

THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF EFI PUBLICATION TRUST

aim

January 2021 ❖ PAGES 52 ❖ ₹ 20/-

A Journey of Faith

The background of the cover is a photograph of a field of white calla lilies. The flowers are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others as buds. The background is softly blurred, showing more of the field and some tall grasses. The overall tone is peaceful and natural.

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A Journey of Faith

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Vol. 50 / No. 1
 AIM Annual Subscription for
 India, Nepal & Bhutan Rs. 200/-
 (Other countries \$ 20)

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Online payment details

Name : EFI Publication Trust | Bank : State Bank of India | Account No. **54015789597** | IFSC CODE: **SBIN0040415**
 Branch : Nehru Place, New Delhi 110019

For subscription query call us: 011-26431133; Tele/Fax: 011-26285350, E-mail: aimatefi@gmail.com, website: www.efionline.org

THE TREASURER, EFI PUBLICATION TRUST, 805/92, Deepali, Nehru Place, New Delhi - 110019.
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Editorial



Rev. Vijayesh Lal

Empowered by the God of hope

A new year, and the people look forward to a fresh start, renewed resolve, a new energy. The anticipation was even more this New Year eve as 2020 has largely been a year of social disruption, economic catastrophe, and heartbreak. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought the world to a standstill, its people to the brink of terminal despair.

But as hard as 2020 has been, can we still be thankful for it?

The losses have been deeply personal and have been felt throughout our social circles and families. We have also seen the blow of the pandemic aggravated because of incompetent and kneejerk government reactions. Who can forget the heartrending images and

videos of the great Indian migrant exodus? The photo of a young child crying for food besides his dead mother, or the exhausted child who slept on a suitcase as his mother pulled the wheeled luggage. The pain has been very real.

But we have also seen the good in humanity this year. Random networks sprang up, and good Samaritans worked tirelessly to provide relief to the afflicted. We witnessed the heroic courage of the medical fraternity as they put their lives on the line to take care of the infected and the sick. Helplines came up, manned by young men and women willing to listen to traumatised callers, and counsel them, soothe their nerves, relieve

their fears with assurances of hope. The digital footprint in the world grew larger as our devices brought us closer in a virtual world. Some companies sacrificed instant profits to make the necessary tools available for free so that the world could connect. There is much to be thankful for and to appreciate, even in 2020.

On a personal level, we can be thankful that we still have breath in our bodies, that we still have life. Many of us have families, food on the table, and have friends with whom we can still connect. That is something for which we can really be grateful. Food on the table in a world where 25,000 people die every day of hunger is a big privilege. India itself loses 7,000 people daily to hunger. The covid-19 pandemic cannot claim numbers of the dead in the same league as hunger does. And hunger is preventable. Eradicating it should be on our priority list along with Covid-19. This should be food for thought as we go into 2021 and should prompt us to action rather than to a state of hopelessness.

Dostoevsky famously said, “To live without Hope is to cease to live.” In a world that is dark and cold, hope is

something that is sorely needed. Our hope cannot rest just on the vaccines promised to us by scientists and governments. Our hope cannot be based on technology for the above reasons as well. Our governments cannot give us hope, neither can our politicians or religious leaders.

There is nowhere that we can find hope except in God.

The Bible tells us that God is the source of hope. He is identified as the God of Hope. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

The Psalmist says, “But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you.” (Psalm 39:7)

God himself is our Hope. He is the sure foundation on which all hope rests. It is because He is good and the source of everything that is good. What is more is that He is aware of the despair that we can feel; He is aware of the struggles we go through, and the hopelessness that chases us. But that is not all. He is not only good and aware of all that we go through, but He also engages with us

and remains with us in our struggles and works with us to produce that which is good even out of situations that seem bleak.

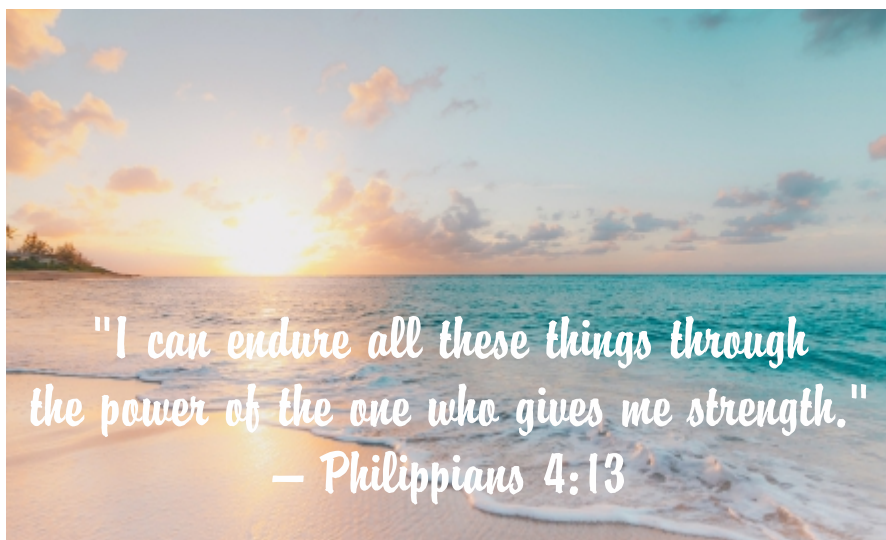
That is why the Lord Jesus Christ came and shared our humanity. We just celebrated His coming into the world. That is why He chose the cross and then rose from the dead. His resurrection is triumph over death, and the reason for our hope. And now we wait in anticipation for His second coming, for He shall restore everything according to God's design and for His glory. That is why we are hopeful people for we know how the story ends.

And yet, hope for a Christian is not

an escape or fanciful thinking, a weary longing for a pie in the sky. It has consequences in the here and now. Because we are a people of hope, we engage in a world that seems devoid of it, we refuse to accept the bleakness. We roll up our sleeves and join with God in His mission of hope, of repairing broken lives, setting the oppressed free, ushering in justice, mercy, grace and God's truth of salvation.

So, as we enter the new year, let us enter with thankfulness for the year gone by and with hope for the year that we have entered in because the God of hope is with us.

Rev. Vijayesh Lal





Great Is Your Faithfulness

Rev. Dr. David Mende

Introduction

The solar-powered airplane Solar Impulse can fly day and night without fuel. Inventors Bertrand Piccard and André Borschberg hope to fly it around the world in 2015 (and they did fly between March 9, 2015, to July 26, 2016). While the plane flies all day by solar power, it gathers enough energy to be able to fly all night. When the sun rises, Piccard says, “It brings the hope again that you can continue.” The idea of sunrise bringing us hope makes me think of Lamentations 3.¹ Lamentations 3:21-24 tells us that we can experience steadfast love and mercies of the Lord in a fresh way with every sunrise. 2020 has been a difficult year for people around the world. But God's Word reminds us that we can make a fresh start by hoping in the Lord.

The main message I want to share in this article is: **Hope in the Lord by focusing on his goodness and making him your portion.**

1. We Can Have Hope in the Midst of Grief by Recalling the Goodness of the Lord (Lam. 3:21-23).

We cannot create hope by denying our circumstances or minimizing our suffering. Rather, we can have hope when we turn our attention to God. The author draws hope in the midst of grief by focusing on God's character (v. 21). In the same way, we can find hope when we focus on God's character. When we feel hopeless or depressed, we must consider the right things. Our spiritual vision can be clouded if we ponder on the wrong things. Even in the stormy clouds, we can see a rainbow if we can look above instead of looking at our circumstances. In times of difficulties, we must look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:1-2). The goodness of the Lord is seen in four aspects:

a. He recalled that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases (v. 22).

While NIV translates the phrase in verse 22 as “because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,” ESV translates this verse as “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.” The Bible affirms both views. As NIV puts it, the reason you and I are alive this day is because of the steadfast love of the Lord. The word translated as “steadfast love” is *hesed* (plural form of *hesed* is used in 3:22) which refers to the covenant love and loyalty of the Lord. Even the ESV (which some scholars believe is more literal) is also true as the second line of verse 22 suggests. God's steadfast love never ceases. Listen to what the psalmist writes:

“Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O LORD.... How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings” (Ps. 36:5, 7).

We may be down, but not out because the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

b. He recalled that God's mercies (or compassions) never come to an end (v. 22).

Verse 22 echoes Exodus 34:6: “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast

love and faithfulness.’” Though the Lord drove into the author's kidneys “the arrows of his quiver” (3:13), he still proclaims that God's mercies (plural form of *mercy*) never come to an end. The author reminded himself that though God judged his people severely, his mercies never come to end. Even as God punished his people, he was doing it out of compassion for them. God is ceaselessly compassionate. Someone said, “God's wrath comes by measure; his mercy without measure.” As Lamentations 3:31-32 says, “For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.” Jesus demonstrated the steadfast love and mercies of God through his sacrifice on the cross!

c. He recalled that God's steadfast love and mercies are new every morning (v. 23).

God's steadfast love and mercies are new every morning. They are not stale. We receive fresh steadfast love and mercies each day. Since God's steadfast love and mercies are new every morning, you can claim fresh love and mercies for the new year. No matter how bad the last year has been, as God's people, we can look forward to the new year with hope and faith. No matter how much you've messed up in the last year, you can start all over again because God's steadfast love and mercies are new every morning!

In Exodus 16, we read that God provided manna to the Israelites in the wilderness daily. In Matthew 6:11, the Lord taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” In the same way, we receive God’s steadfast love and mercy each day. That’s why the psalmist says, “For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime” (Ps. 30:5). God’s steadfast love and mercies are new every morning.

d. He recalled that God’s faithfulness is great (v. 23).

