!" Our service must be full of gratitude and gladness. In his farewell speech, Samuel says, "Only fear

the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you" (1 Sam. 12:24). When we consider the great things the Lord has done for us, it motivates us to serve him faithfully. We must imitate Christ in our service. Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). We must serve the Lord.

4. We Must Acknowledge the Lord's Great Benefits by Sharing about Him.

During his earthly journey, our Master calls a few fishermen by saying, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt. 4:19). Followers of Christ are also fishers of people. You cannot be a follower of Christ and still not fish people.

Listen to the apostles' response when they were asked to stop preaching Jesus:

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and

heard” (Acts 4:18-20).

If you truly had an encounter with God, you cannot stop sharing with others that the Lord is good (cf. Ps. 34:8). Apostle Peter says that we are called to proclaim the excellencies of God. He writes, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

We must shine our light in this dark and sinful world (cf. Mt. 5:14-16). When we shine our light, it may invite persecution, but eventually, it will bring glory to the Father. If we are truly grateful to the Lord, we will have that divine compulsion within us to share the gospel. As apostle Paul says, “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). We must share about the Lord with others.

5. We Must Acknowledge the Lord's Great Benefits by Giving to Him.

The concept of giving was taught in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 26:10-11, Moses

writes, “And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God. And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.” Worship involved giving, and rejoicing in the good that the Lord gave to his people.

When the Magi visited the young child, Jesus, “they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (Mt. 2:11). The wise men worship Jesus by giving gifts to him. So, one of the ways to worship God is through our giving. The Lord created us, saved us, and every day he sustains us. It's because of his rich grace and mercy that we are breathing right now. If we are really thankful to the Lord for all these things, how can we not give to the Lord's work? There's no excuse for not giving unto the Lord.

Writing to the Corinthians about

the need for generosity, Paul says, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). It's not enough to worship the Lord through our lips. We must also worship the Lord through our giving. We must give to the Lord cheerfully, liberally, and sacrificially.

Conclusion

The main message of this article is: **Acknowledge the great benefits the Lord has granted you.**

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, apostle Paul writes, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Well, how can we repay God for making his Son to be sin so that we can become the righteousness of God? We can never repay that!

But we can acknowledge his rich grace and mercy by praising him, living a godly life, serving him, sharing about him, and giving to him. Let's acknowledge the Lord's great benefits today and all the days of our lives!

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.



Rev. Dr. David Mende

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He is married to Sis. Susan Mende, who is also actively serving the Lord. They are blessed with a daughter, Karis Ruth. Dr. Mende can be reached at +91 9848004094 and davemende@gmail.com.

The Bible Society of India

Vacancy for the post of General Secretary

The Bible Society of India, a premier Christian Organization requires a competent person for the position of the General Secretary for its national operations and international relations, with its corporate office in Bangalore.

The post is that of the Chief Executive Officer of the organization, to head a team of nearly 350 staff. The prospective candidate should be in the age group of 50 – 55 years (age may be relaxed in deserving cases). He/she should be an ordained person from a mainline recognised Church, holding a doctorate degree in Theology, preferably in Biblical Studies from a reputed University. The candidate should have a minimum of 10 years experience in administration and ecumenical relations in a senior position in any Christian organisation. The prospective candidate will be appointed initially for a term of 5 years including a period of Probation in the first year, renewable for one more term of five years or up to 65 years, which ever is earlier, subject to proper evaluation. Selected candidate will be required to undergo a medical examination in a hospital recommended by the Bible Society of India at his/her own expense, in order to make sure the candidate does not have any pre existent illness and is fit to undertake the responsibility.

The selected person will be responsible to provide leadership for a national network of 17 Auxiliaries and Translation Centre, located at all strategic places in the country, but will be based in its headquarters at Bangalore. The incumbent should have good rapport with Christian leadership and the Church in the country. Personal qualities of integrity, credibility, commitment and dedication to the ministry of the Bible Society of India are important.

The selected person will report to the Executive Committee headed by its President and will be responsible for the growth and activities of the organisation. Salary and emoluments will be as per the rules of the Bible Society of India. Accommodation and a Vehicle will be provided.

Application with full particulars including Church affiliation, a passport size photograph, two reference letters from persons of good standing, one of which should be from the Head of the Church and a No Objection Certificate from the employer where he/she is currently working, may be sent in a sealed envelope to the address given below, on or before 30th November 2022:

The President, Bible Society of India
206, 'Logos' M.G. Road, Bangalore 560 001, Karnataka, India

Intercessory *Prayer* Points



November 2022

1 TUESDAY Thank God for bringing us to this new month with gratitude. Pray the Lord may open doors and use you to witness Christ boldly.

2 WEDNESDAY Pray for The Transformational Movement, Gujarat. Pray that this organization would be an effective transformational agent that bring changes.

3 THURSDAY Continue to pray for AIM magazine. Pray for all the writers to have new insights and appropriate words to express their thoughts as they write. Pray for their homes and relationships to be protected and blessed by the Lord.

4 FRIDAY Pray for Covenant Life, New Delhi. Pray for this new church to be blessed and be used by God to reach many unreached people in the city of Delhi and NCR and beyond.

