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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

Cities as Crucibles of Opportunity and Transformation

In the ever-evolving tapestry of our world, cities have emerged as vibrant hubs of culture, innovation, and human endeavour. The statistics are staggering: urban populations are growing at an astonishing rate, with projections indicating that by 2030, over 60% of the world's population will call a city home. Megacities are springing up like never before, and the landscape of urban living is shifting rapidly. In India alone, the urban population is expected to surge from 340 million in 2008 to a staggering 590 million by 2030. These trends are indicative of the monumental importance of cities in the modern era.

Yet, as cities swell and evolve, they face an array of challenges, from overcrowding and housing shortages to unemployment, pollution, and a host of social issues. The city, as an entity, mirrors humanity's ongoing struggle for identity, meaning, and spirituality in an increasingly complex world. As Christians, we are called to engage with cities and address their unique needs, challenges, and opportunities.

The biblical narrative offers profound insights into the significance of cities and the Church's role in shaping them for the better. The story begins with the construction of the first city,

Enoch, by Cain, who sought to replace God's protection and purposes with his own. This initial act of defiance set a precedent, as cities often manifest human desires for autonomy, security, and identity apart from God.

The Tower of Babel, built by Nimrod, further exemplified humanity's inclination to rebel against God. Babel's name itself reflects the spirit of revolt, and it ultimately became a symbol of confusion. God's intervention at Babel, however, marked the beginning of His redemptive engagement with cities. Throughout Scripture, we see His response to cities and their inhabitants, even as they veer away from His divine plan.

The biblical account of Sodom and Gomorrah, mentioned more than 50 times in Scripture, is a vivid example of a city steeped in sin. Yet, within this narrative, we find evidence of God's mercy and willingness to spare a city for the sake of His people. It's clear that cities are not beyond redemption, and God's people play a crucial role in interceding for their transformation.

Ezekiel, in his description of Sodom's sin, emphasizes their failure to care for the poor and needy. This reminder resonates today as we witness the plight of the marginalized in our cities. It's a call for Christians to be agents of change, advocating for justice and mercy in the urban landscape.

Cities also play a vital role in spreading the Gospel. They are hubs of diversity, cultural exchange, and influence. Unreached people groups often converge in cities, making them fertile ground for the spread of Christianity. The Church must recognize this strategic importance and engage in urban ministry.

We cannot overlook the fact that Jesus Himself had a deep connection with cities. His compassion for Jerusalem, expressed through tears, serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of seeking the peace and prosperity of our cities (Luke 19:41-42). Jeremiah 29:7 further underscores our responsibility to pray for and contribute to the well-being of the cities where we reside.

Why Must We Care for Cities?

Because God cares. Deeply. Cities are not merely clusters of buildings and roads; they are intricate tapestries of human stories, dreams, and struggles. Our cities are home to people who desperately need God's love and salvation. They are not just geographical locations but dynamic landscapes where the eternal destiny of souls is shaped.

Our actions today shape the world our children will inherit. The decisions we make, the values we uphold, and the love we extend in our cities reverberate through generations. Caring for cities is an investment in a legacy of faith, compassion, and justice.

Because cities are often where unreached people groups are most open to the Gospel. Cities are melting pots of cultures, beliefs, and backgrounds. The diversity within cities provides a unique opportunity for the Gospel to reach people who might never encounter it otherwise. When we care for cities, we are participating in God's redemptive plan for all nations.

Because the influencers who shape culture and policy reside in cities. Cultural trends, policies, and societal norms often emanate from urban centers. By engaging with cities, Christians have the opportunity to influence the influencers, infusing godly principles into the heart of cultural narratives and policy decisions.

Because the poor and marginalized are found in abundance within city limits. Amidst the skyscrapers and bustling streets, there exists a significant population on the margins of society. Cities are often the gathering places for those seeking refuge and opportunity. Caring for cities means extending a compassionate hand to those in need, embodying the love of Christ.

Urban Ministry: A Divine Mandate

Urban ministry is not an option; it's a divine mandate for the Church. Just as God loves the city, we must love and serve it. Engaging with cities is the most effective way to reach nations and cultures. It's a way to be a

light in the darkness and to fulfill our mission as Christ's ambassadors.

City Transformation: A Collective Movement

City transformation requires a unified movement—a movement rooted in contextualized biblical gospel theology, multiplication movements that transcend denominations, and collaborative ministry networks. When the body of Christ comes together, transcending differences to impact cities positively, the Holy Spirit moves in powerful ways.

Contextualized Biblical Gospel Theology

At the heart of city transformation lies contextualized biblical gospel theology. We need a biblical gospel that is not only rooted in God's Word but resonates with the unique cultural tapestry of each city. The Gospel remains a timeless truth, but its expression can be tailored to meet the specific needs and contexts of urban dwellers. This approach bridges the gap between eternal truth and contemporary relevance.

Multiplication Movements

Multiplication movements must be inclusive of all parts of the city and transcend denominational boundaries. Unity within the body of Christ is essential to these efforts. The body of Christ, when working together, can bring about transformation on an unprecedented scale. It's not about competition but collaboration—a shared commitment to the Gospel's advancement.

Collaborative Ministry Networks

Collaborative ministry networks encompass citywide prayer initiatives, specialized evangelism efforts, justice and mercy programs, vocational faith and work opportunities, institutions that support families, theological training centers, and gatherings of Christian leaders. These networks provide a framework for concerted, strategic action, ensuring that the Church's engagement with the city is holistic and far-reaching.

The Power of Prayer: A Transformative Force

As Christians, our foremost response to the urban challenge is prayer. We are called to pray for

the transformation of our cities, recognizing that within their transformation lies the transformation of lives, communities, and nations. It is a call to intercede for God's redemptive work to unfold in our midst.

Just as God loves cities, so must we. Our cities are more than just geographical locations; they are tapestries of human stories, dreams, and struggles. Our prayers have the power to weave God's love into the very fabric of urban life. It is through our unwavering commitment to prayer that we align ourselves with His transformative purposes.

Loving and Serving Our Cities: Beyond Words and Prayers

Our love for cities must extend beyond words and prayers—it must manifest in action. Just as

Christ wept over Jerusalem, we too should be moved by compassion for our cities (Luke 19:41-42). We must seek the peace and prosperity of the cities where we reside, for in their well-being, we too will find blessing (Jeremiah 29:7).

As followers of Christ, let us heed the call to embrace the urban era. Our cities are more than a confluence of buildings and roads; they are living, breathing entities teeming with the hopes and dreams of millions. Let our engagement with cities be characterized by love, compassion, and a commitment to transforming lives. In the tapestry of urban life, may the Church be a vibrant thread, weaving God's love into the very fabric of our cities.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal

For I know the plans I have for you,
declares the Lord,
plans for welfare and not for evil,
to give you a future and a hope.
Jeremiah 29:11



Urban Ministry Matters

Dr Shantanu Dutta

Urbanization in India has been increasing over the past decade. In 2021, approximately a third of the total population in India lived in cities. The trend shows an increase of urbanization by almost 4 per cent in the last decade, meaning people have moved away from rural areas to find work and make a living in the cities¹. The National Commission on Population (NCP) in India predicts that in the next 15 years (i.e., by 2036), about 38.6 per cent of Indians (600 million) will live in urban areas.

The expansion and penetration of urban development in rural India is leading to reduced

farmlands and changing occupational patterns of villagers, seen in a shift to non-agricultural work. Also adding to India's urbanisation process is the saturation of large cities, and the growth of population and economic activities in Tier II cities, which are becoming the new growth hubs.

At present, the share of India's urban population in total population is much less than that in other nations like Japan, Brazil, the US, Russia, Indonesia, and China. However, only China has an absolute urban population larger than India. A large population implies high demand for goods and services, and the

requirement of efficient systems for urban planning, management, and governance. Most national governments, including India, consider urbanisation as an important component of their development agenda. This is in recognition of the undeniable benefits that urbanisation can bring to nations and societies.

Migrants in Indian cities come from various backgrounds and regions, often in search of better livelihoods and opportunities. According to the 2011 Census, there were 450 million internal migrants in India or 37 per cent of the total population. Rural-urban migration is an important part of urbanization in India, with rural-urban migrants making up a significant part of urban populations across the country. Despite being integral to the economy, such migrants often end up on the margins of society and face challenges in accessing housing, healthcare, and livelihoods.

The middle class in Indian cities has been growing rapidly and is driving the country's economic growth. According to a survey by People Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE),

India's 63 biggest cities are now home to more than a quarter of its middle class and generate 29% of the country's disposable income. These cities account for a large share of the country's middle class (27%) and rich (43%). The middle-class forms 55% in metros, 52% in boom towns, and 43% in niche cities. Rapid urbanization is triggering significant changes across cities, which are emerging as growth centres and swelling the ranks of India's middle class.

Loneliness and social isolation are serious problems in cities worldwide. Urban loneliness is connected to population mobility, declining community participation, and growth in single-occupant households. This threatens the viability of our cities because it damages the social networks they rely on. One response to these trends involves creating "third places" outside the home and the workplace. These could be public or commercial spaces that provide informal opportunities for local people to mix socially on neutral ground. Examples of third places in cities include parks, shopping malls, libraries, swimming pools, and cafes. But can the church be an

effective third place too?

Christian ministry to cities is an important and urgent need. The Bible mentions at least 119 cities, and urban centres in every age provide an opportunity for human nature to reveal itself in extraordinary ways. Wherever sin abounds, God finds an opportunity for His grace to abound much more (Rom. [5:20](#)).

The sin and brokenness of the city are ultimately a spiritual problem and cannot be solved by simply serving compassionately. Jesus showed compassion by healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, curing leprosy, and even raising the dead. Yet, Jesus healed the brokenness in the city by forgiving the sins of the outcast, the marginalized, and tax collectors.

Different approaches are needed for effective Christian ministry in cities. Churches can no longer open their doors and expect people to come in. Effective congregations go into the world to encounter those in need of the gospel. A typical way to do this is by working with marginalized communities, such as orphans,

the homeless, the impoverished, the disabled, widows, refugees, the elderly, or immigrants. However, lately, there is criticism of this approach that this exploits people who are vulnerable in several ways. Another approach is to engage in extensive research and develop technology to enable churches and ministries to marry their biblical conviction with the actual needs of the city.

Reaching the educated elite in Indian cities with the gospel is a challenging task. The educated elite in India are often influenced by Western education and may have different beliefs and values than the general population. However, there are many ways to reach out to this group with the gospel. One approach could be to engage with them through intellectual discussions and debates, presenting the gospel in a way that appeals to their rational and logical thinking.

Another approach could be to connect with them through social and cultural events, where the gospel can be presented in a more relatable and personal way. Ultimately, it is important to understand and respect the

beliefs and values of the educated elite in Indian cities, and to present the gospel in a way that is relevant and meaningful to them.

Needless to say, no strategy will be effective unless it is undergirded by prayer. Praying effectively for our cities involves being informed about the needs and challenges of the community and asking for guidance and compassion to address them. Some ways to pray for our cities include asking for healing for those who are hurting, guidance for churches in their efforts to reach their cities with God's Word, and transformation for cities through the penetration of God's Word into every sector of society. We can also pray for unity between pastors and churches, for families, for racial reconciliation, for the value and protection of life, and for local and national government leaders. By praying in these ways, we can

become part of God's solution for our cities.

Cities are important to God, the culture, and the church. We have an unprecedented opportunity to influence the majority of the world through the church in the city centres. God loves and defends those with the least economic and social power, and so should we. That is what it means to “do justice”. By caring for our cities, we honour God and reflect His character.



Dr Shantanu Dutta

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What, then, shall we say in response to these things?
If God is for us, who can be against us?
- Romans 8:31

Agape is Core of the Spirit

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

"But I tell you the truth: it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the counselor will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement:"
Jn16:7-8

The Lord has fulfilled his promise

The precious promise of the Lord got fulfilled more than two thousand years back, when the Holy Spirit came in the form of tongues of fire, on the day of Pentecost, and settled on the members of the assembly gathered to worship. Since then, all who have been accepting Jesus as their saviour, repent truly, commit their lives to obey and are accepted as children of God. They have been receiving the Spirit, as a gift. Now, if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ, but controlled by sinful nature. This is the definition of a professing Christian. When the Holy Spirit abides in believer's heart, it inculcates certain good traits that

make us think right, act right and speak right i.e., the person appears to be an image of Christ with a new heart and new spirit. For the same reason disciples were called Christian, Christianity is not a religion but a way of life with the reflective nature of Christ, following the narrow path.

The Holy Spirit is responsible for regeneration of believers and the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Gal 5:22-23 are his signature: They are Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control. In physical world, fruit of one kind are produced by plants and trees, and they serve at least two main purposes that is - to provide nourishment for birds, animals, and human beings in the

form of food and seeds to propagate other trees and plants of the same kind.

The popular phrase 'Fruit of the spirit' has been purposely used for the nine different shape and colour of the fruit, produced by the Holy Spirit. Though each fruit of the Spirit is responsible of a particular trait in the person as indicated by their names, yet they are interactive and supplement each other individually as well as collectively. There is no kindness or goodness without love; and if there is love in heart, joy and peace and self-control etc. will coexist, invariably. For this reason, they as a bunch are called fruit not fruits. If love is absent, all other traits become redundant or fake. Peter's exhortation can make this concept understandable (2 Peter 1:4-7). Jesus has prophesied that in the end of age love will grow cold because of lack of peace, patience and kindness. In the absence of these traits, wickedness etc, envy and desires of flesh will start controlling the mind of people having no faith (Mt 24:12, Gal 5:19-21).

Bear fruit to glorify God

First, the unseen Creator

revealed himself as Father, who created everything we see and do not see. In the Old Testament we perceive him as Holy God who loves them who obey, disciplines them who are chosen, punishes them who sin, but rewards them who are righteous in his sight. Thus, we came to know the Most Holy God as: Almighty, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Just, Eternal, and Merciful etc. Then he revealed himself as the Son in human form who introduced God as a loving Father. He enlightened his followers to be the light in the dark world by his teachings, preaching, healing and performing thirty seven miracles; as have been recorded. He introduced agape love, that is God who is Love and Spirit (Jn4:24, 1Jn 4:16). When Jesus told his disciples that he would die but resurrect on the third day and then depart from them to go back to the Father, they were very sad to hear this. So, he promised them to send the Spirit of truth, a helper, teacher and guide for them who will believe and repent (Jn 14:26, 15:26, 16:7 and 13:14). Now, the Spirit of God will continue to live with us on earth up to the end of the grace period. Jesus said, "I chose you to go and bear fruit that will last. Then, the

Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is the commandment, we love each other” (Jn 15: 16-17). John the Baptist urged the people to "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance (Mt 3:8). Fruit of the Spirit are nine attributes of a godly life i.e., character of Christ.