The Israelites were unfaithful to God. That’s why they were punished through exile. But God’s faithfulness is great! Even as God judged the Israelites, he was faithful in executing his justice as he had promised earlier. Since we are humans, we are unfaithful to the Lord sometimes. But since he’s God, he is always faithful! As Paul writes, “if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:13).

Like the author, we can say, “You came near when I called on you; you said, Do not fear” (Lam. 3:57)! Jesus said that he is the truth (Jn 14:6). In other words, he is faithful. God is faithful all the time. Let me give you a few scriptures which speak of God’s faithfulness:

“Your faithfulness endures to all generations; you have established the earth, and it stands fast” (Ps. 119:90).

“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9).

Even when we suffer, we can entrust our souls to the faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4:19). God’s faithfulness is great! Like Job, we can hope in God even in the midst of trials and difficulties: “Though he slay me, I will hope in him” (Job 13:15). Now, may I request you all to close your eyes and to recall the worst loss that has ever occurred to you. For me, it was losing my parents in a gap of three months. Now imagine your worst loss and imagine witnessing that loss right in front of your eyes. And say to yourself: “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22-23). Do you find it difficult to say those words as you recollect your great loss?

The author’s circumstances didn’t change. Yet, he was hopeful because he recollected God’s goodness. We can experience the same hope if we focus on God’s goodness.

Remember: life is hard, but God is good!

2. We Can Have Hope in the Midst of Grief by Making God as Our Portion (Lam. 3:24).

In the Old Testament, God told the Levites, “You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel” (Num. 18:20). Even in Psalm 119:57, the psalmist says that God is his portion. Further, in Psalm 16:5, the psalmist says, “The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup.” The author had hope in God because he made God his portion.

We cannot have hope without first making the Lord as our portion. We will be truly satisfied when God alone is our portion. God must be our treasure and inheritance! Is God your portion? The Lord is more valuable than a piece of land, an inheritance, gold and silver, bank balance, loved ones (family and friends), food, fame, sex, smartphones, job, business, and everything else! Don't keep grumbling and complaining about your circumstances. Make God your portion and rejoice about that glorious fact! Then, you can experience unwavering hope.

Conclusion

2020 has been extremely painful for

all of us. But as we have stepped into another year, let our hearts be full of hope and full of faith. Let's focus on God's goodness: (a) His steadfast love never ceases. (b) His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. (c) His faithfulness is great! Let's make God our portion. Then, we will live each day full of hope, faith, and joy!

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



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1. Preceptaustin.org, “Devotionals From Our Daily Bread,” https://www.preceptaustin.org/lamentations_devotionals (accessed 30 December 2018).



PRIORITIES WE MUST HAVE YEAR AFTER YEAR

Rev. Dr. Duke Jeyaraj

An annual master health checkup is recommended by many. What the things that God's Word says we must do year after year?

The word yearly or annually occurs quite a few times in the Bible. Some of these Bible references give us indications about things that the Lord wants us to do on a yearly basis. These would give us a clue as to what kind of New Year resolutions we should be taking. These Bible passages talk about the priorities we must have as believers year after year.

THE YEAR OF GOD-WORSHIP

This New Year, we must resolve to worship God more. Judges 21:19 which tells us that there was an annual festival of the Lord in Shiloh, gives me the specific inspiration for this New Year resolution. It was in

that festival that a dance was a noted feature (Judges 21:21). The people of Israel could not sit in one place when they thought of the good things the Lord had done for them. They, especially the women, had to get up and dance in the Lord's presence! In this year, we must resolve to be people who worship God!

A devotional reading from Our Daily Bread reading made this fabulous suggestion which will help us practically execute this New Year resolution: During daily family prayer, each family member could talk about the blessings God gave them on that day. This could be jotted down in a small sheet of paper. On a typical day, a family may have four or five points for praising God, if each family member spoke up. Each such point should make into a fresh chit of paper. These chits should be

rolled and tossed in a 'thanksgiving bowl'. An empty fish tank bowl can be used. This should be done daily through the year. And when 31 December comes, you can fish out these chits from the bowl and read them out in mega family thanksgiving prayer once again, praising God for the wonderful way, He graciously took care of us in that particular year! If Eric Yuan, the founder of Zoom was a believer, and if he wrote out these kinds of thanksgiving chits, this would be an entry on the April 30, 2020: 'God enabled the company I founded, Zoom, to jump 10 million daily meeting participants in December 2019, to 300 million' (Time, December 21-28, 2020, p.72).

THE YEAR OF FAMILY-WOWING

The New Year should be a year in which you resolve to be a more responsible family person. The Lord has graciously added the New Year into our life so that we can take good care of our families. When I read this portion of Scripture, this New Year Resolution inspiration came to me: 'Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD—a boy wearing a linen ephod. Each year his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him when she went with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. And Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife,

saying, “May the LORD give you children by this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the LORD.” Then they would go home' (I Sam. 2:18-20). We know that Samuel's mom, Hannah, was barren for many years. And God did a miracle and gave her a son. After Samuel, Hannah's son, was weaned, he was left in the house of the Lord. He assisted the priest Eli in God's house. Every year, Samuel's mom made a little robe, travelled to where he was and gave it to him. Wow! This act of Hannah inspires each one of us who are part of a family to unselfishly do loving acts that will put a smile on the faces of other family members. As husbands, we must resolve this New Year to do something special for our wives! As wives, we need to resolve this New Year to do something special for our husbands! As children, we need to resolve this New Year to do something special for our parents! As siblings, we need to resolve to do something special for your other siblings! Taking good care of our families must be part and parcel of our annual New Year resolution list! Why not place a carefully planned and cheerfully executed family holiday in the list of 'to do' things this year? We can learn from Virat Kohli in this regard. He decided to take paternity leave early in 2020 should the time of his wife Anushka's delivery come even

during an important Cricket tour!

THE YEAR OF SIN-BEATING

What are pointers in God's Word when it comes to New Year resolutions? The New year should be a year of Satan-beating! The God-given New Year should be a year when we win over Satan! I get the inspiration to form this resolution from the book of Esther. Here, we read the following: “Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all the provinces of King Xerxes, both near and far, to establish 'among them an annual 'celebration "on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month 'of Adar as the days on which the Jews gained rest from their enemies and the month in which their sorrow turned to joy and their mourning into a holiday” (Esther 9:20-22). There was an enemy of the Jews. His name was Haman. Haman tried to harm the Jews, because of his negative experience with one Jew – Mordecai. But the enemy of the Jews, Haman hung in the nearly 23-meter-high gallows, he prepared for Mordecai (Esther 7:9). God turned the tables on the behalf of the Jews, the apples of his eyes (Duet. 32:10; Zech. 2:8). This event eventually led to the passing of this decree where “letters the king (of Persia) permitted the Jews in each and every city the right to assemble and defend

themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province hostile to them, including women and children, and to plunder their possessions” (Esther 8:11). “Each and every year” this celebration of God-orchestrated miracle victory over their enemies was done among the Jews (Esther 9:24-27).

Our primary enemy is Satan. We sometimes think a certain individual is our enemy. We do not think of Satan who is perhaps behind that individual, instigating that individual to act against us and discourage us (see Math. 16:23). Satan often uses human instruments to work against us. Our main agenda in the New Year that God has graciously added to our lives, should be to win over Satan. Satan's main agenda is this: to make us sin! So, our New Year resolutions should involve a plan and program to have victory over sin! In the New Year we must, enabled by the Spirit of God, seek to win over the “sin that so easily entangles” – the sin that we often feel like repeating, be it porn-watching or outbursts of anger or whatever (Heb. 12:1). Our New Year may not be pain-free, but it can be porn-free! Our New year may not be agony-free, but it can be anger-free (I am talking about sinful anger here). So, in the New Year, we need to win over

sin. This can be done when we have an ongoing cooperation with the Spirit of God who enables us to put to death the misdeeds of the body (Romans 8:13).

What should be our priorities in the New Year? The book of Leviticus gives us another clue. If a well-off foreigner who lived in Israel hired a slave from Israel, the people of Israel needed to pay money to the foreigner to have him released, even if the year of Jubilee when all slaves would be eligible for a free release was still far away. Why? God's children cannot be slaves year after year. This, I understand from my reading of Leviticus 25:47-53.

We must get involved in the work of releasing people from bondage to sin through our giving of our time, talents, treasures and truth. We must make this task a priority in the New Year that God has graciously added to our lives.

What I have talked about in this

essay should be our priorities, year after year! Do a review at the end of the day/week/month/year as to how much time you have given to the activities that God's Word is saying that we must make as our priority "year after year".



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*"I know the plans I have in mind for you, declares the Lord; they are plans for peace, not disaster, to give you a future filled with hope."
— Jeremiah 29:11*



20-20 VISION ISN'T ENOUGH

Rev. Kuruvilla Chandy

It is commonly thought that a person with 20-20 vision has perfect eyesight. A person with 20-20 vision can see things clearly when they are standing 20 feet away from what they are looking at.

At the beginning of 2020, most of us thought that it was going to be a good year. We saw 20-20 visions for the year. Though Covid-19 was first identified in December 2019 in China, it was only a whole month later that it surfaced in India. By the end of the year, 1,465,144 had died of whom 137,621 were from India.

The deadliest pandemic recorded in human history was the Black Death plague that ravaged Europe and Asia (1347-53). According to one estimate it killed about 200 million people, though the conservative estimate is 50 million. Almost 50% of the population of Europe died due to the disease.

AIDS has killed about 36 million, but over a period of 40 years. from 1980 to the present.

