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Faith, At Any Cost
Why The Ailing World
Needs Church More Than
Ever Before

Christian Trends

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Mental Health:
What Christian Leaders
Need to Know
The Stranger

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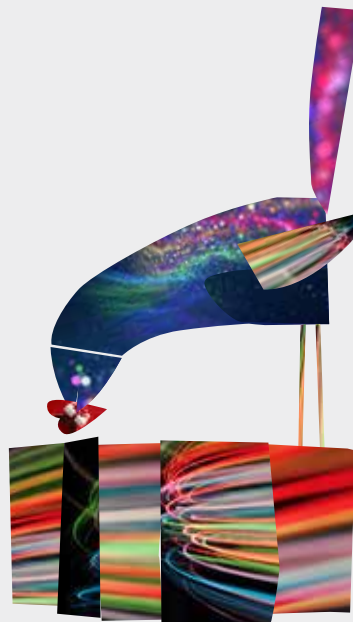


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ONE GLOBAL FAMILY FOR CHRIST



INSIDE

- 05 From the Editor
- 06 Globe Crossing
- 08 Faith, At Any Cost
- 11 Why the Ailing World Needs Church More Than Ever Before
- 20 Did God the Father Forsake Jesus on The Cross?
- 24 What an Oxymoron Christian Life is
- 28 Remember, You Are Loved!
- 32 The Stranger
- 36 Life In A Black Hole? There's A Way Out!
- 40 Mental Health: What Christian Leaders Need to Know
- 44 Parenting in the Time of Pandemic
- 48 O Woman, Arise and Shine!
- 50 Post-Truth Pandemic Where Justice Has Died
- 54 Hearing That Still Voice Amidst Noise of Negativity
- 58 Creator's Sovereign Silence
- 60 What Should We Do Now?



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Do Not Be Anxious About Anything

After being nestled inside homes for months on end as a pandemic raged outside, people are now nervously stepping back into a world that has drastically changed. It is an uneasy adjustment process resulting in all kinds of psychological challenges: death anxiety, social isolation, worry about having access to necessities, ill-health, financial crises and the everyday stresses. Uncertainty of the future is another trigger leading people to feel a lot more anxious. Even those who were earlier at a mild-anxiety level have moved to moderate and severe anxiety, and when anxiety increases, behaviour of self-harm too will rise. Psychologists say there is a 70% increase in the number of patients suffering from depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder due to coronavirus, according to a report in a national daily. So, what can and should we do?

Identifying signs for concern: Wheaton College Humanitarian Disaster Institute's resources suggest, with a pandemic such as COVID-19, signs for concern are to be observed closely. People are experiencing disorientation or confusion, difficulty in communicating thoughts, or difficulty remembering instructions. This is making them easily frustrated and uncharacteristically argumentative. They are having difficulty in making decisions, unnecessary risk-taking behaviour is seen apart from tremors, headaches, and nausea. Unusual clumsiness, limited attention span and difficulty concentrating, or refusal to follow orders are some more concerning signs.

Engage with those around us: We need to protect the privacy and be sensitive to individuals around us going through such

circumstances. We have to communicate trust, respect and sincerity. And, discuss specific behaviours we have seen that have raised concerns like withdrawal, anger, self-destructive action, depression, lack of sleep or loss of appetite. We also need to understand possible barriers or obstacles that may be keeping people from seeking help, and be able to provide suggestions to help overcome these barriers.

Listen to Jesus' direction: Above all, Scripture gives us the best direction. Jesus said in Matthew 6:25-27: "I tell you, do not worry"; he gives us five directions:

First, see what the Lord is doing in nature in detail (Matt 6:26, 28-30), not just a "mere look", but a detailed observation of beauty. Second, it is essential to live in the caring love of God (v. 26). Third, live according to the values of God's kingdom (v. 33), which is found in simple ways to extend yourself to others. Fourth, don't believe everything you think (v. 27) in terms of worry. Fifth, set limits on the time you worry (v. 34) so that we keep the worries of the day within that day.

Apostle Paul when writing to the Philippians says, "Don't worry about anything. No matter what happens, tell God about everything. Ask and pray and give thanks to him. Then God's peace will watch over your hearts and your minds" (4:6-7). The confidence that we belong to Christ Jesus should help us as we glance through the pages of this issue.

FINNY PHILIP



Chinese Textbook Portrays Jesus in Wrong Light

A Chinese textbook published by the Chinese government-run University of Electronic Science and Technology Press has changed the ending in the Biblical account of Jesus saving the woman caught in adultery in John 8 by writing that Jesus kills the woman after telling her that he is also a sinner, reported *Christian Headlines*. The book is said to be used in teaching “professional ethics and law” in vocational schools. According to UCA (Union of Catholic Asian News) News, the Chinese book changes the text to say: “When the crowd disappeared, Jesus stoned the sinner to death saying, ‘I, too, am a sinner. But if the law could only be executed by men without blemish, the law would be dead.’” Uploading a copy of the textbook story to social media, a Catholic parishioner wrote: “I want everyone to know that the Chinese Communist Party has always tried to distort the history of the Church, to slander our Church, and to make people hate our Church.”

THAILAND WITNESSES RECORD BAPTISMS IN A DAY



The Free in Jesus Christ Church Association (FJCCA)—a Thai-led movement that focuses on village-level evangelism—held the largest baptism with 1,435 people baptised on September 6, as reported by *Christianity Today*. The ceremony which reportedly took two hours was accomplished as twenty ministers lined up across waist-deep reservoir waters, waiting for new believers to come one by one from the shore to proclaim their faith and to be baptised. Participants came from 200 villages

and were congratulated with a traditional *wai* greeting—a no-touch gesture (praying hands and bow) that has always been part of the Thai culture. According to FJCAA leaders, more than 75,000 villages in the country have no Christian presence among them. Reportedly, in 2019, the same association held a baptism of 520 people, which the national church leaders then claimed to be the “largest they’d ever seen in their Buddhist-majority country”.

FIRST COMPLETE AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE BIBLE NOW AVAILABLE

Deaf Missions started the project of making the complete Bible available in the American Sign Language for the first time in the early 1980s. The mission, in partnership with Wycliffe USA, American Bible Society, Deaf Bible Society, Deaf Harbor, DOOR International, Pioneer Bible Translators, and Seed Company, accomplished it in the recent fall, as reported by *The Christian Post*. In an earlier interview with *The Christian Post*, J R Bucklew, president of The Deaf Bible Society told that although there are various text translations of the Bible available, some 95% of the world’s deaf population is functionally illiterate. However, the entire Bible is now available to the world’s 70 million people who are deaf—98% of whom have never encountered Jesus—for free online, through social media, and on a smartphone app.

ANOTHER CHRISTIAN IN PAKISTAN SENTENCED TO DEATH

A court in Lahore, Pakistan, sentenced Asif Pervaiz—a 37-year-old Christian and a father of four—to death over charges of alleged blasphemous text messages sent to a Muslim colleague seven years ago, according to a report in *Morning Star News*. Saiful Malook, Pervaiz's attorney, who also represented Asia Bibi, said that Saeed Ahmed Khokhar, Pervaiz's former supervisor at a garment factory, accused him of sending blasphemous text messages from his cell phone—an accusation which charged him of blasphemy laws. The court ruled that Pervaiz would first serve three years in prison, be fined 50,000 rupees and then be hanged. However, according to Pervaiz, the supervisor falsely accused him after he refused to convert to Islam. Often motivated by personal vendettas or religious hatred, false accusations of blasphemy are so widespread in Pakistan that 829 out of 1,534 individuals, who were accused of blasphemy between 1987 and 2017, were religious minorities.



Thousands of tribal animists of Kakadbeda village of Kondagaon district of Chhattisgarh, allegedly incited by Hindu extremists, damaged homes of Christians in three villages, sent them fleeing for lives and left a woman hospitalised with serious injuries, according to *Morning Star News*. Despite multiple attacks and assaults on Christians as a result of police inaction and indifference to the prior warnings of the impending violence, the police's only response was to pressure Christians to contribute to the Hindu festival Shivrathri which was the starting point of the hostilities as Christians refused to comply. Apparently, the tribal animists who attacked the Christians were not Hindus and thus have no relation to the Hindu festival, but the Hindu nationalist groups who worked for more than 10 years, indoctrinated them to undertake Hindu practices and incited them against Christians. On September 19, these tribal Hindus rounded up the



Christians and threatened them as they refused to neither contribute to the festival, nor renounce their faith. When the attacks have finally taken place, strangely the police and the district collector made attempts for formulating compromise between the assailants and the victims rather than providing justice to the victims.

IRANIAN CHRISTIANS APPROACHING 1 MILLION: SURVEY

According to a new survey by GAMAAN (Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran), a Netherlands-based research group, 1.5% of the Iranian population were identified to be Christian. The survey, conducted on 50,000 Iranians with 90% of them living in Iran, asked 23 questions about their "attitude towards religion". When these results were extrapolated to the 50-million literate adults, there were about 750,000 Christians. However, according to this research group, the number of Christians in Iran is "without doubt ... growing beyond a million". A UK judge too believes it to be plausible that "there are as many as 1 million people secretly



practising Christianity in Iran today". While David Yeghnazar, the executive director for Elam Ministries, cautions against endorsing the survey statistics as a true estimate of the body of Christ reasoning that "Christian" can mean anything from a "vague attraction" to a "genuine love of Christ and a growing knowledge of the Scriptures".

