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A Journey of Faith



*He has made everything beautiful in its time.
He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet
no one can fathom what
God has done from beginning to end.
Ecclesiastes 3:11*



Evangelical Fellowship of India
Wishes you and
your family a

HAPPY
New
Year
2023

A Journey of Faith

contents

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Editorial	He Who Upholds All Things By The Word Of His Power
Rev. Vijayesh Lal04	Mr. Chacko Thomas27
New Age Challenges	The Living Water in the Indian Crucible - International Webinar on Sadhu Sundar Singh
Dr. Babu John Vettamala08	Dr. Samuel Richmond31
Resolve To Be Like Jesus	Fun-loving?
Rev. Dr. David Mende11	Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy37
How Much Do We Love India?	Prayer
Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj1743
Lamb's Bride To Wear Fine Linen	
Emeritus Prof. Henry Shepherd21	

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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

New Year 2023 brought no relief for Christians in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh who have had a very troublesome Christmas season already. As this editorial is being written, nearly 2000 tribal Christians have been internally displaced from their homes after facing intense violence and social ostracization, all because of their faith in Christ.

Christians have largely been targeted by horrific violence in the districts of Narayanpur, Kondagaon and Kanker, all part of the Bastar division for at least three months now. The Janjati Suraksha Manch, an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has waged an organized campaign to convert tribal Christians to Hinduism. The

mobilization of attacks began in October 2022 and has continued up until now.

According to current reports, Christians in more than 35 villages have been severely affected, displacing approximately 2,000 tribal Christians. The displaced tribal Christians were threatened with death or expulsion from their villages if they did not renounce their Christian faith and convert to Hinduism. While being confronted and chased out of the villages, the Christians were severely beaten and assaulted with bamboo canes, tires, rods, etc. More than two dozen people had to be hospitalized with injuries like fractures of bones. The tribal Christians had to leave

their village and seek shelter in the open during this harsh winter season without food and other essential basic amenities.

It is to be noted that persecution and opposition for Christians in Chhattisgarh and particularly in the Bastar division is not new. Even last year i.e. 2021, according to data collected by the Religious Liberty Commission of EFI, Chhattisgarh occupied the second spot on the state list where Christians faced most opposition and persecution.

Despite violent campaigns intensifying against tribal Christians, the administration has remained apathetic. Local police did nothing as these incidents occurred, not even registering a first information report (FIR) despite the victims' submitting complaints to several police stations in Kondagaon and Narayanpur districts.

Instead of acting against the perpetrators of violence, the administration appeared to be busy pleading and persuading the perpetrators only to permit the displaced Christians to go

back to their villages. To date, there is no clarity as to whether any FIRs have been filed for Christians. Police and the administration insist that displaced Christians can return to their villages. When tribal Christians attempt to return to their villages, they are met with opposition and attacks. They are told by Janjati Suraksha Manch members and villagers influenced by them that unless they recant their Christian faith they can't come back to their homes. These tribal Christians are without food, shelter, and proper winter clothing.

The most catastrophic day for tribal Christians was 18th December 2022 when Christian tribals from 20 villages were beaten up and chased away from their homes. Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI) wrote to the Chief Minister Mr. Bhupesh Baghel on the very next day and our letter was hand delivered to him. Even though Mr. Baghel promised action, very little has happened to alleviate the sufferings of the victims. Please remember the Chhattisgarh administration in your prayers

that they would be able to restore peace in the area and to ensure justice for the victims.

We need to pray for our sisters and brothers and extend a helping hand. As the Body of Christ, it is our responsibility to uphold each other. EFI and other organizations and individuals have reached out to provide relief to the affected tribal Christians. But the need is great and urgent, both in terms of prayer and resources and there is much that needs to be done collaboratively.

As we step into the new year let us not forget the words of the

Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:26: “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

Identification with the suffering Body of Christ, praying for them, coming to their aid and being present with them, is the best New Year Resolution that we can make.

God bless you and your family abundantly in this New Year and beyond.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal
General Secretary – EFI



Recently EFI extended relief to families from four villages (**Rengagondi, Almer, Mungwal, Tembrugaon, and Toinar**) with **ration kits and blankets in Kondagaon, Chhattisgarh.**

These Christian families were summoned to village council meetings and threatened to forsake the Christian faith and stop attending church. When the Christians refused to renounce their faith, the villagers began brutally beating them and forcefully chasing them out of the village. Presently they are displaced from their villages and hence needed the relief.

Indian citizens who wish to help the affected tribal

Christians through the EFI network, may please send their donations to:

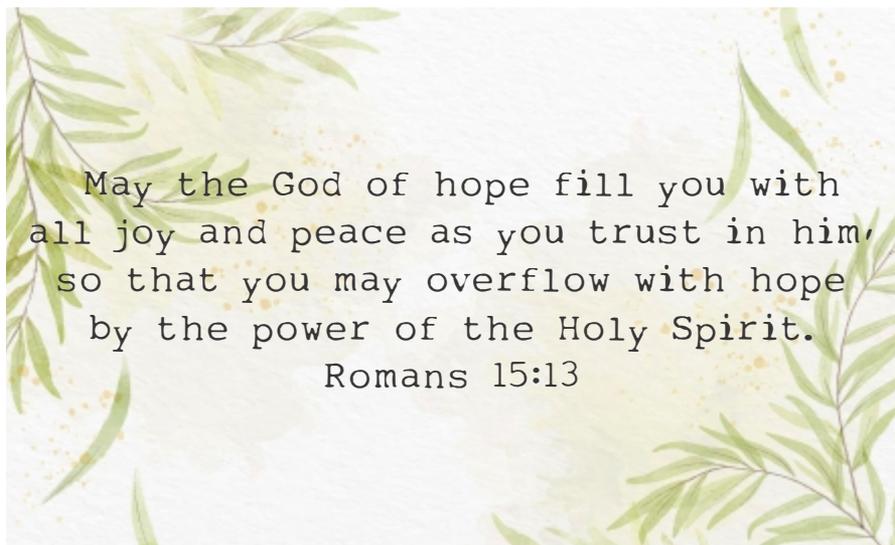
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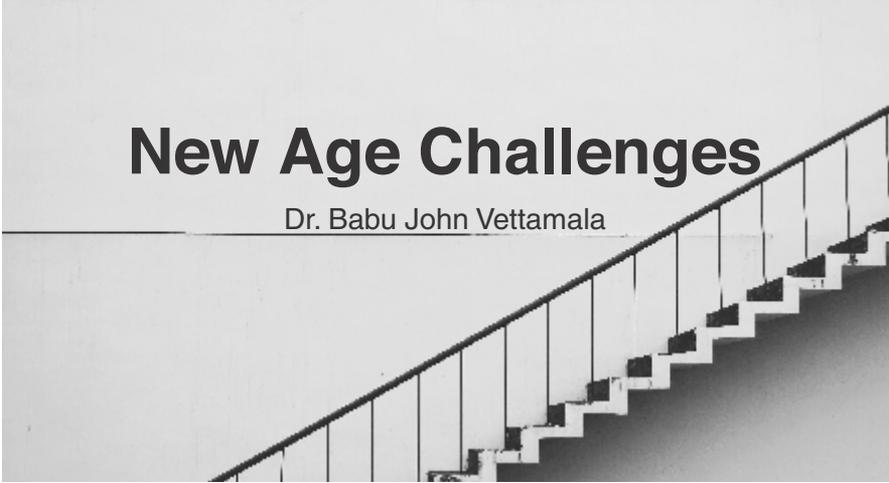
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Please mention "Chhattisgarh Relief" in your transfer. Please provide us with your phone number. Your PAN number would be required in case your gift is more than 2000 Indian Rupees. We request you to kindly send us details / screenshots of the transfer at donate@efionline.org





New Age Challenges

Dr. Babu John Vettamala

When the British empire ebbed away the world fell into disarray. A massive world government that shrank into the horizons of the British islands made it colonies rather emasculated through excited.'

As flies to the wanton boys was the world economy in the hand of the British colonial regime rither to. When the empire vanished, it left the word with no other tryst. Until then they were the greatest industrialist, producers, and sellers in the world. The rest of the world was just buyers. As they bade adieu, world economy caught the cold.

This was the case of cultural world also. Without Great Britain

to spear head the Wester Culture, horizons of modernism were emasculated; something new was to dawn. Or was the world falling aback to cultural anarchy and paganism? No one knew. New Age apostles of culture, civilization, order, morality, and advancement were rather flabbergasted. There was one question loudly heard everywhere; "What is wrong with this age?"

Stalwarts of intellectualism were searching for ideological alternatives. Who could prevent the spiral of atheism? How could the world be saved from permeating anarchy? What hope could the new world have for a better future?

Something wrong was felt in all realms of life; but what exactly it is? Nobody could be specific. Was the world going to be better or bitter, especially when Christianity became a mockery. Belittling Christian values became a passion and a fashion.