The worst pandemic of the last century was the Spanish Flu, which broke out as the First World War was ending. Almost a third of the global population was affected. An estimated 50-100 million people died. India was one of the worst affected, losing about 17 to 18 million people, approximately 6% of its population.

That was almost a hundred years ago. That means that today there is no one who can remember anything like a pandemic. It's got us worried.

Our 20-20 Experience

As 2020 ends, there is news that vaccines have been developed against Covid-19, and so we think it's going to be better in 2021. At least, we hope so. But didn't we feel

that 2020 would be better than 2019, and don't we, at the beginning of every year, wish that it will be better than the previous year?

In 2020, most people were under a sort of “house arrest”. Children suffered because they had to attend classes on-line. Some didn't have the means to do that and some who had the facilities didn't like it because they couldn't understand stuff and couldn't interact with peers.

Many lost their means of livelihood and some of those who were asked to work from home found it difficult to work in isolation. They missed the interaction and camaraderie of working alongside others. Some unscrupulous and unkind employers took advantage of the situation to cut salaries and/or allowances under one pretext or the other.

Some who were sick wouldn't seek treatment because they were afraid they would catch catching Covid-19 at clinics and hospitals. Some grew worse and died.

Those who love to travel for pleasure were unable to do so. Grandchildren have not been able to see their grandparents and grandparents their grandchildren. Those who love adventure holidays are bored at home.

Believers have not been able to attend worship services in person. Some have adjusted to on-line

services. Who knows, but they may demand that on-line services be continued so that they can lounge at home in their pyjamas while just viewing services without further involvement? The habit of church attendance has been broken. Can it be repaired - completely? Maybe, but first the habit of not attending will have to be broken, and then it will take time and multiple repetitions for the habit of attending church to be reconstructed.

Backward or Forward?

So here we are at the beginning of the year hoping that life will go back to what it was before the pandemic hit the world. Earlier, we always wanted to go forward. Now, we want to go backward to pre-2020 conditions. Both our earlier desires to go forward and our new mood of wanting to back manifest that it is generally our belief that “time will heal”. No, time itself doesn't heal. Time doesn't have the power to do that.

Who can tell whether this pandemic will end soon and life will go back to what it was like earlier? The Bible teaches that the world is in a “fallen state”. That means that things are not as they were created and not as they were meant to be. When God looked around at the world after each phase of creation He observed that it was all good ([Gen. 1: 4, 9,12, 18, 21, 25, 31](#)). [But when humans, the only creatures made in God's likeness \(vv.27-28\), broke fellowship with](#)

Him by departing from His mandate for living, they reaped the consequences of that rebellion. The world began to malfunction (3:17-19), just like any gadget malfunctions when we don't follow the manufacturer's advice. Paradise was lost, and humankind has never been able to regain the lost paradise. We gain some and we lose some, and that goes on and on.

Waiting for Redemption

Scripture describes the present fallen state of the world as one of groaning, waiting for redemption (Rom. 8:19-22). This is what God promised to the waiting world:

See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be
remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice for ever
in what I will create...(Isa.
65:17-18).

This promise of God is based on His covenant with His people. In the context of that covenant, God said further:

I will rejoice...
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.
'Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few
days,
or an old man who does not live
out his years...
They will build houses and dwell in
them;
they will plant vineyards and eat

their fruit.
No longer will they build houses
and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.
For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.
They will not labour in vain,
nor will they bear children
doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by
the Lord,
they and their descendants with
them.
Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I
will hear.
The wolf and the lamb will feed
together,
and the lion will eat straw like
the ox,
and dust will be the serpent's
food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,'
says the Lord (vv.19-25).

The day when wolves will lie down with lambs has not yet arrived and will come only when the Lord's kingdom will be established on earth. However, we can still live in that hope.

Let's Get Married

A covenant is not like a legal contract. It's a two-way relationship of intimacy, involvement and interaction. That is why the Old Testament affirms that God is married to His people (54:5), and

[when they break covenant with Him, it is equated with committing adultery \(Ezek. 16:15-34\).](#)

The New Testament reaffirms that, by saying that Christ is married to His people gathered (ecclesia) in His Name ([Eph. 5:22-32](#)).

That was all in biblical times. What about today? Are we in this kind of intimate relationship with God? A marriage is a two-way relationship. If we want God to care for us, we will need to show we want that care in our lives by reciprocating in relationship.

Traditionally, when people get married, they say to each other, "I, ____, take thee, ____, to be my wedded husband/wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge thee my faith [or] pledge myself to you." That is what total commitment is like.

Changing circumstances don't destroy such commitment. There is a "come wind, come weather", "through thick and thin", "through all the ups and downs" attitude and stance that is brought into the relationship. Thus, when Daniel's three friends faced trial by fire, they told the king that they would indeed put their lives in God's hands. They said that they knew that God had the

power to save them, but went on to say that even if He sovereignly chooses not to save them from the fire, they would not give in to the king's threats, and bow to his will, because they had already chosen God's will for their lives ([Dan. 3:16-18](#)).

God loved us first ([1 Jn. 4:10, 19](#)). [For His part, God has already affirmed that He is in an intimate relationship with those who belong to Him. What God has affirmed, needs to be affirmed by us in turn. That is how it is in a marriage. Both parties say the vows of commitment to each other. One of the parties cannot arbitrarily leave the vows unsaid. What God has said to us, we need to say back to Him.](#)

Better with Jesus

Like everyone else in the world, I too would like things to return to pre-2020 conditions. I want to be able to dine out, holiday with family and friends, and most of all worship in fellowship with believers. On the other hand, I see that the groaning of the world is a precursor to the coming redemption – the Second Coming of Christ. Dare I say, "Not now, Lord"?

But the 20-20 vision is not perfect after all, and it just isn't enough for the future. We need to look beyond all this and seek a closer relationship with the Lord – come what may.

2021 may be better than 2020 – or, it

may not be better. Let's manifest the courage manifested by Daniel's friends and say: Who cares what happens? I don't care. That is just not the point of my life. Mine is to

belong to God and to put my life in His powerful, caring, kind hands.

As Paul said, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

The Apostle Paul was one who experienced many troubles. Through all of them, he learnt precious lessons that he shared with fellow-believers ([Rom. 8:28-39](#)):

- In every situation, God is working for our good
- God gave us Jesus – and so He is not going to withhold any blessing from us.
- We're not condemned. Jesus is praying for us
- Nothing can separate us from the Lord's love for us – that's what is important
- We are not defeated. We are conquerors through Christ Jesus because of His love

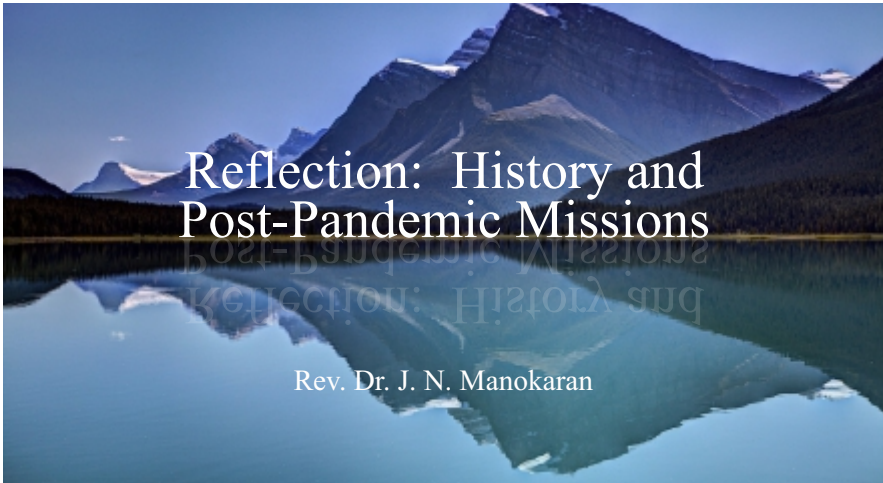
With Jesus, 2021 will be better: just because He will be there for us.



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Reflection: History and Post-Pandemic Missions

Rev. Dr. J. N. Manokaran

God is continuously working in the world. God's purpose could never be defeated. The Truth is God is the Sovereign authority and fulfils His Mission – Mission Dei – according to his own's timetable. Disruptions are from the perspective of humans are not hindrances for God. In the midst of all disruptions God's work is unravelled.

God's Work

Harvest is always ripe and ready for harvest. (John 4:35) Lord of Harvest listens to prayers and send 'labourers' to harvest. Of course, there are several kinds of labourers for the mission. First, Thought Leaders who are thinkers, creators, perceive in mind a vision to fulfil the Great Commission. Second, Movement Leaders who are moved by 'thought leaders' and receive a new vision to

do something. They are pioneers moving into uncharted areas and building new structures. Third, Institutional Leaders who manage structures, create and establish institutions to bring transformation. Yes, God raises a great army of leaders who are lights in the world.

Great Century

KS Latourette, a great church/mission historian writes: **The “Great Century” of Missions, 1792-1910**” In His analysis: “During that period, which is roughly coterminous with the nineteenth century, more new Christians emerged from a wider number of new people groups than at any previous time in the history of the church. Never before had so many Christians moved to so many vast and remote parts of the Globe

and communicated the gospel across so many cultural boundaries.”¹ The gospel transformed individuals, families, communities, people groups and nations.