ROOTS





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FAITH, AT ANY COST

THE MODEL OF FAITH THAT ABRAHAM ESTABLISHES IN GENESIS 22 IS OF A MUCH DEEPER LEVEL BECAUSE HE IS READY TO SACRIFICE THE VERY PROMISE HE HAD WAITED FOR SO MANY YEARS

Abraham offers a great model of faith. He followed God's promise when he left behind his homeland (Gen 12; see Gen 12:1; Gen 12:1–3); when he believed God's promise about a child, God counted this trust as righteousness (15:6). But what happens when acting in faith seems to cost us the very promise that God once offered? Do we still trust God? What happens when God's call does not seem to be, from our perspective, in our personal best interests? Do we still trust God's promise?

This is the sort of faith that Abraham models in Genesis 22. It is a deeper level of faith than the faith in 15:6, but it is not unrelated to it. When we walk with God through years of testing, we can develop a deeper faith that trusts God no matter what. This is much more faith than is needed to be “justified,” as Abram was already in 15:6. This faith is the expression of a long-term, faithful relationship with God.

The narration emphasises the pathos, intensifying the emotion by lingering on the point: Abraham and Isaac love each other. In 22:2, God commands Abraham concerning “your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac” (cf. 22:12). Repetition of “the two together” heightens the pathos in 22:6, 8, as does the narrator's slowing down to emphasise the details in 22:7. Many details add pathos, underlining Abraham's love for his son and how the events leading up to the offering must have torn at Abraham's heart. When Isaac calls Abraham, “My father,” Abraham responds, “Here I am” (22:7), just as he does in this narrative when God or the angel of the Lord addresses him (22:1, 11). Other details emphasise Isaac's innocent trust, such as when he asks where the lamb is (22:7)—trust that must have further torn at Abraham's fatherly heart.

Once Abraham is sure that God has spoken, he does not procrastinate. People back then usually rose early (19:2, 27; 20:8; 26:31; 28:18; 31:55), but the rising early in 22:3 probably especially evokes 21:14—when Abraham obeyed God by rising early to send away his son Ishmael. Abraham did not delay or stall in obeying God; God was always first.

The summons to faith builds on earlier calls to faith in Abraham's life. When God directs him to “one of the mountains that I will tell you” (22:2), God recalls his earlier commission in 12:1: “Go ... to the land that I will show you.” Abraham again had to go in faith, as he did before; the first time he left behind his past family of origin, and this time he must sacrifice his future familial legacy.

Nevertheless, he believed that God would fulfil his promise. As the note for Heb 11:19 in the NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible (Zondervan, 2016) puts it, “Abraham said that he would return with his son (Ge 22:5) and told Isaac that God would provide the offering (Ge 22:8). By now his faith was so strong that he understood that even if he carried out God's instructions, God would →

“WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GOD'S CALL DOES NOT SEEM TO BE, FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, IN OUR PERSONAL BEST INTERESTS?”

restore his son and fulfil the promise. God had, after all, promised that his descendants would be reckoned through Isaac (Ge 21:12).”

This faith is a deeper faith than the justifying faith of Gen 15:6. Before that encounter, God had already promised Abram descendants and land (12:1–2). In Gen 15, Abram nevertheless asks about the descendants (15:2–3), God reiterates the promise more specifically (15:4–5), and Abram puts his trust in the one who is truly trustworthy (15:6). Then Abram asks how he can know that God will give him the land (15:8), right after God has reiterated that promise (15:7). God graciously confirms that promise (15:9–21). So what happens next? Abram and Sarai use Hagar to bear him a son (16:1–2); after all, God had not yet specified that Abram’s son would come through Sarah directly. Despite Abram’s requests for confirmation and uncertainties how the promise would be fulfilled, he exhibits commendable faith in Gen 15; he trusts God’s promise.

The level of faith in Gen 22, however, is at a higher level. Abraham must act on his faith, sacrificing even the very promise for which he had waited so many years. Justifying faith that God counts to us as righteousness, as in Gen 15:6, is very basic. But seeing God’s faithfulness through years of testing takes us to a deeper level of faith—a level of faith that trusts God no matter what, because we know that, whatever else might be the case, God is trustworthy. We know him; we know his character; and so we trust him. This is not a faith for which we can take credit as if we have worked it up by our efforts; it is a faith that flows from experiencing God’s trustworthiness, even in the face of hardship and waiting.

Ultimately, God thoroughly rewards Abraham’s obedient faith. God provides something better than a lamb for sacrifice (22:7–8)—an entire ram (22:13).

Abraham did not go randomly to any location, but to the one that God commanded, and God had a ram ready for him. There is thus another lesson here in addition to the model of Abraham’s obedient faith: God’s faithfulness in providing what will satisfy him. That Isaac and Abraham speak of the coming sacrifice as a lamb (22:7–8) suggests that this narrative foreshadowed for Israel the deliverance of their own firstborn through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb (Exod 12:3–5, 12–13, 21). Those who see here a foreshadowing of Jesus as God’s lamb recognise the same principle of redemption realised in the Passover.

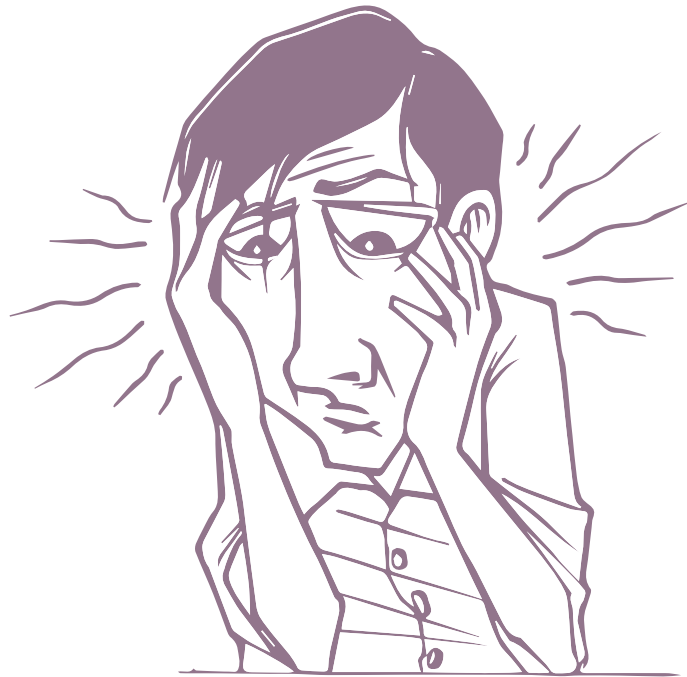
God acts overtly on behalf of his servant who has waited so long and trusted so much. An angel speaks from heaven to preserve Isaac (22:11)—just as an angel had spoken from heaven to preserve Ishmael (21:17). (The next reference in the Pentateuch to God speaking from heaven is at the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exod 20:22.) In these narratives, the angel of the Lord is first mentioned as appearing to Hagar (16:7–11; 21:17), then Abraham (22:11, 15), and then Moses (Exod 3:2).

The promise that God confirms in 22:16–17 because of Abraham’s obedience is something that God had already promised Abraham beforehand. God is the one who makes us the people he can bless; over the years Abraham obeyed God and saw God’s trustworthiness. We believe (15:6), but walking with God himself in the light of his word grows our faith. As we persevere in trusting and obeying God, he makes us ready for things we could not have handled earlier.

“THIS IS NOT A FAITH FOR WHICH WE CAN TAKE CREDIT AS IF WE HAVE WORKED IT UP BY OUR EFFORTS; IT IS A FAITH THAT FLOWS FROM EXPERIENCING GOD’S TRUSTWORTHINESS, EVEN IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIP AND WAITING.”



Selena George is a medical and psychiatric social worker, and co-founder of the NGO headstreams (www.headstreams.org).



WHY THE AILING WORLD NEEDS CHURCH MORE THAN EVER BEFORE

MENTAL ILLNESS, THOUGH COMMON, IS TREATED WITH STIGMA AND APATHY OFTEN EXACERBATING THE SUFFERING OF THOSE AFFLICTED WITH IT; COULD THE BODY OF CHRIST AND THE COUNSEL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT HEAL THIS BROKENNESS?

Mental distress does not occur in a vacuum but in a socio-cultural context. The occurrence of mental illness is closely linked to sociological phenomena like poverty, caste and class stratification, ethnic and communal affiliations, gender biases, etc.

Just communicating compassion through listening holds space for the other to begin their process of healing.

Jyothi, a househelp, complained of recurring aches and pains. She visited many doctors, but none were able to help. A couple of them suggested that the pain was psychological.