With the end of imperialism, great values like equality, fraternity, and liberty were resurfaced everywhere. However, sceptics like Aldous Huxley observed the view that inequality was the basis of all existence.

Christian thinkers and philosophers were still the exponents of anything valuable. Theological and socio-literary perspectives of great men like C.S. Lewis had great influence on the intellectual world. Printed media had a pivotal role in carrying great ideas to the world. They built up the hope that Christianity was not in its impasse. But then if the world is still getting rid of its Christian values and opting for pseudo intellectualism of aesthetic world view, who is responsible for it; what is wrong with the New Age?

The Guardian newspaper decided to address this issue, and so approached G. K. Chesterton, the living think tank of the time. They wanted him to write an article on “What is wrong with the New Age?” No sooner did they gave Chesterton the question than the answer came, reminding Francis Bacon's famous aphorism, “Brevity is the soul of wit”, as exhorted by Alexander Pope, Chesterton's reply was this “Dear sir, I am”. Christian thinkers thought Chesterton had upon them the onus of leading the world in the right direction. They should be cautioning the world of the problem of hopelessness if true Christianity is lost. In Christ alone can one find the rationale of life. It is the Christian values that keep the world value oriented. With the advancement of true Christianity, minds are liberated is the only one thing that can offer ultimate emancipation.

Then comes the question – who can spear head it? Well, that is the commitment of every Christian; a commitment to carry the beacons of Christian values,

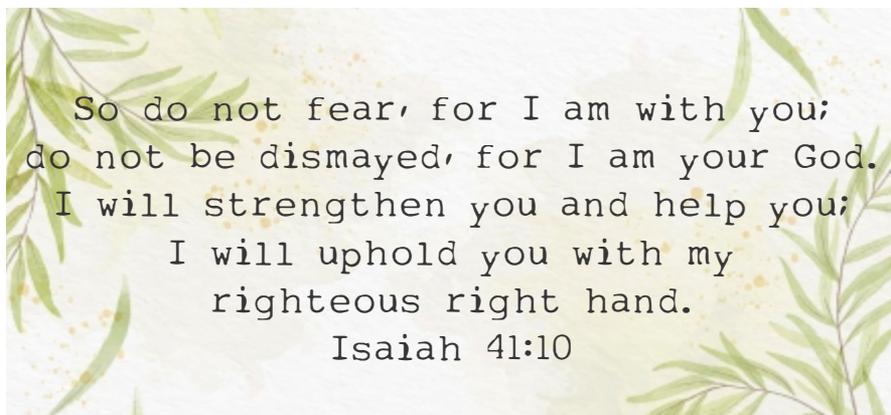
not in all talks. A Niagara of words producing exegetical exactitudes may not make any sense to an ordinary man. But a life lived on the principles of Christianity can make it. Teachings of Christ not only to be talked but also to be practiced.

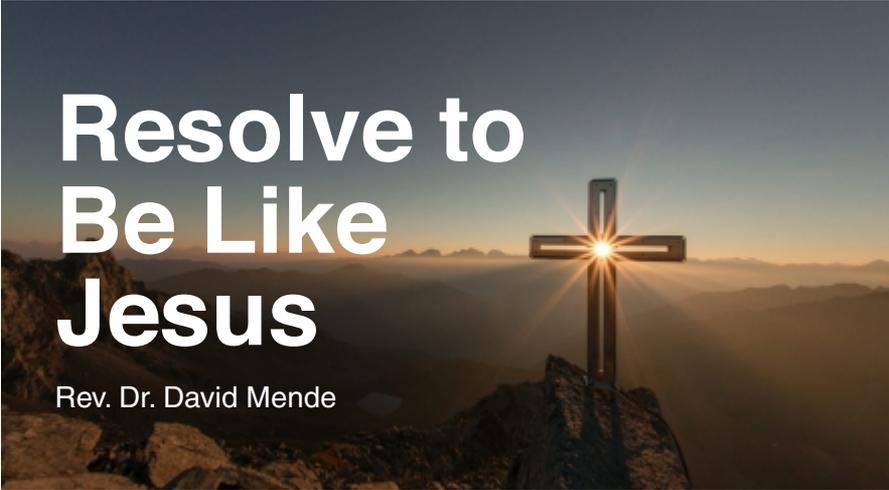


This is the difficult turning point where we have arrived at. If the great ideals of Christianity are not exercised in practical realms the world will grope in the dark for some guiding spirit that can make human life on earth worth living. This is not the mission of some so-called missionaries, but the call of every believer in Christ.

As long as we fail to fulfill it, we had better realize with Chesterton that we are “the wrong” of this generation.

Dr. Babu John Vettamala, *specialised in Biblical Psychology, Management, Law, English literature, Western history and philosophy is presently teaching the Bible and ancient Hebrew. He did M.A, Ph.d, English language and literature. He retired from prolonged professional life- Pastor, Teacher, Speaker, Columnist, and author. He Lives in the U.K with family for the last 25 years.*





Resolve to Be Like Jesus

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

At the beginning of the year, people make many resolutions. Some resolve to eat healthy food. Some resolve to exercise more and lose weight. Some resolve to quit bad habits and develop healthy habits. Some resolve to spend less and save more. Some resolve to read books. Some resolve to spend more time with family. Some resolve to be punctual. Some resolve to pursue their hobbies. While many of these resolutions are good, Christians must not be content with making these resolutions.

Our resolutions must not look merely like the world. Our priorities must look different than the unbelievers. While we must make several of the resolutions

that I mentioned just now, I believe that as believers, the most important resolution that we must make is to be like Jesus. That's because the ultimate goal of our salvation is to become like Christ (Rom. 8:29). If all of us imitate Christ, our homes will be like heaven, our church would be like heaven, and even our society would be transformed. So, as we made a new beginning by entering into 2023, let's resolve to be like Jesus. Romans 8:29 reminds us that God wants us to be conformed to the image of his Son. Based on this text, I have entitled this article, '**Resolve to Be Like Jesus.**'

We can become more and more like Jesus by growing in the following areas:

1. Resolve to Grow in the Word.

In 1 Timothy 4:13, apostle Paul writes to young Timothy, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture.” During Paul's time, people didn't have personal copies of the Bible (Old Testament). So, the only time most of the people heard the word was when they gathered together. What an awesome opportunity and privilege to read God's word from our personal copies of the Bible every day! In 1 Peter 2:1-3, we see that the word of God helps us to grow in our salvation. Let me share some helpful tips for Bible reading:

a. Select a time, a place, and a plan.

If you have never completed reading the entire Bible, complete the New Testament a couple of times and then start reading the Old Testament.

b. Pick up a modern version like NIV/ESV/NET.

c. Use a Study Bible as a study aid.

I use ESV Study Bible or NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible as study aids for Bible reading.

d. Focus on a chapter or two

rather than focusing on ticking the check boxes.

It's good to complete reading the entire Bible in a year. I have done that a couple of times. Did I benefit from reading through the Bible in a year? Certainly! But I have to confess that I had to rush while reading through the Bible without understanding or meditating on the Scriptures. I was more concerned about ticking the check boxes instead of seeing and savoring God's glory in his Word. Now, I stick to 1-2 chapters a day to do a focused reading. With that pace, it may take over 3 years to complete reading the entire Bible, but in-depth reading yields much fruit. It gives me time to meditate on the Scriptures and to memorize portions of the Bible as well.

e. Memorize Scripture.

Memorizing Scripture is one of the means to meditate on God's word.

f. Use Audio Bibles for long passages.

These days, many Bible apps provide audio Bibles for free. Sometimes, we can choose to listen to the Bible rather than read it.

g. Pray over the Word (ACTS).
We can pray over God's word by following the familiar ACTS pattern—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

h. Write down what the Lord speaks to you. Do journaling.
Cut down your time before TV and social media and take time to read God's word each day. Jesus was well-versed in the word. He quoted the word to defeat the devil (Mt. 4). When we meditate on God's word, we will be truly happy (Ps. 1:1-2).

So, this year, let's resolve to grow in the word.

2. Resolve to Grow in Prayer.

David Mathis rightly says that prayer is not about getting things from God, but getting God! In Romans 12:12, the apostle Paul writes that we must be “constant in prayer.”

a. Take out time to pray individually.
Jesus often prayed alone. Luke 5:16 (NIV) says that “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

b. Resolve to have family prayers.
Every Christian family must take

the time to have family prayers every day.

c. We must also pray with other believers.

Corporate prayers are not for a select few. All of us make efforts to attend all the prayer programs in our church. In Acts 1:14, Luke writes, “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.” Sometimes, the Lord answers our prayers only when others join us in praying for us (cf. Jas 5:14-16). Also, when we pray together, new believers and even older believers learn how to pray. Praying together also helps us to know each other and thus we grow in fellowship as well.

d. Learn to fast and pray.
Fasting intensifies our prayers.

