

Just A Prelude

**(Three Score and Ten
Devotional Thoughts)**

Bro. Prakash V. Mathew

Just A Prelude

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Three score and ten simple thoughts, which I wrote in ICPF publications for the last five years, were compiled, at the request of some of my friends and well wishers. It was just the encouragement and motivation of Prof. Mathew P. Thomas (Founder visionary of ICPF) that prompted me to scribble a simple thought in each issue of ‘Campus Counsellor’ and ‘Collegiate Fisherman’ – official publications of ‘Inter Collegiate Prayer Fellowship’ – ICPF.

I’m really grateful to God Almighty for providing all necessary circumstances to write these articles, so that it might turn out to be a solace for those who ponder on it. Thanks are due to Prof. Mathew P. Thomas, Dr. C.T. Luiskutty, Dr. James George and Dr. J. Varghese for reading the early draft of this book and writing a forward to introduce the book.

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May I express my gratitude to all who encouraged me in the completion of the task, including my wife Mercy, Children: Dr. Sneha Sachin, Hridya Rishi and Ashish Mathew. May God bless all beloved prayer partners of ICPF also.

Bro. Prakash V. Mathew

FOREWORD

The great philosopher Swedenborg said “Ability to discern that what is true is true, and that what is false is false, is the characteristic of intelligence.”

When the name ‘Prakash Mathew’ echoes in my mind, I used to think that the above statement about ‘intelligence’ is true. The humble, simple, noble Prakash Mathew is capable of elucidating the depth of the Word of God through his silent thoughts. It is an established fact that those things which are most valuable seem most hidden. Gold, that metal, most coveted and alluring hides deep in the bosom of the earth, the diamond lies hidden in the alluvial deposit, emerald hides in the granite vein and pearl lies in the very body of the pearl oyster. Akin to these things the most mysterious, precious pearls of the Word of God, hidden in the deepest mind of Prakash Mathew have come into light through his book, “JUST A PRELUDE.” I wish that more and more success may attend him in writing, more books in future. I pray that this book will be a blessing to thousands to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Prof. Mathew P. Thomas

“Just A Prelude” is a compilation of thought provoking and spiritually challenging short essays. Though small in size, the book is rich in spiritual lessons, philosophical insights and practical ideas. The author’s scholarship in English literature is evident in the many apt quotations from Shakespeare, Frost, Shelley and others.

In the first essay there is an analysis of what most of us do as we spend our time in painting the background, and a warning that we might miss the opportunity to paint the King. In another, the author sketches the story of an ‘eccentric’ man who “went on refilling his can of oil and oiled the hard places he came across in his life.” What a challenge – to oil our cans with kindness and lubricate hard situations we encounter every day rather than finding fault with others or cursing the circumstances!

I am glad that this is “Just A Prelude”. I expect my Christian brother and colleague, Bro. Prakash Mathew to follow this publication with greater contributions to the Christian reading community – may be 366 short essays like this, one for every day of the year, or with expanded treatise of each essay. It is my prayer that Brother Prakash will continue to use his literary talent and spiritual insight to bless the reading community and that God will use him for such a valuable ministry.

Dr. C.T. Luiskutty
General Secretary, ICPF

I have read the manuscript of this beautiful creation that reveals a mind depending on God for all and sundry issues faced in life. The thoughts of the author traverse through various situations in daily life and finds solace in the Word of God, which certainly would put confidence in the reader in similar walks of life. I also find it an ideal aide for morning Quite Time and devotion. This book will be a worthwhile gift item for young people who prefer quick reading material rather than long essays. I have personally known Mr. Prakash Mathew, for almost three decades. He is one of the finest gentlemen I have met in my life with such amazing simplicity and humility as hallmark. A sincere believer in Lord Jesus Christ, in whom he is strongly anchored by faith, makes it easy for him to smile whether it is storm or calm. I pray God that Mr. Prakash Mathew will be able to bring out many more such publications that would help the reader find comfort in Christ and learn to be dependent on Him for all varied situations in life.

May God bless the author and the reader alike!!

**Dr. James George, Ph.D. (IIT), ARS
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Meekness a word often misunderstood or misinterpreted one. One who is always submissive to others in words and deeds or a person of few words or long suffering? But it is strength under control. In Bible we see a person who was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth i.e. none other than Moses. But he showed no sign of weakness in helping the seven girls of the priest of Midian. He drove them away, saved the girls and watered their flocks even though he was called the meekest man of earth. Meekness is contrasted with humility as referring to behaviour towards others, where humbleness refers to an attitude towards oneself but is still seen by others. In Mathew we read “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” They have the absence of any feelings of being better than others. When a person like this plan to write something and publish it as a book, the words or ideas used in it will not be soft but a sugar coated bomb which does its work internally or intellectually in the persons concerned. My dear friend Prakash Sir is not a man of weak words but shows the power of words under control. Even though he seems to be like a person with soft sound and expressions his words are sharper than a sword in my experience. Surely this book with title “Just A Prelude” will do its work in those who read it and give them deep insights and thereby empowering them for a new vision and mission. This book will be an asset and answer to all communities especially the students folk who are bombarded with many questions in their life.

Dr. J. Varghese
Director, ICPF Counselling centre

PREFACE

Random reflections gained through devotional books and other publications helped much in writing these small and simple articles with the title ‘Just a Prelude’. Although it’s ‘just a prelude’ for deep devotional thoughts, our sincere prayer is that the incomparable beauty, strength and love of Jesus overwhelm all those who read these lines. May the Lord help us to reflect values and commitments through our life also for His glory. Better to live meaningfully than to make ‘much ado about nothing’.

The underlying tone in most of the articles is a note of positive and optimistic belief that ‘unheard melodies are sweeter’. Yet, many a times in the course of writing, I have felt like peering intently at a ‘blank blue sky’! ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ is almost always an uplifting thought for the soul. When people find very little time to think, let alone sit and read for long, capsules of thought provoking little articles come handy.

A verse from the Holy Book is far ahead of any philosophy, counsel or admonition what so ever. Hence, such simple, but life transforming verses were selected as food for thought. Not much explanations and examples are given, but ‘just a prelude’ to a path that can be chosen is depicted, that too not vividly. ‘Brevity is the soul of wit’ – Isn’t it? May I wish nice, enriching and pleasant reading, and also a very personal and blessed experience.

We expect your comments, suggestions also. Let me quote from the book by T.D. Jakes: “A small beginning is ‘just a prelude’ to a tremendous crescendo at the finale!” – God bless you all –

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Redeeming Time...

“Behold, now is the accepted TIME; behold, now is the day of salvation” - (2 Cori. 6:2).

‘Time and tide waits for none’...

Priorities in life should not come topsy-turvy. As our life-span here on earth is very short, we’ve to be very cautious in setting our goal as well as using our time. ‘Catch time by the fore-lock’ is a very imaginative saying!

Once a great artist was summoned to paint the picture of Emperor Fredrick. With great pains the artist painted the details of the picture and the background. But he sketched the Emperor’s figure as a mere outline with charcoal and spent most of the time to complete the background and other details. He purposed to paint the most important part of the picture at the end. Unfortunately the artist died before he had a chance to finish the painting. This partially finished picture is exhibited at Berlin Art Gallery. Is it not a clear warning to set priorities in using time?

Just like this, many people spend all their time and effort taking care of secondary and silly things in life. Most important and crucial duties are often neglected. We need to give first place to the Emperor of our lives and not postpone it for our convenience. Otherwise we would be too late!

May the good Lord bless us and give divine wisdom to utilize our time fruitfully. TIME may be the only gift which is equally shared by the weakest and the most affluent. It's a God given gift in equal measure for us and Bill Gates! Only when we are in His perfect will, we'll be using our time fruitfully. Helen Keller once remarked: "Use your eyesight as you'll be stricken blind tomorrow." Every gift we enjoy is a blessing from the Lord and TIME is so precious!

Paul, the great apostle, held fast to the honour bestowed upon him to use his time, as the steward of the mysteries of Christ. He permitted no one to hinder his race-track. When there was any hindrance, he leaped over it! Let us also try to press on with vigour and 'catch time by its forelock'! Let's pray: "Lord, give us grace to use time judiciously for thy glory..."

2

‘Without Wax!’

“In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity...” - (Titus. 2:7).

Very often, people wear a mask of sincerity, humility, nobility and all such finer dispositions; while their heart might be deceitful. But, when the Holy Spirit discerns them, everything will be disclosed.

I recently read the story of a company chairman who arranged a grand funeral, when its Director expired. He then charged it to the Company’s accounts. A few days after the funeral, the company accountant approached the Chairman and asked, to which ‘head’ he had to show the expenditure. The chairman simply directed him to put all the funeral expenses under ‘packing and forwarding charges!!’

Sincerity, loyalty and such qualities are fast disappearing from the society as well as personal relationships. In fact, the word ‘sincere’ is derived from two words:- ‘sine’-which means ‘without’ and ‘cera’ which means ‘wax’.

The etymology of this word really goes back to earlier days, when sculptors found a depression or crack in their work, they would cover that portion with wax! Customers who knew this deception would ask whether the work of art was with or ‘without wax’. This was how the word came into use.

Let us also examine ourselves to see if we use ‘wax’ to cover cracks in our day-to-day relations or we are really ‘sincere’ according to the real meaning of the word! In Jeremiah 17:9, we read: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?”

Everything pertaining to the old creation must be won over. Let us judge our own old man and yield completely to the word of instruction and correction. Then, we shall win! Then, we would be ‘sincere’ according to the real sense of the term!

3

Be an example

‘Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity... - (1 Timothy. 4:12).

Apostle Paul is giving an admonition here to Timothy to be an example of the believers. In Psalms 12:1, David, the Psalmist bewails: “Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth.” –We see people who are so busy around us. In one of his poems, the English poet P B Shelly very aptly observes:

“We look before and after,
And pine for what is not!”

Even in the spiritual realm, most people are so busy, ignoring the sanctity and importance of personal relationships and eternal values.

George Verwer in his book ‘Hunger for Reality’ recounts the following incident: When he visited Rev. Billy Graham’s office in London with his friend, the staff there was extremely busy with the preparations for some crusade. They had little time to spare to receive Verwer and his friend. When they were about to leave the office, Br. Billy Graham himself entered the room, greeted them and said a few kind words. A person much busier than many others showed his love and was willing to spare his time. This can be a good example for any Christian who aims to follow Jesus.

Somebody aptly commented that ‘BUSY’ means - ‘Being Under

Satan's Yoke'! It's true that sometimes we'll be much preoccupied with a hurried schedule in our life. But, as believers, we've to be an example in our words, conversation, dealings, gestures and what not? May the good Lord give us His Divine Wisdom to attend everything in a polite and sober way, so that HE dwells in us with delight.

‘Character is not made in crisis; it is only exhibited...’



‘Slow me down...’

‘Be still, and know that I’m God’ – (Psalms 46:10).

It is often seen that people depend on their own abilities and try to prove it when and where they confront a trouble on their way. But very often, many fail miserably to solve the problems they face in their day-to-day life. Many a time their own interventions and restlessness make things more complicated and confused!

In reality, there is immense power in stillness. “All things come to him who knows how to trust and be silent”- a saint once remarked. Practical knowledge of this important truth would naturally change our life style, manner of work and general outlook towards life.

Man speaks of himself as refined, brilliant, noble and what not? But although he professes to be so, his restless struggles pronounce that he makes ‘much ado about nothing’! If only we could let the Divine forces of His Spirit work out in silence as it once brooded over the still waters! We may not be able to see the operations of this silent force with our naked eyes, but be assured that it is always working rightly and mightily. It will work for you too, if you get your spirit still enough to be carried along by the currents of its power.

In Romans 8:28, Paul declares that “all things work together for good to them that love God, who are called according to His purpose.” God

will certainly give us victory, but we must be willing to stay still. God will take care of all our need, but not our greed!

I still recall some beautiful lines by Owen L. Crain, which I read years back with the title ‘Slow me down, Lord’:-

“Steady my hurried pace with a vision of the eternal reach of time,
Give me amid the confusion of the day
The calmness of the everlasting hills...
Teach me the art of taking minute vacations
Of slowing down to look at a flower,
To chat with a friend, to smile at a child,
To read a few lines from your Good Book”....

Of course, there is no need for so much hurry! Let us remember that the towering oak grew great and strong because it grew slow and well. In fact, the race is not always for the swift alone..., but there is more to life than increasing the speed. Let God have His own way in our life!



Labour of love

“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” - (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

Our God considers work of faith and labour of love, although it seems so small in the sight of those who evaluate according to quantity. Very often, small things matter much! Apparently insignificant and trifle things can be of great use some times. For example, if we lose a pen, we can buy a new one; but if we lose a pen cap, we may not be able to buy a new one! Extra care must be given to very small things in life. “To be faithful in a little thing is really a great thing.”

Remember, our deeds are not evaluated by God according to its abundance, but the sincerity, faith and love behind them. It’s quite a different standard and method of measurement from that of the world. While people consider only outward expressions, our Lord is more interested in the motives behind our labour. It may be easy to please people around us. Yet, all the time, energy and resources spent for pleasing people turn out to be futile efforts in the sight of Almighty.

‘As for God, his way is perfect’ (Psalms 18:30). He rewards for quality, especially when it comes from a loving and self sacrificing heart. No matter, how gloomy our life may be, one little touch of his love is enough to bring warmth and light, if we are really sincere in our motives.

As somebody rightly observed: ‘for a real missionary there is no

reserves, no regrets and no retreat just like a real soldier in the battlefield!

Even in the case of very noble acts like prayer, fasting, charity etc. our Lord is more concerned about the intentions than the time or quantity. That means, our motives are more important than the duration. In Deuteronomy 7:7, we read: “The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor chose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people” – In fact, all our labour is nothing before his glorious grace. God wants our spiritual fruits and not just religious nuts!

The Christian who denies himself becomes less important, in his own eyes, and grows into an awareness of the glorious sovereignty of God. For those who enter the chamber of peace where God dwells, and hush every other sound, certainly will hear His still, small voice! The peace of God that passeth all understanding’ will be experienced in their life...