Lord Jesus admonished the followers, "If you remain in me I will remain in you.... Neither you can bear fruit unless you remain in me. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourself to be my disciples, The Spirit is also identified by other titles such as - Spirit of: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Power, Knowledge, Piety, Fear of God, Love, Truth, Life and Witness etc. Though Paul has named nine works of the Spirit yet there is no limit for God's gifts. The manifestation of the Spirit is only through the new heart and new spirit after regeneration of sinners into a new creation i.e., after the Born Again status attained. Such a person invariably reflects the image of Christ. Also, the order of the fruit in the list is not random. The Greek word for fruit is also translated in English as offspring, deed, action, result or profit. The Scripture says, “....God has

poured out his love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom5:5). If a believer remains in Christ and Christ in him and they in Lord God then the Spirit continually works. The word of God says- "For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). The Holy spirit is the priceless gift of God while we are still in flesh, to keep us strong in faith particularly during temptations.

Fruit of love the mother of godly virtues

We all know that love is a wonderful emotion which cannot be described in words but can be expressed even without using words. The common 'love' in understood as liking for looks, an intense feeling of deep affection, with or without lascivious desire associated. Love when expressed in words or act, may either result in desired or undesired consequences, but not so with God.

However, when we come across the word 'love' in the Scriptures, it is a jargon, an English translation for either the Aramic, Hebrew or Greek words for the love of God or platonic love, which is holy, selfless, true, and intense

spiritual act, and carries deeper and richer meaning. Greek language has several words for different kind of love. such as: Philia for friendship love; Eros for romantic love; Torge for familial love; Philargyria for love of money and Agape for God's love. For all these words, English translation in the Scripture is simply 'love', and readers are left to understand on their own the type of love. Agape is the highest form of love for which God gave his only begotten Son to save the world from eternal death (Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8). This love was demonstrated by Jesus to the world how to love brothers and enemies at par. Among humans, mother's love for her children is quite near to agape love.

Two recent examples of agape love was witnessed by the world when Gladys Staines forgave the killer of her husband and two sons, and St. Mother Teresa served the poorest of poors, sick and those dying unattended all her life and testified the love of God. Agape love is not simply a feeling or merely an emotion, but the way believers should relate with God, friends, and foes. In his first epistle written to the Church in Corinth, Paul listed eight natural characteristics of

Christians they are: Love, compatibility, patience, kindness, truth, hope, faith, resilience, endurance, and perseverance. He also tells eight things agape love resists: envy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness, selfishness, anger, resentment, and sous wrongdoing. Out of love Jesus shares divine blessings and gifts with them who follow him. The worldly love demands positive response in return or exploits the people who fall in it (Rom6:16).

The sinful nature bears poisonous fruit listed in Ga15:19-21, and resists the work of the spirit. This is love: not that we love God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1Jn4:10), consequently He suffered and died on cross.

Jesus taught us how to love by loving one and all (Mk 5:44; Mh 12:31). Christians who love their neighbours, the reflection of Christ is obviously seen in their conduct. When people find no difference between a believer and non-believer, they call Christians, hypocrite, for they merely preach but do not practise the teachings of Christ. But on the other hand, when they witness

their love, kindness, humbleness, and peace in lives, they develop a desire to know the source of the virtue. So we are supposed, to be the light of the world, a city that is set on hilltop; and salt of the earth to glorify God the Father. We are expected to shine in darkness. Jesus said, "If you love those who love you what reward will you get? Are not even tax collectors doing that?" (Mt 5:46), Everyone who believes that Jesus is Christ, is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves God's children. If we do not love our brother, our claim of love for God falls flat on face. Love is a gift of God for his children.

To love God means, to obey God, with all our mind, heart, and wisdom. There is no intermediate state, either we love someone or hate him. Most of the people display pseudo-love, which appears brighter but it gets rusted soon. To love money or the world tent amounts to hating God, for no servant can serve two masters (1Jn 2:15, Lk16:13). The one who hates his brother is a murderer and cannot have eternal life (1Jn 3:15). Selfless giving or sharing is indicative of love and God loves cheerful givers. The one who really loves God also loves the Son and fellow

brothers, and vice versa is also true. Jesus tested impatient Peter by asking him three times- "Do you love me?" Then restored him firmly as rock for the foundation of Church. Also, there is no fear in love (1Jn4:18), Love, is not a static entity, it will either grow or diminish, depending upon our fellowship, prayer life, and faith level. Jesus first appreciated then rebuked the Church in Ephesus for one deficiency saying, "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first" (Rev 2:4). Jesus has already prophesied for end times that the love of people will go dry, they will love only themselves. Therefore, keep yourselves in God's love who rebukes to discipline his children (Heb 12:6). We are expected to examine the status of love in our lives regularly, for the environment is contagious.

The Fruit of joy, a sign of hope

The word 'joy' carries a specific meaning when used in the Scriptures, Joy is more than but different than happiness, pleasure, delight and ecstasy. Joy is a lasting emotion and an outcome of in-dwelling of the Spirit of joy, therefore essentially related to spiritual matters. In the state of joy, one rejoices in every situation in the Lord. Also, unlike

happiness, joy persists even during most unfavourable circumstance, for it is related to God's promises which assures that he is with us always; guiding, helping, protecting, and comforting his children (Mt 5: 11-12, 28:20). Lord Jesus is our model, who for our joy finished the work of salvation of sinners by paying the highest cost and shed his blood on the cross; now our faith in Christ gives eternal life to penitent sinners of the world, who believe. The obedient disciples used to get filled with joy (Lk 10:17-20) and the Holy Spirit (Act 13:52). It was due to joy-filled hearts that Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God even after severe flogging, in the inner cell, with their feet fastened in stocks (Act 16:23-25). Only believers can sustain joy in persecution and threat on life; For the joy of the Lord is their strength and hope. The Scripture encourage us to rejoice in the Lord always in everything irrespective of circumstance. From dungeon, Paul filled with joy wrote letter to encourage the Church in Philippi and preached them to rejoice with him without grumbling, in every circumstance (Ph 2:14, 17-18, 3:1, 4:4). Also, James admonishes believers, "Consider it pure joy my brothers,

whenever you face trial of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (Jas 1:2-3), Peter teaches the Church to rejoice in sufferings (1Pe4:13); for agape love does not delight in falsehood but rejoices in the trustworthy promises of God. Fear is enemy of hope and true joy is only hope put out of fear.

The Fruit of peace, a gift from Prince of Peace

The peace of God is beyond the human understanding, and is a gift as Jesus assured his disciple and said," Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid" (Jn 14:27). The worldly peace is counterfeit and denotes temporary relief from disputes, violence, riots, and war etc. We have in world: Peace keeping force, Peace committees, Peace corps, World peace day, Peace talk and Peace agreements, yet where is peace in the world? Peace is not real in piece, and if not in toto, it is chaos in waiting. 'Peace peace', they say but there is no peace (Jer6:14),..“There is no peace”, says the Lord for wicked (Is 48:22). The real peace comes from God, and great peace have they who love God

given law, so nothing can make them stumble (Ps 119:165). Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are peacemakers for they will be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9). The role of believers is that of messengers of love and peace. Divine peace is fruit of righteousness. If there is no peace in your life, go to the Prince of peace in prayer with thankful heart, for neither it is sold in market nor can be pinched from others who have it. Peace comes from above with other virtues and a fruit of love. When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace.

The Fruit of Patience, a reflection of wisdom

Patience is one of the important character of Christians and an outcome of love. It is an attribute of God responsible for our life on earth. We are not consumed because of God's patience toward sinners- his enemies, Peter says, "The Lord is patient toward you not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance" (2Pe 3:9). We are able to remain patient because the Spirit abides in us and keeps us always cool and composed. Endurance, longsuffering, self-control and perseverance are its associates. It purifies faith,

fosters hope and leads to perfection and making us charitable, and quenches anger. However, patience is not inaction but an act to make offenders realise their mistake, for the restoration of peace. Proud lack patience, wisdom, and understanding. Love is patient and patience leads to the road to wisdom. It is not an ability to wait, but Christian attitude. A Greek proverb says: 'One minute of patience, ten years of peace'. And Wisdom says, "Have patience with yourself, it is your strength". May the fruit of the Spirit be desire of every disciple and followers of Christ, for it is the light in darkness.



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



THE A-T-H-E-N-S WAY OF SHARING THE GOODNEWS IN OUR ATHENS (CITIES)!

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

The Bible calls us to imitate Christ, the way Paul imitated Christ, using different words, repeatedly. I counted that it does so, atleast five separate times. If you have read I Corinthians 4:16, I Corinthians 11:1, I Thessalonians 1:6, II Thessalonians 3:7 and II Timothy 1:13 you will agree with me.

So, Apostle Paul naturally becomes a good model for us when it comes to sharing the Gospel with those in India's urban centers – doesn't he?

His Gospel presentation in Athens (a cosmopolitan city that can be indeed likened to Mumbai, New Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore, Chennai, or Hyderabad and the

like) is recorded in Acts 17. A closer look at his sermon there will give us practical lessons we can emulate as we seek to share Jesus with the unevangelised in our cities!

I use the acronym A-T-H-E-N-S to outline the approach of Paul when it came to sharing Christ with urban Google Genners.

A-gony. Paul had an agony for the lost people of Athens. When he was at Athens, Paul's “spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17:16, ESV). What about us? When we get to the traditional idols and the modern idols of our times, do we simply look the other way? Or, do they serve as a

missionary call for us, stirring us into sharing Christ with them? No, we don't have to mock at these idols or attack them viciously in our public speeches or via our social media platforms. But these must create a great burden for lost souls within us.

T-ruth-seekers, start with them. A for Agony. Next T for Truth-seekers. We must start our Gospel presentations with them. In every city, there are truth-seekers. Paul started his Gospel work in Athens not with those who were totally pagan but with those in the synagogue, the Jewish people who knew about Yahweh very well (Acts 17:17a). He especially focused on “devout” persons in the synagogue. Chances are that devout truth-seeker you are sharing the Gospel with is already reading the Bible. Or, he or she may be willing to receive a copy of the Bible, willingly. Sit with that truth-seeker with an open Bible. And take them through the “Roman Road of Salvation”. How can that be done? Here's how: Read Romans 9:23 and say, “God has a plan for you”. Read Romans 3:23 and say, “But sin has come between us and God”.

Read Romans 5:8 and say, “Sinless God-in-flesh Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins”. Read Romans 2:4 and say, “Now we must repent from our sins – God will give us power to do so!” Read Romans 10:9 and say, “We must believe and confess that Jesus is Lord and we will be saved”.

H-urtful name-calling, Heated Arguments – expect them as you share the Gospel. A for Agony, T for Truth-seekers, start with them. H for Hurtful name-calling and Heated Arguments, we must expect them as we go about sharing Jesus with those in our big cities. Paul was called a “babbling” by some (Acts 17:18). Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities” (Acts 17:18b). When we share Jesus in India, we usually will hear this response: “You have your god. We have our god. Both gods are equally good!” That's when we must use the sethree Ps to stake the claim for Jesus' uniqueness – Prophecy-fulfilment, Purity and Power that is unique. Let me briefly elaborate: No one fulfilled prophecies like Jesus. He fulfilled 110 major prophecies. The world

neatly divides into two categories: sinners and non-sinners. In the non-sinner category, only Jesus finds a place! Yes, many godmen claim to have power. But Jesus' power was unique for two reasons: 1) None had the unique combination that Jesus had – sinlessness and miracle-working power; 2) None did miracles like Jesus demonstrating selflessness; when he was hungry, he did not turn stone into bread, but when his followers were hungry, he multiplied five loaves and two fish and fed a large crowd that ran into thousands.

E-nquire and Encourage. A for Agony, T for Truth-seekers, start with them. H for Hurtful name-calling and Heated Arguments, we must expect them as we go about sharing Jesus. We are using the acronym A-T-H-E-N-S to understand the best way to share the Goodnews with city-dwellers. We must bring people to a point where they themselves will ask us – make an enquiry in other words – a question for which the Gospel is the answer! Paul was asked, “May we know what this new teaching is that you

are presenting?” (Acts 17:19). For example, we can talk about suicides by popular celebrities. And invariably, the response for that by the Christless city-dweller we are talking to will be this: “Why do they have to end their lives when they have everything?” And your response can be this: “We can have everything but without a relationship with Jesus, there will be a vacuum in the heart. He said in John 10:10 in the Bible, 'I have come that you might have life, life to the full'. That means without a living, daily relationship with Jesus – I am not talking about joining a new religion – that vacuum in our heart with never go away!” Please note that even Jesus in John 4 also used the “thirst” analogy to make the Samaritan Woman ask a question for which the Gospel was the answer.

We must not only create a situation for an enquiry by that without-Christ city comrade for which the Gospel is the answer, we also must start to share the Gospel on an encouraging note. We must not start with a point of denunciation. For example, as he started his Athens Gospel presentation, Apostle Paul never

went into a tirade against the idols in the city or the foolish philosophies of that city (there were Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in that city, Acts 17:18). Instead, he begins with encouragement. Instead, he begins with appreciation. These were his exact words of encouragement or appreciation: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22). We must see whatever our without-Christ buddy is into – be it their rigorous religiosity or be it their sinful habits – as a desperate attempt by them to fill the vacuum in their hearts, the best way they know how. So, acknowledge that journey with positive language like Paul did. You will eventually call for repentance quoting Jesus. Even Paul would do that. But as we start off, we must graciously acknowledge that they are sincerely searching for truth via a path they believe to be true. Eventually we will tell them that their sincerity which refuses examine truth-claims can be dangerous. But that is not how we start.

N-on Biblical quotes from what you SEE and READ, include

them. We are using the acronym A-T-H-E-N-S to understand the best way to share the Goodnews with city-dwellers. A for Agony, T for Truth-seekers, start with them. H for Hurtful name-calling and Heated Arguments, we must expect them as we go about sharing Jesus. E for Enquiry and Encouragement. Non-Biblical quotes from what we see around, we must include them in our Gospel presentation to our city audiences. Paul did that in Athens. Dr. Luke, the author of Acts, himself a Gentile Educated City Dweller who did not know Jesus once upon a time, records what Paul said with palpable fascination: “For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). Instead of hammering, “The Bible says”, right at the start of the Gospel presentation, we must choose to wrap Gospel Bible Truth around what our audiences are going gaga after like Paul did in Athens. I am poor imitator of Apostle Paul in this regard. When I was a Bible College student in Bangalore in the year 1999, I

spotted a hoarding in the famous Brigade Road there. That road was raised up for the honor of the martyred soldiers of the Indian Army who took part in the Kargil war. The hoarding said (as I recall): “He would bleed if you cut him, just like you; He cried each time Amitabh died in the movies, just like you; He has gone to die for a stranger and that stranger is you!” I quoted from this hoarding as I shared the Gospel in a hotel room in a Christmas Gospel Event organized by a prayer cell of an Engineering College in near-by Hosur that year. I connected this quote with what Jesus did for us on the Cross. The otherwise boisterous-through-the-program non-Christian majority audience were all ears as I spoke.