Kenneth Scott Latourette also wrote: “Christianity has been the means of reducing more languages to writing than have all other factors combined. It has created more schools, more theories of education, and more systems than has any other one force. More than any other power in history, it has impelled men to fight suffering, whether that suffering has come from disease, war or natural disasters. It has built thousands of hospitals, inspired the emergence of the nursing and medical professions, and furthered movement for public health and the relief and prevention of famine.”²

These people of God brought in a new way of thinking, innovative way of doing things and built a new global civilization. It happened by introduction of modern education, health services, transport, communication and administration.

Great disruption

Missionaries were glad that they are bringing great changes around the world. Hence, they planned a global missionary conference. In 1910, Edinburgh Missionary Conference

was held in Scotland. Don Fanning writes: “William Carey envisioned a global missionary conference which began with the first all-India Missionary conference in 1872 with 136 participants. In 1910 it was realized: World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, Scotland, with 1200 representatives present.”³ There was a great enthusiasm that the world would be reached, and Great Commission task completed. However, no one predicted: World War I (1914-1918) and World War II (1939-1945) that would ruthlessly hinder the progress of missions.

Don Fanning writes: “Optimism was crushed after the holocaust of WWII. The eschatological motivation during the 19th century was often a post-millennial hope that evangelism would bring in the kingdom. After WWII, the major base of missions shifted to the US since most of the economy, resources, man-power and authority of the European powers were destroyed by the war.”⁴

There were many who became pessimistic and did not know how to respond as world wars ruined the world. Will the church be able to continue the mission? Should the church abandon the mission? God was not defeated.

Great Decades

In the New context: Another Great 70 Years: Approximately 1950-2020. Protestant Missions got re-ignited. Prominent missions God used were: Operation Mobilization (Founder: George Verwer), Campus Crusade for Christ (Bill Bright), Youth With A Mission (Loren Cunningham) and Every Home Crusade (Founders: John McAlister and Dick Eastman). All the four agencies mobilized young people unlike older days when a missionary needed to know Hebrew, Greek and theologically trained; with short trainings or trainings on job. Most of the newer missions focussed on making disciples and planting churches and did not develop infrastructure intensive ministries like education and medical missions. Huge literature mobilization to many. Four Spiritual Laws making a great impact. Jesus Film was a powerful tool seen by millions of people as movie, then as video tapes, CDs and digital versions. Don Fanning writes: "The utilization of radio, aviation, Bible correspondence, gospel recordings, cassettes, films, Theological Education by Extension (TEE), printing press and other technologies helped expand the opportunities to multiply each missionary many times."

Like previous era, there were movements like AD 2000; AD 2020 movements that envisaged the completion of Great Commission. Church Growth Movement, 4/14 Window. 10/40 Window, Prayer movements, Urban movements, Business as Mission movements, Movement Days, Networks...etc.

No one predicted or expected a Pandemic on a global scale. Again, the church was caught by surprise.

Great Global Disruption

This Pandemic (2020) may continue for few more months if not years, its impact certainly for few more months. This has affected the global economy, thousands have lost their jobs, many people have died, mental illness has gripped many. Vaccine seems to be only hope. However, there is no guaranteed timetable for that to be available.

Great Future

What would be the next phase of missions? God will certainly raise visionaries, thought leaders, movement leaders and executioners. His purpose will not be hindered or defeated.

God's Promise

People of faith must go out pioneer, explore and excel in new areas creating new entities. Lord promised

Moses and Joshua: “Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses.” (Deuteronomy 11:24, Joshua 1:3). Yes, missionaries in every era continuously did that. In the previous eras, 'gospel footprints' in the form of schools, colleges, hospitals, bibles in vernacular languages, churches in numerous locations are evident.

Digital footprints and gospel footprints

The new context of the world is 'Information Era.' Digitalization has changed the world dramatically. Smart phone technology has great reach that a considerable percentage of population have access to digital information. The penetration varies from country to country. As smart phones become cheaper and data available in all nooks and corners of the world, all people would have access to the virtual digital world. 'Digital footprint' refers to one's unique set of traceable digital activities. In the new digital world, gospel footprints should reach all digital devices like smart phones and laptops.

New frontier for mission is leaving 'digital footprints' to possess the Promise of God and fulfil the Great Commission.

Democratic Digital Platforms

There are many digital platforms like: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Zoom...etc. How can these be used for multiple facets of ministries like evangelism, disciple making, leadership development, mentoring, teaching, training, equipping...etc?

We have to pray for God to raise thought leaders, movement leaders and executioners for His Mission.



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The Holy Spirit: Sent from Heaven

(1 Peter 1:12)

G. The fruit of the Holy Spirit (2)

Rev. Richard Masih



Introduction-

The fruit of the Holy Spirit is in contrast with the works of the flesh. “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these” (Galatians 5:19-21). On the one hand, there is the flesh (sinful nature). On the other hand, there is the Spirit. On the one hand, there are the works (produced by ourselves). On the other hand, there are the fruit (produced by the Holy Spirit). The difference between a carnal man and spiritual man is this- in carnal man the works of the flesh are in plenty. A spiritual man, is laden with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This is a very simple way to

examine ourselves, whether we are carnal Christians or spiritual Christians. Our Lord said, “You will recognize them by their fruit” (Matthew 7:16). There are nine fruit of the Holy Spirit given in Galatians 5:22,23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” So far we have seen four of them- 1. Love, 2. Joy, 3. Peace and 4. Patience. We proceed further now-

5. Kindness.

Kindness is the quality of being soft, tender, gentle, being loving, forgiving, helping, undemanding, etc. Opposite to kindness is the hardness of heart. Let me give you some examples of hard people in the Bible. The first name that comes to

mind is Pharaoh of Egypt. He was a hard, unfeeling and insensitive man. He and his people could not be moved by the pathetic plight, sighing and groaning of the Israelites (Exodus 1:11-14; 3:7,9). The second is the prostitute which demanded that the living child should be cut in two and given to both of them- half each (1Kings 3:26b). The third is the crowd which was ready to stone the woman caught red-handed in adultery (John 8:3). The fourth is the servant whose large amount of debt was cancelled but who wasn't willing to wait for the late payment of debt by his fellow servant (Matthew 18:28-30). The fifth is the crowd which was baying for the blood of our Lord (Matthew 27:22-23) and Apostle Paul (Acts 21:36). I am sure, the examples can be multiplied.

Our God is a kind God. The Bible talks of the kindness and the severity of God. Yes, he is kind, and he is severe also. So we can't take advantage of the kindness of God and try to fool with him. Romans 2:4 says, "Or do you despise the riches of his kindness, restraint and patience, not recognizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance" (Christian Standard Bible- CSB). If God is giving us a long rope, it is because he wants us to come to repentance and faith. But if

we continue to despise his kindness, his kindness will turn into severity. Romans 11:22 says, "Therefore, consider God's kindness and severity: severity to those who have fallen, but God's kindness towards you who remain in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off."

In Luke 13:1, our Lord talks about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their own sacrifices. Our Lord raises this question to those who had come and reported to him, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way?" Then he goes on to give warning, "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (v.3). He gives them another example and its inherent warning, "Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (vs.4,5). At present, throughout the world there is Corona Pandemic. People are living in fear and uncertainty, unemployment and poverty. There are those who have experienced infection and have tested positive. Lakhs of people have died. We should ask ourselves this question, those who have suffered and died were they worse sinners

than us?” If we don't repent we too will suffer and die. If not with Corona virus, then some other virus! Certainly under God's judgment. Beware.

6. Goodness.

The Psalmist celebrates God's goodness in Psalm 73:1, “Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.” His goodness is seen in the fact that he loved us when we were unlovely and ungodly. Romans 5:6-8, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God's goodness is seen in us that Christ died for us when we were ungodly and still sinners. Ezekiel describes God's goodness in a graphic way in his book in 16:6,9. God says there, “And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I said to you in your blood, 'Live!'...Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil....” His goodness is seen in forgiving us our unfaithfulness and rebellion. It says in Psalm 78:40 about the Israelites grieving God, “How often they

rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert!”

Psalm 78:8 says, “and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast (loyal- CSB), whose spirit was not faithful to God.’ Then again in v.37 of the same Psalm, “Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant.” God's goodness is seen in his compassion towards them, “Yet he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath.” Read further their inequity and God's goodness to them, “He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again. How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! They tested God again and again and provoked the Holy One of Israel” (vs.38-40). We aren't much better than them. Yet God has been good to us also. We should be the same to others.

7. Faithfulness.

'God is faithful' says 1Corinthians 1:9 Cf. 7:25; 10:13; 2Corinthians 1:18; 1Thessalonians 5:24; 2Thessalonians 3:3; Hebrews

10:23). He is faithful in very many ways. Cf. above verses. He remains faithful even when we are faithless (2Timothy 2:13). He is faithful in his promises. He is faithful in his care and compassion towards us. He does not change his mind. He keeps his promises. Faithfulness means being trustworthy, dependable, reliable, etc. So often, we are unfaithful to God and to our fellow human beings. Because of this character-flaw in us, people find it difficult to trust us and to take us at our words. In that case, we have lost our testimony and ministry, and earned a bad name.

8. Gentleness.

Our Lord was gentle. He said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). He never put a heavy load on others. He was very much unlike the lawyers (experts in the law) who would put a heavy load on others and would not give a helping hand even with their fingers. We read in Luke 11:46, “Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.”

Our Lord's gentleness is affirmed in Matthew 21:5 also, “Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble (gentle-CSB), and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'” Gentleness should be reflected on our face, in our voice and in our behavior with people. We should be gentle with our spouse, siblings at home, and weaklings in the society.