5 SATURDAY Pray for the ministries that are reaching out to the next generation today. Pray that the Lord would give them appropriate tools for every challenge that young people would love God despite worldly

trends and influences.

6 SUNDAY International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church (IDOP). Pray for those who are persecuted/imprisoned because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that God would comfort them and hear their cry and answer their prayers. Pray for the persecuted Churches all over the world today to stand strong in the Lord.

7 MONDAY Pray for National Mission Consultation (NMC 2022) held at SAIACS, Bangalore from 8-10 November 2022. Pray that God would give clear direction and vision to leaders at this consultation.

8 TUESDAY Pray for Leadership Development Seminar organized by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Ministry and Evangelical Fellowship of India for Pastors, Church Leaders and full time Gospel workers. Pray that God would speak to each one of the participants that they would draw strength and encouragement from the seminar.

9 WEDNESDAY Pray for EFI new

group member Indian National Evangelical Church in Tamil Nadu. Pray that the church may grow in number and in quality for God's glory. Pray for God's guidance and abundant blessings upon this church.

10 THURSDAY Pray for religious liberty in our country. Pray that every individual would worship and share the gospel without fear. Pray for safety and protection of your church today.

11 FRIDAY Pray for the Junior Church or the Junior Sunday School program in your church. Pray for the teachers to be well-trained and spirit anointed. Pray for the children to diligently learn all the basic teachings of the Bible so that they may build their life upon it.

12 SATURDAY Pray for your city today. Pray that God would heal the sick and comfort the bereaved. Pray also that you would be a blessing to many people in your city.

13 SUNDAY Pray for the evangelists and missionaries that the Gospel would reach the remotest corner of the state. Pray for God's light to shine and dispel darkness.

14 MONDAY Today is National Children's Day. Pray that there would be awareness about children's rights, education and their welfare. Thank God for the children in our lives who have made our lives so worth living. Thank God for His hands of protection over them. Pray

that every child in our country would enjoy their childhood and love God with all their hearts.

15 TUESDAY Pray for Full Gospel Pentecostal Church, Tamil Nadu. FGPC is involved in Church planting, missionary family welfare and providing shelter, rehabilitation and orphanages to needy people. Pray that God would bless the ministry abundantly to display his unconditional love to mankind.

16 WEDNESDAY Pray for Full Gospel Farm Ministries, Maharashtra. Pray that this mission agency would be instrumental in bringing change in people's lives. Pray that God would abundantly bless their ministry.

17 THURSDAY Pray for Shammah Ministries international, Telangana. Shammah Ministries International is involved in church planting, women & children ministries and also for the poor & underprivileged. Pray that God would provide all the means to reach out to these groups so that Christ's love would be embedded in those to whom they minister.

18 FRIDAY Pray for the ministry of Evangelical Fellowship of India. Pray that EFI would continually be instrumental to reach the grass root gospel workers as well as the urban workers and be their voice to the world.

19 SATURDAY Continue to pray for our nation that Christ's light may shine brightly and that more and

more people may see the love of God and develop a greater desire to know Him.

20 SUNDAY Pray for the persecuted churches in your state. Pray that they would draw strength from God and carry on the good works that they do. May God enable them to be bold and courageous as they share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pray for growth of faith as they go through persecution.

21 MONDAY Pray for Kentwood Community Church, Maharashtra. Pray that the Lord would use this community church to shelter and feed many hungry and thirsty souls with His Word.

22 TUESDAY Pray for Kashmir Evangelical Fellowship, Jammu & Kashmir. Pray that this organization would be the backbone of churches in J&K. Pray that God would give clear vision and insights to the leaders to lead believers according to His will.

23 WEDNESDAY Pray that every child in this country would get affordable yet good education. Pray for your child(ren) that they would love to gain knowledge and live their life with great potential, effectively for the Lord.

24 THURSDAY Pray for Doon Bible College, Uttarakhand. Pray that this college would continually groom, equip and empower men and women of God to witness Christ in the world.

25 FRIDAY Pray for effective ministry to spread the love of God during this difficult time. Pray also for people would have fresh awareness of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and live for Him.

26 SATURDAY Pray for the victims of physical abuses. Pray for justice. Pray for healing both emotional and physical. Pray for the strength to forgive and move forward.

27 SUNDAY Pray for the suffering servants of God to be encouraged, emboldened and courageous. Pray that nothing would dampen their spirit to serve their Almighty God with undivided heart.

28 MONDAY Pray for the Mennonite Church in India, Chattisgarh. Pray that the church would be vibrant and over-flowing with spiritual blessings. Pray that the church members would grow in Christ-like character as they live out their faith.

29 TUESDAY Pray for Capital Pastors Fellowship, Chattisgarh. Pray that the Holy Spirit would anoint, comfort and strengthen all the members of this fellowship. May God mightily use them for the extension of his kingdom.

30 WEDNESDAY Thank God for his watchful eyes on His children despite our weaknesses and short comings. Pray that the Lord would bless you as you move to the new month.

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EFI North East centre is located in the heart of Guwahati city. The centre is open for members of EFI and those recommended by EFI members and can be used for conducting seminars, workshops, retreats or even for accommodation during transit.

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