Apostle Paul wrapped elements of the Goodnews not only around what he SAW in ATHENS, but also around what he READ (Acts 17:28). He had read-up the writings of a secular writer whose works the people of Athens were familiar with prior to this Gospel presentation. And he went ahead and wrapped the Gospel around one of the quotes of that writer! How cool is that! As I spoke to the

students of Indian Institute of Technology in a Christmas Gospel Meet held right inside one of their classrooms, I quoted from the words of Harsha Bhogle as he did commentary in the climactic stages India-Pakistan League game in the T20 World Cup in Melbourne (the October 23, 2022 which was played before 90,000 spectators). He said, “It is a mishit! It is a mishit!” when Hardik Pandya skied a catch in the Final Over's first ball bowled by Mohammed Nawaz with India needing 16 runs to win. I connected the word “mishit” with universalness of sin. Not just Hardik, we have all mishits in life – we have sinned against God, I said. The young IITians from various faiths were all-ears.

S-traight Talk, as you come to the climax of your message.

We are using the acronym A-T-H-E-N-S to understand the best way to share the Goodnews with city-dwellers. A for Agony, T for Truth-seekers, start with them. H for Hurtful name-calling and Heated Arguments, we must expect them as we go about sharing Jesus. E for Enquiry and Encouragement. Non-Biblical quotes from what we see around,

we must include them in our Gospel presentation to our city audiences. S for Straight Talk. We must do straight talk as we finish the Gospel presentation. Paul did. He talked about the need for repentance including a strong statement against idol-worship and the coming day of judgment which Jesus would preside over which none could escape (Acts 17:29-31).

It does not mean that everyone who hears us do this kind of A-T-H-E-N-S gospel presentation will believe in Jesus! Even Paul was sneered at following this presentation (Acts 17:32). There were some who procrastinated their commitment to Christ as well (Acts 17:32).

However, a remnant believed in Jesus following Paul's Gospel presentation that day (Acts 17:33). I am sure a remnant whom God has chosen from eternity past place their faith in

Jesus when we go about making this A-T-H-E-N-S type Gospel presentations in our cities!



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The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold
of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

- Psalm 27:1

Failure Christians

Dr. Babu John Vettamala



The Cinderella of Christianity is its saga of success. A Faith set on sail by Jesus Christ of Nazareth, a Jewish carpenter, it had no touch of human candescence to its glory. The retinue of rustic Galileans who became the torch bearers of this New Way had already had the disrepute of being illiterate.

Erudition was unknown to the Jesus band. Their social status was far from being amiable. Nor was the Faith they carried any amicable. Still with unsurpassable vitality and unputdownable power, the Faith conquered a disproportionate slice of the globe in the very

generation in which it dawned.

What must be the impetus that catapulted the fast spiral of growth and expansion of the Christian Faith? Certainly, the moral spiritual values that it conveyed hallmarked its acceptance worldwide.

Usually, when a new Faith or an ideology or a scientific theory like Einstein's theory of relativity is initiated, the sceptic world may not receive it wholeheartedly. But then evolves circumstances conducive to its acceptance, and then it becomes popular. So, create favourable situations, and then it will click, is the generally

accepted mandate for anything new. However, this is not applicable in the case of the Christian Faith.

Every little and great factor that could topple the existence and advancement of Christianity was ready to act and very active when the Jesus movement started.

Political powers, social fabric, cultural concepts, philosophical perspectives, religious views, economic proclivities etc. of the time were all inimical to the survival of this New Way as it was launched. Macabre was the persecution it faced. Spine-chilling cruelties marred its face. Pain was its minion. But despite the antagonistic retaliation from all these, Christianity clicked.

Thus progressed its triumph for the first four hundred years during which the Christian church had nothing earthly to claim for its gain. No influence on the political and governmental spheres it had. Earthly achievements or institutional establishments were rather alien to Christians of those days. Nor did they wield any social status. And most of its members were slaves.

Then came the 4th century A.D which turned everything topsy-turvy. Christianity became the State Religion. Its social status spiralled to many heights. Institutional establishments and high-level acceptance made it the darling of the upper fabric of social life. To be a Christian was the toast of the day.

With the new socio-political privileges and economic and institutional advancement that made Christianity their pride, the myopic Christians leaders of the time thought that Christianity had ascended to higher stature of growth.

Actually, these things had tolled the knell of Christianity. It was corrupted to the very core to become a religion, which it was not originally intended to be. From then onwards a new religion disguised as Christianity, but far from its moral-spiritual value system started to expand world-wide. With its political persuasion and material might, the Christian religion expanded. Its unscrupulous followers and undiscerning outside world took it for the growth of Christianity, while the tolling of its curfew went

on unheard and undiscerned.

This was the religion that the feudalistic, colonial West transplanted into the Indian soil, though the protestant missionaries had permeated real Christianity under this massive umbrella. However, it was the Christian religion, not Christianity, that gained sway in India.

Now religion corrupts man while Christianity purifies him. Religion is slavery while Christianity is freedom in Christ. Religion kills while Christianity saves. Religion extorts while Christianity endows. Religion is a bondage while Christianity is a movement. The one moves man forward to all good while the other blocks man from anything good. Christianity is emancipation while Christian religion is a snare.


Foundation laid in human hearts not on earthly establishments is the crust of Christianity. If it is to survive, the Christian world has but bid adieu to its earthly establishments. Outward appearances and external built can only make it a failure.

Jesus wants His Church to be His

bride un-swayed and unpolluted by its infatuations with the corruptions of the world in which it lives. With this end in His view, God has allowed many uncouth governments to ride roughshod over earthly establishments erected on behalf of Christianity. When we see this terrible situation happening to Christians in India, what is it that we should understand other than the hard reality that Jesus loves the Indian Christians.



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Guiding Children through the Labyrinth of Social Media: A Christian Parent's Biblical Approach

Dr. Daniel B Manorath

In an era dominated by technology and social media, Christian parents face a monumental task – safeguarding their children from the potential pitfalls and perils that lurk within the digital realm. With the rapid evolution of communication platforms, ensuring the spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being of their offspring demands an approach grounded in faith, wisdom, and biblical principles. This article delves into the vital role that Christian parents play in protecting their children from the snares of social media, drawing guidance from the timeless teachings of the Bible.

Understanding the Spiritual Battlefield of Social Media

Social media, with its myriad

avenues of connection and information sharing, can be likened to a vast battlefield where spiritual battles unfold. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Christian parents must recognize that the spiritual realm extends into the digital realm, and just as they would protect their children from physical harm, they are called to shield them from the spiritual dangers present in online spaces.

Setting a Solid Foundation:

Christian parenting begins with establishing a strong foundation of faith within the family.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 provides a blueprint for this approach: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." Integrating spiritual teachings and discussions into daily life helps children develop a firm understanding of their faith, enabling them to discern right from wrong, even in the digital world.

Children are keen observers of their parents' actions, and often, they learn more from what is demonstrated than what is preached. The apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:1 hold timeless relevance: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Christian parents must strive to model Christ-centered behavior not only in physical interactions but also in their online presence. Demonstrating kindness, respect, and discernment in digital spaces can leave a lasting impact on children, guiding them to navigate social media with a faith-based perspective.

Discerning Truth in a Sea of Information:

The digital world is a breeding ground for misinformation and

deceptive ideologies. In this context, the instruction from 1 John 4:1 is invaluable: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." Teaching children to critically evaluate online information aligns with biblical principles of seeking truth and avoiding deception. Parents can equip their children to apply this discernment to social media content, ensuring they are not led astray by false narratives.

Guardians of the Heart:

The heart is central to a person's spiritual and emotional well-being. Proverbs 4:23 admonishes, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Applying this principle to social media involves teaching children to protect their hearts from negative influences, comparison traps, and harmful content. Christian parents can engage their children in discussions about the impact of social media on emotions and self-esteem, guiding them to cultivate a strong and resilient heart grounded in God's truth.

Navigating the Waters of Peer Pressure:

Peer pressure is not limited to

physical interactions; it extends into the digital world as well. The apostle Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 15:33 rings true: "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" Christian parents must emphasize the importance of choosing online connections wisely. Encouraging children to surround themselves with positive and uplifting influences online can shield them from the negative peer pressure that often leads to compromising their values and beliefs.

The Power of Accountability:

Accountability is a powerful tool in the fight against social media's potential evils. James 5:16 states, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." Christian parents can foster an environment where children feel comfortable sharing their online experiences and challenges. By engaging in open conversations and offering guidance, parents can provide the necessary support to help their children resist temptations and make wise choices online.

Fostering Genuine Relationships:

Social media can lead to a paradox of hyper-connectivity and loneliness. Proverbs 27:17 reminds us, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Christian parents should encourage their children to cultivate meaningful and genuine relationships both online and offline. Engaging in respectful and edifying conversations, rather than engaging in virtual arguments or divisive discussions, exemplifies Christ-like behavior and fosters healthy connections.

Conclusion

In an age where technology seamlessly integrates into daily life, Christian parents are called to be vigilant guardians of their children's well-being, especially within the complex landscape of social media. By weaving biblical principles into their parenting approach, they can impart wisdom, discernment, and values that guide their children through the digital labyrinth. Grounded in faith, armed with the Word, and fueled by prayer, Christian parents can equip their children to navigate the online world with resilience, integrity, and an unshakable connection to their Christian identity.

Dr. Daniel B Manorath



The Best that We can do in Times of Adversity

Mr. Chacko Thomas

“Arise, shine; for your light has come,

And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.

“For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples;

But the LORD will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you.

“Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.” Isaiah 60:1-3

How to conduct our pilgrimage with Christ today?

I enjoyed reading the “Portraits ...” of Rev. John Stott's life and ministry, edited by Christopher J. H. Wright, published in 2011. One

of the 36 contributors to the book is Nigel Goodwin, the founder and executive director of Genesis Art Trust, a ministry committed to serving the needs of Christian Artists around the world. He concludes his submission by asking: “Did John have a favourite text? Somehow, I doubt that because the whole counsel of God has been his text. But I believe that these words from the book of Isaiah 60:1-3 are how John conducted his pilgrimage with Jesus around the world.”

A Command with mighty promises:

Much of Isaiah's predictions are history today (the virgin birth, the

life and ministry of Jesus, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the resultant Church). These predictions were hundreds of years in the future for Isaiah's generation and impossible. But the "zeal of the Lord of hosts" brought them to pass. (Isaiah 9:7b). The same "zeal of the Lord of hosts" is still at work today in India and all the nations of the world.

It was in the midst of much bad news that Isaiah issued this challenge to God's people to "rise and shine". And their efforts to "rise and shine" were not in vain. Look, what they have given us, not the least is a full Bible, one of the greatest gifts of God to mankind, thank God. We are standing on the shoulders of giants. "Rise and shine" is the best policy, even at this time of great adversity for Christians in parts of India, in which we all share. Here are two ways we can rise and shine for Jesus.

Every Christian exercising her or his gifts!

One of my mentors, George Miley believes, and I paraphrase it, "God has given us in his body all the gifts needed to accomplish

His work at any given time". George was a great developer of people around him. Thank God for those who invest in the development of people in the body of Christ. Is that not what "equipping the saints" means?

The Apostle Peter tells us that God has given at least one gift to every Christian. "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:10-11, NASB. Please also see 2 Timothy 1:6-7 and Colossians 4:17.)

Fred Flack (UK) was a co-worker of Brother Bakht Sing for about 40 years, in the early days of his Church planting ministry. Flack's wife, Meg, has a great story. She was also from UK, a businesswoman in her early 40s when she began to follow the Lord. She was single and "vowed"

to be single for the rest of her life.

One Sunday in church she heard her Pastor preach on Spiritual gifts. He said that “every Christian has been given at least one gift. Go home and ask the Lord what it is and employ it in the Lord's service.” Meg went home and knelt and asked the Lord, “Lord what is my gift?” The Lord responded in her ears, “Helpmate” (see Genesis 2:18 KJV). She did not like that “gift”. (Apparently, there are many more gifts than listed in the Bible).

A week or so later she prayed again, “Lord, what is my gift?” The Lord spoke again saying, “Helpmate”. “OK, Lord”, she responded. It wasn't much later that Fred Flack, of the same age, arrived from India looking for a wife. They met, married, and served with Bakht Singh and saw about 350 churches established in India. They were significant contributors to Brother Bakht Singh's ministry. Brother Flack attributed his success to his wife.

Meg, seeking and finding her “gift” and submitting to the Lord, has meant she could contribute greatly to the work of the Kingdom in India. She could have

continued in her stubborn ways to remain single and a great businessperson, when she could have been part of a greater purpose of seeing 350 churches established in India. May all our stories have such a positive ending! India needs it.

Help others develop and exercise their gifts!

The “son of encouragement”, Barnabas, a great minister himself, is better known in the Bible for his ministry of developing others, including churches in Jerusalem and Antioch, and in the lives of Paul the great Apostle to the Gentiles and Mark, the Gospel writer and helper to Peter and Paul. That was Barnabas's way to “Rise and Shine” in His generation.

When you see another person, especially a Christian, does the thought come to mind: “How can I help the development of this person in the direction God has called Him?” The church, each local congregation, ought to be an intentional place of people development, upward mobility. Intentionally, ask yourself the question: “How many millions of able people is it going to take to

build the Kingdom of God in India?” It is time to think India, rather than my little ministry or congregation.

The Apostle exhorted his associate Timothy, “and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

Mark 3:13-16 tells us about the Lord: “And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” Has anyone made a better investment in people than Jesus, our Lord? It was D. L. Moody who said: “I would rather get a hundred people to do their job rather than doing a hundred people’s job”.

Another biography -- rather “Portraits” -- I am blessed and challenged by is of Eric “Bash” Nash. One of his portrayers is Rev. John Stott, who came to the Lord through “Bash” and was nurtured from the age of 14.

Bash's goal for John Stott was to see him become the Archbishop of Canterbury (but God had better plans). Stott called him “a guide, philosopher and friend”. Other portrayers include John Pollock and Michael Green. They are among many hundreds who were brought to faith and or nurtured in the evangelical faith in the in the 1930s.