Search me, O God!

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting” - (Psalms 139:23,24).

Very often, the origin of many a wicked way is in the heart. The Psalmist asks the Lord to search him. This kind of submission is the first step for all those who wish for a change in their life to a more complete spiritual walk with the Lord. Now a days, we hear about many well known preachers who fall from their positions of prominence because of sins of the flesh. But naturally, long before the bitter fall, it must have certainly originated in their hearts and thoughts!

To allow the Lord to look inward at the spiritual condition of our heart is probably the hardest part of spiritual obedience. Many people entertain some hidden attitudes and interests in their heart which they don't want anyone to know about. Outwardly, they may look quite spiritual and even very enthusiastic...

Certainly, the Holy Spirit can very well search the dark and hidden areas of our heart, so as to cleanse us and make us holy. Our understanding of things is in fact, limited and partial! Wicked ways, though obscure, can lead us astray from the right path. In order to be in the way everlasting, we have to be on our guard to set our priorities properly. Moreover, a very clear vision of our call by the master is essential to run along the right track and finish this race, without disgrace to His Holy name!

In fact, an openness to let the Lord to search us is quite essential to have a smooth run in the race we are called for. We need to plead for the clear guidance and control of the Divine Spirit to move on, not somehow, but triumphantly! We are called for a life without blemish.

It is in fact rightly observed that “making a sin legal does not make it harmless.” As nobody is free from the chances of temptations, those who yearn for a holy life need to avoid all slippery circumstances. Christ will not live in the parlour of our hearts, if we entertain the devil in the cellar of our thoughts! So, a re-dedication to be searched and cleansed by our master is essential so that we might live for His Glory without any shame, stain or stigma...



Thou Waterest...

“Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it; Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water; Thou preparest their corn, when Thou hast so provided for it” – (Psalms 65:9).

Gratitude towards God who had blessed David is expressed in the above verse. He praises Lord for His power shown in nature, and for supplying all his needs. We too must be thankful to our Lord for the manifold blessings we receive each day.

Indeed, we are bound to express our gratitude to the Lord for His faithfulness to us and ICPF ministry, especially. The verse quoted has a wonderful spiritual application, and for these blessings, we are especially thankful to God at the dawn of this New Year.

The Lord has visited us with His presence, and has come to bless our field with the river of God. He has enabled us to plant the corn into the ground which He has prepared to receive the seed. If it were not for this ministry of the Holy Spirit, we would be labouring in vain. Too often, we assume more responsibility than is ours, and too often we take credit for what God has done!

We can only be effective in our sowing when and where the soil is ready. How often do we throw the seed away by spreading it haphazardly on hard roadbeds or rocky slopes!

We do so little as compared to God’s working. We sow and help in the cultivation, but we are dependent upon the Lord to bring the sunshine

and the rain. In John 15:5, we read: 'Without me ye can do nothing.' Also we read in 1 Corinthians 3:7- "So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that waterth; but God that giveth the increase."

Our Lord is in control of the rain and the sun, the means by which the harvest will come. He will crown the year with His goodness; and his paths will flow with prosperity!



Unheard melodies are sweeter...

“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” - (Philippians 3:14).

Those who have conquered and climbed high above the peaks of Mount Everest must have certainly done it in their dreams long before their feet literally touched the Mountain top! In other words, only those who have dreamt and visualized have accomplished the task successfully.

Those who press towards an upward call can ignore insignificant, trivial, cheap treasures of this world. They won't care the name and fame which people offer.

They have to hold on “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just,” (Philippians 4:8). The more we count the blessings, the less we crave the luxuries we don't have. Cheer up! Remember, that the less you have, the more there is to get! Fading pleasures and failing treasures of the world may give joy for a little while, but it's never long lasting! At death, we leave behind, all we have and take with us all we are! We need to pray for His grace to ‘raise our head above daily trifles’ ...

When we have nothing left but God, then we become aware that God is enough and more! As we saw the mercy of God in the past and see His love in the present, we can certainly trust His promises to see His providence in the future too! The verse in Romans 8:28: “And we know

that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose” - is always an encouraging promise for a child of God. We sincerely hope and believe that our best is yet to come.”

“Heard melodies are sweet,
But those unheard are sweeter!”



Our Sweetest Songs...

‘Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me’ - (John. 14:1).

We live in a world full of trouble and turmoil, disasters and distress! There is every possibility of our heart being troubled due to various reasons. Certain events and people may create disappointments and depressions which would linger in our minds for long. Very often harsh words or unkind deeds may inflict wounds that are not very easily cured. That may be one of the reasons why mature people admonish to handle words and hearts with care. Words when spoken and hearts when broken are the hardest things to repair!

People feel disappointed and lonely for innumerable reasons. But since those who depend and believe in the living God will never be left alone, they will not be ashamed. They will certainly find everlasting joy and comfort in the Lord. Beloved brothers and sisters, walk with Jesus when your heart needs company... take His Hands when you feel alone..., turn to Him when you need someone to lean on... He is the friend you can always depend up on! He is the only true friend whom you can trust with all your heart, at all times. He is the ‘Rock of ages.’

Those who leave everything in God’s Hand will eventually see God’s Hand in everything. Of course, our worries end where real faith begins. God has a special plan for each one of us. But He doesn’t reveal it all at

once, because He wants to teach us how to walk by faith, not by sight. With all our infirmities and difficulties, He gives a new song in our hearts. Let us remember that:

“Our Sweetest songs are those
That tell us of our saddest thoughts!”



Celestial Light...

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God” - (Psalms 42:1).

There are times when people look back and ponder on their beautiful past and feel helpless about their present predicament just like the poet Wordsworth who recalled:

“There was a time when the meadow, grove and stream,
The earth and every common sight to me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light, the glory and freshness of a dream!”

It’s really interesting to note that, the poet bewail the past glory of his creativity which may never be repeated. But, the psalmist knew the secret of restoring his soul. When we thirst for His presence and sincerely long for His help, we’ll find ourselves feel lighter, and a new song begins to hum its way into our consciousness. Before long a smile lights up our faces. Then, what happens outside cannot in any way change our joy within. We’ll then experience ‘the peace that passeth all understanding!’

When God controls our lives, He can give us joy in times of mourning and laughter despite the pain. That’ll be divine and supernatural. The joy and peace that cannot be brought from supermarkets, finest restaurants or from the drug stores is there in Christ Jesus. We find it only in Him! A steady feasting on His Word and the time spent alone with Him can fill

our hearts with joy that knows no bounds. That is the reason why the psalmist's soul panteth for His presence, just like the hart that panteth after the water brooks.

‘The secret of never thirsting is ever thirsting.’

Only those who possess a strong passion and longing for the presence of God can experience the inner warmth and peace. Of course, this passion is also a God-given gift. In spite of various temptations and enchanting worldly desires, the soul that yearns for the divine abode will certainly gain the bliss of solitude.



The Road not Taken

‘But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagle; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint’ - (Isaiah 40:31).

“The road not taken” is a small but beautiful poem by the famous American poet Robert Frost. The poet describes a traveler (himself!) who takes a road less traveled by others. It’s of course, a daring experience to take such an untraditional path. Taking a road less traveled by others is the mark of those who are special in their mental make-up and attitude. In psalms .4:3, we read: `know that the Lord hath set apart him that is Godly for himself’. Godly men, naturally will be special people, in their own lonely way!

Eagle is a bird which prefers to fly high in the air. It must be free to soar in the open space to be happy. As there are not many birds which can reach such heights, it seems lonely up there! But the eagle is not discouraged by the quietness, for it is not its nature to mingle with the multitude. It is a voluntary choice to be alone.

The Word of God promises that we have the opportunity to reign with Christ forever, but we must linger in His presence. The mounting up activity is a reference to overcomers who are in harmony with the throne of God. All believers may not have this honourable place, for they will not step out into the unlimited area of heavenly truth and associated experiences. God has predestined a bride for His son, and He has

purposed that His glory shall be manifested in her. What a high calling!

Those who rise on wings of eagles have discovered freedom in Christ. This is a challenging experience, as we have not traveled through this road before. But the Holy Spirit is within us to give proper direction. The Lord sometimes takes us out of our comfort zone and puts us into heights we never dreamt of!

“Heights of great men reached and kept
Were not achieved by a sudden flight,
But they, when their companions slept
Were toiling upward in the night”



Blessed Assurance...

“For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God, the spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” - (Romans 8:14,16).

For many of us, there may be times when we doubt the leading of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it's because of a feeling of guilt that we have made a wrong move. Satan will aggravate that feeling, until we begin to think of our lives as failures. It is then that the Holy Spirit will bear witness with our spirit 'that we are the children of God.' He encourages us that we are indeed His children, and that He has led us in the Divine will.

The Holy Spirit leads us in God's way, and He does bear witness that we belong to God and that He is pleased with us. When we look back, we are really thankful for all His blessings in the past. There has been nothing which brought any evil, for all things have worked for good. Each incident has brought us closer to the Lord, and has given us a greater desire to please Him.

Of course, there were occasions when there was distress and disappointment. But the inner glow of the spirit which gave the blessed assurance was the motivation to move on. There is victory for us, as long as we take all things directly from the hand of God. Then, we get the assurance and direction to move on, not somehow but triumphantly. As a whole year has elapsed since we included this column 'Just a

Prelude,' we want to thank everyone who has encouraged us by way of words and letters. We thank you especially for your prayers for this ministry. Our sincere prayer for each one of our readers is that the Spirit will lead them in the path of righteousness until the first trumpet sounds that great event-the coming of Jesus for His Bride...

Fading joys and failing treasures of the world cannot in anyway hold back men of God from experiencing His glorious presence...



Daily Dependence

‘Give us day by day our daily bread’ - (Luke 11:3).

Our Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray for their daily bread. This is the principle of daily contact with the living God. Actually, successful prayer means daily contact with Him. Jesus said: “All power in heaven and in earth is delivered unto me.” This power is made available only to those who keep contact with God daily. This may be quite different from a schedule of prayer without any relation or feeling at all!

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray for their daily bread, we see the clue to the secret of a victorious Christian life. Jesus did not ask them to pray for a year’s supply or a month’s or even a week’s supply of bread. He wants us to feel the need of the strength of His presence, of His sustaining power daily.

This great lesson and secret of daily dependence on God was taught in the giving of Manna to the children of Israel. They were to receive only enough for a day’s supply. No man could gather a supply for several days and keep it for future use. Those who did, found that it bred worms and was not suitable for use!

Many Christians expect a healing that can’t lose; rather than the health that comes from a daily dependence on the quickening power. They would rather have financial security that does not compel them daily to approach

the secret chamber and ask God to meet their needs. They need an anointing that does not require a daily waiting on God. But such desires are not in accord with God's purpose. God's plan involves a daily dependence on Him, because without Him we can do nothing!

People are aware that they need natural food regularly, but not so careful about the inner man which also needs a daily replenishing. Daniel is a splendid example of one who learned the secret of daily dependence. Crisis was so common in his life. But meeting with God three times a day was a daily habit with him. He allowed nothing to interrupt this habit, albeit his life was in grave jeopardy. It was not just a scheduled programme, but a very close, relation-based communication...



Place of Safety

“A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on and are punished” - (Prov. 27:12).

We live in a world where we hear about innumerable tragic stories of dangerous traps all around us. How can a man ever hope to escape the traps that devil continuously devise against him? There is such a thing as foreseeing evil and avoiding it. But it is in no way human foresight or wisdom. In Proverbs 3:5, we read: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

Of course, there is a place of safety that is hid from the eye of the ordinary passerby. Job points this out: “There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture’s eye hath not seen; the lion’s whelps have not trodden it nor the fierce lion passed by it” (Job. 28: 7-8).

This place of protection and safety from the evil trap is plainly revealed in Psalms 91:1 “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty... surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shall thee trust...”

This of course is the promised deliverance from the devil’s traps. The expression ‘snare of the fowler’ is a clear allusion to the devil who is busy setting snares for God’s people. It is always better to foresee the

danger and avoid it than fall into the trap and be rescued. The warning to ‘watch and pray’ is applicable to Christians of all ages especially for the present time! There is no place of safety anywhere, no strategy for security whatsoever other than “the secret place of the most high.” Let us thank and praise the Lord for we are under the shadow of the Almighty Lord.



Presence of God

**“My presence shall go with thee and I will give thee rest”
- (Exodus 33:14).**

The awareness about the presence of Almighty God makes it easy to pray and to have faith. But at the same time, His Presence should not be taken lightly and carelessly or even taken for granted. We cannot successfully carry on human and Divine communication at the same time. That is the reason why Jesus taught to go into their closet, make fast the door and then to pray to their heavenly Father ‘who seeth in secret.’

Jesus reminded His disciples of the hypocritical Pharisees who prayed on the street corners to be seen of men. He warned disciples not to be like them. In Matthew 6:56, we read that particular admonition. As true prayer is a communication with the Supreme Being - the Father God - we enter into the presence of God in prayer.

Actually, in prayer we are approaching the creator, the one who is worthy of absolute reverence and respect. In Ecclesiastes 5:2, we read: “let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God, for God is in heaven, and thou upon the earth: therefore let thy words be few.”

Most of us know that God is in heaven, but the secret of prayer is to realize that He is also in the very same room where we pray. It is the realization of His presence that makes prayer powerful and meaningful.

But it also warns us not to be careless in our conversation with Him. We are cautioned against vain repetitions as the heathen do, while praying. When the Lord refused to continue with the children of Israel on their journey to Canaan, Moses pleaded: 'If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence' (Exodus 33:15).

So the presence of God is all the more important than anything else. We need His assurance: "My presence shall go with thee." When we really recognize and feel the presence of God, then we find that prayer no longer is a chore, but a supreme delight...



To take up the Cross

“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” - (Mark 8:34).

Christian life is not just fulfilling all our desires and running the rat race to acquire something! Jesus wants us to deny ourselves and shoulder our own cross. In a sense, it is to set aside our personal pleasures. Our cross is something that can be either taken up or laid down. It entails willingness on the part of the individual.