Manish was addicted to alcohol. He found himself stealing money and indulging in this habit day after day. He wished someone would help, but was too ashamed to ask. →

“I believe one of the key purposes of the Church is to help this world experience the wholistic healing that comes from our compassionate Creator.”

Nagma, mother of a one-year-old, unemployed and unskilled, had been abandoned by her husband. She felt rejected, lonely and scared, and longed for someone to talk to.

Jyothi, Manish and Nagma (names changed) represent common mental health struggles a majority of people, including Christians, suffer from. The pandemic has only exacerbated the existing loneliness, anxiety and violence in many lives. Further, the migrant workers' crisis that unfolded in the wake of pandemic-induced lockdown brought to fore the enormous mental health burden in the context of the marginalised and the underprivileged people.

One in seven Indians are said to suffer from mental disorders. Globally, India is now considered a forerunner in mental health morbidities. Yet mental health does not visibly figure in our national agenda; only 0.05% of total healthcare budget—which itself is a measly 1% of the country's GDP—is allocated to addressing mental health. Much of this is skewed in favour of pharmacological band aids that do not address the core of the problem. There has never been a more desperate need for large-scale, wholistic therapeutic interventions to restore mental health and hope for India.

Easier said than done though. There are only about 4,000 psychiatrists, 1,000 psychologists and 3,000 social workers for a population of 1.3 billion! With such paucity of mental health professionals, and most of these services concentrated only in big cities, mental health care is inaccessible to most. Further, even in cities, quality mental health care remains unaffordable to a majority of people; the cost of just one consultation ranges between Rs 200–Rs 400, beyond the means of an average household.

So, who or what then can stand in the gap?

If there are inadequate social workers, counsellors and psychiatrists, how can this crisis be faced head-on?

As Christians, the answer is obvious: the Church. I believe one of the key purposes of the Church is to help this world experience the wholistic healing that comes from our compassionate Creator. For at the core of our ongoing re-creation as Jesus' resurrected body is our ministry as healers of the brokenness that is at the root of life itself. The actions of Jesus in the Gospels clearly light the way for us; the Holy Spirit embodies the counsellor and comforter today. The bedrock of love that nurtures our relationship with our triune God is the paradigm for the safe relational spaces we are to create in this ailing world.

What I offer below are three issues concerning mental illness that the Church should be aware of; and then, I affirm four simple ways in which the members of the Christian community, even those not professionally trained, can address the mental health issues of their neighbours.

EVERYONE NEEDS HELP

1 We are ill ourselves: Illness is normal. Mental illness, like physical illnesses, may be temporary, or acute, or chronic and to be managed for life through strict disciplines. Like physical illness, it is a mark of our poverty and weakness, through which God's power is made visible and God is glorified. In a world that pursues infallibility, it is a reminder that our God shines through the chinks and cracks in us.

So everyone falls ill at some point. I accessed therapy twice in my life (once as a new mother, another when I entered

perimenopause). Both times, by the grace of God, I was able to access and receive exactly the help I needed. I was fortunate because I had a supportive husband, prayerful believer friends who held space for me, resources to pay for the sessions, and life circumstances that helped me process and practice what I needed to, to move on healthily.

The truth is that we are all both healer and sick, found and lost, putting off the old and putting on the new, and so, saved and being saved. This truth has to be at the centre of all our efforts to address mental illness. The Church is called to realise how flawed and imperfect, and so in need of help, each one of us ourselves is. We are called to normalise the behaviour of seeking help, by practising it ourselves. No one is invulnerable. We are called to confess our own struggles and vulnerability, first to God and then to those who can help us. The best way to become better healers is by experiencing healing ourselves. And all along, to testify to our ongoing journey to encourage our fellow travellers. We pray for sober judgement and humility to know our own vulnerabilities, and courage to seek help and to testify to our journey.

2 Stigma and culture of silence: Manish was ashamed to ask for help for a reason. Often there is a societal stigma against confessing mental distress; a culture of silence that prevents people from seeking help. People viewed as mentally ill are ridiculed; families that have a member suffering from mental distress are looked down upon. This is well ingrained in our churches too.

Jesus was up against this silence too. The gospels are replete with instances where Jesus “knew their thoughts” or “what was in her heart.” Jesus was able to see beyond the superficial to the person’s real need because he was compassion embodied. In the strength of the Holy Spirit, the Church can do this too. Since the mind-body-spirit are interlinked, the need for support is often visible in many non-verbal ways—in the eyes of the person, in their actions or inactions, in their silences, and sometimes their absences. We pray that the Holy Spirit help us to see beyond the visible and stay alert to the needs of our neighbours.

3 Socio-political causes of mental illness: Jyothi’s undiagnosable aches were not imaginings of her mind. Nor was she making up excuses for paid leave. Jyothi’s husband was a daily wage earner and unpredictable manual work meant they were invariably in deep debt. Remembering the mind-body connect, the only way this stress could manifest for Jyothi was as the aches in her body.

The poor socio-economic situation that Jyothi found herself in was not because they were not hard workers. It was the result of complex and inter-generational cultural and socio-political factors like them being born to farm labourers, who belonged to a lower caste, and had no land holdings or social standing. The recent migrant tragedies are but a glimpse of the oppression and inequalities that breed and perpetuate mental illnesses. Mental distress does not occur in a vacuum but in a socio-cultural context. The occurrence of mental illness is closely linked to sociological phenomena like poverty, caste and class stratification, ethnic and communal affiliations, gender biases, etc.

Jesus’ response in situations invariably took into account the context that the person was embedded in. We see this in his interchange with the Samaritan woman at the well, with Zachcheus and the rich young man. In fact, this is the hallmark of all of his interactions. It could be said that Jesus’ entire active ministry to lost sheep, was to those that were socio-politically contemptible. So, when we are dealing with issues of mental health, it’s not enough to view people as individuals who are suffering. We need to be aware of specific cultural issues, accommodating of realities that are very different from ours, and, casting our biases aside, be sensitive to what is of value to the person in distress. We pray that the Holy Spirit will grant us the insight to understand these broader contexts without judgement, so that our responses may be wholistic and true.

EVERYONE CAN HELP

1 Compassionate listening: Nagma’s trauma was deep and complex. For her to start her journey of healing, she needed somebody who would listen to her compassionately, and hold her baby for a while so she could get a break. The primary need of a human being, studies now show, is to have a sense of belonging. The deeper this rootedness, the greater our ability to heal. Today however, migration away from source communities has become a norm (rural to urban, national to international). One fallout of this is that we live in heterogenous communities; traditional rituals and practices that anchored our sense of being seem to slip away; and family and marital crises and breakdowns become more

common. In our increasingly uncertain and digitised world, the sense of belonging is constantly being eroded.

Jesus promises that there will come to reside with us a comforter and guide, the seal of our salvation—the Holy Spirit. And that the Holy Spirit will ever be with us. This knowledge of the triune God never leaving nor forsaking, but always faithful, is what anchors our faith in the most trying of times. In God’s service, we are called to be present, just like the Holy Spirit, for the people around us. As a Church, we must have the ability to be freely available to walk alongside our neighbours in distress, practising active listening viz. listening in alertness and empathy. Just communicating compassion through listening holds space for the other to begin their process of healing. This space for listening can also be in the form of active prayer groups, which become safe spaces not only to listen but also to point to God’s faithfulness and comfort. We pray that we are enabled to practice compassionate listening and providing safe spaces.

2 No assistance is too small: Assisting someone in mental distress is not just about counselling. Once we are aware of the contributive factors, we can find myriad ways to help. This could be providing financial help or food or childcare. In Nagma’s case for example, just holding her baby for a while gave her a break. In Manish’s case it was involving him in works of the church. In Jyothi’s case it was holding prayer meetings in her home periodically. Helping could also be involving the person in worship singing, or decorating the church, or organising prayer sessions so there is a space to hear others who are going through similar experiences and know that one is not alone. Sometimes, these have become places where interpersonal or community disputes may be brought up and resolved. Often contextual burdens are so great, any little thing is received with much gratitude. Building relationships like this also then gives one a chance to point towards resources that could help that are beyond the Church—maybe a workshop or a counsellor or a rehabilitation centre. Even as the Spirit leads us to the Father through Jesus, we minister by pointing to where the answers are. We pray for discernment in knowing how to assist and for generosity in the things that have been given to us.

3 Upgrading our skills: In today’s world, information and training are literally at our fingertips. There are more chances today to learn how to help more effectively than ever before. So as a Church, we can work to constantly upgrade our knowledge, skills and abilities to be of better service. For example, we can together learn about “what is depression” or “how to prevent suicide” or “manage money wisely” or “stress-coping techniques” to help both ourselves and others.

Throughout the lockdown there have been offerings by various resource people. Sharing these possibilities and availing of them strengthens our ability to ease mental health morbidities. We can organise and attend workshops and talks that can help us hone the gifts we have been granted. We pray that God will grant us opportunities to hone our skills so we may be empowered to serve others.