Here is what Wikipedia says about Nash. “Eric John Hewitson "Bash" Nash (22 April 1898 – 4 April 1982) was a conservative evangelical Church of England cleric. His work of Christian evangelism and camp ministry in the top thirty public schools of the United Kingdom from 1932 onwards was highly influential in the post-war British evangelical resurgence. Over 7,000 boys attended camp under his leadership”.

Nash's story, *A Study in Spiritual Power*, published in 1982, says this about him on the back cover: “His influence within the Church of England during the last fifty years was probably greater than any of his contemporaries, for there must be hundreds of men today, many in positions of responsibility, who thank God for

him, because it was through his ministry that they were led to a Christian commitment.” May the Lord give us men and women like him in India!

God's will for us all is to “Rise and shine” in these dark days. God will do the rest. He has a great plan of redemption for the world, India included. God loves India. Please consider Isaiah 60:1-3 as a possible way to conduct ourselves in our pilgrimage with Christ in India. Like Barnabas and Eric Nash, let us aim at equipping the best and the brightest to rise to commitment to Jesus Christ.



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But they who wait for the Lord shall renew
their strength; they shall mount up with
wings like eagles; they shall run and
not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.
- Isaiah 40:31



The Blessing of the Lord

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

We live in a materialistic world. People run after wealth, pleasure, and fame. But as followers of Christ, we must not pursue possessions. What we need is the Lord's blessing. Psalm 127 contrasts God's blessing with the futility of life. As I take you through this familiar psalm, let's see what the blessing of the Lord is. I have entitled this article "**The Blessing of the Lord.**"

In this wisdom psalm, we see that without the Lord's blessing, human toil is futile. When God blesses us, we are truly blessed. However, if we don't give the rightful place to God in our lives, all our activities and efforts will be futile. As a result, we will end up frustrated. A Latin motto, *Nisi Dominus Frusta* comes from the

first words of this psalm. It means "Without the Lord, Frustration." How true! Thus, we should seek God above everything else. This psalm teaches us two vital lessons:

1. Without the Lord, all our efforts are in vain (Ps. 127:1-2).

In verse 1, "the house" may refer to the construction of a house or raising a family. It could even refer to both. Particularly, in the Old Testament, a family is often called a "house" (cf. Gen. 16:2; Exod. 1:21; Ruth 4:11, etc.). After mentioning the house, the psalmist mentions the city. Several houses make up a city. Those who build a house must labor on it and those who watch over a city must stay awake. But the psalmist's point is that all these efforts must be made by trusting in God. It is God only who

can make our work profitable.

Verse 2 alludes to the punishment of man in Genesis 3:17. The psalmist is not belittling the importance of hard work. Rather, he is saying that life is not just about working hard to provide food for oneself and his family. Instead, one should trust God to bless his work. God gives sleep to the righteous. The godly don't have restless anxiety. The provision of the Sabbath helps God's people to trust God for their daily needs. It also prevents them from becoming "workaholics."

Commenting on this psalm, the "Prince of Preachers," Charles Spurgeon says, "Note that the Psalmist does not bid the builder cease from labouring, nor suggest that watchmen should neglect their duty, nor that men should show their trust in God by doing nothing: nay, he supposes that they will do all that they can do, and then he forbids their fixing their trust in what they have done, and assures them that all creature effort will be in vain unless the Creator puts forth his power, to render second causes effectual."

So, without the Lord, all our efforts are futile.

2. Children are a blessing from the Lord (Ps. 127:3-5).

This section reveals that a home is more than bricks and cement. The psalmist reiterates that children are a blessing from God (Ps. 113:9; Gen. 1:26-28; Deut. 7:14; 28:2-4; Prov. 17:6). James Boice writes, "The Jew would ask, why is the house being built if it is not for the family? And why are the watchmen protecting the city if not for the families that live in it? Then as now, the family was the basic unit and most important element of society."

Children are a heritage from Yahweh (v. 3). That's why they are his "reward." In the Old Testament, the primary inheritance of a Jew in the promised land was his property (Num. 26:53; Josh. 11:23; Judg. 2:6). However, if a man did not have children, the inheritance in the land would be lost to the nearest kinsman of his clan (Num. 27:8-11). So, for a Jew, children were a "heritage" in a double sense.

In verse 4, the psalmist compares children to arrows. Just as the arrows protect a warrior, the children of one's youth protect him. Children who are born before the father becomes old provide security against isolation and protection in society. In those days, judgments were given at

the city gate (v. 5; e.g. Ruth 4:1-2). Children will speak on behalf of their father in the presence of his enemies. The children provide multiple witnesses. Today, we must bring up our children in a way that they will learn to take care of their parents when they grow up.

Children are truly a blessing from God! As God's people, we can truly thank God for children as our nation celebrates Children's Day on November 14th and the world celebrates World Children's Day on November 20th.

Conclusion

If I have to encapsulate this article in one sentence, this is it: **Without the Lord's blessing, all human efforts are futile.**

May I encourage all of us to depend on the Lord even as we work hard and thereby glorify God? May the Lord bless our efforts and give us and our families contentment, peace, and satisfaction!

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



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- (i) Enduringword.com, "Psalm 127," <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/psalm-127/> (accessed 15 January 2019).
- (ii) The Spurgeon Archive, "Psalm 127," <https://archive.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps127.php> (accessed 16 January 2019).
- (iii) Enduringword.com, "Psalm 127."



THY KINGDOM, THY WILL

Rev. Kuruvillea Chandy

Got my passport in 1984, Aadhar Card in 2015, and Voter's ID card in 2016. For all that, it is only on paper that I am a citizen of India. In reality, I am an alien. I have one really voluminous document that says in summary that I am a citizen of another country: my "citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20). And I am not alone. There are many more. Not just in India. We, expatriates of heaven, are all over the world and we're all "longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called [our] God, for he has prepared a city for [us]" (Heb. 11:16). Meanwhile, we are all waiting for the Saviour or Deliverer coming from our homeland (Phil. 3:20).

An Old Letter

What was written by a second or third-century Christian reverberates with these notions of Christian disciples being citizens of heaven. Describing himself/herself as *mathêtês* (disciple) the person wrote to one Diognetus:

For Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an eccentric manner of life. This doctrine of theirs has not been discovered by the ingenuity or deep thought of inquisitive men, nor do they put forward a merely

human teaching, as some people do. Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable and admittedly extraordinary constitution of their own commonwealth. They live in their own countries, but only as aliens. They have a share in everything as citizens and endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and yet for them every fatherland is a foreign land. They marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. They share their board with each other, but not their marriage bed. It is true that they are "in the flesh," but they do not live "according to the flesh." They busy themselves on earth, but their citizenship is in heaven. They obey the established laws, but in their own lives they go far beyond what the laws require. They love all men, and by all men are persecuted. They are unknown, and still they are condemned; they are put to death, and yet they are brought to

life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich; they are completely destitute, and yet they enjoy complete abundance. They are dishonoured, and in their very dishonour are glorified; they are defamed and are vindicated. They are reviled, and yet they bless; when they are affronted, they still pay due respect. When they do good, they are punished as evildoers; undergoing punishment, they rejoice because they are brought to life. They are treated by the Jews as foreigners and enemies and are hunted down by the Greeks; and all the time those who hate them find it impossible to justify their enmity.

The unknown Mathétès (disciple) didn't make all this up from his or her imagination. It could be said to be an expanded commentary on what the apostles taught:

- Be subject to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether to a king as supreme or to governors as those he commissions to punish wrongdoers and praise those who do good. For God wants you to silence the ignorance of

foolish people by doing good. Live as free people, not using your freedom as a pretext for evil, but as God's slaves. Honor all people, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the king (1 Pet. 3:14-17, NET).

- This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give to everyone what you owe them: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not covet,' and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law (Rom. 13:6-10).

And, what the apostles taught was in line with what our Lord Himself said: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's" (Mk.12:17).

Since Jesus clearly believed in the overall sovereignty of God, the apostles, in turn, understood that their subservience to human authorities was subject to putting God first, and so, when faced with ungodly demands, they asserted, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard...We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 4:19-20;5:28).

Conduct of Exiles

So, here we are! How then should exiles conduct themselves in their present situation? When Jews found themselves exiled from their Promised Land, some became restive and wanted to wrest their homeland rights by their own means. Then the Word of the Lord came to them through his prophet Jeremiah: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they

produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jer. 29:5-7). In essence, the Lord told them to lead normal lives and seek peace and prosperity for the land of their exile.

Daniel and his three friends were exiles in Babylon. Remaining faithful to God, they excelled and were appointed in the king's service. They didn't compromise to save themselves from the wrath of kings. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refused to bow to the king's demand of worship and declared that they would trust their God to save them from the fiery death the king threatened and even if God didn't do that, they would still stay faithful to God (Dan. 3:1-18). Another time, Daniel confronted the king about his pride and arrogance and foretold that he would be stripped of all his power

and pomp (4:1-37). When another king foolishly enacted a law that he alone should be worshipped, Daniel openly defied that order at the risk of being thrown to the lions and was indeed thrown to the lions (6:1-28).

Esther and Mordecai were exiles in Persia. Though they had to endure the hardships of being exiles in a strange land among unfriendly people, Mordecai safeguarded the king's life by exposing an assassination bid. He did that without any expectation of being rewarded (Esther 2:21-23). However, when a high-up official demanded obeisance due only to divinity, Mordecai refused and earned the official's enmity. In the face of the malevolence of an officer who had the ear of the king, Mordecai remained faithful and alerted Esther to what was going on, and between them, they overturned the nefarious genocidal plot of the enemy and saved all the Jews living as aliens without rights in the kingdom (3:1-8:17).

No Better Prayer

Expressing the same sentiment

as the prophet Jeremiah, Paul wrote, “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:1-3).

What better prayer can we pray than what the Lord Jesus taught us, His disciples,
“Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

However, praying this prayer would mean that,

- We are asking for a regime change, that God should displace those who have usurped His throne, and
- His will should displace all the ungodliness that is there at present.
-

Let me restate that more starkly: We must pray against evil and the perpetrators of evil. The whole point of praying for people in authority is “that we may live

peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” so that we are able to “please God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” Where authorities work against God and His purpose, it becomes our Christian duty to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.”

The Torah (Law) and the Prophets were the only Scriptures (writings) that the Early Church had until the epistles and the gospels were penned by the apostles or their associates. And there, among the Scriptures, was the only prayer book that the Church had – the book of Psalms. The Lord and His disciples sang a hymn/a psalm before going to the Mount of Olives on the night before His crucifixion (Mk. 14:26). Paul describing the way worship was done in house churches of the day said that each one “has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation” (1 Cor. 15:26). Without doubt their songs and hymns were drawn from the Psalms.

There in the book of Psalms are what Bible students classify as “Imprecatory Psalms” (Pss. 2, 37, 69, 79, 109, 139, 143). They manifest a vengeful attitude toward enemies. Modern Christians feel uncomfortable with such sentiments imagining that they are out of sync with the Lord’s teachings about loving enemies and doing good to them in the Sermon on the Mount. Keep on reading after Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount, and you will come to Matthew 23 where you will be able to read our Lord’s imprecations/curses on the hypocritical Pharisees. Loving our own enemies and praying down curses on the enemies of God went hand in hand for the Lord and so, it should be for us when we follow Him. That’s why Paul called down curses on those who perverted the gospel (Gal. 1:8-9).

The Imprecatory Psalms express the desire that the Lord’s name will be vindicated. The psalmist’s desire is not that he should be saved but that the Lord should be honoured by those who were attacking him:

- Utterly disgrace them until

they submit to your name, O Lord. Let them be ashamed and terrified forever. Let them die in disgrace. Then they will learn that you alone are called the Lord, that you alone are the Most High, supreme over all the earth (83:16-18, NLT).

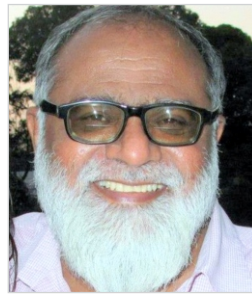
- Pour out your wrath on the nations that refuse to acknowledge you—on kingdoms that do not call upon your name (79:6, NLT).

Ours is the day of political correctness and so, we do not wish to be perceived as those who pray for the punishment of our country. Truth is, we do not pray to harm the country. But we do pray for God’s kingdom and will, and that means that we pray against those who are rabidly against the Lord and His people.

All over the world, there are despots and tyrants who are hellbent on destroying the Lord’s vineyard, on stamping out the gospel and His Word. In our neighbouring country, our brothers and sisters are falsely accused of blasphemy so that a rabid mob can justify their murderous attacks on those

accused and looting and destroying their places of worship. If we do pray for the safety of our brothers and sisters there, we need to pray that God will intervene to stop the harassment, abuse, and oppression. That means we are asking that God Himself will fight against their oppressors. Here too, false accusations of Christians converting people are thrown around with great ease and marauders go on a rampage beating up or killing preachers, desecrating Bibles and destroying worship places, while the police turn a blind eye to such crimes or, in a rush to appease the marauders, arrest the victims as though they are the ones who are guilty.

Can those who don't suffer such atrocities dare to advocate the "moral high ground" of praying down blessings on attackers? Shall the expatriates of heaven pray for the attackers of our brethren to prosper, or shall we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done"?



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Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.
Proverbs 3:5-6



BEYOND NONVIOLENCE

Rev. Kuruville Chandy

We Indians love to claim that ours is the motherland of ahimsa/nonviolence. As proof, we would cite the case of Martin Luther King taking inspiration from Gandhi's example, and challenging Blacks in America to not resort to violence to get equal rights. Gandhi was "our man", and oh, how he has impacted the world with the ethic of *ahimsa*!

In an "eye for eye, tooth for tooth", tit for tat kind of world, Gandhi did dare to think that freedom could be achieved without taking up arms against oppressive rulers, and we like to think that all Indians are innately/naturally believers and practitioners of ahimsa. We think that Gandhi was simply the catalyst that was

able to bring out our latent characteristic of nonviolence.

The Source

The question we need to ask is, where did Gandhi get his ideas for non-violence or ahimsa. Though he never espoused the Christian faith, he loved the Lord's Sermon on the Mount, and was deeply moved by Christ's teaching about not resisting evil: "But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also" (Matt. 5:39). I believe this is where Gandhi's nonviolence came from. Both the epics Ramayana and Mahabharat glorify wars, not nonviolence. As Aurobindo said, "Some prominent national

workers in India seem to me to be incarnations of some European force here. They may not be incarnations, but they may be strongly influenced by European thought. For instance, Gandhi is a European...Yes. When the Europeans say that he is more Christian than many Christians (some even say that he is “Christ of the modern times”) they are perfectly right. All his preaching is derived from Christianity, and though the garb is Indian the essential spirit is Christian. He may not be Christ, but at any rate he comes in continuation of the same impulsion. He is largely influenced by Tolstoy, the Bible, and has a strong Jain tinge in his teachings; at any rate more than by the Indian scriptures the Upanishads or the Gita, which he interprets in the light of his own ideas” (as quoted by Sanjeev Nayyar, “Gandhi, Christianity and Ahimsa”, *Hindustan Times*, 21.03.2008).