We know, Jesus bore His cross willingly. He was ready to lay down his life for us. In Mark chapter 10, we read about a man who approached Jesus and asked, what he must do to inherit eternal life. From his youth, he had kept all the commandments. Jesus said to him, “you lack one thing: go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me.”

To deny ourselves and to take up our cross may not be so easy. Sometimes it may be a cross to stay in a certain place against our interest. There is freedom to leave! But will we take up the cross for a noble purpose? Leaving our treasure or pleasure may be up to our decision. But, when we prefer the treasure in heaven, we’ll naturally take up our cross and willingly leave what is to be left. The martyrs of old would have been set free, had they denied the Lord. But they preferred to remain in prison and die. They bore their cross willingly.

Sometimes, to adjust with someone who is intolerable is a cross. While there remains the opportunity and means to avoid the person, and you prefer to move on peacefully with him for a greater cause, you are taking up your cross willingly.

In a way, the cross is a personal covenant between the individual and the Lord. While we look up to Jesus and depend only upon Him, we gain the strength to take up our cross and follow Him. But, that is not just as easy as we preach. If preaching and practicing should go hand in hand, then it demands a little bit of pain on our part, which is not always that easy.



Stand Still

“Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord” - (Exodus 14:13).

There can be occasion in our life when we are in a stalemate; when we may neither be able to go forward nor retreat. We might be facing a dilemma as to how we should proceed. When a child of God is brought to such great difficulties, then God’s command to him is ‘stand still.’ There is every chance to get innumerable advices at such a juncture from many corners. Some might advise to give up. Others might suggest to seek the worldly way of action. There can be still others who encourage doing something boldly; because to ‘stand still’ is sheer waste of time!

Sometimes people are tempted not only to do something urgently, but to do everything possible! We may get advices to march forward and expect a miracle. But real faith and dependence on the master listen to none of those suggestions! As a child of God, we’ve to hear only the Lord’s command ‘to Stand Still.’

To ‘stand still’ means to keep the posture of an upright man, ready for action, expecting further orders. But he’ll be cheerfully and patiently awaiting a directing voice. It will not be too long before God shall say, as Moses said to the people of Israel to ‘go forward.’ But in every confused situation, we have to wait till we hear that distinct direction.

As somebody rightly said, ‘there is something more in life than

increasing the speed.’ In times of uncertainty, wait. Do not try to force yourself to any action.

The restraint in your spirit to proceed may be a clear indication to keep quiet and stand still. Anyhow, you’ll see the salvation of the Lord in due time! He’ll renew your strength for some greater advance in your life in His time! Till we hear that still, small voice, let’s hush every other sound around...

Not somehow, but triumphantly

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ...” - (2 Cori. 2:14).

Sometimes, we notice that the enemy seems to have the upper hand for a little while. But after this apparent victory, God comes in and upsets all the work of the enemy. He turns the way of the wicked upside down. The seemingly triumphant march of the enemy is overthrown by His Great power. A child of God who depends on the Lord is led to a larger victory which is not even imagined!

When the three Hebrew children were cast into the fiery-furnace it was an apparent victory for the enemy. It seemed as if the servants of the living God were going to face a terrible defeat. Certainly, we all have been in situations where it seemed as though we were defeated, and the enemy rejoiced! When the Hebrew lads fell into the flames, their enemies watched to see them burn up in that awful fire. But, they were astonished to see them walking around in the fire. Even the smell of fire was not on their garments, because “there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.” See, how the apparent defeat turned out to be a marvelous victory!

Beloved child of God, if you are facing a great trial in your life today, do not own it as a defeat. If we continue by faith, to claim the victory through Him who is able to make us more than conquerors, a glorious victory will soon be seen. Our father in heaven, who is king of kings and

Lord of Lords can bring about a colourful victory in our lives. Victory is our promise and inheritance.

The history of Eric Liddel, gold medal winner at the 1924 Olympics, bears witness to this fact. Eric's favourite item was 100 meters race. But when the schedule was announced, the heats were set for a Sunday and he decided that as a Christian who honoured the day for worship, he couldn't run on that day. However, he won gold in 400 meters which was held on another day. Although he won only one gold medal, he is better known than many other Olympians. His life has been recorded in a dozen biographies just because he refused to run on a Sunday! He considered his faith was worth more than an Olympic gold. Our Lord wants us to overcome the evil, not somehow but triumphantly...



Night Reveals Stars!

“Sorrow is better than laughter; for by sadness of the countenance the heart is made better” - (Ecclesiastes 7:3).

Sorrow often reveals unknown depths in the soul and unknown capabilities of service. Aristotle believed that ‘catharsis’ – purgation of the soul – takes place while reading or watching tragedies! When sorrow comes under the power of Divine grace, it works out a manifold ministry in our lives. The mystery behind such sorrow is that it will turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

Very often, it is sorrow that makes us think deeply and soberly. It makes us to slow down our pace, introspect our motives and dispositions. A thunder storm sometimes reveals the inner, unexplored recesses of a region so nearby and yet so little known. So it is with many souls that great thunderstorms of sorrow reveal some hidden depths in them.

Joseph had more sorrow than all other sons of Jacob. But it led him out into a ministry which could not be dreamt of by others. The Holy Spirit said of him, “Joseph is a fruitful bough... by a well, whose branches run over the wall.” (Genesis 49:22).

Our ‘blues’ for having no shoes will remain only until upon the street we meet a man with no feet! Blessed is the night, for it reveals us the stars. In the same way, sorrow reveals God’s comfort.

H.C. Trumbull narrates a story: “The flood washed away home and mill, all the poor man had in the world. But, after the water had subsided, broken-hearted, he saw something shinning in the bare bank. It was gold. The same flood which discouraged him made him rich.” – This often happens in life!

“Two men looked out of the prison bars,
One saw the mud, other saw the stars.”

20

Blessed Waiting!

“Blessed is he that waiteth” - (Daniel; 12:12).

Marching forward might be comparatively easier for a Christian warrior than standing still. But on many occasions we may have to tarry even till midnight. But our commander’s order can be expected at the right time. Till then, we have to wait in prayer, tell our difficulties and plead for His eternal promises.

We don’t have to bother much about the race ahead. It’s the business of the leader to clear all perplexity ahead. “The peace of God that passeth all understanding” should reign our hearts. It is a deep rest that the world can neither give nor take away. Even in the busiest life, there is a place where we can dwell alone with God, in eternal stillness.

It is true that we may have to walk under starless skies that dripped darkness like drenching rain. Naturally, we may long for moonlight or sunshine. The dark and gloomy night may seem to last forever. We may not hear any soothing voice to mend our broken hearts. But we are expected to simply wait in faith, never to murmur as the children of Israel did against Moses. At the right time, we’ll surely see the gleam of sunshine before us and the clear command to move on...

There is a very beautiful English chorus which means: God never is late. We've to wait till His divine plan for us is unfolded. From all dark concealings, He'll bring forth His plans with all bright revealings! As the emphatic pause is much more mighty than any note of music in all the chorus, so is the time of patient waiting in warrior's marching...!

In Jeremiah 29:11, we read: "for I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

Be Affectionate!

‘Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another’ - (Rom 12:10).

We live in a world full of different kind of turbulence, conflicts and confusions. People are in need of sincere, kind and soothing words to mend their broken hearts. But instead of consolation and encouragement, they often hear harsh words that would only pain their hearts. The world of tough competitions also offers tensions. Peace of mind is just a mirage for the most affluent as well as the most needy!

It is in this context that as children of God, we are to be kind and considerate to our fellow beings. There are ever so many lives that creak harshly as they live day by day.... Nothing goes right with them and most of them are pessimistic to the very core. They need lubricating with the oil of gentleness and kindness – Do you have your own can of oil for this purpose? Be ready with that oil of kindness to help the one nearest to you. It may lubricate him for the whole day. A word of encouragement, a pat on the back, the oil of good cheer and your optimistic attitude would mean something very great to the down hearted. There is a much popular song sung by the famous musician Jim Reaves which says: “Each day I’ll do a golden deed to help those who are in need...”

On the rough and tough road of life we may meet with some people, but once. May it make a considerable impact for a good change in them for the better! There is a story of an old man who carried a little can of

oil with him everywhere he went. When he passed through a door that squeaked, he poured a little oil on the hinges. He oiled the latch of gates that was hard to open. People called him eccentric. But he went on refilling his can of oil and oiled the hard places he came across in his life.

We often see very busy people around, but we may not see the soul's storm – swept by sorrow. Kind words may be short and easy to speak; but their echoes are endless. When you are kind to others, it not only changes you, it changes the world.

Song in the Night

‘I call to remembrance my song in the night’ - (Psalms 77:6).

”Our sweetest songs are those
That tell us of our saddest thoughts”...

Many people never learn to sing until the darkling shadows fall. ‘Ode to a nightingale’ is one of the finest poems of John Keats, the famous English poet. The fabled nightingale carols with its breast against a thorn. The angelic song was heard in the dark night. There is the fable of a little bird that will never sing the melody while his cage is full of light!

Just like this, it is doubtful if a soul can really know the love of God in all its richness and glory until the skies are black. Light comes out of darkness and morning out of the womb of the night. The fragrant roses are gathered in the darkest hours. It is noted that forty percent of the fragrance of roses disappear in the light of the day!

The road ahead may be too rough and instead of flowers, there may be thorns in plenty. The skies over may be too dark. But when we walk with the Great Lord, the journey will turn out to be so sweet and sparkling with inward joy. He is the light of the world.....

There is a divine purpose behind every dark night through which we pass. He will not only give a new song in our mouth during the night, but

also provide a beautiful morning ahead.

”And he shall be as the light of the morning,

When the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain (2 Samuel 23:4).

“When peace like a river, attendeth my way,

When sorrows like sea billows roll

Whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say

It is well, it is well with my soul.....”

Perfect Surrender

“The eyes of the Lord run to and fro...” - (2 Chronicles 16:9).

It is really a marvelous conception of God, that He watches everyone and everything very carefully. He shows Himself strong, especially to those, whose heart is perfect toward Him. But He has His own perfect time to act. Until then He'll be still and watching. His stillness is not acquiescence and His silence is not consent. In the most appropriate time, He will arise. When Lazarus slowly passed through the stages of sickness, and succumbed to the rocky tomb, Jesus was only waiting for the moment when He could intervene most effectively. The designs of the wicked and the apparent success of the enemy was fully defeated then.

God is looking for a person whose heart is always set on Him. There is no limit to what God can do with such a person. In an address given to ministers and workers after his ninetieth birthday, George Muller spoke thus of himself: “I was converted in 1825, but I came into full surrender of the heart only four years later, in 1829. The love of money, position and worldly pleasures were gone. God alone became my portion. I wanted nothing else. By the grace of God, I became an exceedingly happy man”.

To do God's will and trust Him with all our heart is greater and

worthier than wondrous miracles. When we learn to wait for our Lord in everything and surrender us completely, we shall know the strength of His protective care. It's fine to know that God builds hedges of protection around His people. But when we fall out of the line of obedience, and yet try for protection, it is a waste of time and strength. For those whose heart is perfect toward Him, God alone is their portion. Their heart will always rejoice in the Lord and the Lord will show himself strong for those who surrender.....

The Power of Praise

**“He that is in you is greater than that is in the world”
- (1 John 4:4).**

Some months back, I enjoyed reading ‘The Cross and the Switch blade’ by David Wilkerson, once again. In the early days of his ministry David Wilkerson, who worked among the youth gangs in New York, encountered a group of aggressive boys. They were preparing to attack him. But with a word of prayer, he continued his advance. When the boys were about to strike him, Wilkerson suddenly clapped his hands and shouted, ‘Praise the Lord’. It is said that the whole gang fled from the place. Actually, there is great strength and protection while we praise His Holy name.

In II Chronicles 20:22, we read: “And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, which had come against Judah; and they were smitten.”

There is a story of an evangelist who was robbed by a thief on the way. The evangelist began praising the Lord and reached the church. He narrated what had happened and began praising the Lord again. People there asked why he was praising, despite losing his purse. He said, ‘First, I did not steal, but I was stolen; second, the thief was considerate that he did not beat or kill me; third, the thief had taken away only my money and not my spiritual possessions. So I Praise God. . . .’! It may not be quite possible always to do so by most of us and we may not be that much positive all the time! But we’ve enough reason to thank the

Lord, because His plans for us are always for our good. Moreover, we've a divine protection as long as we abide in Him. In Psalms. 27:2, we read: "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes come upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell". Regarding this verse, one commentary tells that those who approach us for some evil purpose will get a kind of electric shock!

In Job 1:10, we read that the Lord made hedge about Job, and about his house and about all that he hath on every side. This kind of protection is a great promise for a child of God. So let's "give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus (1 Thes 5:18). Let us praise and thank our Lord from the heart of hearts. It's not because everything seems so well now, but because we know that all things work together for good to them that love God". Praise the Lord.



Priorities in Life

“Finally, brethren whatsoever things are true..... think on these things” - (Phil 4:8).

In life, there are matters to which we have to give priority and there are less important things as well. I still remember an article written by the famous journalist late Sri. T.V.R. Shenoy about 25 years back, in which he pointed out that our country’s planning was topsy-turvy. In support of his views, he pointed out that while we have lakhs of villages without pure drinking water, we spend lavishly for space exploration. By doing so, we got membership in the space-club, but were still in the list of poorest countries in the world. This type of paradox occurs due to poor planning and priority setting.

In 1 Cori. 10:23, Paul says, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not”. In the spiritual realm, we gradually acknowledge that things to which we attach great importance cease to be so in the long run. We understand that in the light of eternity, many of our concerns are less important or just trivial. It’s interesting to note that people run the rat race not only when they are ‘young and foolish’, but also when they are ‘old and foolish’!

It’s quite amazing to note that normally our priorities change as we grow old. For some time, we feel that our career, children, their education

etc are very crucial. But when we confront some health problems or other difficulties, a peaceful life becomes all the more important and all other things are quite insignificant. Later on, as we face the final reality, in comparison with eternal life, everything else lose its charm and lustre.