4 Humbly, glorify God: A regular at church, Vidya (name changed) struggled with anger issues: in anger she said and did things that hurt others or herself, with long-lasting consequences. We had talked about what to do on several occasions: pause, count to ten, take deep breaths, walk away... Nothing had really worked. So I prayed, asking God to give me the answer to give her. Days went by; she kept asking for an answer, and I had nothing but a listening ear. One day she came to me radiant. She said, “*Didi, mera gussa abhi control mein hain.*” She said that God had spoken to her and told her that every time she felt angry, to recite Psalm 23 (we had been learning that in our prayer group). She said that by the time she recited the Psalm, her anger had usually cooled down enough for her to think clearly. I was amazed and deeply humbled. I realised that the actor in all situations is God, not me. And the Holy Spirit is constantly refining me, while helping the others brought my way.

This is something the Church needs to keep at the centre. God is the actor, not us. Our God is alive, and active, right now. The Holy Spirit is the one at work. We are just conduits at best, and privileged witnesses of Jesus’ handiwork always. Our primary work as healers then is to bear testimony for God’s glory. We walk along and beside as companions with the vulnerable, following Jesus together. So we pray that God will enable us to identify and glorify divine handiwork, both in us and in our neighbours.



**EAT THE
WORD**

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ARE YOU TROUBLED BY THE THOUGHT THAT WHETHER YOUR NEIGHBOUR, FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER WHO DOES NOT BELIEVE IN JESUS IS GOING TO BE IN HEAVEN?

Stanley Jones was last century's predominant missionary-statesman. He came as a young missionary pastor to the Lalbagh Methodist Church in Lucknow in 1907, and after a spiritual renewal in 1917 went on to become a world evangelist. He knew Gandhi and others of the Indian independence movement personally. In 1938 *Time* magazine designated Jones as "the world's greatest missionary evangelist". He was nominated for the Nobel Peace

Prize in 1962 and received the Gandhi Peace Prize in 1963.

Jones preached at the Mar Thoma Syrian Church's Maramon Convention several times. Once during a convention someone asked Jones whether Gandhi would be in heaven. Jones gave a politically correct answer, probably something like, "I wouldn't be surprised to find Gandhi in heaven". When the story got reported, it was twisted a bit and every time it was retold, it got more and more twisted, till people were saying that Jones had claimed that Gandhi would definitely be in heaven.

Jones made a mistake answering the question. He should have said, "I don't know and it's none of my business. God is the one to decide on that."

Many Christians are troubled about people they know—who are not Christian— whether or not they will be in heaven. Some say: "Is God going to keep my neighbour out of heaven just because he hasn't accepted Jesus as Saviour? I tell you, he is a better Christian than many Christians I know." It may be a friend, a non-church-going, but loving aunt; an uncle or a cousin, or an exceptionally just and kind employer.

On the flip side, all those who talk this way,



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subconsciously or consciously think that they themselves are okay to get into heaven and that all are okay to be admitted to heaven. They think that if God doesn't admit their friends to heaven because of a mere failure to acknowledge Jesus as Saviour that would be wrong. God's judgement would be in error.

All such thinking reveals that people have the idea that entry to heaven is merit based. That if you score high by doing good work you're a sure-fire candidate for heaven, irrespective of what you believe about Jesus.

If entry to heaven is merit based, then no one needs Jesus as Saviour. Then He need not have taken the trouble to become incarnate, taking on Himself the evils and infirmities of humanity. He need not have given His life in sacrifice. However, Jesus did come and He did die to atone for the sins of all people. That can only mean that there was no other way for humankind to be saved and get to heaven. How then do we face the issue of the fate of those who do not put their faith in Jesus?

BEFORE CHRIST

Everyone before the time of Christ, was a non-Christian.

“All the “heroes of the Bible”—Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Daniel—were non-Christians.”

All the “heroes of the Bible”—Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Daniel—were non-Christians. They did not know about Jesus and so they did not turn to Him for their salvation. Aren't they going to be in heaven? Clearly there's more to the rule that entry to heaven is based on believing in Jesus as Saviour.

When Abraham was told that God intended to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, he was worried because his beloved nephew lived there. Abraham started to plead with God about sparing the city for the sake of the righteous who live there, and ends his petition with the question, “Will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?” (Gen 18:25). Abraham didn't doubt that. It was just a rhetorical challenge. We must not think that we ourselves are kinder and care more for the people whom God fathered by creating them.

We must not speculate about what will happen to people at the Judgement. That is none of our business. That is God's domain. However, we do have some hints in the New Testament about how God will judge people.

Romans 1:16–17 gives us Paul's thesis: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

The gospel is that God offers salvation to all as a gift. They can't buy it with any good deeds. They can only receive it, and receiving is simply a matter of believing God and taking His gospel as true and trustworthy. In the next few chapters of Romans, Paul argues the case for seeing Jesus as fitting the gospel of salvation by faith and in his arguments we can see hints of what will be the criteria for judgement at the end.

A QUESTION OF BRAINS

Did people use the brains God gave them? That is going to be a question they will have to answer when facing judgement and eternity.

Paul said that God had revealed all that was needed to know Him as God: "...what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (vv.18–20). This echoes what the Psalmist said: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (19:1–4). God has been communicating non-verbally with all humankind.

Our world is full of manufactured artefacts and goods. For generations humans have proudly claimed to have made all the buildings and tools, gadgets and trinkets that surround our lives. We acknowledge the existence of makers of all things even though we do not see them in action. Yet, there are people who deny that there is a Supernatural Being who created our world. None of the things manufactured by us have the kind of complexity that exists in the raw in the world around us. The eye as a camera, the ear as an auditory device, the brain as a library for all sorts of records including smell, taste and touch! And, that's just the wonders of the human body. Multiply the wonders of all nature around us. Truly, one has to acknowledge that there is an immensely superior power behind all existence. How can anyone reasonably deny a Creator's hand?

After looking at the magnificence of the created world, it also doesn't make sense to sit down and carve gods out of wood and stone. The Old Testament prophets ridiculed the idea of worshipping gods that cannot speak, hear, touch and have to be carried around as burdens because they cannot move (Ps 115:4–8; 135:15–18; Isa 44:9–20; 45:20; Jer 10:3–5). Again and again, they say that people are not thinking about the foolishness of it all. Paul also echoed the sentiments of the old prophets in Romans 1:19–23.

ACCORDING TO THE LIGHT

A second consideration in judgement will be whether or not a person has acted on the amount of knowledge received. A person who has not heard the gospel will not be judged for rejecting the gospel. However, a person who has heard and understood the gospel but does not accept the gospel will have

"If entry to heaven is merit based, **then no one needs Jesus as Saviour.**"

to face the charge of not having acted on what was made known to him or her.

"God does not show favouritism. All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them)"—(Rom 2:11–15).

The Bible does record a few stories of how God's light reached beyond those identified as God's people. The prophets had messages for non-Jews too (Isa 10:5–19; 13:1–21:17; 23:1–18; Jer 46:1–51:64). Nebuchadnezzar received messages in dreams from God (Dan 2:1–45; 4:1–18) and even had a conversion experience after God had dealt with him (vv.34–37).

Jonah's story makes it clear that God didn't just announce the doom of non-Jews, but sent them messages to win them over. Jonah was told to prophesy to the people of Nineveh, and he didn't want to, because he knew that God would forgive when they repented and then he would look like a fool for having prophesied their punishment.

Then we have the story of how Oriental astrologers studied the stars and set out to find the one born King of the Jews (Matt 2:1–12). God communicated with them even though they were

doing something prohibited according to the Law of God (Deut 18:10–14).

Cornelius had not heard of Jesus, but he was a devout seeker after the truth, and so God sent an angel to him and he was told to send for a preacher of the gospel to make things clear to him (Acts 10:1–8, 30–33).

The light of God still streams into the lives of people who have not received the gospel because no evangelist has reached them. When people receive light from God and act on whatever light they have received God takes them further on their journey of spiritual discovery. Unreached people in remote areas and closed countries are discovering Jesus.

If we are truly worried about the salvation of neighbours, friends and relatives, then we should not be demanding that God lower the standards and rules of entry to heaven. Instead, we should pray that we or someone else will be able to get through to them with the light of the gospel. Once people die, we can't enter pleas on their behalf. Whatever we want to do for their salvation must be done while they have an opportunity to choose Jesus.

SAVING FAITH

Next, we consider what the Bible has to say about the judgement of those who have not heard the gospel of salvation through Jesus. We must conclude that they will be saved just like the Old

Testament heroes. Abel found favour with God, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and Abraham believed God and so it was counted as righteousness. David didn't seek forgiveness by offering blood sacrifices but by approaching God with a broken heart. None of them thought that they were worthy of salvation or that they could save themselves. All of them cast themselves on the mercy of God.