9. Self-control.

The ninth fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control. The word of God says that “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control (2Timothy 1:9). Every child of God, full of the Holy Spirit, keeps his tongue (words) and temper (anger) under his self-control. He is not easily provoked. The word of God says, “The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult” (Proverbs 12:16). Similarly, “A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back” (Proverbs 29:11). A Spirit filled person keeps his tongue and temper under control. He does not say whatever comes in his mouth. He doesn't allow dirty words to come out of his mouth because that is one thing, among many, what God forbids. Ephesians 4:29 says, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for

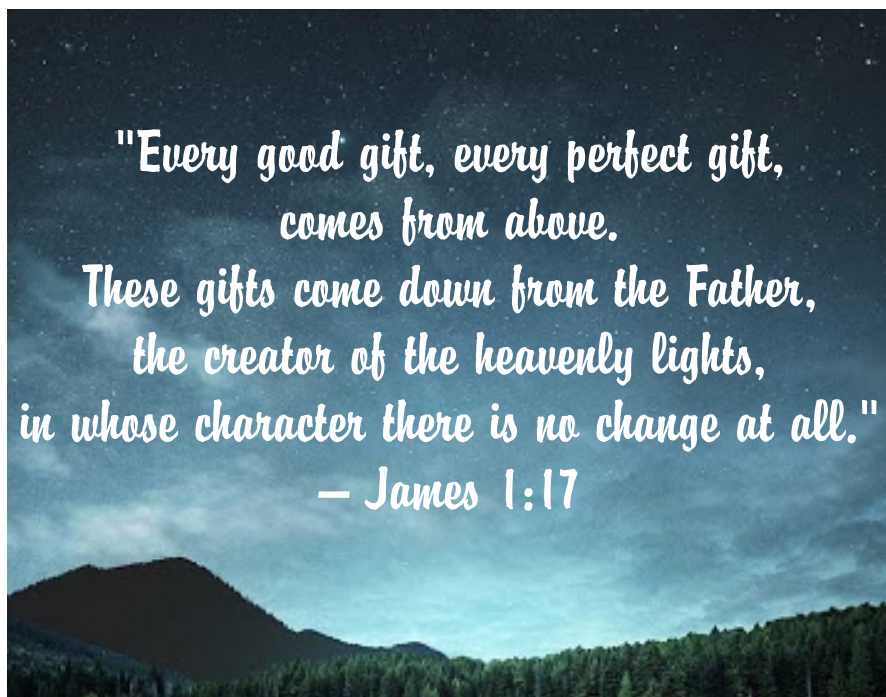
building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” Further, “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking.” A Spirit filled person keeps himself and all his habits under his control. Apostle Paul had this to say, “But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1Corinthians 9:27).

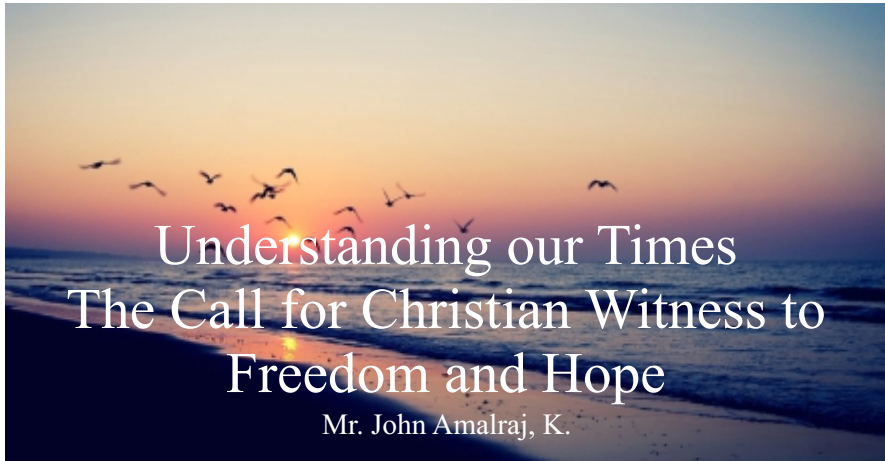
Let all these nine fruit of the Holy Spirit which are reflected in the nature and character of God and our Lord Jesus Christ be reflected in us also in ever increasing manner. Amen.



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Abstract: This article discusses how Christians in India can witness by proclaiming freedom to the people who are marginalized and face an uncertain future by focusing on mobilizing the whole church to re-imagine new ways of witnessing.

As the year 2020 draws to a close, there seems to be light at the end of the dark tunnel. The year 2020 will long be remembered as the year of the pandemic in this new millennium which abruptly ceased 'normal' life for millions of people as the government imposed strict lockdown. Millions of people lost 'hope' for the future. The hope for a return to 'normal' life seems to be returning as governments are ready to roll out mass vaccination to control the epidemic. It is in this context, we need to understand the times and how as Christians we can witness the freedom in Christ and the hope within us.

Prophets of the Old Testament like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk have cried out "How long?" (Is 6:11, Jer 47:6; Hab 1:2). It is a prayer on the lips of the millions who are suffering. There are three images of the year 2020 that will remain. First, thousands of women sitting in protest to the amendments of the citizenship laws in many cities expressing their anguish. Second, thousands of migrant workers walking back home to their villages amidst the lockdown with no hope for their future. Third, thousands of farmers marching to the capital city in protest of the new agriculture laws that take away their hope. The pandemic fear and the response of the governments to enforce a strict lockdown has deprived people of their freedom. Political leaders, rulers, and bureaucrats have assumed authority beyond their legitimacy to advance their interests rather than do good to the public.

Proclaiming Freedom as Christian Witness:

The present-day context in India calls for Christians to proclaim the Good news of 'freedom'. The Gospel is about freedom, oneness, bridges, hope, and shalom. Jesus' first public words as recorded by Apostle Luke, was a reading from the scripture and presumably a one-sentence exposition in the synagogue (*Bosch, Transforming, 101*). The selected scripture from prophet Isaiah as recorded by Luke is now known as Jesus' Nazareth manifesto that in its essence is a proclamation of freedom as the Gospel (Lk 4:18-19, Is 61:1-2a, 58:6f). We often ignore the plight of millions of Indians who are pushed to the margins, without a voice, or power to make choices. These marginalized people live without hope in broken families and warring communities. It is not uncommon to see children and women on the streets in our cities who often have no freedom of choice over what they eat, what they wear, where they live, and their future. In a broken and oppressed world of the poor and exploited, we witness those who are abused by others and are held in bondage through evil systems and barriers. Amartya Sen, the Nobel Laureate and economist gave a clarion call during the end of the twentieth century that freedom is the goal, principal, and means for human development (*Sen, Development, xii*). This echoes the

Christian understanding of holistic mission and the calling for Christians to proclaim freedom as the Good News. 'Freedom' is very close to our theological understanding of the image of God (*Myers, Walking, 31*). Often our discussions on freedom are limited to colonial rule, slavery, free speech, religion, trade, etc., and in a spiritual sense to 'freedom' from sin. We seldom extend our conversation to issues that affect people who live in the margins of our society without any freedom or basic human rights. Proclaiming the offer of freedom from sin is a half-truth. When we invite Jesus into our lives, He not only offers freedom from our sinful past but proclaims freedom from all our oppressors.

Proclaiming freedom as part of our Christian witness is the mission of God as it challenges that which is seen as not affirming and denying life in all its fullness (Mombo, "Fourfold" 40 & 43). We are called to challenge the inequalities, exploitation, and power structures that bind people in poverty and deprivation as we fulfill our prophetic role. The initiative for inviting us to witness is with the people around us, but as Christians, we are responsible for witnessing and pointing to the Good News in our day-to-day life. Our changed lifestyle and relationships can lead people around us to transformation.

Christian Witness and the Whole Church:

Urban Christians in India, living as part of the middle class are often indifferent to the daily struggles of common people living in the margins of our community and miss the opportunities to witness. We rightfully assume that we are privileged to be the children of God – chosen and blessed like the people of Israel. Bishop Leslie Newbigin wrote “Through the repeated hammer blows of defeat, destruction, and deportation, interpreted by the faithful prophets, Israel has to learn that election is not for comfort and security but for suffering and humiliation” (*Newbigin, The Open Secret, 73*). We are chosen to be a channel of blessing to others and not to become comfortable in the blessings we have received. We are called to move out of our comfort zones within the four walls of our church buildings and engage our neighbours. Our Christian witness must focus on the character and activity of the triune God whom we worship, whose Son Jesus is the messiah and whose Spirit through His presence gives freedom and integral to who we are and what we believe (*Myers, Walking, 309, 316 & 351*).

We witnessed glimpses of hope as local churches across our nation responded positively to provide relief to the migrant workers and the poor in the community during the

lockdown. More than the Christian development agencies and missions, it was the young people in our churches who organized a local response to the suffering migrant workers that stands out as our hope for the future. We do have a problem with mobilizing the local churches to witness. A missional congregation must interpret the teachings of the word of God to the local context to fulfill her calling (*Newbigin, The Gospel, 227-233*). Newbigin suggests six characteristics of a local church: a community of praise and thanksgiving, the community of truth, a community concerned for its neighborhood, a community where its members are trained and equipped for exercising its priesthood in the world, a community of mutual responsibility and finally, a community of hope. To achieve this vision, we need to break down the hierarchical leadership styles and functions of pastors, evangelists and mission workers and equip every congregation member to engage from the frontlines (*Bosch, Transforming, 478-485*).

The recent measures of the government to increase its scrutiny over the thousands of mission organizations and their activities by tightening the legal provisions as to how voluntary organizations receive donations and conduct their affairs is a way to restrict organized mission work. We are now called to re-imagine our Christian witness to

become organic within the local church context and reach out to the neighbourhood. Our Christian witness can no longer follow the same traditions and methods of the last few centuries. Organizations and institutions should not be made as historic monuments and become our objects of idol worship. A creative way of serving people around is what is expected of Christians.