So, let's resolve to grow in prayer this year.

3. Resolve to Grow in Love.

Loving God and people is the greatest thing we can ever do. When a scribe asked our Lord what the greatest commandment is, our Lord replied: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”¹ The second is this:

'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mk 12:30-31). Jesus loved the Father and he also loved people.

a. We must love God.

We must demonstrate our love for God.

i. We must love God by giving him the first place in our lives.

We must love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

ii. We must love God by seeking him.

In Psalm 73:25, Asaph asks, "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." We must long for God and seek him earnestly (Ps. 42:1).

iii. We must love God by obeying him.

In John 14:15, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. If we love God, we will delight to do his will (Ps. 40:8).

b. We must love People.

Love your family first. Also, we must love our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We must fellowship with one another (Heb. 3:12-13). We must be accountable to one another. We must love people in practical ways. We must visit people when they are sick. We must do acts of kindness for our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We must call them and encourage them. There will be times when others will hurt us and even we will hurt others. We must not keep any grudges against anyone. Let's forgive one another just as Christ forgave us (Col. 3:13).

So, let's resolve to grow in our love for God and people.

4. Resolve to Grow in Service.

Again, Jesus is the supreme model for service. In Mark 10:45, Jesus says, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." In Ephesians 2:10, apostle Paul writes, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." God wants each one of us to do good works that he has prepared for us to do.

a. Minister to people in the church.

God gave us different gifts so that we can build up each other (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). Let's serve the Lord with more dedication and passion this year.

b. Minister to people outside the church.

This can be done by sharing the gospel with the lost. Paul says that “the love of Christ controls us” (2 Cor. 5:14). In this year, let's lead people to Christ. Look at your profession as a ministry. Don't just build your career. Live for Jesus. Be a mission-minded Christian! In this year, let's resolve to bring at least one soul to the Lord.

5. Resolve to Grow in Giving.

Jesus gave himself for us on the cross. In Galatians 2:20, apostle Paul writes, “ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” As Paul talks to the Corinthians about the need for giving generously, he reminds them about how Jesus gave

himself (2 Cor. 8:9). Paul reminds the Corinthians that in response to God's grace, we must give for his work. Let's plan our giving. The Bible says that “whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6). We must give to the Lord's work cheerfully and liberally.

6. Resolve to Grow in Character.

As Romans 8:29 says, God wants us to become like his Son, Jesus. Let's ask the Lord to help us grow in our character by developing the fruit of the Spirit within us (Ga. 5:22-23). Along with Galatians 5:22-23, there's another list in the New Testament that mentions the virtues that a Christian must develop. In 2 Peter 1:5-7, apostle Peter writes, “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with *s t e a d f a s t n e s s* , a n d steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.”

Like Christ, we must love

righteousness and hate wickedness (Heb. 1:9). It's not enough to act righteously. We must love righteousness. Hating the consequences of sin is not good enough; we must hate wickedness. Let's ask the Lord to develop the fruit of the Spirit in us. In this year, let's seek to become more and more like Christ in our character.

Conclusion

If I have to encapsulate this entire article in one sentence, it is this: Let's resolve to be like Jesus this year.

As we entered into 2023, let's resolve to be like Jesus by growing in the word, in prayer, in love for God and people, in service, in giving, and in our character. We cannot grow in any of these areas in our own strength. We need the power of the Spirit. So, let's lean on the Spirit and become more like Christ this year and for the years to come.



Rev. Dr. David Mende

serves as the Lead Pastor at El-Shaddai Assembly of God Church, Hyderabad (elshaddaiag.in). He also serves as an adjunct faculty member at Southern Asia Bible College (SABC) in Bangalore, Hyderabad Institute of Theology and Apologetics (HITHA) in Hyderabad, and SUM Bible College & Theological Seminary in California, USA. He has authored seven books, including The Dangers of the Health and Wealth Gospel.

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.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28



I love India. The inspiration to do so comes from the Bible.

Love that moves me to INTERCESSION!

Apostle Paul loved the country he belonged to. He expressed that love by writing these words: 'I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites' (Rom. 9:1-4). He was ready to go to hell – be accursed – if that could bring the people of

his nation who largely had rejected Christ, to Christ! This extreme love for his countrymen which Apostle Paul showcased, was not much different from the crazy love which Moses showed for the idol worship loving, idol worship returning people of Israel: Then Moses returned to the LORD, and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!" (Ex. 32:31-32).

Do we love our Country enough to pray this: *Lord, I did not choose*

the country of my birth! But you chose that I be born an Indian! Save Indians Lord! Let the Gospel be proclaimed to every Indian. Use me also in this task! Move me out of my comfort zone for the accomplishment of this task!

Through the ministry I run, the Grabbing the Google Generation from Gehenna Mission, the G4 Mission, we run an event called Fountain of Tears of Against Mountain of Fears Fasting Prayer over Zoom. We pray for India in this once-a-month event after gleaning prayer points from national news magazines such as The Week, India Today, Open, Outlook, etc. This is my way of showing love for my nation! Yes, through INTERCESSION!

Love that moves me to make a 'DONATION'!

Also, when the Lord started blessing my finances, I started paying Income Tax! Some suggested that I pay only a nominal tax as my Income Tax – a miniscule amount. But I did not want to do that. I wanted to pay

the right amount to the government! And I have been doing this! I was inspired by Jesus to do this! He paid taxes. He paid two kinds of taxes. He paid his religious tax to the temple authorise. In Matthew 17:24-27, Jesus arranged the payment of this tax. A coin was found inside a fish's mouth. This coin was paid as Temple Tax. Though Jesus asserted that he did not have to pay this tax, he nevertheless paid it, because he wanted to be above reproach!

That's not all. In Matthew 22:15-22 Jesus used a coin as an illustration to assert that we must pay taxes to respective governments that rule our Land. In Jesus' case, a Roman Government ruled the nation he was born into – Palestine! And Jesus was quite clear, one had to pay taxes even to the political government ruling the land of your birth!

Do you love India that much that you also pay Income Tax to the Indian Government if you need to do that?

Apostle Paul also called believers to pay tax and thereby in-effect express their love for the land they belong to. He wrote: 'For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due'(Rom. 13:6-7). Yes, we must express our love for India via the DONATION called TAX!

Love that was fuelled by a Visa REJECTION!

On August 12, 2010, I appeared before the US Consulate in Hyderabad for a US Visa interview. An organisation was ready not only to buy me a ticket to the USA and back but also sponsor the fees to apply for the US Visa. I was to go there and make a presentation in a Christian Conference. But the visa got rejected. Though I was disappointed, I felt God orchestrated these events to help me focus on a pan-India ministry.

'Till date, it has been my privilege to preach God's Word with passion and unctions in over 20 Indian states, with the organisers paying for my ticket. God wove together events to bring me a point of a genuine love for my nation, as difficult as it was, at one point in time! I can honestly say that I have no regrets at all that the best years of my youth have been spent in serving Jesus in India, the nation the Lord chose as the nation of my birth, a really needy nation! Through this US visa REJECTION, God increased my love for my own country!

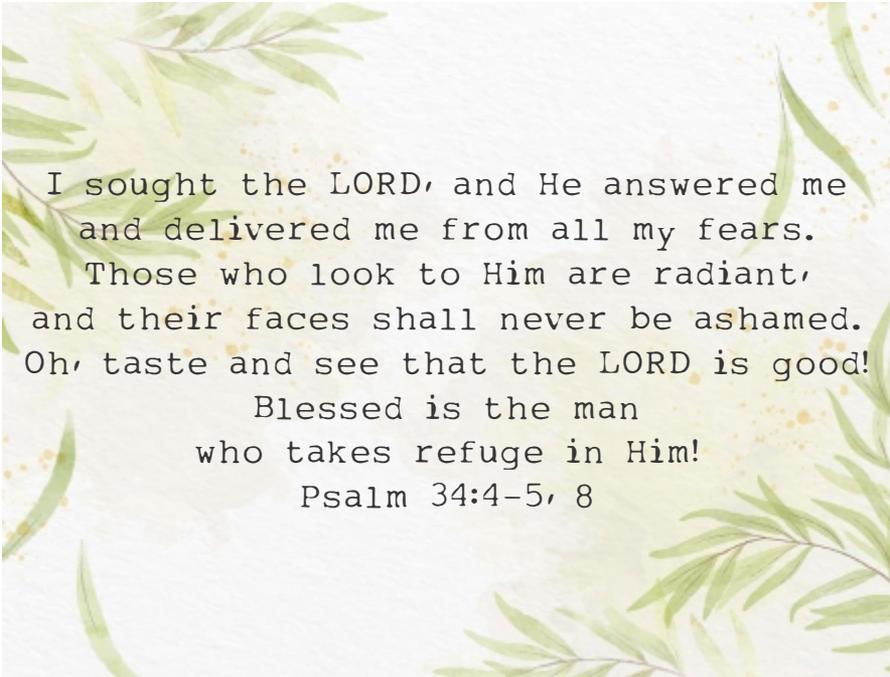
Are you listening to God's voice to you inspiring you to love your nation? You must!