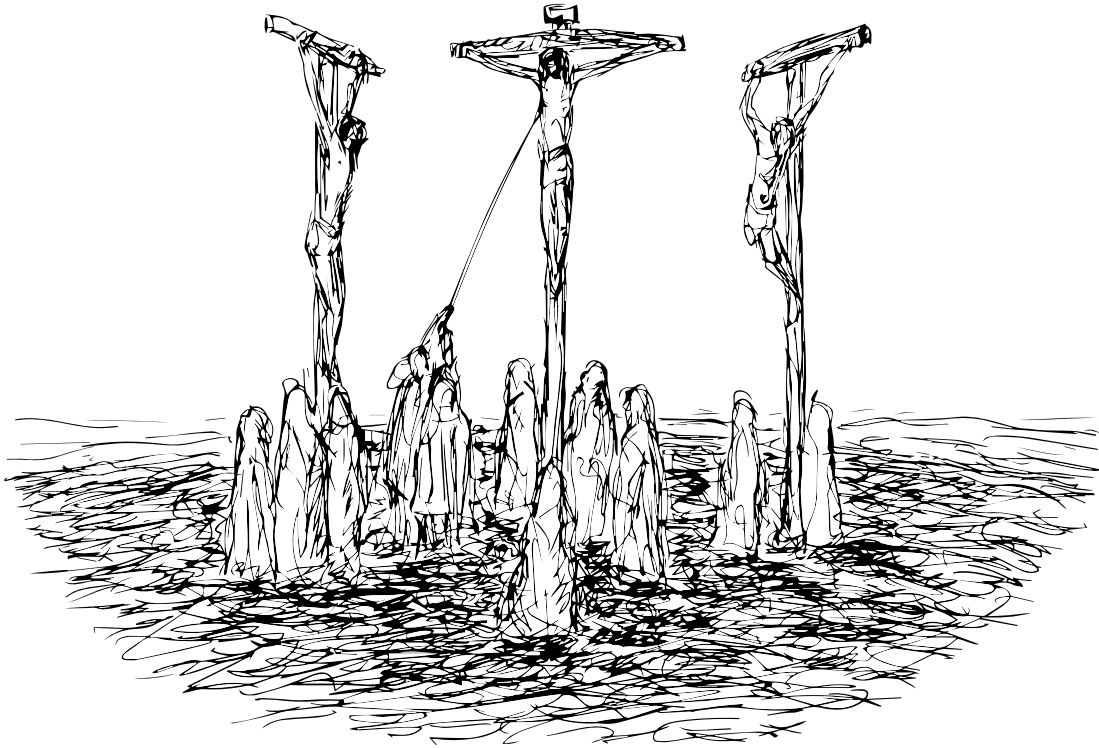
Paul argued that that is the way people are saved. "What shall we say, then, of Abraham, the father of our race? What was his experience? If he was put right with God by the things he did, he would have something to boast about—but not in God's sight. The scripture says, 'Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous.' A person who works is paid wages, but they are not regarded as a gift; they are something that has been earned. But those who depend on faith, not on deeds, and who believe in the God who declares the guilty to be innocent, it is this faith that God takes into account in order to put them right with himself" (Rom 4:1–5, GNB). Paul then made the point that this was true of David because "...he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven; whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them'" (vv.6–8). Paul clinched his argument by saying, "We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!" (vv.9–10).

Paul's argument was that Abraham was counted righteous before he did anything to earn points for good deeds. He simply believed God and God counted his faith as Abraham's righteousness. Elsewhere Paul wrote, "God saved you through faith as an act of kindness. You had nothing to do with it. Being saved is a gift from God. It's not the result of anything you've done, so no one can brag about it" (Eph 2:8–9, GW).

Thus, the question that everyone—Christians and non-Christians alike—will have to face is whether they are at heaven's entrance claiming right of entrance based on their merit or believing

in God's grace and mercy. Whom have they put faith in—themselves or God?

I believe God is just. You need not worry about people who didn't receive Christ in their lifetime. What you do need to worry about is whether you yourself have acted on the light that has shone on your life. You have heard the gospel that salvation is through Jesus. Have you received Jesus into your life as Saviour and Lord? And that is a question you need to answer this side of heaven and eternity.



DID

GOD THE FATHER FORSAKE JESUS ON THE CROSS?

IF YOU READ PSALM 22 CAREFULLY YOU WILL HEAR, IN THE
INSPIRED WORDS OF THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFERER, THE RESONANCE
OF JESUS' THOUGHTS ON THE CROSS



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“He knew his disciples would scatter and abandon him; but not his Father. Instead, he said: “The time is coming when you will leave me all alone. Yet, I am not alone, for my Father is with me.”

Did

God forsake Jesus on the Cross? A chilling thought! But one that does enter our minds.

On the cross, Jesus cried out, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (Aramaic for “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?”)

According to a line in a beautiful modern hymn, “The Father turned his face away”.

The earth-shaking question is: Did He?

Did the Father turn his back on Jesus in his hour of greatest need?

To be honest, I had till recently answered this question in the affirmative.

But, having seriously struggled with this heavy thought, I have changed my mind. Also, let me confess, that I feel inadequate to articulate the depths of the marvel and mysteries of the cross of the Saviour. A hundred sermons would be insufficient to aptly describe what happened on that first Good Friday.

However, we must grapple with the meaning of the

cross, since the cross and resurrection are at the very centre of the Christian faith. There is no other symbol that adequately represents the followers of the Nazarene.

I may not convince all—so please feel free to disagree. All I ask is that you consider these thoughts; and we could still remain friends.

Does any text in the New Testament (apart from the aforementioned words of Jesus on the cross, to which we will soon turn our attention) explicitly say that the Father God had to turn his face away from Jesus, because our sins had been laid on him?

No.

Then how do we interpret these words of Jesus, mentioned in the Gospels of Mark (15:34) and Matthew (27:46)? (These words are not found in Luke and John.)

Among the words that escaped the parched lips of the mutilated Messiah, were these words. Taken at face value, it is a cry of dereliction: The Father had apparently forsaken the Son.

In which case, the eternal bond within the Godhead, ➔

between the Father, Son and Spirit, was broken on the cross. Did that really happen? Was that even possible?

Did Jesus face the deepest unimaginable pain of the greatest abandonment? He could have borne the pain of his disciples running away, but, his Father too?

How else can we see those words of lament from the cross? I believe there is a better way to understand these words of Jesus on the cross.

First, as seen in the Gospels, *Jesus always addressed God as “Father”*.

Therefore, among the recorded words uttered from the cross, we hear: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” and, finally, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:34, 46).

Thus, we should not be in a hurry to read the other words of Jesus (“My God! My God!”) as perfectly representing Jesus’ deep anguish of being abandoned by his Father.

Second, *Jesus*, well aware of both the absolute horror and the decisive victory of “the hour” (as John puts it), *never ever spoke of his Father forsaking him*.

He knew his disciples would scatter and abandon him; but not his Father. Instead, he said: “The time is coming when you will leave me all alone. Yet, I am not alone, for my Father is with me” (John 16:32).

Wholly submitted to his Father’s will in Gethsemane, Jesus was perfectly assured of his Father’s presence on Golgotha!

Now we may think: Since the sin of the whole world was on Jesus, how could a holy God look upon the horrible evil and sin. Now it is true, as Paul puts it: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Yes, Jesus was the Lamb of God who was taking away the sin of the world.

The prophet Isaiah says: “Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4b). That’s how *we considered him*. No wonder Paul went after those who believed in an “accursed Messiah”.

Jesus tasted death and the darkness of sin on behalf of the whole human race. He experienced the absolute and infinite darkness and degradation of sin.

God, by sending his Son as a sin offering, condemned sin in human flesh (Rom 8:3). Along with that, God took away our condemnation, and disarmed and triumphed over Satanic powers and authorities (Col 2:13–15).

But who says, a holy God cannot look at sin? I know a

complaining prophet thought so (Hab 1:13). But, is that true? God loves the world—Yes! Though full of sin and evil. The giving up of his Son on the cross was God’s merciful idea (John 3:16).

God does not turn his face away from the world right now—does he? What about us, with our petty religiosity and selfish lifestyles? God still reaches out to us and to this whole world in unbelievable grace and love.

Third,—and this may be the clincher—*Jesus was reciting the words of the Messianic Psalm 22*. The psalm recounts the inspired words of the righteous sufferer, who expresses his lament to God—the pain and darkness of unjust present suffering, yet moving on to ultimate vindication and salvation.

The book of Psalms was the hymnal of Jesus. If you would have heard Jesus humming a song while working away in Joseph’s workshop, it was probably a psalm set to a simple tune.

On the cross, Jesus was reciting the words of Psalm 22, beginning with the opening verse. And then he would have worked his way through the psalm. Jesus would have learnt, early on, that such psalms revealed his calling to be the Suffering Servant who would deliver Israel.

Just read through Psalm 22. You cannot miss the many resonances to what Jesus is going through on the cross.

The bystanders shake their heads and mock him (Ps 22:6–8; Matt 27:41–44; Mark 15:29–30). He suffers terrible thirst (Ps 22:15; John 19:28). The soldiers cast lots for his

inner garment, maybe to keep as a trophy (Ps 22:18; Matt 27:35).

While the psalmist says metaphorically that “they pierce my hands and my feet” (Ps 22:16), Jesus’ body was literally pierced—and the marks endure after the resurrection.

But the psalm continues: “For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him, but has listened to his cry for help” (Ps 22:24).