Most of the things we held on so close turns out to be of less value. For a five year old child, toys and colourful things may be a source of amusement. Things which are so dear at the teen ages lose their attraction in the youth. Worldly possessions may cease to be in the priority list as people get mature and grow spiritually.

Moreover, we become aware that there is nothing we can hold on to tightly. After all, we all need to bid farewell to this life empty handed one day. If only we could develop a better sense of setting our priorities regarding time, treasure and talents! Remembering that we are going to die is the best way to avoid the trap of thinking that we have something to lose. All expectations, pride, fear of embarrassment or failure fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important.

Love's Labour, Never Lost!

'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast; unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord' - (1 Cori. 15:58).

'Love's labour lost' may remind us the play by Shakespeare with that title. But this is quite a different subject: Apostle Paul affirms that our labour for the Lord is not in vain. In the book of Nehemiah, we see in chapter 2:2, the King asking "why is thy countenance sad, being thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." Nehemiah was in good position at the palace. But he was not happy when his people were left in captivity and in great affliction and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem also was broken down, and the gates thereof were burned with fire. So he sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. He was strengthened by Almighty to build the wall of Jerusalem, in spite of challenges from Sanballat and others. Such labour which was initiated by real spiritual pains was not in vain!

It was in 1819 that Ida Scudder, a young graduate from USA came to India to visit her parents. They were medical missionaries from America. Once some men from the neighbouring villages approached Ida requesting help for their wives who were experiencing complications during child birth. Since Ida had no medical training, she explained her helplessness. As the village custom did not permit a man to help during child birth, the three women had died due to improper medical intervention. This challenged young Ida to become a medical missionary and to set up

CMC, Vellore.

Robert Rakes was touched by the pathetic plight of young children in the streets which prompted him to start Sunday schools for them. George Verwer had such an inner urge and pain which paved the way for the beginning of 'Operation Mobilization'. The very same burden prompted David Wilkerson to minister among the youth gangs in New York.

It was such a spiritual insight and goodwill in Prof. Mathew P. Thomas which ignited the flame for Campus evangelization through Inter Collegiate Prayer Fellowship (ICPF). The labour of such men of God proved to be quite fruitful, even though all of them had much personal struggles behind it. But their pains were not in vain. As Apostle Paul reminds us, we've to be "steadfast unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord". There will come a day when all the pain and struggles will be rewarded and we'll certainly know that such labour of love was not in vain!

Ignited to ignite

“I am the vine, ye are the branches..... without me ye can do nothing.....” - (John 15:5).

We are called and separated by the Lord specially for His divine purpose and plan. It is not at all to exalt and eulogize ourselves, but to magnify His amazing and Mighty Name. It is heard that Michelangelo, the famous painter kept a candle on his cap while painting. He did so to avoid the light from falling directly on his sculpture or painting and also that his shadow would not fall on his work that could lead to imperfection. Similarly, a Christian has to be very careful that no shadow of self will dim the work he does for the Lord.

Once a young Bible school graduate was asked to pastor in a big congregation. In spite of his degrees and oratory skills, his congregation sensed that his sermons lacked something. One day he found a note for him on the pulpit. It said: “Sir, we would like to see Jesus”. The young pastor was touched and the Holy Spirit convicted him of his superficiality. From that time onwards, he decided to magnify only the Lord. Then, his messages brought about changes not only in the church, but even in himself.

The diary of David Brainard, dedicated missionary from USA, was published after his death. An English cobbler happened to read it. The fire ignited thus made him start an amazing missionary movement in

India. He was none other than William Carey. His epoch - making message – “Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God” challenged many. When he died at the age of 73, he had seen the scriptures translated into 40 languages, founded a college, opened a botanical garden and had been responsible to a great extent for prohibiting ‘sati’ in India.

‘Haystack prayer movement’ ignited Adoniram Judson to reach Burma and translate the entire Bible into Burmese. A country minister’s prayer saved a little boy in Scotland. He was Robert Moffat, who later went as a pioneer missionary to South Africa. His lecture ignited a student to go to Africa. He was none other than David Livingstone!

Thousands were thus challenged and inspired by the lives of selfless ministers who were keen to project only the Name of the Lord. “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things”! – (Romans 10:15).

Anxious about Nothing!

In nothing be anxious - (Phil 4:6).

Of course, there may be ever so many difficulties, afflictions and trials in any normal life. Yet, we are admonished not to be anxious over it under any circumstances, because we have a Father in Heaven. Not only is He Almighty, but also He loves His children as He loves His only begotten son. His joy and delight is to help us at all times, and under all circumstances. “In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanks giving let your requests be made known to God”. What a glorious privilege for a child of God!

We are told not just to bring very serious matters alone, but even very small and apparently trifle matters of life before His gracious throne. ‘In everything’ includes little and very little things!

Sometimes, the requests may be forwarded even without verbal support. Groanings and sighs are recorded with equal importance. When we awake at night, by a kind of spiritual instinct, and bring our various little matters before Him in the sleepless night, He listens to each one of them. ‘I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart; and my spirit made diligent search’. -Ps. 77:6.

In Gen 29: 31 -35, we read about Leah, who was hated, dejected and disheartened. But she did four things which brought in miracles in her

life. First, she let the Lord see her condition -Reuben means God sees. Then, she let Lord hear her - Simeon means God hears. Then, she joined herself unto God - Levi means God brings together. She praised the Lord as she got Judah which means Praise. As the meaning of her son's names indicate, she was ready to submit herself fully before the Lord and finally she was recognized and blessed more than many others, even more than Rachel who was more loved by Jacob.

We know that our Saviour and Lord is more interested in our spiritual well being to mould us for eternity. But at the same time, our difficulties in connection with our family, profession, health and everything is also duly taken care of. So, speak to the Lord. Pour out your heart in His presence. All supplication is to be supported by the strong foundation of thanks giving. In fact, we have abundant reasons for thanksgiving. 'And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus'.

Perfect Picture

**“What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter”
- (John 13:7).**

Here on earth, with ever so many limitations, our knowledge whatsoever is partial. We perceive only very little and conceive even lesser. We've only a very vague view of God's dealings. We see only half completed, (half baked?) half developed plans. The full picture will stand out in fair and graceful proportions only in eternity. Once, when an artist was painting the picture of a young lad in his studio, the boy got bored at the silly sketches on the canvas. It was just some drawings here and there with no specific shape at all. The boy expressed his dissatisfaction and irritation. But the painter tried to pacify him by saying thus: “stay cool, I'm only working on your portrait”. Only if we wait till the perfect picture is finished, we'll be able to see its beauty.

Even the most attractive natural scenes are painted by some trivial sketches here and there, at first. By and by, we see summer smile upon it, night spreads its feathery foliage with dew drops, the birds nestle on its branches and so on.... It is just the same in our life also. “All things work together for good....” In Jeremiah 29:11, we read: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end”.

We feel sad when the cedar tree which stood in its majesty in nature's

sanctuary succumb to the woodman's stroke. We see the axe making its first gash on its trunk, then the noble limbs stripped of their branches and at last the tree coming to a crash to the ground! We may exclaim against the wanton destruction and demolition of this proud pillar in the temple of nature. Some may bewail like the Shakespearean Character:

“As flies to wanton boys are we to gods,
They kill us for their sport...”

Of course we may be tempted to doubt the purpose behind each and every pain.....

But just wait a little. Watch the wood while the workman launches it down the mountain side and at last behold it as a glorious polished beam in the temple of God. How many of us are like this Cedar! When the axe struck us, we found no reason for such mysterious dealings. But the master carpenter and sculptor had a noble plan to set us as everlasting pillars. Yes, the perfect picture is yet to emerge.

30

‘Peace that passeth all understanding’

“My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you” – (John 14:27).

The lexical meaning of ‘peace’ is harmony, calmness, serenity, stillness, tranquility etc. But our Lord promised peace that passeth all human understanding. Once some renowned painters were asked to illustrate the abstract idea of peace. They drew different types of pictures. One painter chose the scene of a still, lone lake among the far off mountains with all its serenity. There were many such beautiful paintings. But one painter pictured on his canvas a thundering water fall, with a fragile birch tree bending over the foam, and at the end of its branch, sat a robin almost wet with the spray and yet singing! This picture was awarded at the contest.

A life of real peace is not a life without any trouble and tumult. The life of Jesus was outwardly one of the most troubled lives. Great waves and tempest was breaking over the boat all the time until the body was laid in the grave guarded by armed Roman soldiers. But his inner life was a sea of glass. The great calm and serenity was unequalled. Even when the human blood hounds were dogging Him in the streets of Jerusalem, He offered to His disciples as a last legacy – ‘My peace’. He taught through His life that peace is not a hallowed feeling that comes over us in church meetings alone, but it is the repose of a heart set deep in God!

At any moment, when you go through deep depression and tough conflicts in life, be assured that real rest comes only through the prince of peace. Even when our prayers and groanings seem unheard, His promises are ever dependable. At the eve of this year, we wish all the very best for all our readers.

As in the darkest nights, the sweetest songs of nightingale sooth the wounded soul, His sweet fellowship turns all grief to glory.

The way of glory leads right to the cross.
Living for the Lord, fearing Him each day,
Best prepares the soul for the stormy ways,
As trials come, tempting to despair
We can rest secure, safe with in His care.....

31

Wings of Faith to Soar High

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” - (Rom. 8:37).

It is really wonderful to note that our spiritual conflicts and hard times in life turn out to be among our choicest blessings. Our adversary is used to train us for his ultimate defeat.

“Our sweetest songs are those
That tells us of our saddest thoughts...”

When temptations are victoriously encountered, it doubles our spiritual strength.

In Isaiah 11:14, we read: “But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the philistines.”

As we know the Philistines were deadly foes of God’s people. The enemy will not only be conquered, but will be used to carry the victors on their shoulders for further triumphs. By the victorious grace of God, even the most unfriendly and unfavourable circumstances and painful problems are turned out be productive projects. Yea, God can turn problems into projects, obstacles to opportunities!

We are more than conquerors, as we get out of the conflict with a spiritual discipline that will greatly strengthen our faith. The promise and assurance we have in the Lord is not to move on somehow, but

triumphantly. It will be far above the expectations of the world or the enemy! People considered Joseph as a dreamer, but God made him a Prime Minister. People considered David as a shepherd, but God made him a King!

As for a child of God, the battle always belongs to the Lord. A bird sitting on the branch of a tree is not afraid of the shaking branch, because the bird trusts not the branch, but the one who gave wonderful wings! Let's have faith in our Lord who gave us the wings to soar high...

It's not just our talents, treasures, time or dreams that help us to accomplish anything in life. It's nothing but the grace of our Lord and grace alone that helps us to move on...

We wish a very bright and happy new year to all our readers, yes, wings of faith to soar high...



Devotion rather than deeds

“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love” – (Rev. 2:4).

The church at Ephesus was rebuked because it had lost sight of the first things, left the first love. In other respects it was a remarkable church. They labored with patience, hated evil, exposed false apostles, persevered and endured for His Name. Heart and soul they were for the Lord and nothing had made them give up. Yet, in spite of all this, the Lord had something against them.

They were warned that unless they repent, His anointing would be withdrawn. What was so serious about them? They had grown cold in their love for the Lord. They had not lost their love for Him, but just left their first love elsewhere. They were so busy with their meetings, programmes, conferences and what not? They just lost sight of the One for whom all these things existed!

Friends, clearly this shows that He cares more for the devotion of our heart than all our activities. The devil, knowing this will get us involved in a thousand engagements in the name of spirituality. In the long run, we'll find no time to spend with our Lord.

It's amazing to note that among the vast majority of professional Christians, their spiritual temperature is below freezing point! Most of them are not concerned about relation with the Lord, or even with people.

They are pre-occupied with a number of activities which would promote their name rather than the glory of God.

In an interview with Rick Warren, author of ‘Purpose Driven Life’ and pastor of Saddleback Church, California, he observed: “In a nutshell, life is preparation for eternity. God is more interested in making our life holy than making it happy. Moreover, God is more interested in what I’m than what I do. That’s why we are called ‘human beings’ and not human doings!”

We know that the world considers only the bold, beautiful and successful. But rather than a bundle of deeds and success stories, a broken and contrite heart will be more pleasing to our Lord. Let us try to make ourselves available for Him always, instead of designing new strategies for any project whatsoever without His guidance...

Test of spirituality

“Lovest thou me more than these?” – (John 21:15).

We know that Peter was entrusted the great task to feed the sheep only after his confirmation of love to Jesus. Before crucifixion, Peter had denied the Lord three times. Yet, when Jesus entrusted Peter with the feeding of His Sheep, He made no reference to any of those weaknesses. He did not even challenge him to be humble and prayerful in future, nor did He ask Peter's willingness to witness boldly facing any persecution. He did not ask Peter any such questions or warned about the chances of his life being in jeopardy!

Jesus knew well that just one simple question would be sufficient. If that question found a true response, everything else would automatically follow: “Lovest me more than everything and everyone else...?”

Love for Christ is the real test of anybody's spirituality. If a man has attained a high rank in church hierarchy, he need not be a spiritual man, just because of his designation alone. Possessions of theological degrees and researches done for years are no guarantee for spirituality. In fact, pseudo-spirituality may cause more harm than non-spirituality.

Dress code and pious appearance may often deceive and mislead people. Even zeal for evangelization may not be the real mark of true spirituality. Often we see that the so called spiritual realm is “full of

sound and fury, signifying nothing!”

As we are living in the last days, there is every chance of being misguided by hypocritical people wearing the mask of spirituality. Very often, trends and practices in cults try to attract people with no definite convictions or real relation with the living God. In short, the test of genuine spirituality is only one thing: the extent of our love for God. Ultimately relation with God is what counts and it is between you and God!

Competition Vs Comfort

“Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man’s envy of his neighbour” - (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

Ours is a world of tough competitions. Many people labour hard, not knowing what they are aiming at. As P.B. Shelly wrote:

“We look before and after
And pine for what is not!”