The new year 2021 is a new beginning for many of us as we continue learning to navigate the limitations imposed due to the pandemic and the restrictions enforced on our freedom. God's answer to the cry of the prophet "How long?" was that God was working on something that even if it was explained we will not be able to understand or believe. The purpose of God's work is that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Hab 1:6; 2:14). The scripture encourages us to cast our hope like

an anchor on Christ Jesus who has gone before us to heaven. This 'hope' we have as an anchor for our soul, a hope both sure and steadfast. (Heb 6:19-20). We are called to live out this 'hope' as a witness among a hopeless generation and proclaim 'freedom' to the marginalized. Are we willing to witness in creative ways in times as challenging as we face today?



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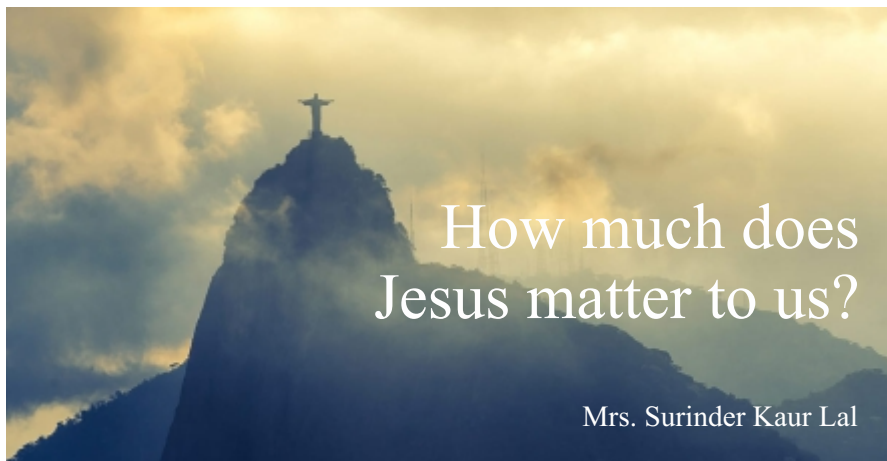
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How much does Jesus matter to us?

Mrs. Surinder Kaur Lal

Many Christians, including many who are serving in Christian ministry, seem to be struggling to adjust God in their busy schedules. Perhaps, we tend to think that whatever work we are doing as unto the Lord, counts as some sort of fellowship with Him. We often get so busy working for the Lord that we begin to give a higher place to the work we do, than God Himself. Perhaps, we should stop to think whether God is pleased about our adjustments and the place we give Him?

It was just recently that God convicted me on this count and checked me on my priorities. It is impossible to have two number-one priorities in life. Matthew 6:24 says, “You cannot serve both God and Money.” Money might not

necessarily be a competitor in every case; other things like ministry, Facebook, WhatsApp, our spouse, children, parents etc. can side-line God and take a higher place in our lives.

God taught me that He should not be given the 'most important' place in our day-to-day activities, but that He should get 'all' the place. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” [Mark 12:30]. He is a God who does not like to have second place in our lives. When we give our all to Him, are we left with anything? No! And that is exactly what God expects from us. To give ourselves 100% to Him and to have Him 100% into our lives. Jesus told Martha that only one thing is needed, and that

Mary had chosen what was better.

In the busy world of today, how much time do we have for God? Are we merely adjusting Him in our daily schedules and are content about doing our bit? Should it not be the other way round? Should we not be adjusting our daily schedules around God?

We may wonder, if we spend all our time with God, who is going to do the more 'practical' work? Does this thought trouble us? Jesus promises to take care of the rest when in Matthew 6:33 He says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you."

There is something more wonderful that happens when we give our 'all' to Jesus. He is not a God who loves to keep us subjugated to Himself, but when we truly surrender to Him and find absolute joy in abiding in Him, He blesses us. He makes us to live to our full potential, as only He can. We are able to do the same work - be it office work or household chores, far more efficiently, smoothly and in perfect peace. We will find ourselves more fruitful. "...every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." [John 15:2b].

The Bible is full of God's promises for the one who loves God. God's promise of rescue, protection, answering back the calls for help, being present when trouble comes, His promise of deliverance and He does not stop here, He goes on to say that He will honour us, give us a long life on earth and eternal life after we are gone.

"Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;

I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

He will call on me, and I will answer him;

I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.

With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation." [Psalm 91:14-16 NIV]

What is interesting is that when we have surrendered our all to him and are ONE with Christ, ["...as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us." John 17:21b NKJV], it will no longer matter to us whether we live or we die, because we would know that if we live, it is for Christ and if we die, we will see the Lord face-to-face.

[Philippian 1:21 NIV “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”].

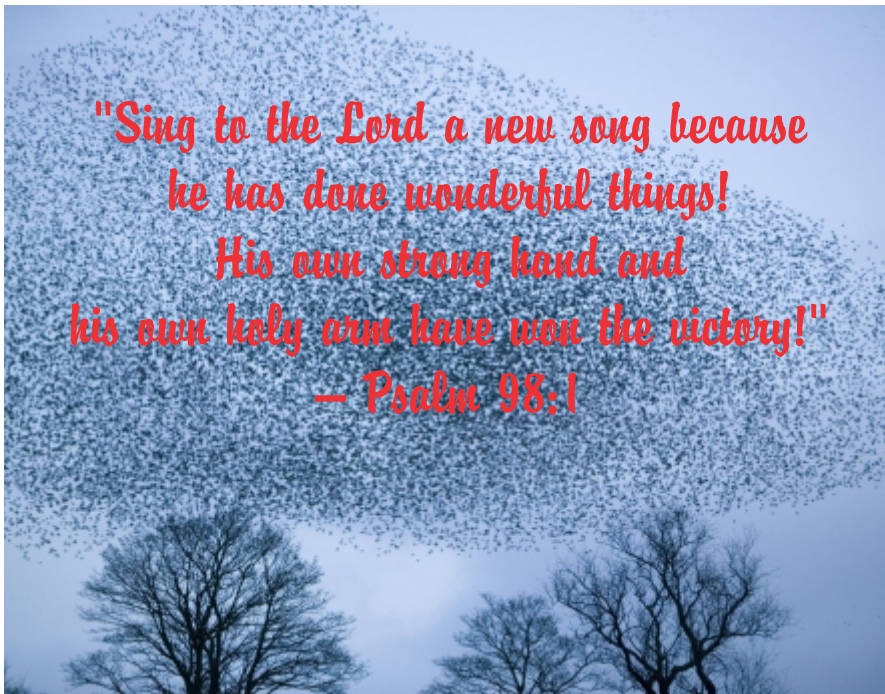
Not only death or life, but riches or poverty too will not matter, for God's grace and His fellowship would be constant and every situation turns out to be for our gain because of the transformation in our attitude and in the way we see and perceive things. That is to live in surrender and to walk in victory at the same time and it is beautiful.

“In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success.” [Proverbs 3:6]



Mrs. Surinder Kaur Lal

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





MAY I NEVER BOAST EXCEPT IN THE CROSS OF JESUS

Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj

Today many do not take offence to the Cross, though they may belong to another faith. Many wear it around their neck in spite of not knowing the real significance of it. It was not so during those days in the Roman/Palestinian context. The cross was one of the most degraded and debased symbols imaginable. Perceived as an instrument of torture and death, it was considered to be utterly shameful, vile and vulgar, and the cruellest and the most dishonourable form of death.

What made the apostle Paul to emphatically say and be convinced that he will never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14)? He was not an ordinary person. He was a blue blooded Hebrew, belonging to an elite community among the Jews. He was a great scholar both in Hebrew and Greek, studied under a highly

learned man, knew every detail of the precepts of his religion and followed them in detail, and a highly respected person among his people. To such a man, what was shame to the world had become the glory of God. Why?

I. Power Of God

The message of the Cross of Christ is the power of God unto salvation (1 Cor. 1:18). The God-incarnate was given the name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). Jesus said that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world (Jn. 3:17). Our Saviour came into the world to save us from the bondage of sin and give us life eternal.

Look Ephesians 2:1-10. Without Christ, you and I are actually

spiritually dead. The ungenerate man, because of his sin and wickedness, is spiritually dead. He follows the ways of the evil one, and gratifies the cravings of his sinful nature and by nature is an object of the wrath of God. What he needs is life. Only God can give him life. That life is conveyed only in the Cross of Christ. V.5 "He made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with Him, and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." He does it because He loves us and showers us with His immeasurable riches of His grace in Christ. V 8 "For by His grace you have been saved through faith-and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-not by works, so that no one can boast." And the purpose is, V. 10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared for us in advance for us to do."

II. Reconciliation with God

The message of the Cross of Christ is the access to Reconciliation in Him. "For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him (Christ), and through Him to reconcile all things whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood shed on the cross. Once

you were alienated from God and enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now, He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight" (Col. 1:19 - 22).

Today, there are many people living in alienation from God, living in hostility to Him and rebellious against Him, due to various reasons. Their lives are in contradiction to His will and purpose. One such person was Velma, sexually abused when she was a child. Her bitterness and anger led to be a drug addict and rebellious against God. She was convicted of murdering her mother and her boyfriend, and thrown in prison. As she was waiting for her execution, the Spirit of God touched her and she got reconciled with God through Christ. She totally submitted herself to her heavenly Father. As a result, her life was fully transformed and became a great influence in bringing many prisoners to the feet of Christ.