Jesus would declare God’s praise among his “brothers and sisters”—which is Psalm 22:22, but cited in Heb 2:12. The psalmist is quite confident that his God will vindicate him, and as a result, “the whole world will turn to the Lord and bow down before Him” (Ps 22:27).

God would vindicate the cross of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit would raise Jesus from the dead! And how does the psalm end? On the triumphant note: “He has done it” (22:31c)!

That was exactly Jesus’s victorious cry: “It is finished” (John 19:30)!

After this, Jesus could peacefully submit his spirit to the hands of his Father (Luke 23:46).

The Father was right there with Jesus. As Jesus expected.

Fourth, see the insight of the apostle Paul and others:

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them” (2 Cor 5:18–19).

So, where was God when Jesus was on the cross? He was in Christ! He too suffered with Jesus!

[Jürgen Moltmann (*The Crucified God*, 1972) wrote about a God who participates in solidarity with the suffering of his creatures, so as to ultimately redeem them.]

In some marvellous and mysterious way—too deep for

me to articulate here—the Triune God was involved in the redemption of the world on the cross of Jesus. The eternal bonds within the Godhead could never be broken.

The writer to the Hebrews says that Christ offered himself to God through the eternal Spirit (Heb 9:14).

Friends, in ways we will never fully fathom, the love of God has been fully revealed on the cross of Jesus. The way of sacrificial love. And that love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).

In the words of the theme song of the early 20th century Welsh revival:

On the mount of crucifixion,
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God’s mercy,
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And heaven’s peace and perfect justice,
Kissed a guilty world in love.

The Father never abandoned Jesus. He will never abandon you!

“What about us,
with our petty
religiosity and
selfish lifestyle?
**God still
reaches out to
us and to this
whole world in
unbelievable
grace and
love.”**



WHAT AN OXYMORON CHRISTIAN LIFE IS!

**IN CHRIST, IMPERFECT IS PERFECT, MEEK IS STRONG, POOR IS RICH;
THOSE WHO BEAR THE CROSS KNOW BOTH THE PAIN OF PERSECUTION AND
THE JOY OF FORGIVENESS**

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ife is an oxymoron. Or, to be precise, ‘Christian life’ is an oxymoron. This is something that I have had to learn, sometimes the hard way. And, I can’t say that I get it right each time. But definitely this is something that strikes me when I look back on the road I have travelled.

What am I getting at? Good question. As a Christian, I learned many things

by rote (Sunday School, Sword drill, Vacation Bible School (VBS), etc., were good at filling my head with a lot of Biblical knowledge and jargon). Yet I never really thought through a lot of what I knew. If I had, I would have probably realised much sooner that *living* the Christian life was no walk in the park. Let me explain. One of the most familiar verses I learned as a child was Romans 5:3: “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance.”

If I had only taken the time to think about that, I would have realised how ridiculous that statement was. I sang all the right songs, quoted all the right verses, and read all the right books. But when you are smack face-to-face with pain and torment and heartbreak, you honestly do not feel like “glorying”! I didn’t. I felt betrayed and angry and disappointed. Not very “Christian” at all!

Yet it was in the valleys of life; during days and months of loneliness and despair, when life didn’t make sense that I truly began to hear



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“Essentially, everything the Bible says, all that Jesus spoke and lived and taught, points to this fact—that what may seem contradictory at first can actually exist in perfect conjunction.”

God's voice. Those were the times when He was most real to me, when He guided me every day, when He stuck closer than a brother.

And that was when I realised that the Christian life was an oxymoron. Google defines an oxymoron as *“a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction.”* Essentially, everything the Bible says, all that Jesus spoke and lived and taught, points to this fact—that what may seem contradictory at first can actually exist in perfect conjunction.

The Bible is filled with such examples. Take “love your enemies” for instance—imagine actually living that out! How would I deal with those who attacked my family just because we did not belong to their religion? Could I love them? And “love” in this context would be the whole shebang—turning the other cheek, praying for those who persecuted me, and doing good to (i.e. proactively seeking the benefit of) those who spitefully used me and reviled me. Honestly, I'm still struggling to answer that one truthfully. I know what my gut reaction would be, and it would *not* be how Jesus responded to His accusers, how He bore the shame of my sin

uncomplainingly, how He forgave freely. Yet, that is the bottom line—the ultimate oxymoron—love my enemies.

When I look back at the last decade, it is crystal clear to me. I've learned that there is joy in the midst of pain; I can love the unlovable because Jesus did that for me, that with God the impossible is possible—the dead can live again, the blind can see, the crooked paths can be made straight, and there can be streams in the desert. I've learned that when I am weak, then, in Christ, I am truly strong. When my eyes deceive me with “facts”, the hope of the cross gives me my faith wings. And that only when I die to myself, can I truly live!

So, it is possible and doable when Jesus says:

“... Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6: 27–36).

Ultimately, the Christian life is all about Jesus. It's all about Him. Not me. But we can exist in perfect conjunction when we live in submission to His Lordship.

REMEMBER, YOU ARE LOVED!

**READ THIS POWERFUL
TESTIMONY TO KNOW
HOW THE LORD'S LOVE
FIXES BROKEN HEARTS
AND MINDS; RESTORES
PHYSICAL AND MENTAL
HEALTH**



It is not easy to put in words the struggle our family, particularly our son Adiel, went through for 13 long years. My husband is a pastor for a Telugu Church in Singapore. The Lord blessed us with two children, son Adiel and daughter Jessica.

Adiel was exceptionally stubborn and adamant since childhood and this caused a lot of conflict in the family. We requested every pastor to pray over our son. There were occasions when we were utterly helpless and had to call the police to handle situations. There was unrest and fear that gripped our family all the time. We never knew when a situation would get out of control. We had no peace. Adiel kept to himself most of



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the time and there was anger in his heart towards the family.

In the beginning of 2019 one of my close friends, a believer in Christ, advised that we should step down from pastoring the church. Quoting 1 Timothy (chapter 3), she reasoned that since we were unable to manage our own son, now 17 years of age, we were no longer eligible to pastor a church. The spiritual battle against us was getting intense. I fell prostrate before the Lord beseeching Him to release us from this bondage.

Shortly after that, in the month of March 2019, Adiel became absolutely docile and I thought that the Lord had indeed answered our prayers by transforming our son. The Lord did answer our prayers but in the least expected manner.

Adiel started to complain that something was wrong with his brain. He could not focus on his academics. We took him to couple of counsellors and psychologists but his condition only worsened by the day. His behaviour and actions were turning bizarre.

In June 2019, we had Vacation Bible School (VBS) in our church and the topic

I was given to teach the children was: 'Heavenly Father's love'. I realised that something was amiss in my experience of God's love and that it was almost impossible for me to speak on the subject. I was telling the Lord that I will be unable to speak on something that I myself had never experienced in depth. However, I did run through the VBS lessons, although on a superficial level than experiential.

Adiel could hardly attend school. He would lie in his bed for hours together or just while away his time doing nothing. He was losing his appetite and could not sleep well. We even brought him to NIMHANS, Bangalore for treatment.

In October one day, he carried a kitchen knife and a pail and took to the road barefoot. His father ran after him but could not catch up with his speed. Adiel was soon out of sight. We quickly informed the police. The police spotted him at a bus stop. The armed policemen surrounded him and aimed at him asking him to drop the "weapon". By God's grace, Adiel dropped the knife. He was taken to a mental health institution from there. Carrying a weapon subjected the offenders to caning by law. By God's grace Adiel was not charged with caning as we had enrolled him for clinical counselling, just one month prior to the unfortunate incident. We saw the protective hand of the Lord guarding Adiel at every step.

Adiel tried to run away from the hospital and he was put on 5-point restraint which he hated all the more. He was put on medication for his mental illness and every day he would cry to be taken back home. We had no clue whether Adiel would get any better. Doctors diagnosed him with high-functioning ASD (autism spectrum disorder) which led to psychotic episodes. This explained his weird behaviour since childhood.

“In October one day, he carried a kitchen knife and a pail **and took to the road barefoot.**”

“If a wretched human like me knew how to love my sick and ailing son, how much more does our Heavenly Father love us, who created us all in love!”

This was the time when the Lord had become more real in our lives. There was a day where my son asked, “Mummy, I know I have hurt yourself and papa very much. Will you forgive me? Do you both still love me?” I answered, “Of course, *pandu* (dear). We forgive you and we love you very much.”

Couple of days later, he asked me the same question and I assured him that we have forgiven him and that we hold nothing against him. But he kept asking again and again. I finally told him, “Adiel, we love you so much that there is nothing you could do to lessen our love for you or nothing you could do to add our love to you. We love you because you are our son.” As soon as those words left my lips, the Lord began speaking to me: “That is exactly how I love you my child. There is nothing that you could do to stop me from loving you. I loved you even before you were fashioned in your mother’s womb.” Suddenly the love of the Heavenly Father became very real!