Bhikhu Parekh, Professor of Political Theory at the University of Hull, gave a presentation on the strengths and weaknesses of Gandhi's concept of nonviolence, on 12 February 1999 at the

Department of Peace Studies, Bradford University. According to Parekh, Gandhi argued that suffering love was profoundly redemptive because it redeemed you, and it redeemed the other person. Gandhi, Parekh said, was fond of asking, “How come that this shepherd whom we call Jesus of Nazareth continues to haunt you 2,000 years after his death? Why does that figure on the cross move you so deeply?” Pointing out that Gandhi was a man who never entered a Hindu temple in his entire life, and never bowed his head before a Hindu deity, Parekh noted that the only icon he allowed in his Ashram was Jesus on the cross. Gandhi thus saw himself as living out a life of suffering love, trying to redeem others, and was deeply inspired by Jesus. He believed that through one's suffering, one could touch the other person. The transformation would not be instant, but the suffering person would disturb and destabilise the other person and create a conflict within him, thus forcing him to examine the issues involved (<https://civilresistance.info/challenge/bhikhu>).

Captive to Biblical Values

It must be admitted that Gandhi's nonviolence wouldn't have worked with Hitler or Stalin. It only worked because he was confronting a nation that was subconsciously captive to the teachings of Jesus. His teachings formed the fabric of British society. Though people in England were individually not followers of Jesus, their society was built on values and principles derived from the Bible. So, Gandhi made the British feel guilty by being more Christlike than them.

Parekh said as much in his presentation that for nonviolence to work there had to be a shared basis of understanding. "Without that, no kind of persuasion, or satyagraha, is possible. Gandhi realised this. Although his satyagraha in South Africa was reasonably successful, he knew that it didn't really achieve very much, and that the system of White domination continued. Where people were dogmatically convinced that something was right, nothing would shift them - even if you gave up your life in the effort to persuade them. It would

have made no difference to Hitler and did not move the dogmatic Hindus in India. Out of five attempts on his life, four were by orthodox Hindus. To them, Gandhi was corrupting Hinduism. Firstly, he was saying that Untouchability was evil. Secondly, he was saying that Hindus must learn from other religions - and the religion which he admired most, next to his own, was Christianity. Orthodox Brahmins had always accused him of Christianising Hinduism...To Hindu extremists, he was far worse than the missionaries because whereas they were working from the outside, Gandhi was introducing Christian notions at the very heart of the Hindu religion and saying this was how Hinduism was to be interpreted." Parekh went as far as to say that "the present-day attacks on Christian missionaries in India were the unfinished business of Gandhi's assassination."

Countering Violations

Today, is there any *ahimsa* left in India? Yes, on Gandhi Jayanti politicians give speeches on nonviolence and talk of how

Gandhi is an inspiration to all. Educational institutions have essay competitions on the subject. Otherwise, almost every day there are news reports of brutalising sexual assaults and rapes of girls, women and young boys, and atrocious abuse of Dalits. Muslims and Christians are attacked and lynched without impunity – often with the police and administration turning a blind eye to such crimes or even arresting the victims instead of the criminals. Where in India is ahimsa?

The truth is that nonviolence by itself falls short. Jesus didn't stop with teaching about turning the other cheek. He also talked of going the second mile (Matt. 5:41). He talked of loving enemies and doing good to them (Lk. 6:27, 35). He wasn't just preaching. He practised what He preached. He healed the wound of one who came to arrest Him (22:50-51). He prayed for the forgiveness of those who tortured Him on the cross of Calvary (23:34).

In line with what Jesus taught, Paul wrote, “Do not repay anyone

evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

‘if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'

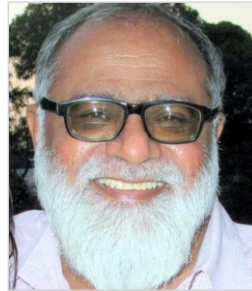
Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:17-21).

Peacemakers Blessed

Our Lord said that those who make peace are blessed, they are children of God (Matt. 5:9). As the English idiom says, “Like father, like son.” God is a peacemaking God. He earnestly wanted to reconcile those who had revolted against Him, and He paid a huge price for it – sacrificing His own beloved Son Jesus. When our Lord God is a peacemaker, if we are His children, we have to be like Him in this.

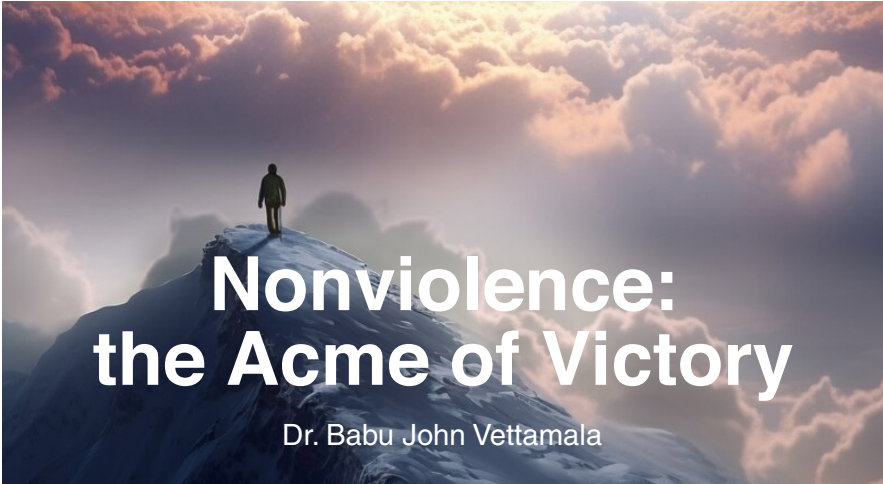
Jesus laid the burden of initiating peace on those who followed Him. He said that when we are at fault, we need to leave the altar of worship and dedication to reconcile ourselves with those we are at variance with (5:23-24). Even when the other person is at fault, the initiative of reaching out to the estranged one belongs to the disciple of Jesus (18:15-17). “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive them” (Lk. 17:3-4).

Our world defines peace as the absence of war/fights. That's not peace. Where God is the ruler, there's peace. It is the state of the place where God reigns. Seek peace. Go beyond nonviolence.



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I have said these things to you,
that in me you may have peace.
In the world you will have tribulation.
But take heart; I have overcome the world.
John 16:33



Nonviolence: the Acme of Victory

Dr. Babu John Vettamala

The escutcheon of victory is violence. The greater the measure of violence that one could inflict on one's opponents, much greater one's victory is counted as. This is how the world has been ever since its very beginning.

For instance, Cain, the earliest offspring of mankind must have thought that he was a greater victor when he killed his younger brother. So was Lamech, the polygamist, when he announced to his wives that he would kill any man in case anyone wounds him.

Great stalwarts in the realms of victory from Genghis Khanto Roman Caesars, and colonial powers like Britain thought that

the capacity to inflict violence would help them win the world. The Assyrians were the worst in the field of violence.

This alone was the impetus behind every invasion and warfare that the world has seen so far.

Historical records have a speciality- they are first written by the conquerors, not by the conquered. And the world that reads history from the conquerors' perspective only praises the heroes.

“David killed ten thousands while Saul killed only thousands” was the most popular song among the Judean lasses of the time. Thrill

and excitement filled the hearts of the readers, and thus violence became popular for thousands of years, until a Nazarene carpenter named Jesus Christ of Nazareth appeared on the world stage with the revolutionary ideology of nonviolence. This indeed resulted in revolutionising the world wherever and whenever it was practised.

While platonic ideologists like M.K Gandhi hailed it, the pragmatic world found it rather misfitting in a world of untold injustice. While the philanthropic world blows the trumpet of nonviolence, the world at large mocks at it, and hence, the spiral of violence in the world today.

Look at the reality of the situations. Violence is the toast of the day while nonviolence is easy to speak but difficult to practice. Here is the balance of probability. Victory seems to be the minion of violence because all gains are caused by those that inflect violence.

This victory is only the story of the moment. Revisit the fields that victory marred with violence, and

then we see the other side of truth. Every victory achieved with violence has been transient.

For example, the Assyrians, the most violent people the world has ever seen does not have progeny or a piece of land on earth to mark as theirs.

If transient, what is it there to achieve by violence?

The progeny of Cain, the first murderer did not last long. They did not inherit the earth. But the spiritual descendants of Abel, whose blood is still crying for justice has inherited the earth. And he is hailed as the first righteous man.

So is the aftermath of every perpetrator of violence. Every empire and every kingdom established on violence has resulted in deprivation of justice and peace.

Knowing this great truth, Jesus Christ of Nazareth who came to earth to establish a kingdom that will last for ever, decided to adopt a new strategy, and that is the strategy of nonviolence.

On the edicts of nonviolence Jesus established a kingdom which has been on the spiral of peaceful growth and expansion for the last two thousand years, and that too worldwide.

The Lord Jesus reigns, and one day His kingdom of nonviolence will reign over this evil-ridden world.

Some political avant-gardeslike Gandhi and Nelson Mandela also tried it against the invincible British colonial reign, and the victory that they won still thrills the world.

Well, there are two phases of violence: the one is violence applied to establish justice, and the other, the violence inflicted to eradicate justice. To this end, every peaceful system has a certain element of violence in it that establishes peace and justice. But it is not for the sake of peace that many wars and atrocities have been committed in the world.

To conclude, lasting victory is not the lot of violence. Religious fanatics and fringe elements of terrorism have not learned this ardent philosophy. However, those who know it may not deviate to the path of violence.



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Blessed are the peacemakers, for
they shall be called sons of God.
Matthew 5:9



An Exemplary Teacher

Rev. Dr. David Mende

“Better than a thousand days of diligent study is one day with a great teacher,” says a Japanese proverb. How true! Teachers lay a vital foundation for children. Teachers have an important role in nation-building as they mold young people into responsible citizens. Teachers are a great blessing to every society.

October 5th is celebrated as World Teachers' Day. In our country, Teachers' Day is observed on September 5th every year to commemorate the birth anniversary of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who was a former President of India. He was also a teacher, educator, and scholar. On Teachers' Day, students make cards for their teachers and even give gifts to

them. Even as the world celebrates Teachers' Day this month, I would like to present seven qualities (using seven adjectives) of an exemplary teacher by using the acronym T-E-A-C-H-E-R. Though I'm a pastor and a theological educator, the qualities that I mention here apply to all teachers.

1. Tenacious

While some students grasp concepts quickly, others take time to understand what is being taught. That's why teachers must be tenacious until their students grasp the content. Jesus himself was persistent in repeating the same teachings until their disciples grasped them (e.g., Mt. 15:16; Mk 8:21; 9:32). An

exemplary teacher is tenacious as she teaches.

2. Encouraging

Anatole France, a French poet once said, “Nine-tenths of education is encouragement.” Many students need more than a lecture session. Especially those who struggle in their academics need encouragement from their teachers. A teacher can make a huge difference in a student's life by being a constant source of encouragement.

3. Adaptive

Each student is different and thus teachers must be adaptive. The recent corona virus crisis forced many teachers to be adaptive to the changing circumstances and needs of education. Even as new education policies are constantly introduced by our government, teachers are challenged to be adaptive. As times are changing, good teachers learn to quickly adapt in order to continue serving and equipping the students.

4. Caring

Some students may be having health challenges and/or academic challenges. Some even come from dysfunctional homes. This is where a caring teacher can make all the

difference. Teachers must get to know their students. When students know that a teacher genuinely cares about their studies and future, they tend to pay more attention to what is being taught. The students even gain confidence as they study. A caring teacher can literally transform the lives of his or her students.

5. Hardworking

While some people hardly work, others work hard. Teaching is hard work. Preparing the lessons, teaching for several hours, grading the papers, and doing several other task spertaining to teaching is a lot of hard work. Most teachers get low pay and work long hours. Still, exemplary teachers work hard and give their best to their students as they see it as a ministry to the Lord and their students.

6. Enthusiastic

When a teacher is demotivated in a class, we can be sure that even students will be demotivated. Students don't like to listen to a boring teacher. However, energetic and passionate teachers motivate students to learn and engage in the class. Our enthusiasm is communicated through our

voice, body language, eye contact, etc. What's more, a teacher's enthusiasm can be contagious and encourage students to be enthusiastic about their studies.

7. Reproving

There will be times when teachers have to reprove their students. An exemplary teacher doesn't overlook indiscipline among the students. Even our Lord often reproved his disciples. Sometimes, a playful student who disrupts the class has to be reproved. Needless to say, teachers must reprove the students in love with the goal of seeing them become better students.

Conclusion

Lord Jesus is the greatest Teacher! Scottish theologian, James Stuart, who lived and ministered during the 19th century once said, "The teaching of Jesus has had a power and an effect with which the influence of no other teacher can even for a moment be compared." Amen! Christ is the role model for all teachers. He taught through words and deeds. Teachers, we are given a great privilege as well as a huge responsibility by the

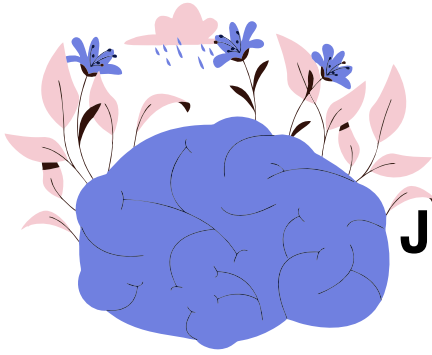
Lord. Let's strive to imitate Christ and thus glorify God and be a blessing to people!



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Faith and Mental Health: Joining the Dots

Dr. Shantanu Dutta

According to the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), one in seven Indians suffers from some form of mental illness. The most common mental disorders include depression, anxiety, and substance abuse and all of these disorders can have a significant impact on a person's life, including their relationships, work, and overall well-being.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the high prevalence of mental illness in India. These include:

- **Poverty and social inequality:** Poverty and social inequality are major stressors that can lead to mental health problems.
- **Lack of awareness and education:** There is a lack of awareness and education about mental health in India. This can lead to people not seeking help for their mental health problems.
- **The stigma associated with mental illness:** There is a stigma associated with mental illness in India. This can prevent people from seeking help and can lead to discrimination and social isolation.