People are not satisfied with their lot. They toil hard to gain success and comfort. Somebody remarked that in a consumerist society, “People buy things they don’t need, to show people they don’t like, with money they don’t have!” The basic inspiration behind the hard work and efficiency of many people seems to be nothing but envy. The spirit of competition to achieve greater success develops when one feels envy at the success of another person.

Very often, people who are workaholic and too much competitive minded forget to take rest. They work all throughout their life to gain comfort in the end. But real comfort is a mirage, as they get entangled in the web of competitions! There is a story of a fisherman who was resting on the sea shore after his day’s toil. He was advised by a millionaire, who came to the beach, to use his leisure time too so that he could buy a big fishing boat instead of his small boat. The simple minded fisherman

expressed his doubt as to why he should buy a big boat! The millionaire explained that he could then get more fish and earn more money. Again the fisherman asked: ‘what then?’ “Then, after working hard for some years, you can take rest like me in some beautiful beach like this;” said the wealthy man. The fisherman smiled innocently and said: “That’s what I’m doing just now!”

In the book of Ecclesiastes, the author says: “Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.” (4:6. NIV).

Continued toil without considerable rest is the characteristic of a social atmosphere where mutual competition is the norm. In an economic system based on envy and competition, individuals labour hard for wealth without due consideration for their own comfort. While greed is the root cause of many an evil, contentment of the heart leads to real comfort. In Mark 6:31, we see Jesus calling the apostles to take rest: “Come ye, yourself apart and rest a while...”



Antidote for distress

“Let not your heart be troubled” - (John 14:1).

As we are just human beings and our framework so frail, we tend to have troubled hearts. What we hear, read and notice around may not be encouraging to our hearts. On the other hand, we may be thoroughly discouraged and disheartened. Even great men of God like David, Jeremiah, Elijah, Paul and others were also discouraged on certain occasions. To be honest, we need to admit that we had tumultuous hearts on ever so many situations in our life.

God knows well that the times are terrible and the vivid calamities around can cause worry and fear. Yet He admonished not to be intimidated by the trouble and turmoil of these tumultuous days. But, what exactly is the real cause of our distress and discomfort?

Is God still in control? Does He still care for me? When we acknowledge the omniscience and omnipotence of God, we'll certainly feel comfortable beyond all reasons of worry. Every unsettled circumstance drives us to our knees. Troubled hearts travel to God's word for solace. When we just ask Jesus to help us and submit all our woes before Him, we experience a relief that really touches our soul. Stressful times, unexpected setbacks, unfulfilled ambitions, long awaited desires and various other indefinable dejections can cause a troubled

heart. It's a paradox that all worry and human remedy cause only more worry! There is of course, a panacea for all such illness. Jesus Himself is the antidote. All our distress is radically removed once we enter into a deep communion in His holy Presence...

Apostle Paul in 2.Cori. 4:8 says, "We are... perplexed, but not in despair." In Christ we are liberated from the bondage of anxiety, distress, disharmony, and all discord. The Holy Spirit equips us with the spiritual armour to resist all kinds of disappointments. One little word of faith defeats our enemy. We must be alert, not to be entangled in the traditions of some spiritual repertoire which might try to sneak us back into some hypocritical bewailing!

36

Comforter of the bereaved

“And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, weep not” - (Luke 7:13).

As Jesus went into a city called Nain, he was touched by the sight of a grieving mother on the way to bury her only son. Jesus had compassion on her. While his disciples and mourners were watching in utter amazement, Jesus touched the coffin. “And he said, young man, I say unto thee, Arise.” The young man got up, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Jesus was so compassionate, while he was on earth. With thoughtful, loving action and words, Jesus brought new life, hope and comfort to the forlorn widow. Even when Lazarus died, the deep sorrow of Mary and Martha touched him. They were grief-stricken as Lazarus was their only brother. Jesus comforted them by affirming that He is resurrection and life. Those who believe in Him will never die. He brought Lazarus back to life.

Departure of loved ones can cause waves of grief that seem as though they will never subside. Empty places at the table represent vacuums that are hard to fill. The heart of Jesus is so compassionate and is open to our cries. We need not hesitate to bring our sorrows, tears and apprehensions to Him. Without specific details, we accept Isaiah’s prophetic picture of Jesus—a man acquainted with grief and pain (Ish. 53).

When we confront our personal loss, sorrow or pain, we turn to Jesus and find that he comes to us just as He did to the widow of Nain and to Martha and Mary. He is life and resurrection. He lives to revive our depressed, sorrowful hearts and spirits. In both the above cases, their loss was great as it was the only son and only brother. Jesus gave a specific reply in their great loss.

We are also expected to comfort others in distress as we were comforted by His love. Sometimes, we may not know how to console people who are drenched in deep sorrow. But our prayerful presence may speak volumes even in silence. Our love, care, prayer and a pat on the back can do wonders and they receive renewed strength! We can be Jesus to those who grieve, if we own a compassionate heart.



Way towards meaningful life

“Jesus said unto him, I’m way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” - (John 14:6).

In fact there are not many ways, as many people think, for a meaningful and goal-oriented life. We are really indebted to God Almighty for giving us this wonderful gift of life on this beautiful planet. Very often people don’t bother to spend a little time to thank God for it. Many people don’t even spare a little time to think where they are heading to! Everyone is so busy in life...

All who think soberly will agree that with all their hectic schedule, they confront solitude in life. Even after amassing great wealth, fame or whatever they thirst for, they remain alone at the end to face the grave reality-death. Ever so many great men who lived and disappeared from the face of earth have tried to analyse and find out the real meaning of life. According to Shakespeare, “Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing!”

For many a philosopher, life is a ‘Gordian knot’, where they fail miserably to set an example or to direct their followers, to a convincingly model life style.

It’s in this context that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ stand unique in history. Those who believe in the cleansing blood of Christ are saved to live anew. Saint Augustine once remarked that all humans

have a vacant part in their heart which could be filled only by God.

While Jesus talked to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, regarding born-again experience, it was difficult for him to grasp it. In fact, it remains a mystery which cannot be understood just by worldly knowledge. Those who are not born-again cannot live meaningfully because it is made possible only by divine, life-giving power from above.

We might have obviously noticed how our preferences in life change as we grow in age. Things which were so dear to us in our 20's remain worthless in 60's. Even those things which seemed so precious will turn out to be useless and rubbish when once we face the eternal truth-death. All valuable documents that were safely treasured once will be worthless and futile in the final lap. There is no hope comparable to the divine promises of our Lord Jesus that can be exchanged for any trivial treasure whatsoever....

38

Heard melodies are sweet...

‘For surely there is an end; and your expectation shall not be cut off’ - (Proverb 23:18).

The optimistic note in some of the poems of the famous English romantic poet John Keats are quite refreshing:

“Heard melodies are sweet,
But those unheard are sweeter...”

When the disciples asked Jesus about the sign of His coming and the end of the age, He listed a number of end time signs and concluded that the good news will be preached throughout the whole world. Although the devil devises different types of hurdles against soul winners, doors opened by Almighty God for evangelization cannot be shut by any force what so ever.

It is estimated that over 75000 souls are added to church worldwide every day. True, a good number of missionaries are persecuted. All the powers of hell work against genuine evangelists. It might be probably intensified. – Weak-minded and half-hearted warriors may retreat to comfort zones with ever so many lame excuses!

“One who cannot dance,
Often blames the unevenness of the floor...”

It's quite surprising to note that evangelistic revival is widespread in many forbidden areas of the world, even behind iron or bamboo curtains! Yea, "the best is yet to come..."

As we know, troubles faced in many nations are already very severe. The future seems to be very bleak, in a sense. World leaders are baffled, not knowing what to do... only the church has a valid reason to lift up its head, in optimism. Yes, only the church of Christ can look forward expectantly to its future glory!

"The earth shall be filled with the knowledge
of the Lord as the waters cover the sea..." (Isa. 11:9).

Individuals are Important

**“It is not my Heavenly Father’s will that even One should perish”
– (Mat. 18:14).**

While Jesus was on earth, multitudes followed Him. But He cared for each single, individual because He realized the worth and significance of each person. Amidst His tight schedule of ministry, He was ready to attend their very personal problems also!

Even opportunities that appear so small were exploited. Sometimes, multitudes came to know Christ through just one individual. When Andrew introduced Messiah to his brother Peter, he was instrumental for the salvation of thousands.

Soul winners often sacrifice their comforts, start out early to do the difficult task of ploughing, sowing, watering, manuring and what not? It is said about George Verwer, (Founder of OM) that he distributed gospel tracts personally and daily to as many people as he could.

Personal communication with individuals often brings in desired results. In the first chapter of St. John’s gospel, we see Jesus making personal contacts with Peter, Philip and Nathanael. In the next chapter, Lord spends time with the servants at a wedding.

In chapter 3, we see Him in a long and personal conversation with Nicodemus. Chapter 4 narrates the conversation with the Samaritan

woman. The next chapter is the encounter with the helpless paralytic. Even on the cross, we see Jesus communicating with individuals with His everlasting mercy and special concern. In Luke 19, we see that Jesus took time to stay with Zachaeus amidst his crowded programmes.

For a soul winner with real burden, every single person is important as well as crucial. Jesus spoke three parables in Luke chapter 15. A shepherd loses one of his hundred sheep; a woman loses one of her ten silver coins and a father, whose younger son gets lost. In these three Parables, the percentage of loss for the shepherd was just one; for the woman it was ten; and for the father, it was fifty!

But, percentage of loss is not much relevant. Every single loss is significant. We'll accomplish little in our life and ministry unless we understand the worth and value of individuals!

40

Accomplished!

“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, it is finished; and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost” - (John 19:30).

The problem with many of the so called religious leaders is to understand how the greatest of all gifts can be received by simple faith. Naturally, man with his inborn pride attempts to ‘do’ something to earn it. But, with regard to salvation, God declares, ‘Done’!

The message of the cross and salvation is profoundly simple. Many of the rationalists cannot ever comprehend it. They can’t conceive of so simple a way for salvation.

Even in Christendom, there are many who try to make the whole story very complex. Many of the interpretations regarding the Word of God appear to be unnecessary and irrelevant. The gospel is good news for those who have done their best, but failed.. All kinds of self motivated efforts and boasting are totally out of place.

Not only all the earthly pleasures, failing joys and fading treasures become worthless before the “old rugged cross,” but also all our pride, prestige and pre-fabricated practices!

Jesus bore all our sins which were red like crimson, on the cross of Calvary and has thrown them into the depths of the sea...

God deals with the root cause of sin and not with its effect. Jesus

paid the penalty for ‘all’ our sin. The blood of the Lamb of God cleansed us. So we are called saints and not as forgiven sinners. Like a perennial river running over the pebbles, we are still under the cleansing stream of Immanuel’s precious blood. We are what we are only by the grace of God. Never a moment can we afford to be outside the boundary of the cleansing blood.

In the book of Acts, 15:2: we read that when certain teachers from Judea urged the early Christians to be circumcised besides their faith, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them. Law and grace cannot go hand in hand. But it doesn’t mean that there is no discipline at all. We need to live a very disciplined and sincere life. Our salvation is purely based on the accomplished task by our Redeemer on the cross. Nothing else and nothing less...



Rather Holy than happy

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and in health, just as your soul prospers” – (3 John : 2).

We know that progressive holiness means walking blameless before God as well as maintaining clear relationships with men. In fact, our God is also concerned about our wholesome well being. We, as human beings need enough health and all other material blessings. But our spiritual well being is all the more important.

A.W. Tozer remarked that the first mark of a spiritual man is that he desires to be holy than happy. Revival is not just for sinners, but for the saved as well. Very often, people are touched when they hear a moving and comforting sermon. Many shed tears over their problems. But rarely do people repent regarding their sins!

We need prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah to preach repentance. We should never be satisfied by seeing excited and happy people. ‘God is more interested in making us holy than making us happy’, as Rick Warren, the famous writer and evangelist remarked.

Normally, nobody is interested in hearing something sad and dismal from others:

“Laugh and the world will laugh with you

But when you weep, you weep alone!”

One of the gross errors of the modern ‘health and wealth gospel is that they encourage to obey God with the primary motive of getting earthly blessings...

We need to beware of being blind folded by material blessings. God’s blessings are not endorsements of our ways. The purest motive of obedience to God must be to please him, but not just for any material benefits, whatsoever.

In fact, the process of practical sanctification starts from the point of justification itself. When the rags of self righteousness are replaced by robes of salvation, based on the standing before God, we are called saints (not as forgiven sinners!) When positional sanctification is a privilege, practical sanctification is the responsibility of the believer.

42

Aged, but young!

“Those planted in the Lord’s own house will produce fruit even in old age” - (Psalms 92:13).

“People grow old only by deserting their ideals and not just by merely living for long years”. This seems to be a very wise and keen observation.

Sustained youthfulness is one of the promises of the New Heaven and New Earth. But old age and all the ailments connected with it may be inevitable here on earth, in this life. There are many people who strive hard with all known tactics to stay young. Hair dye, facial, fitness exercises, cosmetics, attire and what not are attempted!

Walterson was right when he observed: “Years wrinkle the face, but lack of enthusiasm wrinkle the soul”... Senior citizenship is a privilege and honour.

In fact, the whiteness of the hair, the slow steps or the strange image that greets you in the mirror doesn’t matter much, as long as you hold the confidence that you are growing old to bloom before the face of God. Retirement and old age are never a curse. It’s often reminded that ‘retire’ means to ‘re-tyre!’

We know that Moses was 80 years when God called him. God never relieves anyone from serving him just because of increasing age. As loss of enthusiasm and idling will lead to all sorts of psychological as well as

physiological maladies, it is advised that retired people take up some regular service.

Is it not astonishing to note that John Wesley preached more than twice a day, even at the age of 86. Michelangelo was still designing structures in his 89th year. He painted the ceiling of Sistine chapel when he was 90. Bernard Shaw wrote some of his famous plays at 80. Mother Teresa, with all her ailments served among the poor till her death, at 87. John Milton wrote 'Paradise Regained' at the age of 63. History abounds with such testimonies of senior citizens with vigour and vision.