We could hardly eat or sleep without Adiel at home. And the thought of him lying all alone in his hospital bed wanting to be back home crushed us. We wanted to do everything in our capacity to make him well, to give him life. And again, the cross became so real. The Father loved us so much that He did not spare His only begotten son, Jesus, that we may have life! If a wretched human like me knew how to love my sick and ailing son, how much more does our Heavenly Father love us, who created us all in love! Who can separate us from the love of Christ?

During those darkest moments, God’s Word helped us to hang in there without losing hope. It was the firm foundation upon which we could stand without doubting His goodness. God would send us a timely Word whenever our souls felt crushed. The Word lifted us up. Hymns which speak of God’s unchanging character and His unconditional love lightened our wearied souls.

Most importantly, during those lonely moments in the hospital, Adiel experienced God’s presence like never before. God even provided Adiel with a Muslim nurse who quoted scripture from the Bible and those verses encouraged our son a lot. Adiel understood the love of his family members for the first time in his life. He allowed himself to be loved.

Adiel in his own words testified: “During my stay at the institute, I experienced the Lord very intimately. I understood the importance of family.”

Last but not the least, the prayers of the church and family members were our source of strength. A few people from the church, who shared our pain, gathered with us week after week for intercessory prayer for Adiel. Two young men whom Adiel loved to hang out with were kind enough to visit him regularly during his stay at the hospital. They graciously set aside time for Adiel despite their busy schedule. This was the Lord’s provision.

After nearly a month, on November 15, 2019, Adiel was discharged from the hospital. The Lord was true to His Word and kept His promises. By God’s grace he was able to function normally. Adiel sought to be baptised as he committed his life to the Lord voluntarily. We have no more disagreements or conflicts with Adiel in the family. No more fear gripping us. God’s peace and love prevails in our home in a tangible way as we love each other. All things have become new in Christ!

DURING YOUR SEASON, TAKE STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS FROM COVID-19:



Know the symptoms of COVID-19 and do not travel if you are sick



Keep 6 feet of distance and wear a face covering



Limit touching surfaces (handrails, seat backs, etc.)



Avoid touching your mask or face



Wash hands or use sanitizer frequently



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- CDC & local health department
- Travel authority

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FICTION



THE
STRANGER

City of Magic - Part XV

CAN YOU DECODE THE HIGHLIGHTED
WORDS?



Domenic Marbaniang teaches at Hong Kong Baptist University. He is married to Goosie and they are blessed with two children, Jeremiah and Joanne.

WHEN HE WAS MIRED IN VENOM OF EARTH WITH NO WAY OUT,
WHOSE CALM VOICE ASKS THE PROTAGONIST TO RUN AWAY?
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Sophia had managed to rip off a sewer lid and pulled us into it. It all happened in the twinkling of an eye, and the barred lid was closed. We were curved now in a four-foot-deep gutter that had, by now, a foot of rain water gushing through. I held Inno in my lap so that she could sit straight and we kept our heads close to the lid. The light from the headlights grew near and then disappeared completely, leaving a fading trail of humdrum from the vehicles that eventually stopped. It was all dark again. I wondered that my life had all been underground. If hiding was all reality; then, the world did look like a cursed reality now. How long, I asked. What wretchedness, I thought. The sky still flashed and gurgled, spitting rain on the ground: it did look like spit on our faces looking up the barred lid above.

Sophia softly pushed the lid up and made sure that it was all fine. Then, she climbed up and pulled us back onto the road. I marvelled at her agility, but was not afraid to follow her lead—she acted even before I could summon ideas for doing some proper thinking. Her action nailed me into submission; for they always seemed to be well calculated.

We moved swiftly and found an intersection. The trucks had come from the right. I looked towards the left. “Not that way,” said Sophia, “We’ll go the way that they’ve cleared.” We moved on. We slipped into a dark street, walked through few turns of various streets and found ourselves in a market place. The weather had become dry here and the heavens above were as dark as nothingness. The walk we were on opened onto a square where there were a number of people. The number of people did gradually rise through each street that drew close to the shopping area. Intriguingly, I noticed that the lamps here had a certain green shade. It also seemed that the people here were a bit obsessed with snakes; for these creatures, in their numerous varieties, served as the ground pattern for all commodities here: shoes, suits, and snacks alike.

“Her dazzling eyes spotted us and within moments we fell on the ground bound with strong twigs. I looked at Inno and saw that she was bound as well.”

Sophia slowed her pace, and I followed suit. From the distance, I could now notice that a number of policemen were stationed at the square. Two of them were approaching from in front of us. They wore dark green uniforms and had serpent badges on. "This is Invidia, the territory of Envy," Sophia whispered. The two policemen were discussing something that seemed to be too important to them; they just passed by us without even throwing a glance. I felt relief.

We reached the square where a statue of the Lady Invidia stood. She was seated on a coiled green viper. A plank on the serpent had these words carved:

INVIDIA Venom of the Earth

Four lampposts stood on the four corners of the square, each bearing a serpent's head with green light blazing from its eyes. The first was called Self-seeking; the second, Blindness; the third, Hatred; and the fourth, Rottenness. I had a severe desire to just get away from this appalling and disgusting sight. At that very moment, it seemed like the scene in front of me was torn apart like a canvas of painting, and a fiery dragon pierced through and leapt onto the middle of the square out of nowhere. Seated on it was Invidia. Her dazzling eyes spotted us and within moments we fell on the ground bound with strong twigs. I looked at Inno and saw that she was bound as well. Immediately, officers surrounded us and sprayed a green gas on our eyes. Then, everything was pitch darkness and I fell unconscious.

I thought it was rain, and then I realised that it was water being thrown on my face, and was puzzled that I hadn't yet awakened from this dream, as it seemed. I looked up and saw that I was in some kind of a stony dungeon; some officers stood there smiling at me sarcastically. One of them looked at me with utter disgust. I looked and saw that Sophia and Inno were still tied; they were unconscious.

The disgusting looking officer pricked a baton under my cheek and asked, "Who else are with you?"

I answered nothing. My mind reeled with the nauseating stench around. The officer was disgusted. "Get that thing out!" he shouted. "Spit it out or you'll be impaled on a pole with your friends before all eyes!" another one cried. They looked extremely violent and vulgar.

"Please leave me alone for some time," I cried out loud.

Inno and Sophia awoke with a startle. The officers looked stunned. "Let me deliberate a little; then, I'll tell you what I wish to say."

They looked at each other and nodded. "Think, then," the officer said, "before your brains are spilled out!" He then moved out and the others followed suit, one by one. I lowered my head in an utter sense of desperation.

"Don't fret!" Sophia said, "It's impossible for darkness to overcome light!"

"But, where light finds no way to enter, there darkness reigns. That is the kingdom of darkness!"

"If it were all dark, then why would I have a ray of hope?"

I found no answer. I felt just confused. I could think of no way out. For the first time I felt that evil had triumphed over man through the venomous sting of envy. At that instant, the only dim lights that lit our dungeon sizzled off and died, and it was all pitch dark. Inno cried with fear. "Don't be afraid!" Sophia tried to strengthen her. I moved in every way possible to break off the strands; but they held me tight. I struggled and I felt Sophia struggling too. Suddenly, it seemed that somebody stood close to me.

"Who is it?" I cried.

There was pindrop silence. I could hear the panting of Sophia and the cries of Inno.

"Tell me, again, who is it?" I cried out.

There was again a deep silence. Then, something touched my strands and they broke off loose. The next instant, I sensed Sophia and Inno stood on their feet too.

"Run away!" a voice calmly said, "I've come to take your place."

"Who is it?" I asked groping around with my hands.

"Get away from here and do not worry about my name; for, in a little while you shall see me again!"

"No, tell me your name?"

"They call me **Stranger** here. That's all you need to know for the moment. Now, run!"

"Where do you live?"

"I have no home here."

"What do you do?"

“Ask the ground beneath your feet what it does,

Ask the firmament above your head what it does,

Ask the daystar that fills the world with energy what it does,

(Now hidden from your view; yet, not annulled)

Ask the heart that beats within your breast what it does,

Ask the cold rain pouring from the fiery sky what it does;

Who has appointed it? What office does it hold?

Is it paid from the treasures of Hamartia?

Or does Sarx marshal it like he does the forces of wild Desire?

Then you shall know that my office is not from below;

Neither am I esteemed by this estranged world of woes.

Sin finds nothing in me, nothing worthwhile but profuse enmity!

Do not ask any further; for this is not the time to ask and answer;

Run! Run away from here! Stop not to look back,

Turn neither to the left nor to the right! Just run, run away from here!”

“Where to?”

“Just run away! Away now!” he cried and his voice struck us like an electricity; in an instant we were jolted out of the dungeon and landed on a street.

The street was very dimly lit and littered with all kinds of refuse. There was a far heavier stench here than ever that we had to cover our olfactory senses. The houses were all dilapidated and on the verge

of crumbling. People walked clumsily on the road; most just sat idle on the ground. A giant tower loomed at a little distance and upon it were inscribed the words,

BABEL

Easy Come Easy Go

We three stood there marveling with our mouths parted wide. The walls of this part of the City, including the tower, were made of stones and resembled the back of a tortoise shell.