An estimated 11-31 million youth suffer from reported mental health problems in India. Household and individual factors like place of residence, wealth quintile, age, education, and

occupation are the most important determinants of mental health problems among Indian youth.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15-19 year-olds. Additionally, the findings of the National Mental Health Survey 2016 revealed that nearly 9.8 million young Indians aged between 13-17 years are in need of active interventions. In India, children with mental health disorders are mostly undiagnosed and hesitant to seek help or treatment.

According to the Indian Journal of Psychiatry in 2019, even before the pandemic, at least 50 million children in India were affected with mental health issues; 80 – 90 per cent have not sought support. The stigma associated with mental health problems particularly affects help-seeking among young people. One-third of young people display poor knowledge of mental health problems and negative attitudes towards people with mental health problems.

India is facing a significant shortage of mental health

professionals. According to a WHO study, India has nearly 0.29 psychiatrists and around 0.07 psychologists per 100,000 population. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare states that our country needs 13,500 psychiatrists and 20,250 clinical psychologists, whereas only 3,800 psychiatrists and 900 clinical psychologists are currently practicing mental healthcare services.

The Bible does not speak directly about mental illness apart from Deuteronomy 28:28 which reads, “The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart.” Here, God was warning the Israelites about rebelling and worshipping the Canaanite gods. Mental illness would be one of the results of rebellion.

This verse was played out in the life of King Nebuchadnezzar. “O King Nebuchadnezzar, this message is for you! You are no longer the ruler of this kingdom. You will be driven from human society. You will live in the fields with the wild animals, and you will eat grass like a cow” (Daniel 4:

31-32 NIV). While we know mental illness can be the direct result of God humbling a people group or an individual, it can also simply be the result of living this side of heaven. Just as a person's body can be physically ill, an individual's chemical composition can be unbalanced.

The Christian understanding of mental illness has evolved over time, reflecting the changing views of society as a whole. In the early church, mental illness was often seen as a form of demonic possession or punishment from God. In the late 1980s, when I came across a person with definite signs of mental illness, I requested a pastor who was the guardian of a young lady living away from home to have her treated by a psychiatrist. The pastor thought that laying hands and praying over her would resolve matters but of course, it did not, and the condition persisted. It took more perceptive lay people to discern that she did indeed need treatment which they arranged, and the illness was successfully treated.

As I write, in 2023, the Christian understanding of mental illness is

generally more compassionate and understanding. People with mental illness are no longer seen as being possessed by demons or punished by God. Instead, they are seen as people who are struggling with a medical condition. There is a growing recognition that people with mental illness need support and understanding, both from their churches and from society as a whole. However, the role of psychiatrists, therapists and counsellors is still not sufficiently recognized, and the tendency is still to approach pastors or church elders who may mean well but are just not trained to address such matters.

If there is a shortage of mental health professionals in the country, there is a further shortage of Christian professionals in the field. There are a few institutes which train people in Biblical Counselling and while that has its uses, there is still a need for qualified therapists, clinical and counselling psychologists, psychiatrists, and others. Biblical counselling helps people to understand and apply God's Word to their lives in order to grow

in their relationship with God and to become more like Christ. Biblical counselling places a strong emphasis on spiritual growth and well-being. Counsellors help clients explore their faith, understand biblical principles, and apply them to their lives.

This can involve prayer, scripture reading, and discussions about spiritual matters. This often helps individuals make decisions and resolve personal issues based on a biblical moral and ethical framework. In some cases, biblical counselling may integrate psychological principles with theology to address mental health issues. This approach may combine secular counselling techniques with a biblical worldview.

The church can render great help if they choose to provide mentorship and support to Christians who are interested in becoming mental health professionals. There can be many challenges to pursuing a career in mental health, such as the long years of education and training required. By providing mentorship and support to

Christians who are interested in becoming mental health professionals, you can help them to overcome these challenges and to achieve their goals.

In contemporary society, mental health is generally understood as a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. While the Bible can offer spiritual guidance and support, many times it may be necessary to also seek assistance from mental health professionals when dealing with mental health challenges. It's essential to approach mental health holistically, considering both faith and evidence-based approaches for well-being.



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Fruitfulness of the Word

“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”
Psalm 119:105

Mrs. Poornima Lall

Spiritual Fruitfulness of the Word is the Essence of Christian life and essential for our walk with Jesus. Word of God also emphasises greatly on being productive and fruitful Christian. Jesus talked about it at length throughout His ministry and preached about the importance of fruitfulness of the Word by practicing the teachings as the clear and visible evidence of our faith.

Four Grounds

Most familiar and known example of fruitfulness of the Word preached and explained by Jesus is in the parable of sower, which is found in all the three synoptic gospels (Matthew 13:1–23, Mark 4:1–20, Luke 8:4–15). The parable of the sower

was told to the crowd that had gathered around Jesus. Jesus tells the story of the sower who scatters seeds on four different types of soils. The first type of ground was hard, and the seed could not grow in it at all as it remained on the surface and was snatched away instantly. The second type of ground was stony. The seed was able to sprout and began to grow, however it could not find depth for deep roots and withered in the sun. The third type of ground was thorny and although the seed could germinate and grow in it but could not compete with the number of thorns that overtook it. The fourth ground had good soil that allowed the seed to go deep, grew strong and produced fruit.

Four Hearts

Jesus used this parable to explain to his followers and the disciples that how there are different responses to the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. The seed is the Word of God, the grounds are different kinds of hearts, and the different effects show how different hearts react to God's Word. Why to compare God's Word to seed? Because the Word is "living and powerful" (Heb. 4:12,). God's Word has life, and those who believe in God's Word, receive life. Jesus told this parable in a way that makes its meaning clear.

- **The Hard Heart:** The hard ground represents someone with the hardened heart full of sin that hears the Word of God but does not accept it. Satan is able to keep this person from growing in Christ and bear fruit at all. The person with a hard heart doesn't want to hear what God has to say, which makes it easy for Satan to take it away. Before hard hearts can accept the seed, they have to be "ploughed up," which can be painful (Jer. 4:3; Hos. 10:12).
- **The Shallow Heart:** The

rocky ground is someone who shows interest, excitement, and awareness in the gospel, yet his/her heart isn't fully convicted so that when troubles come his/her faith is not strong enough to stand firm. The rocky ground can also be compared with shallow heart. There is no depth in them. Nothing can grow because there are no roots. They are "emotional hearers" who accepts God's Word with joy but doesn't really know what it takes to become a real Christian.

- **The Thorny Heart:** The thorny ground is a person who receives the gospel but who had many other idols and distractions in life such as worries, riches and lust which takeover his mind and heart and he can not grow in the truth of God's Word. It has a crowded and double minded heart which desires Word and world simultaneously which is not possible in our walk with Jesus as a believer.
- **The Fruitful Heart:** The good soil is someone who has heard and received the Word of God and allows it to take

root and grow within his life. It is receptive, open, and soft. Word is received, believed, and produced by it. This person represents true salvation that bears good fruit. According to Warren Wiersbe, “the truth of God must take root in the heart, be cultivated, and be permitted to bear fruit.”

Jesus spoke the parable of the sower to teach how important the state of our heart is to receive the gospel and how our salvation is affected by our choices, responses, and actions after hearing the gospel.

Four Lessons

It is clear what makes a soil bad and a heart unproductive and unfruitful. Spiritual fruitfulness is not optional rather it is mandatory for every believer, therefore, it is more important to see what makes a good soil good and a heart fruitful.

- The first requirement for our **f r u i t f u l n e s s** and productiveness as Christians is not having earlier things found in first three types of unfruitful soil. It allows Word to work within, understands the Word in depth so Word does

not remain on the surface only instead it bears good fruit. It is moldable like a soft and wet clay that allows God to be the potter of his life which is only possible by a Spirit led life.

- Secondly, we need to be deep rooted in Christ Jesus. In spite of having living Word with us and having Holy Spirit as our helper we all feel hardening of heart from time to time as Word of God says in Romans 3:2, “*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” But as a saved community and community washed by the blood of Jesus, we need to grow in Him. Both the Word of God and the Holy Spirit points us to be like Christ. It is not easy to be like Him. As Jesus himself said “*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.*” Matthew 26:41. One thing is evident here that spiritual fruitfulness is directly related to spiritual watchfulness which is only possible when we are deep rooted in Christ through our faith.
- Thirdly, we need to encourage each other. At times we feel choked as our hearts become crowded with worries,

concerns, hardships, and challenges. Unfortunately, our marriage, our parenting, our relationships suffer because of our heart condition. Our fellow believers also suffer. In this time, we need to support our family, friends, and fellow believers and encourage them to grow in God's Word. As Apostle Paul said in Hebrew 3:13. *“But encourage one another as long as it called today so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.”*

- Fourthly, we need to bear good fruits in the midst of all challenges. One heartening fact is this, that Jesus understands it completely. Whether it is the parable of Talents or the parable of Sower, he clearly understands our limitations and capabilities. He is not hard on us. That is why he categorically mentions, **“He indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty and in another thirty”**. Whatever fruit we bear by doing our best and keeping at his feet, he receives gladly and feeling proud of us. We all

are His children, and He equally loves us. We only need to practice one simple rule, 'Let the Word of God comes in us, works in us and flows out from us'. It will naturally grow manifold and will keep multiplying.

Three Ingredients

It is explained very well that why bad soil is bad, but as a believer, we need to find out the answer that how and why good soil which symbolises good hearer is good, fruitful, and productive. To make things easier and understandable for us, apostle Paul picks out three main ingredients for the fruitfulness essential in a Christian life which we read in his letter written to the Church of Thessalonica. After hearing an encouraging report of Thessalonians from Timothy, Paul's heart was filled with joy and encouragement. Though Paul could spend only three weeks with them, the growth of the Church was exemplary and when Paul came to know about the vibrant, living, and active faith of Thessalonians, he wrote to them a letter of appreciation with a joyful heart, *“Remembering before our God and father your work of faith and labour of love*

and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 1:3. As apostle Paul writes here, works produced by faith, motivated by love for Christ and endurance inspired by hope in Jesus Christ are the most important things for the truthfulness of the Word in believers. It also motivates us to become imitators of Christ which helps us to live a Christlike life resulting in becoming a fruit bearing Christians. Seed sown by Paul in the Church of Thessalonica could bear so much fruit because people of the Church there proved to be a good soil. They changed their hearts, affirmed their faith in Christ and accepted Him as their Savior. Faith, Love, Hope, and Efforts to lead a Christlike life made them receptive, responsive, and reproductive for the Word of God.

One Command

Another amazing example of fruitfulness is seen in the book of the Prophet Jonah which shows the power of the living Word. We all are familiar with the life and story of Jonah that how he tried to flee away from the presence of the Lord, swallowed up by a huge fish in the sea and finally saved by the God as God had His own

plans for him.

The reason behind Jonah's disobedience was that he did not want to take the message of warning and repentance to the people of Nineveh as asked by God. Jonah hated Ninevites and would rather see them destroyed due to various reasons of his own. He did not want God to forgive them as God had decided to destroy them because of their evil and wicked ways.

Finally, Jonah reaches the city of Nineveh and preached his one-line sermon. *“Forty days more and Nineveh will be destroyed.”* By walking in the city, he threw this message to them, maybe half-heartedly and without intensity. But to our amazement, we see the power and fruitfulness of the Word here. People of Nineveh not only heard, received, and believed the Word but also repented truly and turned from their evil and wicked ways. The changed and repentative hearts of Ninevites were accepted by God and He relented from destroying them. Spiritual fruitfulness of the Word in the people of Nineveh brought a great revival and renewal which is a visible outcome of receiving,

believing, and practicing the Word of God.

In Jonah 1:1, the word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: 2 “Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” God gave one commandment to Jonah i.e. to deliver His message to the people of Nineveh. It is important that we should be obedient to God's Word, because “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Jesus said, “Who hath ears to hear” (Matt. 13:9), “Take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24), and “Take heed ... how ye hear” (Luke 8:18).

Today, during these turbulent times, it is a lot more important to ponder upon the fruitfulness of the Word in our own lives and evaluate ourselves about how well we receive the Word? Is our heart receptive enough and allow Word to come deep within us and work actively. Is our faith vibrant, active, and firm and not withered away easily by the strong winds of challenges, hardships, and provocations of life. Does our love for Jesus keep us excited to hear His Word regularly and know

more about Him by becoming a good hearer? As a faithful servant of Christ, we need to be ready to change our hearts, if needed and make the soil of our heart a good soil and make all the efforts to bear more fruit for Jesus which will surely be pleasing to Him as Jesus said, “*By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*” John 15:8. If we are, “*Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God*” Phillipians 1:11 then Jesus can surely say to us, “Well done good and faithful servant.”



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International Day of Non-Violence

Mr. Chacko Thomas



It is sad that the word “violence” already appears in the early pages of the Bible.

Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with **violence**. And God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for humanity had corrupted its way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, “The end of humanity has come before Me; for the earth is filled with **violence** because of people; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.” (Genesis 6:11, 13, NASB).

The act of violence appears even earlier in the Bible, in chapters three and four of Genesis, the devil being the greatest violator, followed by Cain killing his

innocent brother. So, what is new? We have been living in a violent planet for millenniums. It is a miracle that humanity still exists. Humanity's greatest enemy is humanity itself. What a tragedy.

Christians targeted

Christians down through the centuries have been a special target of human violence. A few years ago, I was in a city called Van, in Turkey, on its eastern border with Iran. I was told that early in the last century (around 1915) the Turks slaughtered more than 20,000 Armenian Christians and threw them in the lake Van, a huge lake. The Turks also killed about half a million Christians on the Greek side. Armenia, I understand, was the

first Christian country in Europe.

I welcome the International Day of Non-Violence championed by the United Nations. It is a matter of pride for Indians to see Mahatma Gandhi's name linked to the Nonviolence Day, it being celebrated on his birthday. Dr Martin Luther King and President Nelson Mandela are two great names linked to this concept of non-violence. Apparently, they learned it from Gandhi. And Gandhi from the Sermon on the Mount, perhaps?

Nonviolence won the battle in Gandhi's day against a heavily armed Great Britain, thanks to any Biblical value the country may have honoured at the time. Nevertheless, a Day set aside internationally for the concept of non-violence is significant and needed in our time. Our Lord said, "Blessed are the peace makers" – though He did also warn us about persecution, just a couple of verses later in the same Beatitude. I look forward to The Day when the Prince of Peace will reign in righteousness and justice and peace will reign in all realms. (Isaiah 16:5; 2:4; 11:4 – 9; 65:24-25.) In the meanwhile, we hold the fort and do our best for

peace and harmony.