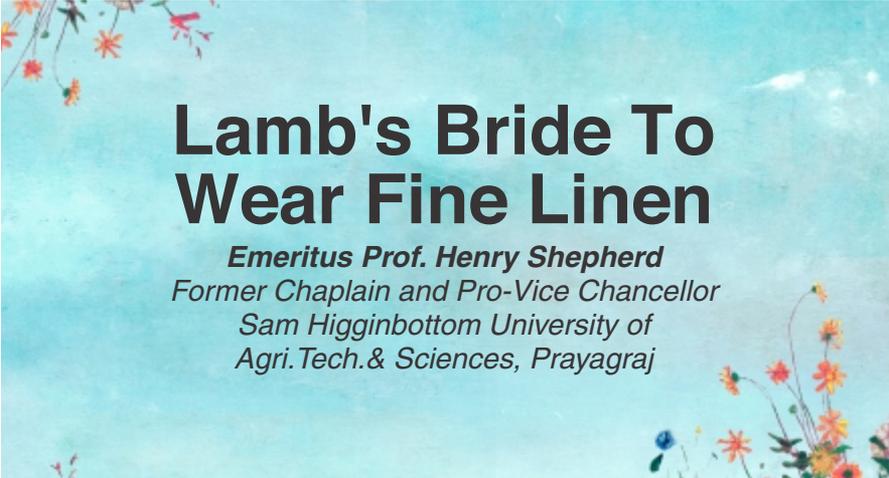
Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj,
*an Agri. Engineer turned M. Div.
Gold Medalist and Doctor Of*

Ministry Graduation Speaker, is the founder of Grabbing the Google Generation from Gehenna Mission, the G4 Mission. This is a para-church ministry to present-day people functioning from Chennai. God has graciously opened doors for him to preach in over 20 Indian states and in a few other nations right from the first time Duke preached, as a school boy of 16, in the year 1991. He has authored three books: Straight Talk (Sex, Love, Marriage, Porn, Phone Addiction, married-sex, etc., – what the Bible says), Daniel in

Dell (practical study of the book of Daniel for modern working professionals), Good news for the Google Generation (the Gospel presented the way Jesus did in Luke 13 and the way Paul did in Acts 17). Reach him via emailduke@gmail.com or WhatsApp, +91-8886040605, in case you want to buy these or have a question. Duke is married to Evangelin, Odisha Missionary's daughter, and this couple are blessed with two children – Dale, 19, St. Stephens Delhi, and Datasha, 15, Class X.)



I sought the LORD, and He answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.
Those who look to Him are radiant,
and their faces shall never be ashamed.
Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!
Blessed is the man
who takes refuge in Him!
Psalm 34:4-5, 8



Lamb's Bride To Wear Fine Linen

Emeritus Prof. Henry Shepherd
Former Chaplain and Pro-Vice Chancellor
Sam Higginbottom University of
Agri.Tech.& Sciences, Prayagraj

Expounding on Righteousness and Icons

Let us start with 'Amen' on a blessing pronounced by Jesus – "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled" (Mt 5:6). Righteous and righteousness are frequently used word in both the Old and New Testaments. These words appear approximately five hundred and fifty times. Its frequent use encourages the Bible readers to perceive the insight of the words, more so because righteous being an attribute of God. Righteous person enjoys numerous promises and blessings from God. However, righteous and religious are different aspects of faith. The righteousness is a quality closely related to: upright

need, piety, holiness obedience, wisdom, peace, love, integrity, hope and eternal life. Apostle John has characterized righteous as-"He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous" (1Jn3:7). The word righteous also means being right with God and being holy as He is holy. This simply means turning away from old sinful nature to a new spiritual nature i.e., getting renewed to enable us to imitate Christ in living according to the Spirit of God. Also, righteousness is doing right in right way for right purpose. Here 'right' particularly means what God has declared right. Being righteous is a quality of being morally right or being justifiable in the sight of just God. Righteous acts, are essentially in accord with God's precepts performed to obey God.

Metaphorically righteousness is (Is 6:10) fine bright and clean linen given to, Lamb's bride (Church) to wear (Rev 19:7-8). A righteous remains free from guilt of sin. He puts off the old self to puts on the new self which in likeness of God, and has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph4:24). Righteous person is born of Spirit, loyal to Church and faithful to the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Righteous walks on the path of righteousness side by side with God, to the same Jesus called – 'The narrow path.' Thus, the goal of every professing Christian is to put on the righteousness of faith. A righteous lives by faith, his life is blameless, bold and fearless, and he cares for justice for the poor and needy.

Abel was the first righteous offspring of Adam, who was killed for his love for God (Mt 23:35). Noah was also found righteous and was chosen to build the Ark to save animal kingdom and human race from extinction (Gen 6:9). He preached for 120 years but people made fun of him. Abraham believed in God's call and left his house and people to the promised land, without knowing its location and it was credited to him as righteousness

(Rom 4:3). Moses (Rom 10:5) and Job (Job1:1), may be called icons; as they stood toughest tests. Job was doubly blessed in the end (Job 1:8, 42:12-16). Before, Christ's obedience in following law literally, was considered righteousness works but Christ was end of law, now the word of God counts them righteous and holy who are firmly grounded in faith (Rom 10:12-14). They believe in Jesus' virgin birth, substitutive death on the cross, resurrection from grave, ascension to heaven, promised second coming and judgment in the end. James says, "For who keeps the law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of them" (Jes 2:10), therefore Scripture says for the same reason - None is righteous not even one... (Rom 3:10). So, now righteousness from God apart from law is by faith in Jesus Christ. Another kind is pseudo-righteousness but most prevailing among humans is self-righteousness. A self-righteous looks to self and behaves as if what he says or does is always right and others who differ with him are always wrong. It is the most dangerous trait but unfortunately prevailing from time immemorial. Paul's logical statement puts an end to the query – 'As to who is truly

righteous?' He said, "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law Christ died for nothing" (Gal 2:21). So, there is only one righteousness, and this righteousness comes from God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe. Sinners are justified freely by his grace through redemptive work by Jesus Christ (Rom 3:22-24).

Scholastic Views on Righteousness

Some views from men and women who lived righteous life, experienced the truth of practical Christianity and have received wisdom from above. One of them was John Calvin, a well-known servant of God. He said, "We shall never be clothed with righteousness of Christ except we first assuredly know that we have no righteousness" (of our own). The statement becomes more clear in the light of Ep 4:22-24 and Rom 3:28. Pharisees considered themselves super righteous at the strength of Mosaic law, they claimed to practice and profess more than anyone else. But for some reason, they became great hindrance in accepting Christ the Son of God and Savior of the world. So, Jesus eventually

warned people to obey them but not to do what teachers of the law say to do for they do not practice what they preach. Jesus said, "Be on guard against the yeast of Pharisees and Sadducees". "For I tell you unless your righteous surpasses that of Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 23:2-3,16:6 and 5:20). Our righteous acts are like filthy rags compared to fine linen of righteousness (Is 64:6 Mt 22:9, 1-13). A.B. Simpson says it firmly like this – So if we walk in righteousness, He will carry us through.

No one is born righteous and everyone is given a chance to choose freedom and eternal life given by Christ and receive righteousness of Christ, by accepting him Savior and Lord, who died for our sins on the Cross. "Righteousness is a status achieved through divine intervention and human obedience" (Joel Dahistorm). On receiving Christ as our Lord and Master, we are babies in faith and can digest only milk. But gradually, as we mature and become capable of assimilating solid food; that is, as long we are babies, we do not understand the spiritual meaning of word of God. But when one attains spiritual

maturity, believers feel hunger and thirst for holiness and righteousness. We seek them and ask, for they do not remain by merely hypothetical knowledge but become our practical experience. Bernice King says, "Each one of us must decide whether it is more important to prove right or to provoke righteousness."

Jesus said that righteous shall be accused, blamed, left lonely and persecuted by worldly people who hate truth and crucify sinless Christ. He warned his disciples not to lose patience or fear when these things happen. He rather said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for there is kingdom of heaven"(Mt 5:10). What is right for man has been decided by God already so a human view in contradiction to word of God is trash. William Penn has strongly supported this view by saying, "Right is right even if everyone is against it, and a wrong is wrong even if everyone is for it".