There are people who involve themselves in social clubs and activities. But, when God's people gather with fellow saints, in the Name of Jesus, our hearts rejoice more than anything else. Age is not a barrier then. The refreshing restfulness thus gained will naturally revive our vitality. Of course, old age can be much miserable without God's grace. Because of His unfailing love, 'we may sing for joy to the end of our lives', (Psalms 90:14).

Thankfulness with gratitude

“O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good” - (Psalms 107:1).

Thanks giving is nothing but an expression of gratitude to God. Psalms 106 & 107 starts with thanks giving. In fact, a grateful heart is essential as we approach the throne of grace. We deserve nothing, considering our sin and ingratitude. We owe to God and His everlasting grace for all what we enjoy.

Yet, just like the people of ‘Israel who forgot altogether His tender mercies’ and turned back from true worship, we often turn out to be ungrateful. Many a time we step inside the shoe of the prodigal son and walk away from a loving Father!

Expression of thankfulness is a virtue and part of a refined character. Often thankfulness is expressed in words, while gratitude is shown in deeds. Thankfulness may be a beginning and gratitude, an end. Cicero regarded gratitude not only as “the greatest of all virtues, but the parent of all others”.

We feel gratitude towards somebody who goes beyond the call of duty. Naturally, there will be a sincere desire to repay what has been received. But, there are people with ‘vanity, pride and arrogance’ who dare not care about it.

French king Louis IV observed: “Every time I appoint someone to a

vacant position, I make a hundred unhappy and one ungrateful"! But, the possibility of ingratitude should not be a hindrance to helping someone in need.

Seneca said: It's another man's fault if he be ungrateful, but it's mine if I do not help him! "Modern researches have shown that those who practice gratitude tend to be more creative, have a stronger immune system and have stronger social relationships."

"Thou that has given so much to me,
Give one thing more, a grateful heart"

-George Herbert.

Let's also plead for a grateful heart, at the dawn of this New Year. Best wishes for all our readers.

“A tale told by an idiot?”

“Therefore I hated life, because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me; for all is vanity and vexation of Spirit” – (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

Even the wisest king ever lived, king Solomon, bewailed the vanity of human labour. Great thinkers and philosophers have tried their best to know more of the meaning and scope of life. It was a Shakespearean character who observed that” “life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing!”

Similarly, no philosopher could ever come to a conclusion as to the real meaning of life. But it was only Christ, ‘the real way, truth and life’, who showed us the path towards a meaningful and wonderful life experience. Life without Him is indeed void and meaningless.

In John 3:3, Jesus said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”. Just as we were born physically into this world, a heavenly birth is a reality. This happens when God attracts us and we submit ourselves to His divine call. In Romans 10:9, we read” “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth and believe thou shalt be saved”. According to the Bible, only the one who had gone through this experience is a child of God. Others also may get worldly blessings. But divine inheritance is for the church alone.

Gospel is so simple, but a mystery. As we know, many people are unaware of this eternal truth. Many turn a deaf ear to this reality. As

our life on earth is so short and no scope for a second chance, eternal truths are to be taken seriously.

It's really astonishing to note that all what people acquire has practically no value at the face of death – the ultimate reality! Eternal life is offered for those who believe in the price paid for our redemption on the cross. Only those who are assured of this promise can be called 'blessed'. May the Lord help us to be His real witnesses and enjoy the sweet fellowship with Him on this earth and hereafter.

Living in the Light of eternity

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest..... think on these things” - (Phil 4:8).

In an ordinary life style, people are involved and tied up in a thousand little and silly issues, which they think are inevitable. In the long run, they may recognize and admit that all their hard work and aspiration ends up nowhere! As we read in Ecclesiastes 2:11, they too might conclude: “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun”.

We come across people, who are workaholic, spend all their time, energy and resources for accomplishing their assigned tasks. Finally, when they count the outcome, they are disillusioned. In the famous novel ‘Old Man and the Sea’ by Earnest Hemingway, we find an old man engaged in the earnest effort to catch a big fish. It was really a very tiresome and exhaustive encounter in the deep sea. People thought that it was a very successful business. But, at last, we find the man lying on the sea shore with just the skeleton of the big fish and nothing else! The net result of the thrilling expedition was a big zero!

Apostle Paul exhorts to ‘hold on to eternal life’, because everything else has a diminishing value. Ravindra Nath Tagore’s prayer: “Help me to raise my head above daily trifles” – is really a remarkable plea for a

sublime life style. Often we get entangled in so many silly matters which are worthless in the light of eternity. Living in the light of eternity is not just a blessed way of life, but the most meaningful one also.....

In practical life, we know that we keep a number of unnecessary, outdated and useless things at home, which serves only the purpose of robbing off our valuable space. Once such rubbish things are removed, we breath the free air of liberty and relief. Useful and precious items will be more accessible then. Likewise, when there is a cleansing; “whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and good” will be more visible and prominent.

Undistracted attention

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” - (2 Chronicles 16:9).

In Psalms 25:15, we read: “Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord”. When we recognize that an ordinary Christian life is tragically shallow, the need of a deeper Christian life becomes all the more important. Unless and until we feel the need for a transformation, we’ll be following the trodden path of sluggishness.

Very often, we see many of the so called believers following a set pattern familiar to them, adhering to the rituals of their group. They do it with a kind of self satisfaction, but not with concentration. When the eyes of Peter were diverted from the face of the Lord, and saw the rolling waves ahead, he began to drown. In fact, there can be a thousand scenes around, which might attract our attention. This may end in entertainment or enthusiasm for a short period. Anyway, the final outcome will be dejection and dismay and alienation from the path of truth! “There can be a thousand reasons for failure, but not a single excuse!”

“Stopping by Woods on a snowy Evening” is a beautiful poem by Robert Frost, famous American poet. The last stanza of the poem was a source of inspiration for Jawaharlal Nehru, which he kept on his study table:

‘The woods are lovely dark and deep

But I’ve promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep

And miles to go before I sleep’.

The lonely traveller was bewitched by the enchanting natural beauty around, which prompted him to linger there for more time. But then, he was reminded of his duties and promises to be fulfilled. He decided to continue his journey with strong determination. This kind of vision and firm action is quite necessary for a believer also, which will enable him for a victorious and deeper Christian life....

May the Lord help us to move on with undistracted attention



The Answer

“I’m the way, the truth and life. No one comes to Father except through me” - (John 14:6).

In this problematic and complex world, people seek to find an answer which might quench their thirst in various contexts. Very often, these problems range from very personal matters to socio-economic issues. We find people and places where readymade, quick answers are provided. May be, for a little time, the seekers are satisfied because many of them are not so serious about long lasting remedy.

There was a cartoon published long back, in ‘One World’ – a publication of WCC. The cartoon depicted two hippies standing under a hoarding placed in a public place. The inscription on the hoarding read: ‘Christ is the Answer’ - These hippies exclaimed: “By the way, what’s the question!?”

Knowingly or unknowingly, many preachers give the message that we seek God to get an answer to one or other problem! It’s quite true, that we’ve enough and more problems, questions, trials and what not... It’s also true that our gracious and merciful Lord is there to help us in our troubles and tense situations in life. But, isn’t God something more than just a problem solving centre? If not, we are in the wrong track! How much more and how different should be our attitude and relation with Heavenly Father!

Very often, the tender and mystic relationship with a loving Father is mistaken for an answering machine! The centrality of Christian faith – crucified and risen Christ – is ignored in many pulpits... Christianity is more a relation, rather than a mere religion.



Contentment

“...But godliness with contentment is great gain” - (1 Thim. 6:6).

We live in a world of tough competitions. Even from early childhood till old age, we are told to strive hard in order to win. Success and speed seems to be the two guide words of this generation. People are very often misguided by attractive advertisements and success stories.

Godliness is never a marathon race after gain and success. Real contentment is gained not from material blessings. ‘Less luggage, more comfort;’ is true not only in train journey, but also in life’s journey as well. We see people around with too many engagements. They don’t dare to spare a breathing space in between their tiresome toil. With all accomplishments and achievements, they are not really satisfied. Moreover, some people employ all kinds of tactics and acrobatics to attain their goal, and ascribe it all to their credit of serving God!

Simple living and lofty thoughts are alien to their life style. Self praise and vanity are the core of their constitution. Yet, in all their dealings, there would be an apparent coating of spiritual vocabulary to cover up the real intentions. No matter, how godly we profess to be, unless we learn to be satisfied with having primary necessities of life, we need to retrospect our goals.

Apostle Paul was a man of diverse and rich experiences in life. As

king Solomon expressed his observations and views on life, Paul concludes that ‘godliness with contentment is great gain’. The greatest gain is not wealth amassed, positions or designations acquired; but simple godliness with contentment of the heart. “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain, we can carry nothing out”. (1 Timothy 6:7) It’s then, quite simple logic that godliness with contentment is the only real and great gain!



Strength in Weakness

“For my strength is made perfect in weakness” - (2 Cori. 12:9).

The statement ‘strength in weaknesses’ may seem to be paradoxical. How can strength come out of weakness, when the world speaks about the survival of the fittest? But it’s quite true that God gives power to the weak and He gives might to those who have no strength. He perfects His strength in weakness.

Many of the so called spiritualists are too big for God to use. They are often too full of their own schemes and their own way of doing things. One who is conscious of his inadequacy and weakness will be encouraged by a divine pat on the back. They’ll surely hear: “Be strong. be not afraid” (Joshua 1:9). On the threshold of his new responsibility, Joshua was a bit hesitant, and felt weak. But God comes and lifts up people to leadership and responsibility, when they lean on Him rather than their own capability. It’s quite true that the world selects only the qualified for a challenging position. But it’s amazing to note that God qualifies the selected and not select the qualified! We are not at all worthy or capable to do any divine duty assigned, unless we are strengthened and appointed by the Spirit to accomplish it.

In the Book of Joshua 1:1, we read, “Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Mose’s minister.” He is mentioned as Moses’ Minister. A minister is one who is prepared to serve people. Joshua had endured the

wanderings in the wilderness, the hardships and frustration. But he firmly believed that his God was able. After his faithful and dedicated service behind the curtain, God speaks to him. He was asked to assume the position of leadership.

Many people conceive that they are worthy of something bigger than their narrow round of daily duty. They feel that their little sphere of service seems so inadequate. But, God's plan for our life never comes through big things, but through little things. Moreover, His glory is manifested in and through our life, not by our strength, but when we admit our weakness, inabilities and submit ourselves without reservation.



Unshakable Conviction

“As yet I’m as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me” - (Joshua 14:11).

Among great Bible characters, we read about leaders like Moses, wonderful Kings like David, Solomon and others. But, in chapter 14 of the Book of Joshua, we see a very ordinary man, but quite wonderful! The secret of Caleb’s greatness is deep, yet simple..... His unshakable conviction is quite amazing. It’s not just the apparent optimism in his observations that attracts our attention. This man of God had an unwavering faith.

After a swift crossing of the wilderness, Israelites reached a place called Kadesh-barnea, on the very border of the land of God’s promise. The unbelief which had so often plagued them during the wilderness prompted them to send spies to survey the land. The report brought by Caleb and Joshua admitted the existence of giants. But, when the majority measured giants against their own strength, Caleb and Joshua measured giants against God! Although Caleb was an ordinary man, his convictions were unshakable. Moreover, he wholly followed the Lord (14: 8,14). He was very optimistic to declare that: ‘therefore we are able to overcome’ (vs 12). These two qualities, viz. closely following the Lord and his unshakable and optimistic trust helped him much. It’s quite a challenging declaration by a man of fourscore and five years to ask for the mountain!

Today when we see fresh graduates from Bible schools wander around in expensive vehicles, with costly gadgets, and all modern facilities, here, we see an old man ready to take up the risk and threats in the mountain. Caleb had a blessing that he never wasted, and a love that never waned.

Ordinary people become quite extra ordinary with their uncompromising qualities, and unshakable conviction.



Tyranny of small minds

“Sees thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him” - (Proverbs 26:12).

The tyranny of small minds cause trouble, not only in the secular field, but even in the spiritual circles. Many institutions in the world today are unfortunately governed by small minds. Often, it is the incompetent who most need to feel self important. They somehow have the notion that they are the centre of the universe and that the whole world revolves around them! And so they have to push, shove and force others, because they want to prove their existence.

Many dictators all over the world have suffered from the same self delusion. It's true even in the ordinary context of daily life where small minds exercise a strange hold on others in jobs, offices, organizations and even in religious circles. Such people may depend on their designations to exploit others.

They are tyrants, but sometimes not recognized as such. Even though notions of equality and fair play have been on the scene for quite a while, very few subscribe to them in practice. When we treat others equally, we respect their dignity, worth and views that could be contrary to our own.

Humanity has survived not because of superior military power, but because of the good that continues to be done by ordinary people.

Although we pretend that we live in more enlightened times, the fact remains just the contrary. When women are treated like door mats or employees like disposable material, how can we claim that today's world is better? Wherever a 'use n throw' culture thrives, people are really exploited.

Almost all religions of the world speak about equality; but in real practice, it's quite different. I don't mean to say that there should be no hierarchy. But, people working at different levels need to be treated decently with respect and gratitude.

Let's truly wish that all unprivileged people enjoy real freedom; where orphans smile, destitute be cheerful, physically challenged move with pride and unskilled labourer work with dedication. Let's show that we still support them survive the tyranny of small minds. I still remember a maxim heard in political science classes: 'the government which governs least is the best government'. This seems to have sense when we notice the tyranny of small minds in many fields.



Quest for happiness

“Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness” - (Proverbs 14:13).

There is a universal quest for peace and happiness. After all, no one wants to be unhappy. People try to find joy in numerous ways. Some search for it in wealth and possessions. Others try to find it in positions, name and fame. Some look for it in worldly pleasures. Yet, some others seek strong relationships. Many pursue amusements such as movies, music, cultural programmes etc. There are some others who enjoy sports. Then, there are people who experiment excitement through drugs and alcohol. Even spirituality is attempted by some people in their search for happiness!