"Thou Shall not Violate"

Across the world, we are seeing the alarming rate of increase in crimes of murder, rape, lying, stealing, human trafficking, lawlessness, immorality, greed, and of course wars. These are the very same things the great Ten Commandments tackle brilliantly.

But how many in India know that such Commandments even exist? How are they to know what they are? When was the last time you preached or heard a message on one of these Commandments, especially the last six, which stand against all violence and, in the words of the Lord Jesus, what it means to "love your neighbour as yourself".

Someone has suggested that the Ten Commandments are more like a "Table of Contents" of the Bible. I must agree with it. One or more of the Ten Commandments are sprinkled right through the Bible, almost every page of it.

In recent weeks, I had the honour of taking a new follower of the Lord from a Hindu background though the Ten Commandments

in one session. This was specifically requested by his daughter, who was instrumental in his turning to the Lord. I started with the last six Commandments before covering the first four. Although I had taken him through a few sessions already, I never saw him so affirmative and appreciative of the Bible and its God as we ended the session on the Commandments.

'TEN' Laws of Love Set in Stones

"TEN" is the title of a book written by Canon J. John, the great British evangelist. His seminars on the Ten Commandments have seen great success across the UK. It says on the back cover of the book: "Imagine a world where love guides every action. A community where people place others before themselves. A place where God is recognised and respected. ... Thousands of years ago, God revealed the framework of life as it should be. ... Yet society is slowly moving from this essential guide, as these absolute truths give way to a subjective culture. ...".

What to me is very instructive about J. John's presentation is that he starts his series from the

Tenth commandment ("You shall not covet") and works his way back up to the first Commandment ("You shall have no other God before me"). And the series ends up in a great session of worship to God.

Invest in India as unto the Lord

I was strengthened by the Editorial of AIM Magazine in August, where Rev. Vijayesh Lal urged us to continue to contribute to the nation building of India in spite of the opposition and persecution of Christians. I felt this call is from the Lord.

We Christians, including the thousands of missionaries, have served Indian people over the centuries by providing health services, education, and uplifting the downtrodden. This is our call and our privilege, even though we are not appreciated for it. It may be naïve to expect a violence-free India (especially against Christians) any time soon.

What would Jesus Do?

In the course of teaching Matthew's Gospel, I came across Jesus' response to John the Baptist's arrest and imprisonment (Matthew 4:12-17). I had for years misunderstood our

Lord's action. I thought that he was running away to Galilee to escape arrest. How wrong! Here is what Campbell Morgan of Westminster Chapel, London, wrote about it in his book *Searchlights from the Word*.

Matthew 4:12 "When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee". This statement is revealing our Lord's courage rather than His caution. There are instances on record of how in hours of danger He moved out of the danger zone. This is not one of them.

Here, He went into the danger-zone. Galilee was the tetrarchy of Herod, who had imprisoned John. Into that region then, our Lord went to continue the ministry of the man thus silenced and to begin His own more public propaganda.

As another Herod had sought the young child to destroy Him, so now this one, given over to evil courses, attempted to silence the troublesome voice which had denounced the sin of the court as sternly as the sin of the crowd.

When Jesus heard it, He moved into the region of Herod's

influence, and took up the message of His herald, and gave it more publicity and more power.

Thus, it has ever been, and still is. Evil may silence a voice, but it cannot prevent the proclamation of the Word. If John is imprisoned, Jesus takes up the message; and that means that it will be proclaimed with clarity, directness, and power, more arresting, disturbing, and prevailing.

We need to have no trembling of heart when evil seems for the moment to have gained an advantage, and to have triumphed over truth, it is truth which is mighty, and God ever finds some new instrument through which it will proceed to yet greater victories.

May the Lord give Christians everywhere much wisdom and boldness in making Jesus known.

Irrelevant preaching

I do not remember the exact context, but it happened in a message that someone was preaching, when Brother George Verwer blurted out: "Irrelevant preaching!" I had to agree with him in that context. I do not think

we can ever accuse Jesus of “irrelevant preaching”. So also, with John the Baptist or any of the prophets before him.

The Apostle told Timothy and us that “All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or *woman* of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work.” Equipped for every good work.

How then have our pulpits become irrelevant? Have we missed the point? Well, the kind of preaching in the first century produced people who turned the world upside down. It is time now that churches should be places where such men and women are developed, who will bless and serve India and the world. The western church was reputed to have “developed people” who “ran the nation”. The results have been obvious, for a long while.

The time has come for us to recognise that God has placed us where we are and to give ourselves to it to the best of our abilities, for the benefit of the nation, to bless it with the love and light of the Lord Jesus.

“Our job is not to bring India to Christ but it is to bring Christ to India”, as Samuel Zemmer once said. May we see the knowledge of God covering India, as the waters cover the sea!

How can we make sure that all Indians can know at least the important chapters of the Bible, like the Creation Story, the fall, the Ten Commandments, Isaiah 53, Psalm 23, and more? God will bless and honour His Word. And India will be changed for the better. God bless India.



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Wisdom is Crown of Virtues

Emeritus Prof. Henry Shepherd

"Where did this man get these things?" They asked
"What is this wisdom that has been given him that
he even does miracles! Is not this the Carpenter?
Is not this Mary's son and brother of James,
Joses, Judas and Simon?
Are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him"
Mk 6:2-3

Perspective of the wisdom and its source

The people of Jesus' home town in Galilee wondered about the wisdom they witnessed in him, and miracles he could perform. He used to teach authoritatively, without attending any school of rabbi. He was born and brought up in Nazareth as an ordinary poor boy of a humble carpenter family. For Jesus they once said, "Search and look: for out of Galilee riseth no prophet" (Jn 7:52); "Can any good thing come from Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46). These remarks reached him, so he gave them the reason of their disbelief: "Only in his home town among his relatives and in his own home is a prophet without honour," for

even his own brothers did not believe in him (Jn 7:5). Also, the Scripture testifies: 'Jesus as a child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom and grace of God was upon him but they did not notice, for his time had not come'. In him was hidden treasure of wisdoms and knowledge was prophesied by Isaiah in 11:2. Outside his hometown, Jesus had a great following and he had become a cause of concern for Pharisees, teachers of the law and scribes etc. People used to flock to hear the words of wisdom, even from nearby countries. The miracles he performed were proof that God was with him, yet the learned Jews did not believe that he was Messiah, the king promised by

God. His wisdom was apparently visible through his answers for difficult questions, from the age of twelve years. Surprisingly, scholars of that age did not care to keep a track of the boy who was having outstanding wisdom.

Later, they wanted to know: "Where did this man get these things? Even today, many Christian believers are anxious to know the biblical answers of such queries, for false teachers and miracle workers are misguiding people. The Bible tells explicitly that the only source of godly virtues is God, including divine wisdom. Job also tossed a common query before his wise friends: "But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? Man does not comprehend it's worth, it cannot be found in the land of living. The deep says, It is not in me? It cannot be bought with fine gold. It is hidden from eyes of every living thing.....' Destruction and death say,'Only a rumour of it has reached our ears'. God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells" (Job 28:12-15, 21-23). Solomon's understanding says, "To the man

who pleases God, he gives wisdom knowledge and happiness" (Ecc 2:26); Daniel testifies- "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are His.... He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. I thank and praise you; O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power" (Dan 2:20, 22-23). The only source of wisdom is triune God. He created everything perfect by using his wisdom which is infinite and beyond human perception. God's wisdom is clearly visible in nature, human body and its functions and in the word of God. The worldly wisdom is no match for godly wisdom, for its scurrilous source and purpose are contradicting to the true wisdom. Worldly wise could not answer the issues Jesus raised, but when he answered their testing questions they used to get tongue-tied. The Holy Spirit is Spirit of wisdom and helps God's children in knowing the deep meaning of words of wisdom.

God gives wisdom to foolish and then uses them to preach the wisdom of Christ to the so called

wise. No one can boast in his worldly wisdom for it is incapable to discern godly mysteries and will of God (I Cor 1:29-31). Therefore, our faith should rest in the power and wisdom of God and not on human wisdom. It is God's gift of wisdom that fulfills the spiritual need of the Church. Jesus' wisdom was extremely outstanding, it was not merely verbal but had mighty power to perform mighty miracles. Godly wisdom gives peace to troubled and insight to commoners, so they glorify God of heaven and earth. He gives wisdom to the believers and new babes in the Church. Wisdom reproves the double-minded backsliders, and to them who are known black sheep.

Traits of Counterfeit and Spiritual wisdom

Jesus has warned us not to get deceived by false teachers and prophets, and said, "Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them." Generic wisdom is merely an ability to do certain routine things properly but not useful in spiritual matters. Though it is not untouchable as such, but since it gets corrupted when controlled

by desires of flesh it has limited use. Since the whole world is controlled by sinful nature, people choose worldly wisdom as their first choice. There is no moral value attached with counterfeit wisdom for it is demonic. Its aim is to get success by hook or by crook. The conventional wisdom is the only choice for them who do not know God to make sensible decisions in day to day affairs of the world. Worldly wisdom employs cunningness, craftiness, deceit, falsehood, lies, and even murder if needed. Without wisdom man is a par with beasts, as evident from daily crime news concerning scams, bank robberies, cheating banks, and recently in e-crimes etc. For the focus is on becoming successful, rich or famous without slogging for it using unfair means. It will be called ignorance if believers are not able to discern this difference. Knowledge can make living better and comfortable without using foul means. Counterfeit wisdom puffs up the person after attaining success in mission. Counterfeit wisdom is of several kinds, and their speciality is evident from their names, they are: Earthly

wisdom, Intellectual wisdom, Devilish wisdom, Reflective wisdom, Cognitive wisdom, Compassionate wisdom, and Bookish wisdom. For earthly wisdom, God says, "I will destroy the wisdom of wise; the intelligence of intelligent I will frustrate" (1 Cor 1:19). He said so because this wisdom makes men blind, deaf, greedy, arrogant, and an atheist. Devilish wisdom promotes cult culture, orgy, and immorality etc.

Worldly wise consider the message of cross a foolishness, and Good News illogical. For them only seeing is believing. However, apparently such wise appear smart, sharp, outspoken, overconfident, extremely clever, learned and are successful in earthly affairs. But they cut a sorry figure when it comes to spiritual matters. They are fools in the eyes of God (1 Cor 3:19, Is 29:14, Rom 1:22 and Jas 3:15) for they promote sin and sensuality. Worldly wisdom does not believe in final judgement or in life after death. It promotes devil's plans: divisions in Church. Worldly wisdom gives a mindset that does not value

God's love. It gives an ability to abuse physical senses and emotions on priority. Devil is the source of earthly wisdom which he provided to Eve saying, "You will not die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4-5). This wisdom is result of inordinate knowing of earthly possessions. If we want to know only how things work?; how to answer difficult question related to sciences and general knowledge? how to manage things in business? and 'how to receive appreciation in world and get fame? then earthly wisdom insufficient. It tells you: Follow the desires of your heart and do what pleases you and others, for earthly life is short and desires are numerous, so, go fast. It tells - there are many ways to reach God, use any that appeals to you.

On the other hand, godly wisdom is given to the children of God to know him closely, to lead a godly life and to obey God diligently. Godly wisdom is needed to finish works assigned to his servants; and they are able to say, "It is finished". True wisdom is not only

superior but makes us humble, kind and a loving person. It helps in discerning hidden truth in divine messages, believing in one God and salvation plan of God and his Son Jesus Christ, the true wisdom never contradicts the word of God. Christ is the power and wisdom of God for them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, wisdom has been spelt out in Scripture in different ways, such as:

*The fear of the Lord is wisdom and to shun evil is understanding (Job 28:28).

* The fear of the Lord is beginning of wisdom; and who follow his precept have good understanding (Ps 111:10)

* The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom and humility comes before honour (Pr 15:33).

There are certain traits that certify the man of wisdom,"for wisdom is proved right by her action",said Jesus. Solomon says," He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; He who cherishes understanding prospers; It gives him patience, ability to restrain the flood of emotions (Ps 19:8,

11, 23:4); Wisdom, brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance (Ecc 8:1, 10:2); the heart of a wise man inclines to righteousness. James has also given a few signs found in a wise man, he says, "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (Jas 3:13, 17). He admonishes," If anyone of you lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him "(Jas 1:5). Paul writes to the Church,"I keep asking God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better" (Ep 1:17). Godly knowledge has to do with clear perception of truth, and wisdom gives ability to use godly knowledge. Spiritual wisdom gives ability to see beyond the material world and understanding its worthlessness in eternal life. In a nutshell, there are seven features of heavenly wisdom: fear of God, ability to perceive divine instructions, ever

readiness to share testimony, understanding God's will, discerning secrets of the word and craftiness of worldly wise, living around us. Since godly wisdom condemns the evil of worldly wisdom, it offends unbelievers. The word of wisdom reaches to heart and works.

Biblical characters with heavenly wisdom

Adam and Eve were initially given the word of wisdom for it was needed in that circumstance and time: they were admonished "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen 2:16). Yet, they chose to believe the devilish wisdom suggested to her, for it appeared acceptable to them and was according to the desire of their flesh, though it was contradicting the word of God. King Solomon was known for the wisdom he received from God to rule the people of God, and wise people use to come to his court to listen to his judgements. We should note that godly wisdom, abilities, and blessings are conditional. Obedience,

faithfulness, truthfulness, and integrity etc. are some of the generic conditions a believer has to observe in order to remain blessed. Solomon started well, but with time he lost godly fear and concentrated on women, wealth, and grandeur. By the time he reached the old age, he had started worshipping other gods of his & foreign wives and became so wealthy that silver was as common as stone. He loved things prohibited for kings and tried to please God by offering sacrifices of thousands of animals, goats and sheep instead of obedience, for all these things, he shifted for cognitive wisdom, as obvious from several verses in the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs. He not only lost godly wisdom but was rejected by God for ruling the united Israel by his descendants.

Joseph also received wisdom, particularly with the ability to interpret dreams and ability to administer Egypt in bad days. By this, he could also save the family of his father during seven years of severe famine. God made him the Prime minister of Egypt, for during testing he had proved his

integrity, obedience, and faith in God. Daniel was also blessed with heavenly wisdom with ability to interpret dreams. His wisdom was acknowledged by rulers, and because of his faith, God was glorified in foreign land. But he always gave full credit to God who gave him these blessings (Dan 2:46-48 and 2:20-23). He also saw divine visions concerning end time. He was found ten times wiser than the wise men of Babylon. Joshua, the successor of Moses, was chosen by God to lead people into the promised land, and for this, he was given wisdom with ability to lead a nation to be. Wisdom lives with prudence who please God (Pr 8:12, Ecc 2:26) by obedience.