Fruits and Gifts of Righteousness

A tree is recognised by its fruit, so is true for righteous man. In the days of Noah, the great

flood was the result of God's wrath towards prevailing unrighteousness on the earth. God observed it, tolerated it, but when it became unbearable, He declared, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals and creatures that move on ground and birds of the air for I am grieved that I have made them" (Gen 6:7). The wickedness of man was extremely great so much so that every indication of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time (verse 5). But sin had entered in the DNA of humankind, so after flood, sin again started growing with time. In the days of Abraham, people of Sodom and Gomorrah became so wicked that they forced Lot to open the door of his house so that they could sodomise the angels who were sent by Lord to destroy the city. Though Abraham interceded for the people but could not find even ten righteous in Sodom. Since Lot was a righteous man, he was allowed to leave the place with his family (Gen 18:32, 19:5-11). Thus, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed completely by rain of burning sulphur (Gen 19:24). God has been punishing wickedness in different parts of the earth, from time to time, by sending famines, floods,

earthquakes, and pandemics etc. He also blesses righteous people with basketful of choicest blessings and gifts, and does not let them die or suffer with unrighteous population.

God has made 7147 promises according to Herbert Locklear, though out of them many are conditional. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away" (Mt 24:35, 5:18; Is 40:8; Nu 23:19). So, righteous have been enjoying fruits of righteousness on earth and then also in heaven. However, the priceless gift is – eternal life. Here is a list of blessings, as quoted from the book of Psalms and Proverbs, in the order, as given below:

*The Lord watches the way of righteous. * The LORD blesses the righteous and surrounds them as a shield. *God examines the righteous and joins their company. *The ears of the LORD are attentive to the cries of the righteous. *The LORD delivers righteous from all the troubles. *In the days of the famine they enjoy plenty. *Righteous stumble but do not fall. *the righteous inherit the land and live forever. *The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD. * He will never let the righteous fall. *The name of

the righteous is written in the book of life. *The righteous will flourish like a palm tree and cedar. *Light and joy are for righteous. *The righteous man is remembered forever. *The righteous are loved by the LORD. *He is filled by joy and peace. *God blesses the house of the righteous. *Blessing are crown of the righteous. *The mouth of the righteous is fountain of life. *The wages of righteous brings them life. *Righteous will never be uprooted. *The desire of righteous end only in good. *The fruit of righteous is tree of life. *A righteous escapes trouble. *The righteous may fall seven times but he rises again.

Traits of Righteous Persons

- Righteous discern and test God's will (Rom 12:12),
- Teachings, integrity and life of righteous are blameless (Tit 2:7-8),
- Righteous, live by faith (Gal 3:11),
- Anger of righteous is in his control (Jes 1:20),
- Righteous lead others to Christ (Mt 16:15, Act 11:26),
- Righteous is confident of receiving eternal life (Mt 25:46),
- Prayer of righteous is powerful and effective (Jes 5:16),
- Righteous work diligently, as if

- working for God (Col 3:33),
- Righteous acknowledge that he is righteous by grace through faith in Christ (Ph 3:9),
 - They do not join the company of wicked people (Ps 1:1),
 - God is present in the company of righteous people (Ps 14:5),
 - Mouth of righteous is fountain of life, word of wisdom and justice (Ps 37:30, Pr 10;11),
 - A righteous man is bold like lion (Pr 28:1),
 - Righteous are loved by the Lord (Ps 140:8),
 - Righteous care for poor, needy and his animals (Pr 12:10; 29:7),
 - Righteous stand firm forever even in storms of life (Pr 10:25, 12:3, 24:16)
 - Righteous hate what is false (Pr 13:5),
 - Righteous fear the LORD (Pr 13:5),
 - The heart of righteous weighs his answers (Pr 15:28),

Righteous hunger and thirst for righteousness and God keeps on filling them, for their prayer pleases Him. A professing Christian must assess his own righteous status from time to time and should pray for when found lacking. They rejoice in the promise, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled". The Church shall receive

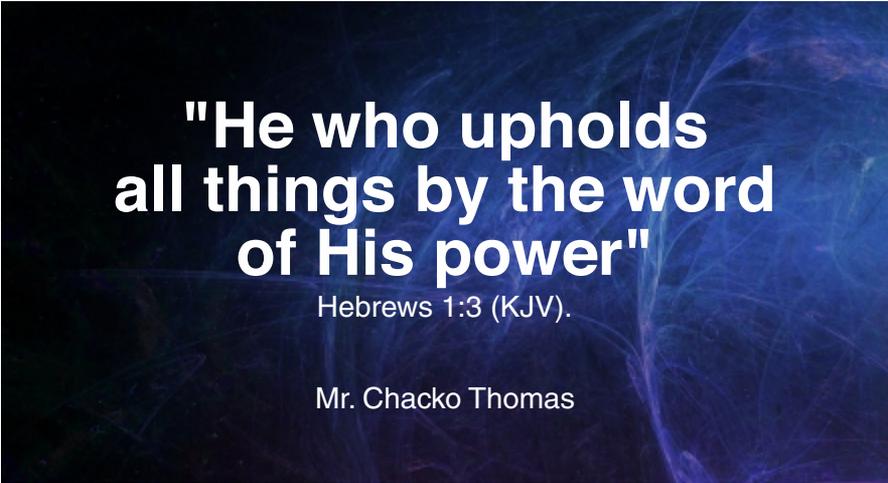
clean, bright and fine linen, prepared for Lamb's bride to wear. The fine linen is symbolic and stands for righteous acts of saints (Rev 7:9). John describes a scenario of heaven:

"After I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands." And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, Who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb." Rev 7:9-10



Emeritus Prof. Henry Shepherd is former Chaplain and Pro Vice-Chancellor of Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology & Science, Prayagraj.



"He who upholds all things by the word of His power"

Hebrews 1:3 (KJV).

Mr. Chacko Thomas

These words from Hebrews 1:3 have ministered to me over the years and especially now as we start a New Year.

In 1971, the newly acquired OM ship Logos had been in India for several months of ministry. The ship was scheduled to leave India for three months to minister in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, before returning to India with new visas for the crew and staff.

I was among a dozen Indians invited by George Verwer, then Director of the Logos, to join for the three months, to serve on the M/V Logos ship alongside 100 plus Internationals, almost all Europeans and Americans.

This would be my first voyage ever. I had never even stepped on to a little boat before; only seen them going by on the calm backwaters of Kerala. We boarded the Logos in Chennai where the ship was tied up safely in the harbour. It was sturdy, there was hardly any movement.

But things changed drastically at about 10.30 at night when the ship left the harbour and entered the open seas. It was pitch dark all around the ship. And the little Logos was pitching forwards and back. I was sure that the ship will go down to the bottom of the sea with us in it.

Scared, and holding on to the rails, I walked slowly down the

stairs to my cabin in the back of the ship. Although lying down on a comfortable bed at the bottom of the ship, I was afraid to sleep. Just then I heard in my ears these words, “who upholds all things by the word of His power.”

I knew that the phrase was in one of the first few verses of the Book of Hebrews. Although it did not altogether calm my nerves, I did get a good night's sleep. Back up on the deck, I was happy to see the sun again and us still afloat, although the ship, like a piece of cork, was going up and down over the waves. Five days later we arrived in beautiful Penang, in Malaysia.

The knowledge that our God “upholds all things by the word of His power” has become important to my life's journey; much of it had been like sailing over the seas, both literally and figuratively. I did since, go on to serve for 15 years on three different OM ships; and have been in much, much worse voyages too. God kept me afloat these 50 plus years.

Those words mean so much to me, that even in small matters like

driving on a busy road. I ask the Lord to make space for me on the road. I believe that He holds the flowing traffic too by His word of power. Not just the galaxies. Wow! What a great God! I have had worse experiences and seen God in perfect control of events, including grenade attack or mob attacks for preaching the Gospel.

India and much of the world has entered turbulent waters in recent years. During Covid, when death was more certain than life, my hope in God who “upholds all things” did much to sustain me. The Bible is a history of God. We see in it the part He played over thousands of years to “uphold all things by the word of His Power”. The history of Israel is a great example, especially its main players, like David or Jonah.

God upholds His Church.

The church in India is navigating some rough seas. I am very concerned. The first-generation followers of the Lord, especially from oppressed backgrounds in the villages and towns are paying a heavy price. It is easy for them to feel being all alone with no help of support from anywhere. In

many cases, that is the ground reality. But they too are under the care of a God who “upholds all things by the word of His power.” (I am not undermining the reality of their suffering or implying that the wider body can ignore them, we cannot.) But there is much more going for the church than meets the eye.

The Church is ultimately a “Gathering” of the people, unto Him. There is a beautiful picture of the two or three million slaves, miraculously delivered from the iron grip of gods and people of Egypt and gathered before God around Mount Sinai. There they entered into an exclusive relationship with their deliverer, the living and true God, much like a man and a woman enter a marriage relationship. There they were made a “Holy Nation, a Royal Priesthood” by Him. God has been gathering people to him ever since.