III. Reconciliation with One another

God has reconciled us to be reconcilers. The Word of God makes it clear that, "Christ Himself is our peace, who has made the two (Jews and Gentiles) one and has destroyed

the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh, the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility” (Eph. 2: 14 -16).

Today, as we look around, reconciliation is needed in many situations at various levels. There is a need for it in families, in the churches, and between communities and nations. God has given us the message and ministry of reconciliation, and has made us His ambassadors to live by it and proclaim it. Whatever our calling and ministry may be, we are primarily reconcilers.

IV. Authentic Witness

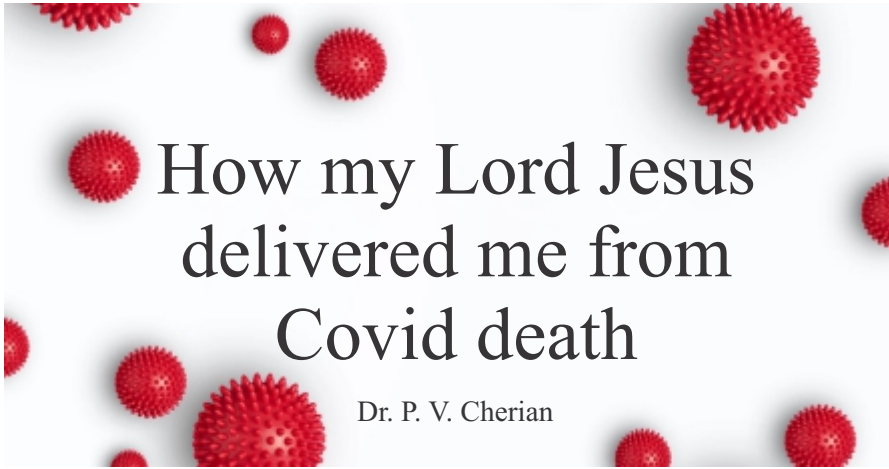
The message of the Cross of Christ causes us to be His authentic witnesses. Never take the grace of God for granted. His grace is not an excuse for sinning. THE GRACE OF God is costly, manifested on the cross of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Pastor killed by Hitler, in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, says, “Cheap grace is the grace we bestow upon

ourselves... It is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without discipline, communion without confession.... Grace is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives man the only true life.”

The message of the Cross of Jesus Christ empowers each one of us with His salvation; enables us to be in reconciliation with Him, and through Him with our fellow human beings, and equips us to live a life of authenticity, with the ultimate goal of spreading His Kingdom everywhere. Therefore, let our boasting-our glory-be in the Cross of Christ!



Rev. Dr. Francis Sunderaraj
*former General Secretary,
Evangelical Fellowship of India and
Asia Evangelical Alliance*



How my Lord Jesus delivered me from Covid death

Dr. P. V. Cherian

To introduce myself, I am now 69 years old, having obeyed & followed my Lord since my youth. He helped me to become a missionary eye surgeon, helping many poor under-privileged people to restore their precious eyesight in various rural areas of India. Recently, we started residing in Chennai city since past 15 years in order to care for one son, who could not remain alone by himself. In Chennai, our Lord helped us to get jobs in private hospitals. Thus, until 19th September 2020, I was working in a private hospital. I was taking all necessary precautions to protect myself from Covid infection.

I took Paracetamol for headache and took rest on September 21st for the whole day, as I was feeling very tired. On 22nd morning, my co-

brother-in-law (Mr. Binu Thomas) took me to KMC for Covid testing and I returned back home safely soon. By evening, the result was given; I was declared Covid positive. So, I informed my praying friends in Chennai EMFI about this news. They started praying for me at once and one Dr. Mrs. Kalavathy Moses informed me that she will take full responsibility for my medical treatment and home quarantine. [She is working as a senior Critical care consultant, SIMS hospital, Vadapalani, Chennai.] She started me on the required medication and we got my Oxygen saturation monitored at home with a Pulse Oximeter. By 27th, my Oxygen saturation was reducing to 93% in supine and rising to 96% in prone position on the bed. So, Dr. Kalavathy Moses advised me to get

admitted in any good hospital for Oxygen support.

Dr. Justin Paul, Cardiologist, at RGGGH helped me to proceed straight there to stay in a single room...thanking the Lord our Master for this best arrangement, as they also have good dietary arrangements totally free of any cost.

On 28-09-2020, I was taken to KMC for Blood tests and Chest CT scan...with the help of our friend Dr. Mrs. Mary Nirmala, [Asst. Professor, ENT] there. Next, on 29th, I was admitted in RGGGH under Dr. Rajendran [who also happened to be well known to my wife Sarah, as he is a visiting physician at St. Antony's Hospital, Madhavaram.] This was an unexpected surprise kept hidden by our faithfully caring God, until I got admitted. On 30th morning, Dr. Rajendran started continuous non - invasive Oxygen support for me. Also, he instructed me never to step outside that single room, as my personal Urinal pot and Bedpan for passing stools would be provided inside the room itself. 24 x 7 monitoring service was arranged for me by junior doctors, nurses and sweepers. Best quality fresh food was arranged for me from the best hotels. However, I had daily continuous fever of 100 degrees

Fahrenheit, for which I was taking Paracetamol as required. My appetite, thirst and urine output were all obviously reducing. I knew that I was getting more sick. They began necessary medication : RemsediVir, Dexamethasone, Heparin, antibiotics, etc. apart from 24 hours Oxygen supply through the Face mask. Even though the food provided was very tasty & nutritious, I was unable to sit in the chair and eat



food, because of the breathing difficulty. I would fill my mouth with food and immediately cover my mouth & nose with the Oxygen mask to breathe properly. Even for a few minutes, I couldn't breathe properly

without that Oxygen supply. This problem continued until Saturday 10th October evening.

Finally, unknown to me, a miracle was coming on 11-10-2020 Sunday morning. I couldn't sleep much at night, because of my sickness. I was awake at 07:00 am, remembered that at 07:30 am, our NLAG church had a live worship service through YouTube. So, I opened the channel at 07:30 am and started listening to the Tamil service with Pastor D. Mohan leading it. He was preaching from Hebrews 12:24 about the effective power of Jesus's blood to help us in our helplessness. Jesus's blood speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Then, pastor Mohan shared the Holy Communion. As I listened and watched, tears were flowing from my eyes. Suddenly, I became aware of the awesome, powerful, omnipotent Presence of my Lord Jesus beside my bed. Very soon, my sick feelings went away and I sat up. Felt more thirsty and I began to drink more water than what I could drink before. I passed more urine than before; and the colour of my urine changed from dark yellow to clear light yellow, which is a healthy colour.

I was able to sleep for some time and woke up, when Dr. Rajendran arrived at 09:00 am to inform that I

don't need any Oxygen gas support now. I didn't understand what he was saying. Only later in the afternoon, when I asked the nurse why they are not giving me Oxygen anymore, she told me that Dr. Rajendran had completely stopped my Oxygen support. I can continue breathing normally from the atmospheric air inside the room. I was amazed to realize what my Lord Jesus had done. I started messaging my dear family and some praying friends that Jesus had visited my room and touched me. I was filled with gratefulness towards Jesus.

This situation continued until 19-10-2020, by which date, my health improved much more steadily and gradually. My strength, appetite, digestion, and appearance all showed improvement. Though I couldn't visit the restroom for a shower bath, I just put Coconut oil on my head, cleaned my face and changed all my dirty clothes to wear fresh clothes.

On 19th of October, 2020, Mr. Binu Thomas came in the afternoon to take me home. The government arranged a nice Ambulance, with me as the only passenger sitting inside with my luggage. My dear wife Sarah and my son Arpith Varghese met me outside our residence to take me home after a gap of 21 days. It

was an unforgettable experience.

During my career of 69 years, I had passed through a number of “near – death” experiences, like fatal accidents, grievous illnesses from which I was wonderfully delivered by my Heavenly Father God, who revealed His omnipotence in every difficult situation which I had to face in the past. However, this Covid experience was like a death sentence, which was cancelled by the mercies of my God.

Therefore, I wish to offer the remaining days of my life at the feet of my Lord Jesus Christ, who alone

is the Sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords.

Now, I have fully recovered from all the consequences of Covid-19. However, I am staying indoors at home, along with my wife Dr. Sarah and my son Dr. Varghese.



Dr. P. V. Cherian Chennai



EFIC@R 2019 REPORT

EFIC@R is engaged in safeguarding the lives of the vulnerable through Prevention, Prosecution and Protection programs.



CAPACITY BUILDING:

Capacity Building is a key part of EFIC@R's protection program. Through our legal trainings and workshops, EFIC@R aims to strengthen the involvement of churches and civil society in promoting and securing the rights of children from the Tribal and Dalit communities.



NETWORKING:

EFIC@R aims to lobby and network in a collaborative way to build and strengthen strong networks with churches, like-minded NGOs and government agencies for improved action in prevention, protection and rehabilitation of the trafficked persons. EFIC@R conducts networking program with churches, government officials and like-minded organization in order to reach out and sensitize the people on human trafficking, as well as to develop effective and innovative programs and projects.



ADVOCACY:

Advocacy programs create awareness of the extent of the negligence, exploitation and discrimination towards children in India through awareness campaigns, speaking tours, interventions with schools, colleges, panchayats and communities, forming vigilant committees, peace building efforts and building child advocates



EMPOWERMENT:

EFIC@R builds resilient communities by empowering them with a means of livelihood and equipping the church leaders to mobilize the community on addressing issues of poverty alleviation which will facilitate to stop trafficking and peace building.