Only fools despise godly wisdom for they don't need it. Godly wisdom teaches man not to store gold and silver on the earth (Mt 6:19-21), for loving the world makes man enemy of God. Worldly wisdom makes worldly people wretched, pitiful, poor,

blind, and naked (Rev 3:17-18). If anyone lacks wisdom and if he feels the need, then such children of God should pray for it and God is always willing to give best of blessings. One should crave, for it is in itself an act of wisdom to have hunger and thirst for godly wisdom. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And the Good News is that the spirit of Christ lives in every believer; just acknowledge it (Rom 8:9-10), and wisdom will be your companion.



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You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.
Isaiah 26:3



The 69th EFI Convention and North Zone Urban Transformation Conference Report



The 69th EFI Convention and North Zone Urban Transformation Conference was held at Don Bosco Technical Institute, Delhi, from September 4 to 7, 2023, with over 200 urban pastors, heads of Christian institutions and other leaders actively participating. In line with the theme, “Seeking the Peace and Prosperity of the City-Nation”, based on Jer. 29:7, plenary sessions, Bible studies, urban contextual presentations, breakout sessions, case studies and critical ministry presentations were articulated well by prominent urban thinkers and practitioners. Most participants came from eight north Indian states, northeast India and a few from five southern states. Many denominational and church leaders, pioneer urban church planters, cross-cultural missionaries, CEOs of Christian organizations and scholars from various fields were represented among the participants. A comprehensive and well-planned conference schedule covered major urban themes from the Biblical, urban contextual, and practical perspectives by prominent resource persons with significant urban expertise and experience. The overall response from most participants was very positive, as most considered this conference a milestone in understanding the city and considering urban ministry and mission as the most strategic and urgent priority.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal, the General Secretary of EFI, welcomed resource persons and participants and called for active participation in the Conference. Dr Richard Howell, former GS of EFI and current Principal of Caleb Institute, brought the inaugural message. Dr. Atul Aghamkar, Director of the National Center for Urban Transformation, elaborated on the theme and challenged the participants to seek peace and prosperity in their cities. Bishop Paul Mathews, the national president of Filadelfia Fellowship Church, Udaipur, gave an inspiring challenge to get involved in the city prayerfully.



Two Biblical reflections were creatively brought by Dr. Prabhu Singh, Principal of South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, Bangalore. In his first session, he dealt with "The Church at Antioch: Analysis of an Urban Christward Movement based on Acts 11: 19 - 26, and the second one entitled "The Textile Entrepreneur Who Transformed Europe - Study of an Urban Missional Business Woman, Acts 16: 6 - 15. These

were carefully and creatively expounded by him, drawing implications for the urban context of India.

Rev. Susanta Patra, former General Secretary of India Missions Association and President of National Fellowship, spoke on "Urban People and Cities in the Plan of God" with an enthusiastic response from the participants. Dr. Aghamkar's second plenary, "Looking at the City from God's Perspective," enabled participants to change their negative perspective about the city and join hands with God to look at the city from His perspective. In the following plenary, "Christ and City," Pastor R.L. Gupta and his wife Rajani, Founder and President of Siyyon Prayer Tower in Ludhiana, presented a creative model of the urban church. That has a comprehensive ministry among the migrants. Pastor Samir Deokuliar, the lead pastor of The Dwar, a multi-cultural urban church in Delhi, presented on the City Gospel Movement. Pastor Victor Nazareth gave an insightful presentation on Delhi Transformation Network.



Ev. Vijay Mohod, an executive member, chaired the EFI's Annual General Meeting. The highlight of the AGM was a comprehensive report by the GS, Rev. Vijayesh Lal, highlighting various strategic ministries undertaken by EFI and its various departments. This year, the relief work among the Christians who have been heavily persecuted and displaced in Manipur and Chhattisgarh was especially highlighted. EFI's initiative in preventing human trafficking and serving at-risk children was another highlight of his report. ASK 365, a year-round prayer network, grassroots theological education through Punjab Mobile Bible Training and the establishment of EFI regional committees were other highlights of his report. Finally, he announced the EFI's decadal strategic event, The All India Congress on Church in Mission (AICOCIM), to be held in

A book, *Rethinking Urban Mission and Ministry in India*, edited by Dr. Atul Aghamkar and Dr. James Patole was released by Dr. Prabhu Singh. Rev. Dr. Sunil Kolhar', Founder and pastor of Citylight Foundation, Ahmedabad, took a plenary session on "Urban Contextual Perspective and Building a Gospel Movement in the City." This session was well-researched and documented, with rich content and practical insights. Rev. C B Samuel, former CEO of EFICOR, presented the challenge to be faithful in the ministry in the city and exhorted the participants to make a difference. Rev. Dr. Laji Paul, the working president of the Indian Pentecostal Church and pastor of Navjeevan Satsang Sabha, Delhi, took Biblical Reflections on Strategic Ministry in the City and provided Biblical solid as well as contextual perspective and challenged the participants to be involved in the strategic ministry in the city. Rev. Rajesh Tiwari, a Global Ambassador for the India Missions Association and Mission Researcher and Strategist, conducted the final plenary session. He presented his research on urban youth and challenged the participants to engage with them. The concluding session was taken by Dr Aghamkar, who took a Bible Study on Nicodemus, highlighting the need to focus on the educated and intellectual elite of the society and allowing them to follow Christ in a non-traditional way.



The participants were given opportunities to gain more profound and practical insights through the breakout sessions that were carefully planned as follows:

1. Equipping Urban Church Leaders: by Rev. Isaac Dutta and Rev. Johnson Chidda
2. Ministry to the Urban Migrants: by Dr. Laji Paul
3. Ministry to the Urban Neighbor: by Rev. Sushil Tyagi
4. Urban Church Outreach Ministry: by Rev. Susanta Patra and Dr. Sunil Kolhar
5. Freedom and Justice: by Rev. Adv. Amit Manwatkar and Rev. Vijayesh Lal
6. Prayer for the City: Rev. Onassis Jeevaraj

A specific time was also allotted for EFT's ministry presentations that covered a range of ministries undertaken by various departments of EFI. Other strategic urban ministry presentations also provided innovative and practical insights to the participants. During this time, those who represented the state of Manipur at the Conference were invited to come forward and share their experiences. Special prayers were offered for the peace and restoration of normalcy in Manipur.





Dr. Sanjay Makasare, the district Superintendent of the Free Methodist church in Mumbai and Rev. Rahul Pant, former EFI and Open Doors staff from Uttarakhand, and Rev. Mandol ably handled the Hindi translations of various plenary sessions. The Caleb Institute Choir led the praise and worship on the inauguration day. For the rest of the days, the Evangelism Explosion Worship Group, under the

Tyagi sisters' leadership, led to a significant and active time of praise and worship.

Participants were given opportunities to provide feedback reflecting this Conference's impact on them. Over two dozen participants from the state of Maharashtra met twice during the conference, formed the Maharashtra Urban Transformation Network, and planned a follow-up Seminar on October 4 in Amaravati under the leadership of Rev. Pranay Nitnawre. Another participant, Rev. Girish Tamta, stated, "It was an amazing experience for me as my heart was longing to initiate ministries in cities like Dehradun, Haldwani, Nainital, Amora, Ranikhet Rudrapur and Lalkuan in Uttara Khand. I felt called to plant house churches in these cities. This conference gave me a fresh understanding and new directions for urban ministry." Participants from Nagaland reported how they were enriched and blessed through the conference. In consultation with their senior pastors, they plan to explore possibilities of reaching the non-Nagas in the cities of Nagaland. Another prominent layperson from CNI church in Mumbai, Mrs. Kalpana Sirwaiya, stated, "This conference opened my eyes, as I plan to share with others what I learned from various resource people at this conference. Joel Damle from Amaravati stated, I gained Biblical insights for the city and received a vision to engage with the neglected urban people." John Alexander of Adonai Ministries, Bangalore, stated, "I am now more open to working with other people in the city as this conference has broadened my vision for the city. I learned something fresh and new at the conference." Rev. Robert Clark from Jhansi said, "This was an insightful and helpful conference. I plan to organize a conference for city pastors and share these insights with them." Rev. Hanokh Massih from Agra affirmed his commitment, "I gained new insights and skills to reach the city people. I am motivated to put into practice some of the strategies I learned at the conference." Rev. Jose Kalemil of Delhi commented, "I am more committed to God and his mission in the city now due to being part of this conference. I will need help starting model training for pastors so they can be equipped to reach the urban population of Delhi and beyond." Rev. Bobby Vaiphei said, "This was an amazingly enriching conference and an eye-opener. I will use the insights in our urban ministry and start networking with others."

The conference was concluded by Rev. Vijayesh Lal's vote of thanks and a concluding prayer by Dr. Susanta Patra. The Conference was well managed by Mrs. Sonia Daniel, Mr. Samson Kumar and their efficient and committed EFI team.

J. Francis Kumar

National Center for Urban Transformation, Bangalore

Sonia Daniel

Evangelical Fellowship of India



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Points



October 2023

1 SUNDAY Thank God for the new month. Pray that God would bless you and your family with many blessings that you may be a blessing to others in return.

2 MONDAY International day of non-violence (Gandhi Jayanthi). Pray that every citizen of India would uphold and value non-violence. Pray for peace and prosperity for our nation.

3 TUESDAY Pray for Assam today. Pray for growth in all areas. Pray for political leaders to govern the state with integrity, love and understanding. Pray that the Assamese people would be a source of blessing to the whole North East region both economically and spiritually.

4 WEDNESDAY Pray for Rajasthan. Pray for God's light to shine on the people of Rajasthan. May God reveal Himself personally to those who seek Him.

5 THURSDAY Pray for Punjab. Pray for God's servants to be

strengthened despite many obstacles and challenges. Pray that the churches may grow. Pray also for the Punjab Mobile Bible Training in Punjab this month. Pray that the training would train and equip many leaders who would teach the Word correctly.

6 FRIDAY Pray for Chandigarh. Pray for hearts that are teachable and ready to accept the message of the Cross. Pray that people who are sharing the Gospel would do it with the power of the Holy Spirit.

7 SATURDAY Pray for believers in Odisha to be strong and courageous. Pray that they would share their faith boldly and wisely to their neighbours.

8 SUNDAY Pray for revival in Jharkhand. Pray that the Word of God would be accepted and practiced and that it would change people's mindset and eventually their lives.

9 MONDAY Pray for focused, clarity and discernment for those working

for the new CEEFI curriculum. Pray that the revamped curriculum would be meaningful, easy to learn and children would love study the Word of God through them.

10 TUESDAY Pray for Sikkim. Pray that the Holy Spirit would move people's hearts and minds and draw multitude to Christ and His Word. Pray for the strengthening of the Churches in this state to be the salt and light in their communities.

11 WEDNESDAY Pray for Evangelical Trust of North India (ETANI). Pray that God would give wisdom and discernment as they deal with church properties and legal cases.

12 THURSDAY Pray for Nagaland. Pray for Christ to be the center of peoples' lives in this state. Pray for hunger and thirst for God's Word to grow. Pray for revival for the Churches in the state.

13 FRIDAY Pray for Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Pray that the people may learn to seek God in times of trouble and need. Pray that God would provide the way to draw people to himself.

14 SATURDAY Pray for Madhya Pradesh. Pray for the churches in MP that they would shine brightly despite the many challenges they face. Pray that they would bear many spiritual fruits.

15 SUNDAY Pray for all the worshippers today as they gather to honor, praise and worship Jesus Christ. Pray that God's kingdom may be extended and many dying souls will receive salvation.

16 MONDAY Pray for Caleb Institute, Gurgaon. Pray for the students and the teaching staff of this institute that they may be equipped and empowered to share the Gospel very effectively.

17 TUESDAY Pray for the state of Uttar Pradesh. Pray that development would reach the most inner part of the state. Pray for the political leaders to work with the best interest for the people. May God shine His face towards the people of UP and show His unceasing love for them.

18 WEDNESDAY Pray for Lakshadweep. Pray for God's amazing grace and love to reach every individual in these 36 islands.

19 THURSDAY Pray for Maharashtra. Pray for the unreached millions in this state. Pray for more gospel workers to reach them. May the Holy Spirit would actively work among them.

20 FRIDAY Pray for the ministry of Evangelical Fellowship of India. Pray that EFI would effectively continue to serve as the voice of the evangelicals. Pray for all the departments to reflect God's love

and care as they function in their respective fields.

21 SATURDAY Pray for Manipur. Pray for peace for the people of Manipur. Pray that believers would live out their faith and display God's glory.

22 SUNDAY Pray for all Christian agencies in our country to be accountable, faithful, consistent and focused. Pray that our works may display God's salvation grace that was revealed in and through His Son, Jesus Christ.

23 MONDAY Pray for Meghalaya. Pray that the churches in the state would focus more on witnessing. Pray the many youngsters from different parts of the NE would meet God personally during their stay in this state.

24 TUESDAY Pray for Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Pray that God would open the way for those seeking to know the truth. Pray for believers in this place to love the Word of God and obey it wholeheartedly.

25 WEDNESDAY Pray for Puducherry. Pray for spiritual awakening of the people of this UT. Pray that their spiritual hunger and thirst would be quenched with the Word of God. Pray for God's mercy and grace for this land.

26 THURSDAY Pray for Kerala today that believers would have fresh

desires and commitment to God, His Word and His Church. Pray that lives may be transformed through study and obedience of God's Word.

27 FRIDAY Pray for Delhi today. Pray that the love of God would overflow this city. Men and women would turn to God for help. Pray that the churches in this city would be revived and bear many spiritual fruits.

28 SATURDAY Pray for Tamil Nadu. Pray for spiritual renewal for believers in the state.

29 SUNDAY Today let us pray for our pastors, evangelists, missionaries and all those in church leadership. Pray that they may serve their respective responsibilities with deep love and concern and put others ahead of them. May our churches display the love of God through our works and deeds.

30 MONDAY Pray for the people of Daman and Diu to have fresh encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ in a new and fresh way. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work actively in believers' heart and minds.

31 TUESDAY Pray for the ministry of EFI through the publication department. Pray that God may bless and use the articles in the AIM magazine to bring hope, peace, comfort, guidance, love and strength to the readers. Thank God for bringing you to the last day of the month.



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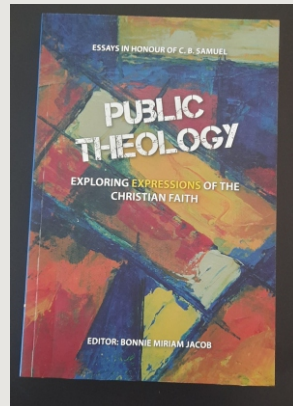
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