Most people think that they gain happiness in trying to fulfil their desires. Some wish to buy vehicles, houses, gadgets or other things. Some might try to study their favourite subject or add an additional degree to their name. Anyway, the emphasis is on being able to fulfil their desires.....

Life goes on in a way by which people try to fulfil one desire after another. What really happens is that desires do not end. When one desire is fulfilled, another one crops up. It's quite true that modern life style, advertisements and culture tries to instil in us new desires. Men and women are easy prey to the tricky advertisements on television.

Market is saturated with goods and services that we may or may not need. We are surrounded by temptation!

When we analyze these pursuits, we'll come to know that the fulfilment of desires do not bring real happiness. People may derive happiness for some time; but the loss of any possession or relation brings untold misery. "Laugh and the world laughs with you. But when you weep, you weep alone".

At some point in life, people recognize that happiness in the material world is a transitory illusion. Everything we see around is to be perished. Ultimately everyone has to face a physical end, leaving behind all that they once cherished. Since our system is geared to focus on fulfilling desires, we need the right kind of desires. Of course, the right desire is related with eternity and eternal truth. When we spend our precious life here for pursuing the fulfilment of material desires we'll certainly come to the conclusion that it doesn't bring us any contentment in the end.

There is only one source of happiness which can't be destroyed. It cannot be taken away from us, whatever be the circumstances. The only permanent source of happiness is God and God alone. True joy is not as elusive as some sages and philosophers think; we can find lasting joy if only we look in the right place for it.

Humility not hypocrisy

**“Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth”
- (Mathew 5:5).**

People acclaim ‘survival of the fittest’, not only as a pattern which prevailed in the society, but also as a policy for so called ‘success in life’. That is one of the reasons why people proclaim that ‘this world is for fighters and pushers’. So, even though people prefer to pay lip service to humility, they will not recommend it for practice in deeds of daily life.

The word ‘humility’ is derived from the Latin ‘humilitas’, which means ‘grounded’. In fact, humility is not to be perceived as lack of self esteem or lack of confidence, but an attitude which allows for other’s greatness. Very often, we’ve a wrong notion of humility being associated with timidity and self effacement. This is not true. The Beatitudes begin with the assertion: “Blessed is the meek; for they shall inherit this earth”. (Mat 5:5).

It’s really discouraging and sad to note how we measure human worth. Money dominates our lives. We respect people with big bank balance and who drive big cars. There was a time when a man was judged for his character, values and knowledge. Today, these things do not seem to matter much. Tagore’s prayer: “Never to disown the poor and never to bend the knees before the insolent might” seems to have no impact. Now it seems many are ruled by money alone.

When the disciples got into an argument over who would get places in heaven, Jesus said: “who so ever will be great among you, shall be your minister. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For the son of man came not to be ministered into, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10: 43,45).

Who among us will do our best, in our allotted, sphere of life, without worrying about ‘greatness’, ‘fame’, and ‘popularity’? Anyway, we’ve a special space, which no one else can claim and occupy. Let’s bring humility and simplicity back to the forefront, rather than hypocrisy and timidity.



Wisdom is Strength

“Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city” – (Ecclesiastes 7:19).

Wisdom is valuable as a great inheritance. Normally, a city is protected by police or army. But, more than that, protection for a city is rendered by a community of the wise. So modern societies give great importance to education. Many countries set apart a good portion of their income for the expenses on education on the assumption that education will impart wisdom.

It's really astonishing to notice that violence, crimes and inhuman acts abound, not in uncivilized and uneducated societies alone. Even among the most educated people, we see very low standards of behavior, attitudes and acts. So, real education which we seek to bring in wisdom seems to be a mirage.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, education is not just imparting information. He said: “By education, I mean the drawing out of the best in child and man, body, mind and spirit”. In fact, real knowledge comes through knowing the creator. King Solomon said: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7).

“For the Lord giveth wisdom; Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6).

Very often people misunderstand knowledge to be a bundle of

information. But real knowledge will bring about a sea change in our attitudes and outlook.

As we know, we learn many facts and figures from books, media, institutions and what not? Many of that information are easily forgotten, unless we need it for some practical purposes in life. “What we hear we forget, what we see we remember and what we do we understand”—

It’s true that good teachers and their life influence children, let alone information they impart. Moreover, as somebody remarked: “Real education is what we remember when we forget everything we’ve learnt”! In other words, it’s the long lasting influences that counts and not just mere information that we acquire.....



Nightingale among birds

“The Lord is my shepherd” - (Psalms 23:1).

There are many Bible scholars who think that Psalms 23 was written during the time when David’s son Absalom rebelled against him. David had to flee into the wilderness of Judea. David comforted himself with images drawn from his more peaceful days as a shepherd.

‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want’ is more than a declaration of faith. It includes unflinching confidence, sense of belonging, everlasting hope and what not? Memorising and repeating God’s word is a panacea for a dejected soul. When it lies deep in the mind, we feel its peace and serenity invading and penetrating each cell of our being.

Twenty third Psalms is acclaimed to be one of the most beautiful and best loved passages in the Bible. As Mount Everest towers over the Himalayas, this serene and sacred Psalm towers over the others. According to C.H. Spurgeon; “what the nightingale is among birds, this Psalm is among others; it has sung so sweetly in the ear of many a dejected soul, and in the night of his weeping, has given hope for a morning of joy”.

John Keats, famous English romantic Poet, in his ‘Ode to a nightingale’ vividly describes how the sweet, **soothing** voice of the nightingale comforts weary travelers in the farthest Hebrides islands. He affirms

that “a voice so thrilling never was heard”.

When we confront difficulties and problems in life, we call upon our dear Lord and lean on His everlasting promises. Day by day, as we sincerely make an effort to absorb the truths from the Word of God, we feel grateful to our gracious and loving Father. We’ll certainly recognize that His promises are all tailor-made to meet our each and every need. Let’s hold on to the eternal promises of the Lord, at the dawn of this new year.....

‘Nostalgia’

“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” - (2 Corinthians 5:8).

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.....” is a very popular hymn in Christendom which affirms that it is quite possible for a person to know with all certainty of faith that he or she is a recipient of God’s grace. But there are many people who think that, to affirm one is ‘saved’ can be spiritual pride. When a preacher enquired if somebody was saved, his reply was that it would be presumption to say that!

It was Christ Himself who declared: “He who believes in me has everlasting life”. The Word of God makes it clear that we can be fully assured of salvation and that we have eternal life. In Romans 8:16 we read: “the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

It’s quite true that real followers of Jesus not only have an assurance regarding heaven, but also have a nostalgia for it. The word ‘nostalgia’ comes from the Greek word: ‘nostos’ – meaning ‘return home’ and ‘algos’ meaning pain. It’s of course, incurable home sickness until one reaches the destination – home....

It’s a timeless truth that when God comes into our lives, we have not only the assurance that we belong to Him, but a deep insatiable longing for His presence.

*‘This world is not my home,
I’m just passing through..
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue....’*

We observe this longing in the life of Apostle Paul also. He was so preoccupied with the affairs of Lord’s kingdom on earth; and yet he sighs to be ‘at home with Lord’



Table in the presence of enemies

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies” - (Psalms 23:5).

When the psalmist referred to ‘table’, he was not thinking of an indoor banquet, but of the high, flat-topped plateaus where the sheep were taken to graze in the summer. Before taking his sheep onto this green pasture, a caring shepherd would go up alone to see if there were any wild animals or poisonous weeds there. The sheep arriving on the high table land may not realize that they owed their safety and security to the loving shepherd, who had gone before hand to “prepare a table in the presence of their enemies”.

A shepherd, more often than not, has to go through a good deal of personal sacrifice in order to prepare the table, or feeding ground for his sheep. He may have to endure loneliness, deprivation and even physical injury in his efforts to prepare the feeding ground. Many a shepherd comes back from such an expedition with bruises and marks of sacrifice. Just as a shepherd sacrifices for the sake of his sheep, so has Jesus. He had gone to the utmost possible to bring His sheep into a place of spiritual security.

Unfortunately, we often forget the personal cost, Christ paid in preparing the table for His redeemed people. As we approach the “Lord’s table”, we need to remember with great thanks giving that it cost Him,

His life to prepare this table for us. Never did any shepherd climb a mountain as challenging as Mount Calvary. There, on its summit, the good shepherd silenced forever the voice of the enemy of our souls and prepared for us a table in the presence of our enemies.

In 2 Samuel 17:20-28, we read about the situation when David was driven into the wilderness by his son Absalom's rebellion. When David was desperately hungry, thirsty and weary, God directed to him three men. They brought flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, for David and his people to eat. David must have rubbed his eyes in wonder as he saw God's provision for him. Yea, 'a table in the presence of his enemies'. David might have this in mind, as he wrote the verse in Psalms 23.

The responsibility of the safety and security does not always rest entirely on the shepherd. The sheep has to stay close to the shepherd. His presence is the only one place of our safety.

*“His love in time past forbids me to think,
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.....”*

John Newton.

His grace is more than enough in any situation.



Tears trickling down

“Thou tellest my wanderings: Put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?” - (Psalms 56:8).

When disasters strike their life, some people turn more hard-hearted. They question everyone, curse everything and become all the more miserable. Even in the case of a true believer, we may not be able to find specific answers to the question: Why do disasters strike their lives? But we know that we can do two things. First and foremost, we can always turn to God, who alone can help us. We understand that we require God centred and God initiated solutions to our most urgent and even serious problems.

Secondly, we'll recognize that disasters are opportunities to give careful attention to our relationship with God. It is the time for repentance. A night spent in prayer and mourning can be good for real reconciliation. In fact, spiritual matters need immediate attention and serious response. One can see better through tears than through a telescope!

In the book of Joel, we see that the crops were completely ruined, animals were suffering and there was a severe shortage of water. Moreover, the regular supplies for temple offerings dried up and the worship of God was severely affected. This kind of a crucial situation called for an urgent action.

The action required was nothing else, but to turn to God with

repentance. Broken heart and tears shed in repentance will certainly be considered. The priests put on sack cloth and started mourning. Leaders and people were summoned to the Temple to ‘cry out to the Lord’.

People were exhorted to stop all other business and focus on God. Earlier, they had committed the mistake of taking spiritual matters too lightly. This was the exact time to reconsider their ways and return to the Lord. God can turn problems into projects and use calamities to convert people. When worldly joys bring sorrow, Godly tears produce unfading joy.....



I've enough!

**“I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself”
- (Gen. 33:9).**

Except in the case of meals, people hesitate to say that something is enough! When our appetite is satisfied, we would usually say that word: ‘enough’! But most people we see around are not at all content with money, possessions, positions, pleasure or whatever earthly achievements. We live in a world full of dissatisfied and greedy human beings. As P.B. Shelly, the famous English poet observes:

*“We look before and after
And pine for what is not...”*

In 1 Timothy 6:6, we read: But godliness with contentment is great gain”. It’s really surprising to note that even the so called believers are part of the rat race after worldly wealth. We see many people in Christendom, wearing the mask of a saint, but always pulling a long face of dissatisfaction. At the same time, it is equally surprising to note that the first person in the Bible who said, ‘I have enough’, was not acclaimed as a saint. We know that it was Esau, who said these words to his brother Jacob.

Jacob not only deceived his father, but also stole the birth right of his brother Esau. Esau became angry and determined to kill Jacob. But later, we see him as a transformed person. He affectionately addresses

Jacob: “my brother”. Not only that he expresses his contentment, he doesn’t want to take over the possessions of his brother.

In fact, in this age of materialism, greed and dissatisfaction, we rarely see people who declare: “I’ve enough”. On the other hand, we see lot of people who even dare to shed blood for silly matters. It’s true that when we are content with what we’ve, our relationship with God and others will be right. Even when freely offered, we’ll have no desire to amass wealth or acquire positions. How then can we covet another man’s possessions!

It’s amazing to note that the man who said. ‘I’ve enough’ had the face like the face of God, then. (Gen 33:10). But just imagine how terrible will be the face of those who says, “I’ve not enough”- It’s crystal clear that contentment changes you and others through you.



Blessed are the poor in Spirit

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” - (Mathew 5:3).

Sermon on the Mount can be considered as the essence of Christ’s teachings. As we know, it has influenced many world leaders and philosophers. Among them are Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and scores of others. Ethical and moral codes that exist in many parts of the world have their base in these divine teachings.

The text quoted above is the first beatitude spoken by our Lord. Doesn’t it seem a strange contradiction to call the poor in Spirit as blessed? We live in a world where the affluent and powerful are called blessed; whereas the poor is looked down as unlucky!

What exactly do this – ‘poor in spirit mean? In II Cor 8:9, we read: “Jesus Christ became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich”. Our Lord is the best example of ‘being poor in Spirit’. He emptied Himself of all His glory in heaven and came down to this earth. In Philippians 3:7, we observe that Paul emptied himself for Christ’s sake and counted all things but dung! In a sense, the blessed secret of becoming ‘poor in spirit’ is to empty oneself, for the sake of Christ, all glory and honour.

Normally, people consider the treasures and pleasures of the world as something big. But, once the vision of ‘Christ crucified’, is writ large in our heart, everything else turn out to be worthless! Of course, there is a

time when everyone has to leave everything close to their heart. For those who never have emptied themselves, will find it really hard to leave this world and all that were so dear to them!

How do we know that we've emptied ourselves? If our close walk with the Lord is not in any way disturbed, when something is received or taken away, then it can be a proof that we've emptied ourselves to some extent. Yes, let's try to empty ourselves and to be 'poor in Spirit'. To consecrate ourselves for the noble cause of God's Kingdom can be made possible only by living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. True blessing is something beyond all worldly achievements.....



Seeking God diligently

“Without faith, it is impossible to please Him: for He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” - (Hebrews 11:6).

In simple terms, faith is just trusting God and acting according to His word. Faithlessness often leads to fear. Even excess self confidence destroys our blessings and relation with the Lord. In John 15:5, we read: “For without me ye can do nothing”. Trusting and depending God on all matters is a sign of faith. When self dependence leads to destruction, great faith will please God greatly.