We await another much bigger gathering before the same God, who delivered us from the slavery of Satan, sin, and death. It is going to be a huge “Gathering”. It is a crowd that no one can

number. These people come from every tribe, tongue and nation. From Chhattisgarh, U.P, Odisha, Punjab, Kerala and beyond, from the ends of the earth. So, the church survives. In fact, it triumphs over all its fearsome adversaries, many of them are named in the Bible, like Babylon and Rome. Our hope for triumph is our Risen Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Four things God did “for the Church”:

In Ephesians 1:20-22 we read that, God raised Jesus “from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed Him to be head over everything **for the Church (Ephesians 1:20-22).**

First, God raised Jesus from the dead; second, God seated Him at His right of power in the heavenly realms above all powers; third, God placed all things under the feet of Jesus and fourthly, He appointed this great Saviour and

Lord of all to be the head of the Church.

Remarks Chris Green, “God has not only organized the whole universe to establish His plan of making a church, and then engineered the path of history and the patterns of the billions of individual human hearts, but He eternally purposed that His Son, **the Beloved** (1:6) should die to achieve that plan. And day by day, across the world, He applies it to those *He chose. . .in (Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him and predestined. . .for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will (1:4-5).* There is nothing in the whole of creation which has any significance outside of God's *plan for the Church.*” (Quoted from “The Message of the Church” by Chris Green in the “Bible Speaks Today” series).

It is with this hope that we go into the New Year to serve for the Lord, the Church and the world. We stand on the shoulders of millions who have gone before us, including Peter and Paul,

Moses, and David. Above all, if I may say respectfully, we stand on the shoulders of Jesus Christ, like children sit on their fathers' shoulders.

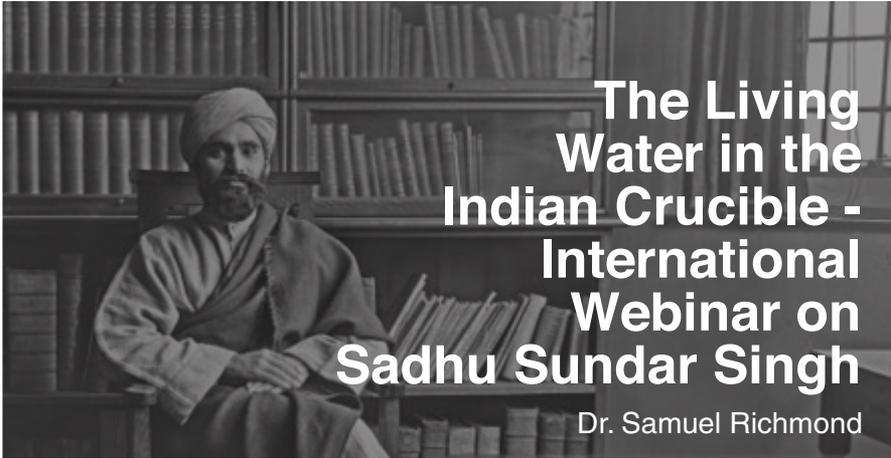
The last phrase of the book of Acts reads “no man forbidding him” (Acts 28:31, KJV).

May we find faith and courage and victory in and through our Lord Jesus Christ. He holds the keys.



Mr. Chacko Thomas

is presently a Minister-at-large with Operation Mobilisation. He served for 15 years on the OM Ships Logos, Doulos, and Logos II. His ministry has taken him to 107 countries in six continents. One of his few passions is to see the earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord and His values blessing the nations. He can be contacted on chacko.thomas@om.org



It gives me pleasure to share about the International Webinar on Sadhu Sundar Singh, which was organized by Sadhu Sundar Singh Global Forum in collaboration with Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), Caleb Institute, AsiaCMS and National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) on 30th November & 1st December, 2022. The theme of the Webinar was *'The Living Water in the Indian Crucible.'*

India Today magazine, dated 14 November, 2022 gives a detailed report on the church growth in Punjab. The title of the magazine: "Pastors of Punjab: A new wave of charismatic Christian preachers draw a large flock of followers, making the Sikh and Hindu mainstream

apprehensive", has drawn the attention of theologians, pastors, Christian leaders and others worldwide. After going through this, one may say that God is at work and people are experiencing the power of God. It is not the first time people are responding to the gospel in Punjab, but even in past, others experienced the divine transformation, and one of them was Sadhu Sundar Singh.

Sadhu Sundar Singh was a well-known preacher and devotional writer born on September 3, 1889 in Rampur, Punjab India. He hailed from a Sikh family, and as a boy he went to American Presbyterian School for his studies. At the age of fourteen, he publicly burned part of the New

Testament. Shortly thereafter, he was seized by remorse—or perhaps fear—and claimed that he was on the point of suicide when, early one morning, he had a vision of Jesus. Sundar was baptized in Simla on his sixteenth birthday by an Anglican missionary, J. Redman. Sundar Singh often said that his mother had taught him most about God. He was convinced that if she had lived longer (she died when he was fourteen) she would have become a Christian. He told the Archbishop of Canterbury that if he did not see his mother in heaven, he would ask God to send him to hell so that he might be with her there. However, after becoming a Christian he strongly believed in spreading the hope & peace he found in the gospel, to Indians in an Indian way. Like Jesus, he had no possessions and called the road his home. Stories are still told of the amazing miracles that God did through Sundar. Though there have been many life-threatening attempts to poison him, imprison him and stone him, but there have been even more miracles. He stood out from other Christians as he always wore a saffron turban and a saffron robe. He was known as, "the apostle with the bleeding feet" for he walked far

and long i.e. from the northern mountains of Shimla & Tibet to the southern plains of Tamil Nadu. He has also preached in Ceylon and in other nations around the world.

The International Webinar was inaugurated by Bishop P.K. Samantaroy, presently the Bishop, Diocese of Amritsar & General Secretary, Church of North India, and the Chairman of the Sadhu Sundar Singh Global Forum on 30th November, 2022. In his address Bishop Samantaroy shared about the vision and mission of Sadhu Sundar Singh Global Forum. Rev. Vijayesh Lal, General Secretary, EFI, New Delhi, Rev. Dr Chan Nam Chen, Executive Director, AsiaCMS, Malaysia, Rev. Dr Richard Howell, Principal, Caleb Institute, Gurugram and Rev. Dr. Asir Ebenezer, General Secretary, NCCI Nagpur greeted the august gathering. Each shared about the impact of Sadhu Sundar Singh's life and ministry in India and other places.

Prof. Kirsteen Kim, Professor of Theology and World Christianity & Director Global Research Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA, was the Keynote Speaker. She talked

about the importance of the water of life and the flow of the Holy Spirit. She shared the role of Sundar Singh in spreading Christianity in India and beyond. Scholarly papers were presented by a host of theologians and practitioners of the Christian faith, highlighting the need to focus on the life, Spirituality, Mission, Evangelism and Theology of Sadhu Sundar Singh, who continues to speak to generations of believers at a time when the Church in India is blamed for worshipping a foreign God.

In his paper on 'Pictorial Theology: *The Theological Method of Sadhu Sundar Singh as found in Religion and Reality*' Rev. Dr. Sunil Caleb, Principal Bishop's College, Kolkata discussed the 'method' in theology and introduced the theological method of Sadhu Sundar Singh. For him, Sundar Singh was a theologian of the first order. He had a good idea about theological thinking. He highlighted the different views of writers who have written on Sadhu Sundar Singh. Lastly, from various passages from Sadhu Sundar Singh's book, *Religion and Reality: Meditations on God, Man and Nature*, Dr. Caleb gave

the Pictorial Theology that Sadhu Sundar Singh mainly employs in his writings.

Rev. Dr. Sunni E. Matthew, Principal, Dharma Jyoti Vidhya Peeth, Faridabad presented his views on '*Sadhu Sundar Singh: Indian Christian Universalist of Wider Acceptance*' where he shared about the life and struggles Sadhu went through while sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Dr. Matthew considers Sundar Singh the pioneer and champion of Indian Christian theology.

Bishop Dr. Patrick Augustine, Bishop, Diocese of Bor, South Sudan shared about the work of Sadhu Sundar Singh in his paper *The Living Water in the Indian Crucible*. He stated that Sundar Singh was a spiritual seeker who deeply understood the language of other traditions. He had read the Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu holy texts and understood how language could help him deliver the Word of God in a way that people could understand.

Bishop Dr. Surya Prakash, Former Bishop, Karimnagar Diocese, CSI in his paper *Sundar Singh: A Christian Sadhu Par Excellence*, gave the

chronological biography of Sundar Singh and his contribution as an Indian Christian Sadhu. As a true *bhakta* of Christ, Sadhu devoted his life to *bhakti*. He was one of the earliest Christians in India to show in his life and work what it meant to be an indigenous Christian. He spoke of the gospel in an Indian cup.