EDUCATION:

EFIC@R education programs exists to provide strategic interventions by opening children clubs, children literacy centres, schools, adult literacy centres to transform and develop the lives of children and adults. The most

common reason of trafficking is illiteracy and many women and young girls are lured with good jobs or schooling by the traffickers. EFIC@R's adult literacy centre is helping the women to develop their reading and learning skill which is also helping them to start self-help groups.



HEALTHCARE:

To respond and invest in the health and well-being of the poor, the needy and the marginalized victims, EFIC@R conducts regular medical camps providing free medical aid to people in target areas.



EFIC@R conducts regular rescue operations along with rehabilitation and legal aid services for the victims, in partnership with various NGOs and the local authorities.

PROSECUTION:

EFIC@R provides pro-bono legal aid to victims of trafficking. Many traffickers who have been caught red-handed while trafficking young boys and girls often get bailed easily and they go back to their old trade without any fear of punishment. EFIC@R continues to work towards ensuring such traffickers are kept behind bars for the safety of the children. EFIC@R is also dealing with cases that includes false implication, especially in the Christian community.

EFIC@R has filed 30 no. of legal cases against Human Traffickers in 2019.



Relief work:

Total 240 people provided and 1000 mask distributed.

Being the Change Production and Distribution of Masks

Sonu*, a rickshaw puller from Dandkhora village in Bihar, was caned and chased away by the police twice for coming to work without a face mask. Manav*, a daily wage earner from Pakaria village, lost his job due to the lockdown. Since he needed money to provide food for his family, he needed to go out to work. However, stepping out without a mask was not only endangering him and his family, but it was also considered as a punishable offence.

Due to illiteracy, ignorance, and financial constraint, it is tough for people like Sonu and Manav to afford and maintain the safety protocols against COVID. The Women SHGs groups who are engaged in stitching, supported by EFI - Children @ Risk (EFIC@R) came to know about the hardship faced by the villagers and volunteered to produce masks for free distribution to the marginalized community.

EFIC@R supported them by providing the raw materials required for the production and connected them with El Bethel Church, a local church, which has willingly offered space to the women for setting up their unit for production of masks. EFIC@R connected the SHGs not

only with the local churches, but also with the local government administrations, who are placing orders in bulk.



A total of 1000 masks were produced for free distribution which have benefited 9 villages. Today, many of the daily wage earners are going to work and earn their living. They have expressed their gratitude to EFIC@R for providing them with the masks. The women of the sewing centre has also been constantly supporting and teaching other women to become Aatma Nirbhar, meaning Self-reliant, bringing a change in the community.



Ms. Aashima Samuel.
*National Director,
EFI – Children @ Risk (EFIC@R)*

Intercessory
Prayer
Points



January 2021

1 FRIDAY Thank God for the New Year 2021. Pray that you would start afresh and expect great things to happen because of God's goodness.

2 SATURDAY Pray for the homeless who are under the extreme weather. Pray that people would have compassion and have the heart to share their resources with them.

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

4 MONDAY Pray for Christian Education department of EFI. Pray that many more churches would use the curriculum that they have designed and benefit greatly from it. Pray that the team would come up with new creative ideas to plant God's Word in children's hearts.

5 TUESDAY Pray for farmers in our country. Pray that God would stir the hearts of the political leaders to hear, understand, love and act for the

welfare of our farmers. Pray that God would continue to strengthen the farmers' faith, courage and hope. Pray also that somehow, they would hear the Gospel of Jesus and get to know Him in His fullness.

6 WEDNESDAY Pray for children who are under the stress of exam. Pray that they would do their best and trust God for the outcome. Pray for good health, clarity in thoughts, good retention power and deep understanding of their subjects. Most of all, pray that they may be hopeful and joyful.

7 THURSDAY Pray for Episcopal Church in India Council, Madhya Pradesh. Pray that God would use them as a channel of His blessings to the people of Madhya Pradesh and beyond.

8 FRIDAY Continue to Pray for Covid-19 disease to stop spreading further. Pray for families who have lost their loved ones to start the year by holding on to God as their shield and protection. Pray that God may

heal their wounded hearts with His unfailing love.

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

10 SUNDAY Pray that your Church worship today would bring glory to God and deep satisfaction to all the worshippers.

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

12 TUESDAY Today is National Youth day. Pray that the youth of our country may know and honor God in the height of their youth. May God give them the desires of their hearts that would bring glory to Him and joy to them.

13 WEDNESDAY Pray for Blood of Jesus International, Odisha. Pray that their ministry through printed media would bring many to faith in Christ. Pray that God would continually use them to be the voice for believers.

14 THURSDAY Pray for Fusion Church (Jan Milaap Samiti), New Delhi. Pray for growth in spiritual maturity as well as in number.

15 FRIDAY Today is India Army Day. Pray for all Indian Army families. Thank God for their sacrificial love and services for the country. Pray for protection upon them and their families.

16 SATURDAY Pray for all the children in your church and your neighbourhood that they would be protected from all harms and that they may enjoy their childhood.

17 SUNDAY Let us pray for ourselves again today that God would enable us to keep our self aside and be a friend, a helper and a counsellor to someone whose life is broken.

18 MONDAY Pray for Evangelical Fellowship of India to have clear and new direction to serve the Lord this year. May God equip, strengthen and use EFI to be a channel of blessings to the churches in India and the world.

19 TUESDAY Pray for all the schools in your neighborhood. Pray that they would be a place where our children are safe, taught, loved and developed as good human beings. Pray for good relationship between our children and the teachers and staff. Pray that Christian values and principles would become the foundation for our children.

20 WEDNESDAY Pray for the ministry of Heavenly Feast in Kerala. Pray that the members of this

church would grow and mature in Christ and as a result serve God and His people without reservation.

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

22 FRIDAY Continue to pray for Covid19 to stop spreading. Pray for medical teams and others who are working closely in identifying and isolating and treating the patients. Pray for God's intervention and healing.

23 SATURDAY Pray for the servants of God whom you know by name. Pray that they may be strengthened to follow the God whom they served faithfully. Pray that they may overcome temptations and lead the way with good example.

24 SUNDAY Pray for the Churches in India to seek the Lord and His ways despite many challenges.

25 MONDAY Pray for the children whom you know by name. Pray that each child would have saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and would be led by His Spirit.

26 TUESDAY Republic Day. Pray for safety and protection as India celebrates the 72nd Republic Day today. Continue to pray for all the political leaders in your respective states. Pray that they would bring changes in their sphere of influence.

Pray they would love the people and would fulfill the purpose that they were elected for.

27 WEDNESDAY Pray for those who are suffering because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that God may work in their circumstances and as they wait for God's deliverance, they may learn to trust God and wait for His timings and plans.

28 THURSDAY Continue to pray for our nation persistently. Pray that all in leadership position would be a faithful and caring guardian of the constitution as well the people.

29 FRIDAY Pray for your neighbours today that you may love them as yourself. Pray for safety and protection of your neighbourhood.

30 SATURDAY Pray for those who are under the bondage of the evil one. Pray that God would make a way for them to hear His Word and that they may experience release. Pray for God's people to have courage and strength to save many dying souls.

31 SUNDAY Pray for all the Church leaders in our country. Pray that they would love the Lord with all their hearts, minds and strength. Pray that they would handle the word of God correctly and teach diligently. Thank God for His presence and guidance throughout the month.

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Evangelical
Fellowship of
India



One in God; Together for Good.

Introduction

Evangelical Fellowship of India, founded in 1951, is the national alliance of Evangelicals in India. As a central network of evangelicals and a service organization, it is the custodian of Evangelical faith, movement and values in India, representing the Evangelical voice, building capacity and promoting participation in nation building.

EFI is a charter member of the World Evangelical Alliance. Its membership includes over 65,000 Churches, over 150 Church related mission agencies and organisations and thousands of individual members.

Our Vision

To see evangelical Churches, institutions and individuals effectively witnessing the good news of Jesus Christ in word, deed and transforming nation.

Our Mission

As an evangelical alliance, serve churches, institutions and individuals through strategic initiatives, capacity building and forging solidarity, thus facilitating the mission of witnessing to the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed, and nation building.

Networks

- a. CEEFI (Christan Education Department of EFI)
- b. EFI Publication & Media
- c. EFI National Centre for Urban Transformation
- d. EFI Children @ Risk
- e. Evangelical Trust Association of North India
- f. EFI Micro Enterprise Development
- g. Evangelical Financial Accountability Council (EFAC)

Commissions

- a. EFI Women Commission
- b. EFI Theological Commission
- c. EFI Youth Commission
- d. EFI Religious Liberty Commission
- e. EFI Commission on Relief (EFICOR)

EFI is a Charter Member of the World Evangelical Alliance
An NGO in special consultative Status with the Economic & Social Council of the United Nations

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E-mail: mail@efionline.org | Telephone: +91 11 66602434, 26431133 | http://www.efionline.org

Published date on 25 December 2020
Posting date 26/27 December 2020

RNI. Regd. No. 19728/70 / Postal
Registration No. DL(S)-01/3241/2018-20
Licensed to post without prepayment at
NDPSO New Delhi -110 002 / U(SE)-9/2018-20

"Enter his gates with thanks;
enter his courtyards with praise!
Thank him! Bless his name!"
Psalm 100:4



Evangelical Fellowship of India
Wishes you

Happy
NEW YEAR
2021

Printed & Published by Mr. Vijayesh Lal, on behalf of EFI Publication Trust,
805/92 Deepali Building, Nehru Place, New Delhi - 110 019.
Printed at Royal Press, B-82, Okhla Phase -1, New Delhi - 110 020.
Editor Mr. Vijayesh Lal