Of course, God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. Most people are after the reward, may it be health, wealth, possessions or positions. But, note that God is a rewarder of them that ‘diligently seek Him’. That means, not just seeking the blessings. Many people make the mistake of seeking the blessings alone, instead of seeking the giver of all blessings. The trouble is that when blessings are removed, then the fragile faith will naturally fail.

In the scripture, we read the case of Job. He lost his wealth, health, his children and what not? But his faith abounded all the more. Not only that his faith became stronger and stronger, it grew to such an extent that he shouted: “I know that my redeemer liveth.... Yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25). His faith was not at all connected with blessings.

But then, what exactly is meant by diligently seeking God? Those

who are keen in walking with the Lord will naturally seek the very character of God. It may be quite natural that a close walk will help to imbibe the qualities and character. But, it's quite essential that we need to have an intense desire to seek the character of our loving Father.



Precious than diamonds!

**“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil”
- (Ephesians 5:15,16).**

To the usual query about most precious thing on earth, the invariable answer may be nothing but ‘time’. Undoubtedly the most valuable thing will be the precious ‘Blood of the Lamb.’ But, time, as we’ll certainly agree is quite important, more precious than gold or diamonds!

Once, a young man walking along a sea shore stumbled on a small sack. He opened it to find pieces of rock. As he walked along the shore, he threw the stones one by one into the sea, just for pleasure. There remained only a very few at the close of his walk. He put them in his coat pocket: when he reached home and examined he was surprised to see that it was not just rock pieces, but real diamonds! He felt extremely sorry to lose quite a lot of those precious pieces.

Yes, the days gone by were more precious than even diamonds. How do we feel about days wasted in the past, not knowing the real worth of time? Just as the young man with few diamonds only remaining in his coat pocket, perhaps the years left ahead may be quite few. We are not even sure whether there are years ahead! But, are we going to spend the time leisurely seeking after vanity? Or shall we repent for having wasted so much of the most precious time?

Let us faithfully and diligently use every moment of our time for His

glory. It is said about Henry Martin, that: ‘he was a man who has not wasted a single hour’! There is a famous saying which goes like this: “Catch the time by the fore-lock”. Unless we determine to spend every second in the most fruitful manner, we are wasting it. ‘Time and tide waits for none’ is a very common maxim. Redeeming time is really a covetable experience and a most wise decision. Understanding the will of God and redeeming time are very closely connected. Let’s value it more than precious diamonds!



Live healthier

“Pray without ceasing” – (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

How is it humanly possible to pray continually? A book that narrates some keys to a healthier life, points out prayer as a panacea for the same. As we all know, no one ever gets the full attention of someone else all the time; even if they are so close to us. Although they could partner with us in helping, advising, encouraging etc, they may not be able to share our hearts’ desire always. In that sense, we are alone in our life’s journey.

But, at the same time, as Christians we are never alone. God is always there to share our burden, sorrows and joy. Knowing that we are not alone gives us a sense of serenity and security. This will even enhance health condition. According to a medical doctor, “people who pray experience the relaxation response: drop in blood pressure, heart rate and levels of stress hormones. Duke University Medical Center study concluded that even occasional prayer and Bible study helped people live healthier. It’s pointed out that a person who prays is less stressed.

One of the amazing privileges of being a child of God is that we are connected with a God who wants us to ‘pray continually’. It’s possible to pray continually only if prayer is an attitude of the heart – an attitude of worship, submission and humility. In the words of John Bunyan, “when

you pray, rather let your heart be without words, than your words without heart”.

A famous physician once wrote, “I have had some of the best time, beside a meadow stream, enjoying the pattern of the ripples of the clear water along the pebbles and watching ducks float by. My thoughts of the creator soar high as I watch the birds do aerial stunts. I enjoy praying at such times when walking through the forest.” Yes, it’s really good to spend some time to look at a flower or the innocent smile of a child. Sometimes we send up sentence prayers. Sometimes we pray as we walk or work. Sometimes, we ask for forgiveness. Method doesn’t matter as much as having our heart and mind focused on God. That’s what prayer is all about - a spiritual connection.



Hold on to Hope

**“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life....”
- (1 Timothy 6:12).**

Hope of eternal life alone can be considered as blessed hope, because anything of this world is perishable. Hope is more than a virtue to be nurtured. ‘Hoping against hope’ is a phrase which shows the strength of swimming against the current. “Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all” – Allan K. Chalmers observed.

We find many thrilling stories of hope’s victory over despair in life which might certainly inspire us. We hear about people receiving an urgent help at the last minute, finding a solace when they were about to lose everything. Finding somebody so close after many years of search, or making a full recovery by clinging to hope!

Hope is the elevating feeling we experience when we see in the mind’s eye – a path to a better future. Hope also acknowledges the significant obstacles along the path. But, true hope has no room for delusion. Many physicians certify that true hope has proved as important as any medication.

True hope is based on trust in a larger reality, who is in control and who knows the ultimate outcome of our lives. By faith we cling to that hope, described as an anchor for the Soul. (Hebrews 6:19) Hope and

expectation are not synonyms. While hope is open, expectation is closed. Hope is not even equivalent to positive thinking. In fact, hope is a vital component of health and well being. Result of hope is inner character, joy, steadfastness, serenity and confidence. It's one of the strongest words in Bible and planted in our hearts by God. Even people who run their last lap of life, long for a beautiful finish with the everlasting hope of eternity...



Secret of Contentment

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” - (Philippians 4:11).

Living a life of purpose reflects who we are deep inside. Our beliefs, values and passion for living are linked with our purpose. As we know, any new electronic gadget arrives with a set of complete instructions describing how to assemble it, use it and get the best service from it. In fact, knowing and fulfilling our purpose will determine the sense of meaning and satisfaction in life. This is possible only when we live according to the Word of God.

We live in a world where most people lead a life of discontentment and dejection. The consumeristic society around constantly tempts us to believe that we need to buy a new commodity in the market. Media has convinced us that ‘clothes make the man’ and wearing last years’ styles is simply not acceptable! Sales people try to convince us that this new item will fulfill our dreams and make us content. But within no time, after the arrival of the newly bought equipment, our contented feelings begin to slip away!

Real contentment is not at all connected with achievements, accomplishments or acquisitions. Secret of contentment is connected with purpose of life. In his book ‘Purpose driven life’ – Rick Warren, the famous evangelist, points out the importance of purposeful and meaningful life.

It's not just material blessings that give us contentment. In Philippians 4: 11-13, Apostle Paul wrote: "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength".

Contentment is more than mere satisfaction with something we've achieved. It's an attitude that is possible no matter what our circumstances may be. Of course, it's very closely connected with our mission and purpose in life. As Dante observed: "In His will is our peace". Godliness and contentment go hand in hand.



About tears!

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy” – (Psalms 126:5).

Very often, weeping and shedding tears has been associated with immaturity or weakness. That’s why people say: “big girls shouldn’t cry”- Evidently ‘big boys’ shouldn’t cry either. People wear a mask in order to hide their emotions. One US President Candidate seriously endangered his chances of winning when he choked up during one of his campaign speeches!

But tears can’t be considered a weakness. As somebody observed, you may be able to see ahead through tears as through a telescope. The shortest verse in the Bible is ‘Jesus wept’ (John 11:35). Surely the Lord is a better role model than any brave man of the world! In Psalms 56:8, we read: “You have taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in your bottle”.

Evidently our tears are not just wasted emotion, but are meaningful to God. There is a popular song which says: “tears are a language God understands”. Tear ducts come as a standard human organ. We cry when we are sad and sometimes when we are happy too. Scientists say that tears are not just drops of salt water, but are alive with hormones, enzymes and toxins. Tears serve many critical functions like lubricating eyeball, removing toxic substance from body etc.

It's clear that crying is a primary way for the body to eliminate harmful stress hormones. That's why after crying, people feel better, physically and psychologically. Suppressing tears makes one feel worse. Once people considered shedding tears as a sign of emotional instability. Maybe it's good not to weep in public. Once, a missionary remarked that it's rather better to wind up the mission, if your tear glands dried up. Tears tickling down our cheeks will never go unnoticed by our Creator!



Ray of hope

“Now, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”- (Romans 15:13).

Even in times of dire distress and dismay, there is a ray of hope for those who trust. This law of hope works when we believe in God who is in control. We serve a God who fills us with hope. Paul’s prayer for all believers is that He “fills you with all joy and peace in believing”. He also introduces another important idea in this passage – that “we may abound in hope”, which means that a supply of overflowing, excessive, beyond measure hope is offered. In fact, the Greek word for hope is ‘elpo’ meaning ‘to look forward to with pleasurable confidence and expectation’.

In reality, we see hundreds of Christians who just want a ray of hope, instead of abundance of it! In Romans 8:24-25, we read: “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for why does one still hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance”.

Usually, we yearn to see a change from our troubled situations. But, Paul reminds us that if we need overflowing hope, we need perseverance also. Peace and joy rule our hearts only when we acknowledge that God has everything under His control and authority. In Jeremiah 29:11, we read: “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end”.

Optimism may be a panacea recommended by psychologists for a dejected soul. But, to get rid of all pessimistic and negative thoughts, we need to trust the Lord. He wants us to enjoy perfect and constant peace in life. Despair leads to destruction, where-as trust and belief in the promises paves the way for a strong and meaningful life. Because God has everything under control, there is not only scope for 'ray of hope', but certainly the privilege to rejoice in abundance of hope.



About Simplicity

**“The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with three, and the books, but especially the parchments”
– (2 Timothy 4:13).**

These are the words of a millionaire’s son who left all possessions and dedicated his life for God’s Kingdom. For Apostle Paul, towards the end of his life, his earthly belongings were limited to a bare minimum of essential clothing and some books! Yet he was quite happy.

It goes without saying that we live in a very complex and confused world situation. Simple living is far from the thought and style of modern man. May be, circumstances compel people to involve and entangle themselves in a thousand different engagements. But, as Norman Wright observes: “if over- involvement and busyness are the rulers of our lives, then it’s snuffing out our happiness, our purpose and our joy”. For most of us, life is plagued by ‘too manys’ – too many commitments, too many tasks, too many boxes, too many shoes and what not?

To ‘simplify your life’ is not an easy task. It needs determination, decision and specific direction in attitude and actions. In fact, it’s our value system that controls most of our decisions and actions in life. It’s our direction in life that ultimately decides whether we end up “travelling light” or carry a big baggage of tasks, bills, boxes, and shoes etc, which may deplete our energy and time and leave us exhausted.

Most of us are confused about what we really want, and chronically

distressed and depressed, which can even be detrimental to mental health. 'Less luggage, more comfort' is applicable in life's pursuits also. Every person has a unique core system of values. Once we've identified our core values, we can begin to simplify. Everything that we do, all possessions we've accumulated can be viewed through the lens of our values. Deciding which old apparel, or your 30 year old son's first teddy bear or very old utensils to be disposed off, depends on your priority setting. Anyway, many of the materials amassed and busy schedule seems meaningless, in the light of eternity. A life voluntarily chosen and lived in freedom, a life that is focused, diligent and disciplined; - a life characterized by creativity and spiritual authenticity – without hypocrisy – is it not more desirable?



Integrity

**“Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait on thee”
- (Psalms 25:21).**

Here, we see the Psalmist longing for integrity and uprightness in life. Mark Twain, Nobel Prize winner and famous writer once remarked: “live in such a way that you would not be ashamed to sell your parrot to the town gossip”. It means that a transparent and open life demands integrity. While we see majority of people wearing the mask of hypocrisy, straight forward and simple life calls for inner courage. The word integrity has its roots in Latin – ‘entire’, which means completeness, soundness and incorruptibility. In fact, a person of integrity can be called ‘an individual self’. Such a person will keep his promises, tell the truth, live his life openly and honestly. In short, he’ll be totally trustworthy and decent.

Whether it’s the blue blood that makes a person with qualities of integrity or his determination is debatable. But, a person who is cleansed by the precious Blood of the Lamb needs to be a person of integrity.

‘Cowards die many times before they actually die,

Valiants die but only once...’

Mark Twain observed; “If you tell the truth, you don’t have to remember anything”. People who tell lies live in a state of anxiety, always trying to remember what they’ve told whom. Unresolved guilty conscience is hazardous to health also. Ralph Waldo Emerson, famous

American writer observes: ‘To believe your own thought, to believe what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men – that is genius’.

A person of integrity will never sacrifice his core values. He’ll adhere to his belief consistently. The question of personal integrity is a matter of self discipline as well as commitment to a divine call. Many people rationalize and find painless short-cuts to adjust to suit to a particular situation. Gandhiji was a person of integrity (How much more should a true Christian be honest?) He tried to practice what he preached. Living with integrity simply means being who you really are – without pretense. When our beliefs and actions go together, we’ll be much happier and free.....



‘Shalom’

“The days of spring from on high hath visited us to guide our feet into the way of peace” - (Luke 1:78, 79).

‘Shalom’ means peace, which we know is the most sought after and precious concept in the world. Individuals and nations seek perfect peace, which seems to be a mirage. Nobody has perfect peace in heart or at home. Unfulfilled desires, uncertainty about the future, dead yesterdays and unborn tomorrows often stands in the way of peace!

While preparing him for his mission, God appeared to Gideon and said, “Peace be with you, do not fear”. Gideon built an altar there and called it ‘Jehovah – Shalom’ – which means ‘The Lord of Peace’ (Judges 6:23, 24).

Announcing the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, the heavenly host said, “On earth peace” (Luke 2:14).

Isaiah called the ‘Babe of Bethlehem’ – “the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

In this world, where we witness severe and disappointing scenes of terror and turmoil, the only source of peace is nowhere else, but in the secret place of the Most High. Yes, under the shadow of the Almighty, we’ve perfect peace and secure shelter. As He is the ‘Prince of Peace’ we are promised perfect and constant peace. Peace with God is the pre-requisite of peace in life.

“If winter comes,
Can spring be far behind?”

When we turn to Jesus, His peace ‘that passeth all understanding’ will flood and reign our hearts and minds – (Philippians 4:7). The grace of our Lord Jesus be with our spirits.

Amen.

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