Bishop Dr. Jagdhari Masih, Retired Bishop ECI & Former Dean, the Faculty of Theology, SHUATS shared Sadhu's resemblance with Francis of Assisi in his paper *The Mystical Experiences (Anubhuti) of Sadhu Sunder Singh*. Bishop Masih asserted that Sadhu Sunder Singh was never distracted by the Western Liberal Theologians. He was faithful to the Evangelical Teachings in which he was taught and baptized. Western Theological books did not influence his mysticism. Bishop Masih referred to Bishop A. J. Appasamy, who desired to see more saints in India like Sunder Singh and was willing to die for the sake of the faith in Christ.

Ms. Rebecca Azariah, Asst. Professor, Dept of Missiology, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Chennai, in her paper,

The Living Water in the Indian Crucible: Missional Reading of Sadhu Sunder Singh attempted to read the theme from a mission perspective. Sunder went out to his missionary wanderings barefooted, with no possessions, without any protection against wild beasts, only with his thin linen garment and a blanket. His only property was the New Testament in his mother tongue.

Rev. Dr. Abraham Mathew, Executive Secretary Policy, Governance and Public Witness, NCCI presented paper on *Shades of Orientalism in the Mission Thinking of Sadhu Sunder Singh*. He stated that Sadhu Sunder Singh was primarily a mystic evangelist and pragmatic missionary rather than a systematic theologian. In this paper, Rev. Mathew tries to problematize the imagination of indigenization in India and especially looks at how Sadhu Sunder Singh captivated in missiological imagination.

Rev. Ashish John Archer, Assist. Prof, Department of Missiology, Bishop's College, Kolkata, in his paper, *Revisiting Sadhu Sunder Singh: Relevance of His Mission Methods in Today's India* made an attempt to bring out the

understanding of mission in Sadhu's thoughts and examine their effectiveness in today's Indian context. For him, Sadhu's understanding of preaching, his evangelical journeys to various parts of the country and to the West, his understanding of Theology and Christology and his attempts to contextualize Christianity can be understood as his mission methods. His understanding of the water of life in one cup and his understanding of fulfilment theology for the whole country raises serious concerns. It needs a critique for mission understanding in contemporary India.

Dr. Ashish Alexander, Dean, School of Film and Mass Comm & Head, Dept. of English, SHUATS, Prayagraj *Political Dimensions of a Mystic's Life: Sadhu Sundar Singh and Indian Christians Today*. He started his session by raising relevant questions: What did Mahatma Gandhi think of his contemporary Sadhu Sundar Singh? Why do we need to talk about the political dimension? Sundar Singh lived in the era of colonialism and the time when national sentiments were at their peak. Although he vehemently abjured politics. Sundar Singh read the

autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi. And Gandhi was the only politician whom Sundar Singh quoted. Dr. Alexander stated that righteous living was the politics of Sadhu.

Mrs. Samarpita Patra, Faculty, Dept of History of Christianity, Calvin Institute of Theology, Hyderabad, in her paper *Spirituality and Devotion of Sadhu Sundar Singh's Mother: An Inspiration for Christian Women* expressed that spirituality and devotion are essential aspects of any religion and both are essential to become a spiritual woman and man. Spirituality is highly attached to women, and when a woman becomes a mother, she is responsible for transmitting the same to her children and family. Sadhu Sundar Singh accrued his spirituality from his mother, and she played a unique role in his life. In this paper, she highlighted the importance of spirituality and devotion in Christian women.

Dr. Jose Abraham, Associate Professor, Fuller Theological Seminary, LA USA shared the well-known parable of Good Samaritan to reflect Sundar Singh approach towards non-Christian religion in his paper

Reading the Parable of Good Samaritan: An Orthopathic Encounter with Religious Order. He pointed out the importance of compassion in maintaining interfaith and intercultural relationships. Also, a person can go beyond the otherness created by culture and society.

Fr. Dr. S. Lawrence, Chairman, Dialogue Commission, Patna Province & Director, Jesuit Peace Mission, Patna talked about Universal Spirituality as the most effective possible path-way that people can undertake to attain virtues such as Peace, Reconciliation, Harmony, Love, Compassion, Mercy and Hope in his paper *A Universal Spirituality-The Need Of The Hour!*

Rev. Dr. Richard Howell, Vice-Chairman, SSSGF & Principal, Caleb Institute, in his paper, *Encounter Results in Transformation with Signs*, highlighted the present context of the Church, particularly North India. He asserted that the foundational text of the Christian faith is Jesus' inauguration of the Kingdom of God: "the time has come," he said "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Referring to Sundar

Singh's life, Dr, Howell asserted, 'theology without prayerful piety is like a fountain whose water runs dry.' He talked about Christ Centred Ecumenicity if we look for holistic transformation.

Many responded that Sadhu Sundar Singh was like Christ in the way he acted and responded. The need is to publish the papers presented by the presenters to initiate a new movement of "Rethinking Christianity in India Today." The Forum proposes to publish the book of papers presented by March 2023, which will have an international readership. Around 400 participants registered as well as attended the Webinar. Theologians, Bishops, ordained ministers, theological students, and laity actively participated in this Webinar from India and abroad.



Rev. Dr. Samuel Richmond
Coordinator, International Webinar & Hon. Secretary, Theological Commission, EFI

FUN-LOVING?

Rev. Kuruville Chandy

Gracious, loving, compassionate, merciful, kind, holy, almighty, awesome, fearful, and the like are the adjectives that we use to describe God. Has anyone ever thought of God as “fun-loving”. I didn't. I asked myself whether I thought that God was the opposite of fun-loving. The opposites are “killjoy, party pooper, wet blanket”. If one refuses to think of God as fun-loving, then sub-consciously one holds the view that God is the opposite of fun-loving.

Did you know that the Lord our God likes dancing? While the *New American Standard Bible* says, “The Lord your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He

will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy”, the Roman Catholic *New Jerusalem Bible* gets it right, translating Zephaniah 3: 17 thus: “Yahweh your God is there with you, the warrior-Saviour. He will rejoice over you with happy song, he will renew you by his love, he will dance with shouts of joy for you.”

God Who Parties

Jesus told a story that we refer to as “the Parable of the Prodigal Son” (Lk. 15:11-32). It should rightly be titled, “the Parable of the Prodigal Son and his Prodigal Father”, because the word not only means “wastefully or recklessly extravagant” but also “very generous, lavishly

abundant”. When the prodigal son returned home, it was the father's turn to be prodigal: he threw a party and there was music and dancing. The music was loud, and the dancing was noisy or riotous enough for the elder brother to know of it even before he entered the house. Remind yourself that the father in our Lord's story represents God. The prodigal father threw a party and joined in the partying.

In His earlier stories of the lost sheep and the lost coin (vv.3-10), Jesus said that when they were found, the finders threw parties for their friends and neighbours, and then the Lord equated that with celebrations in heaven when people repent and get converted (vv.7, 10). I bet you didn't think of heaven as a place famous for serious partying.

However, our Lord didn't reserve partying only to celebrate conversions. Jesus attended a wedding. If Jesus was known to be a killjoy who frowned on all frivolity, He would never have been invited. He wasn't like that at all, and so it was that His mother felt free to turn to Him when the wine (the essential catalyst for

celebrations) ran out. Mary didn't think Jesus would disapprove or object. He only objected to being thrust into miracle-working mode before it was time for Him, but then He did oblige His mother and performed His first miracle, which was for the purpose of making a significant contribution to the wedding celebrations. Did Jesus wink and grin at the servants sharing only with them the secret of how the wine was produced? Did He join the merrymaking afterwards? Of course, He must have. He would have thoroughly enjoyed the wedding. After all, He was there to celebrate a wedding(Jn. 2:1-10).

Joy of the Lord

Almost everyone knows that the shortest verse in the Bible says, “Jesus wept” (Jn. 11:35). That and the fact that New Testament writers identified Jesus with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah's prophecies makes us think of Jesus largely in those terms—Suffering Servant, and Man of Sorrows, (Isa. 53:3, KJV, NASB). Question is, did Jesus never ever laugh. Was there no joy in His life?

Of course, there was joy in the Lord's life. That was why He was able to call a child to Himself (Matt. 18:2). There's no way a child would have gone so readily to someone with a stern demeanour or a scowling face. A child would go only to someone who made children giggle and laugh, someone who would get down to their level to play with them. Jesus must have tickled children, played tricks on them and laughed with them for a child to be so free with Him.

We know too that mothers brought their little ones to Jesus (Mk. 10:13-16). As the old song puts it, "the stern disciples drove them back...but Jesus saw them...and sweetly smiled and kindly said" to let the children come to Him. Jesus was stern with the disciples for being stern and trying to keep mothers and children away from Him. No mother would take her child to someone who didn't love children or couldn't bear the noise of their laughter and crying. Quite obviously, Jesus enjoyed a reputation for loving kids.

He even scandalised contemporary religious teachers

and leaders by His lifestyle of feasting and drinking. They called Him a glutton and a winebibber. They accused Him of befriending publicans and sinners (a euphemism for prostitutes), preferring their company instead of that of Pharisees (Matt. 11:19). It was Jesus Himself who drew attention to this activity of His and how it was viewed. No one could have been a woebegone killjoy and partied with that crowd. Jesus had to join in the dining and drinking and be a "jolly good fellow" to be acceptable among them. Jesus dismissed the charges by simply saying that it was not the healthy who needed a physician, but those who are unwell(9:12) and that He had come, not to call the righteous, but the lost (Lk. 19:10).

Lord of the Dance

It is no wonder that a 16th century carol by someone unknown has our Lord singing,
Tomorrow shall be my dancing day...

Then was I born of a virgin pure,
Of her I took fleshly substance
Thus was I knit to man's nature
To call my true love to my dance...

Into the desert I was led,
Where I fasted without
substance;
The Devil bade me make stones
my bread,
To have me break my true love's
dance.

The Jews on me they made great
suit,
And with me made great
variance,
Because they loved darkness
rather than light,
To call my true love to my
dance...

Before Pilate the Jews me
brought,
Where Barabbas had
deliverance;
They scourged me and set me at
nought,
Judged me to die to lead the
dance...

Then down to hell I took my way
For my true love's deliverance,
And rose again on the third day,
Up to my true love and the dance.

Then up to heaven I did ascend,
Where now I dwell in sure
substance
On the right hand of God, that
man

May come unto the general
dance.

Similar thoughts were expressed
by Sydney Carter in the song.
"The Lord of the Dance" (1963).
I danced in the morning when the
world was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the
stars and the sun,
And I came down from heaven
and I danced on the earth:
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

Dance, then, wherever you may
be,
I am the Lord of the dance, said
he,
And I'll lead you all, wherever you
may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance,
said he.

I danced for the scribe and the
Pharisee,
But they would not dance and
they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen, for
James and John;
They came with me and the
dance went on:

I danced on the Sabbath and I
cured the lame:
The holy people said it was a
shame.

They whipped and they stripped
and they hung me on high,
And they left me there on a cross
to die:

I danced on a Friday when the sky
turned black;
It's hard to dance with the devil on
your back.
They buried my body and they
thought I'd gone;
But I am the dance, and I still go
on:

They cut me down and I leapt up
high;
I am the life that'll never, never
die.
I'll live in you if you'll live in me:
I am the Lord of the dance, said
he.

Fun with God

People who don't think of God as fun-loving, lose their way and fall into sin. That is what the history of Israel shows us. They thought that compared to the pagan gods, their own God was boring. So, time and again, because they wanted to have fun – illegitimate fun, they flirted with idolatry.

Understanding this tendency of theirs, the seer Balaam, advised pagan king Balak that the only

way he could remove the divine protection they enjoyed was to make Israel stray from their covenant with God. He told Balak to get Israel to party with his people tempting them with forbidden foods and orgies, making them believe that their own God was boring, while Balak and his people had fun-loving gods (Num. 25;1-9; 31:16). When Israelites fell for that, they were in a lot of trouble (Num.31:16).

That is still a temptation for God's people today. When followers of Christ allow the Devil to plant the idea that their faith in Christ limits them from having fun, then they leave the safety of the Kingdom of God to explore the world and dabble in sinful activities. Though temporary, there is pleasure in sin(Heb. 11:25). On the other hand, as the psalmist said to God, “You direct me on the path that leads to a beautiful life. As I walk with You, the pleasures are never-ending, and I know true joy and contentment” (Ps. 16:11, VOICE).

If we are serious about wanting true happiness, then we have to affirm the covenant that our fun-loving God has put in place. We

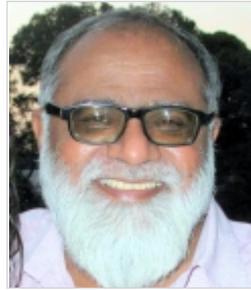
need to stop thinking of Him as the God who is against dancing. We need to emulate David. He laid aside his dignity and didn't mind appearing to be a lowly person. He enjoyed dancing for God because he enjoyed relating to God (2 Sam. 6:16, 20-22).

In the New Year Num. 31:16 we want everything to be new. However, newness depends on we ourselves being new. If anyone is in Christ, then that person is a new creation. The old has passed and the new has come (2 Cor. 5:17).

When Jesus commands and He is obeyed, joy comes in and there is fullness in that joy. It would be complete (Jn. 15:11). There would be no gaps and holes in the fabric of their joy. It would not be tattered by the storms of life: "In the world

you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (16:33). There is no promise that there will be no storms in your life in the new year. That's okay, because Conqueror Jesus is there for you. He will not let you be defeated. He will not let you be crushed.

Enjoy Jesus. He's fun-loving. Have fun.



Rev. Kuruville Chandy
is a freelance preacher and writer. He can be reached at: reverendkuru@aol.com

I can do all things through him
who strengthens me.
Philippians 4:13

Intercessory
Prayer
Points



January 2023

1 SUNDAY Thank God for the New Year. Thank Him for all the good things He has done for you last year. Pray that this year Christ's kingdom would be extended and many more would come to the faith.

2 MONDAY Pray for the homeless and the poor who are under the extreme weather that they would be provided. Pray that people would have the desire to share their resources with them.

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

4 WEDNESDAY Continue to pray for Evangelical Fellowship of India that God would provide its needs and continue to use it for the extension of His kingdom.

5 THURSDAY Pray for Episcopal

Church in India Council, Madhya Pradesh that the church would grow in Christlike characters and be a good influence on the people around them.

6 FRIDAY Pray for children who are under the stress of exams. Pray for clarity of thoughts. Pray for good health, good retention power and good time management so that they would give their best in their exams.

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

8 SUNDAY Pray that God would eradicate Biblical illiteracy among His people. Pray that God would use you as His agent to fulfill that goal.

9 MONDAY Pray for the ministry of Heavenly Feast in Kerala that the church would serve the cause of Christ with integrity. May the

Lord grow them in number as well as in quality.

10 TUESDAY Pray for Christian Education department of EFI (CEEFI). Pray that the new materials would be ready soon and that it may effectively be used by many churches.

11 WEDNESDAY National Human Trafficking Awareness Day. Pray for those involved in human trafficking awareness programs that they would find ways to make people aware of this social evil. Pray for the victims of human trafficking that they would be restored emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

12 THURSDAY National Youth Day. Pray that the youth of our country may know and honor God in the height of their youth. Pray that they would live meaningfully in Christ. Pray also that God would provide and meet their needs in His right time and right ways.

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

14 SATURDAY Pray for those who are suffering because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray

that God may work in their circumstances and as they wait for God's deliverance, they may learn to trust God and wait for His timings and plans.

15 SUNDAY Pray for your church to grow in maturity to serve God and His people without reservation. Pray that God would draw many people to hear His Word through your church.

16 MONDAY Pray for Fusion Church (Jan Milaap Samiti), New Delhi that the Word of God taught would impact many and transform them. May those who come in contact with them will see the light of Christ in and through them.

17 TUESDAY Pray for all the EFI Members both group members and individual members to be guided by the Holy Spirit as they start the new year.

18 WEDNESDAY Pray for Blood of Jesus International, Odisha that they would glorify God through their ministry. Pray also that their readership would increase and the gospel would be spread far and wide through them.

19 THURSDAY Pray for the finances of Evangelical Fellowship of India. Pray for God's abundant provision for the need so that EFI may continue to be the voice of the Indian churches.

20 FRIDAY Pray for your neighbourhood today that it would be a safe place for all the residents as well as visitors.

21 SATURDAY Pray for your family today. Pray that God who established family in the beginning, would continue to strengthen and sustain family relationships.

22 SUNDAY Continue to pray for the persecuted church. Pray that the church would relentlessly spread the love of Christ despite oppositions.

23 MONDAY Pray for all Indian Army families. Thank God for their sacrificial love and services for the country. Pray for protection and God's abundant blessings upon them and their families.

24 TUESDAY National Girl Child Day. Pray for all the girls in our country that they would enjoy equal rights and build a bright and beautiful life.

25 WEDNESDAY Pray that the Gospel preached would bear many fruits and Christ's body would grow.

26 THURSDAY Republic Day. Pray for our nation as we celebrate the 74th Republic Day today. Continue to pray for all the political leaders in your respective

states as well as in the center for good governance and excellent leadership.

27 FRIDAY Continue to pray for our nation persistently. Pray that all in the leadership position would be faithful and caring guardians of the constitution. Pray that they would grow in wisdom, understanding, discernment and knowledge. Pray that people would feel protected, loved, and cared for under their leadership.

28 SATURDAY Let us pray for ourselves again today that we would love giving more than receiving and be a blessing to many around us.

29 SUNDAY Pray for all the Church leaders in our country. Pray that they would love the Lord with all their hearts, minds, and strength. Pray that they would handle the word of God correctly and teach diligently.

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

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

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