“This is Acedia, the province of Sloth,” muttered Sophia.

“What did Stranger mean when he said that he had come to take our place?” I asked.

“I don’t know. But, one thing I know: he had come to save us.”

“I hope Stranger is safe,” Inno spoke with a deep pity in her voice. I took her in my arms.

“Yes, he’ll be safe dear,” I said, “If he knew how to get in, he sure knows how to get out as well.”

But, who was this Stranger after all, I wondered to myself. Deep inside I had an assurance. Providence had not failed us one more time.

“If you promise to share with me some, I’ll show you the best liquor shop just a little away,” someone suggested from behind. I was about to turn back, but Sophia gripped my hand.

Decoders:

John 1:11

Matt 8:20

“There was again a deep silence. Then, something touched my strands and they broke off loose. The next instant, I sensed Sophia and Inno stood on their feet too.”



LIFE IN A BLACK HOLE? THERE'S A WAY OUT!

CHRISTIANS ARE AS VULNERABLE TO ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AS OTHERS, BUT THEY CAN, AND MUST, LEARN TO HANDLE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS WITH THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL



Abhishikta Satpathy is the pastor of Delhi Bible Fellowship (West Delhi). He is passionate and dedicated to build Christian leaders in North India.

“Godly people, including Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon, throughout history have suffered dark and crushing emotions to some degree or the other.”



What is a black hole? If you have watched movies like *Interstellar* or TV programmes about space, perhaps you have got a picture of what it looks like. Black hole is a space in the galaxy where gravitational pull is so extreme that stars are swallowed up in it and are torn apart, not even light can escape it. It is said that everything changes there—space, time and matter. To be in a black hole means ‘the end of everything’ and it’s really a scary picture to even think of.

Have you felt recently—after the outbreak of COVID-19—that our life is also being sucked into a ‘black hole’? The pandemic, far from over, has already claimed millions of lives around the world while affecting many more in unimaginable ways. It will still have far-reaching effects.

From massive slowdown of the economy to heart-wrenching migrant workers’ crisis; from closure of educational and religious institutions indefinitely to heightened tension on borders;

from social isolation to political mayhem; from unemployment to overburdened public health system, our country is also faced with multiple challenges in the wake of the pandemic.

But another side effect of a pandemic which often goes unnoticed is emotional pandemonium—while there’s so much happening around us, there’s also a far stronger war raging inside us. The world is witnessing an unprecedented rise in the cases of anxiety, fear, depression and stress among people during this time and Christians are no exception to that.

Remarkably, we can endure it all but only if our mental health is intact. However, if we are not in a sound mental health, we will fall apart at slightest crisis. Our emotional health controls all spheres of our life and we, Christians, need to accept that humans are a sum total of their physical, emotional, relational, moral, spiritual and existential being.

Therefore, I have realised that reducing every matter to spiritual dimension is a flawed approach. There is a famous quote by Richard Baxter, “Preaching a man a sermon with a ➔

REFLECTION

broken head and telling him to be right with God is equal to telling a man with a broken leg to get up and run a race.”

When the pandemic has put focus on mental health like never before, let us go back to the Word and learn how the gospel helps in handling negative emotions.

Suffering from mental health issues is not an un-Christian experience

It's sad to see that mental health is very little talked about in the Christian faith and there is stigma attached to it even today. There are people who would say that any depression, anxiety or stress in life is associated only with the unsaved people but they have no place in a genuine follower of Christ. If that proves to be true, then perhaps, we have to blot out the names of many servants of God from the Bible and church history. Do we not find examples of godly people who have suffered mental issues?

The characters in the Bible were not superheroes who could change their life at the snap of a finger; nowhere are they portrayed as impeccable and flawless people. All had their set of struggles and weaknesses, and the scripture neither hides nor sugarcoats the weaknesses of godly people. Elijah, the prophet, wished to die under the broom tree even after a triumphant victory on Mount Carmel against the priests of Baal because he had run out of ideas to change the queen and people of Israel (1 Kings 19:5). Job is known to be a person of whom God himself testified that he was a blameless and upright man, who feared God and turned away from

evil (Job 1:8), yet he was on an emotional roller coaster and was almost losing his mind because of the immense suffering. David, the king who is known to be the man after God's own heart, writes many psalms of anguish, loneliness and fear. Jeremiah, known as the weeping prophet, was repeatedly rejected by his own people and was oppressed for speaking the truth. He was gripped with depression and loneliness (Jeremiah 20:14).

Godly people like Martin Luther, Jonathan Edwards and Charles Spurgeon throughout history have suffered the dark and crushing emotions to some degree or the other. Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, went through a torrent of setbacks in his life—physical illness, overwork, politics, trauma, and critics. These pushed him into depression so intensely that he once said, “I could say with Job, ‘My soul chooseth strangling rather than life’ (Job 7:15). I could readily enough have laid violent hands upon myself, to escape from my misery of spirit.” If you are suffering from any type of emotional issue, take comfort from the lives of godly people because you are not alone in this journey.

God understands our emotional issues

The incarnated Jesus has undergone all sorts of pain—physical, relational, emotional and spiritual. Isaiah, the prophet, mentions of Christ as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus broke down emotionally; in fact, his agony was so deep that he was sweating drops of blood while praying to the Father. On His way to the cross, his body was mercilessly bruised, he was deserted by his disciples, and his loud cry of anguish was “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?” The good news is we have a Saviour who understands our pain, loneliness, depression, weakness, rejection, shame and hurt, and reaches out to us with compassion.

Unlike in any other faith, Jesus is not just a healer but a wounded healer who has undergone far more suffering any human can think of and therefore, he can understand each of us in our own weaknesses and provide us strength and hope. God allows the seasons of suffering in our lives to work together for good and to make His sovereign plans come to pass. Jesus has suffered on our behalf so that we might not suffer but when we suffer, we might become like Him, conforming to the image of His son (Romans 8:29). That's His purpose for us.

The Gospel is at work in Paul's crisis

Apostle Paul was obsessed with the gospel of Christ and that is evident in the letters that he writes. For Paul,

this gospel is not just the door or the entrance point into God's family, but the path and journey that one is to walk every day in his Christian life. The gospel is not just some rudimentary spiritual matter about how to become a believer in Jesus but it has larger implications for it shapes our Christian living. Like many other saints, Apostle Paul had nervous breakdowns to the extent that he felt it was better to die (2 Corinthians 1:8). But he did not choose an escape route as people do it today by swapping to Netflix, alcohol, porn, social network or online gaming.

Philippians is one of the prison letters where one would expect to see the depressed Paul but he bursts with joy despite his struggle. The reason of his joy and sound mental health in the midst of crisis is grounded in 'the gospel' for he knows that the joy of the world cannot replace depression or anxiety. The source of his joy in his predicament lies in the understanding of 'the gospel' and its furtherance (Philippians 1:18). We need to imitate Paul by saturating our numb mind with 'the gospel of Christ' even when we can't see or feel the presence of God because it's 'the gospel' that imparts a glorious hope, a fresh understanding about life and it corrects our misplaced priorities.

“The good news is we have a Saviour who understands our pain, loneliness, depression, weakness, rejection, shame and hurt, and reaches out to us with compassion.”

Depression and anxiety do not go away overnight—sometimes, they will always stalk a person's life but God is committed to our wellbeing in all aspects. 'The gospel of Christ' is able to provide us with the perspective to handle negative emotions and therefore, let the gospel permeate and shape all spheres of our lives—identity, values, thoughts, relationships, behaviour, work, culture and society.

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Mental health: What Christian leaders need to know



Dr. M. Thomas Kishore is an Additional Professor in the department of Clinical Psychology in the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore. He works with children and adolescents.

NEARLY 10 IN 100 PEOPLE SUFFER FROM EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL ILLNESSES IN OUR COUNTRY BUT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES STILL DO NOT GET THE URGENT ATTENTION THEY NEED

Christian Leaders, especially pastors, minister to large congregations of faithful and people from different walks of life. It is highly possible that there is no other system than church and its leaders who get to meet people of different ages and educational and economical backgrounds almost on a weekly basis. In any given church there usually are specific programmes for children, youth, men, women, and the elderly. If a church is more vibrant there are specific programmes related to healing ministry, music, education and empowerment of communities besides its regular Sunday services. So, the church leaders do have unique opportunities to promote health and wellbeing in its congregation and thus in the society and the nation.

WHAT IS HEALTH?

For most of us health means physical health. So, one may say, 'I am fine because I do not have any physical ailment'. But, we also know that despite being physically fine, at least overtly, one may not feel good about many things. For instance, one may not be able to experience positive emotions and feelings; or overcome chronic stress and anxiety; or not able to maintain a satisfactory relationship with self or others. So, there is this possibility that one can be psychologically (also commonly referred to as 'mentally') ill despite being physically alright.

"ACROSS THE GLOBE, IT HAS BEEN FOUND THAT MANY PEOPLE PREFER TO GO TO THEIR FAITH LEADERS FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE IN MATTERS RELATED TO MENTAL HEALTH."

It is also true that sometimes we only focus on physical problems and ignore the psychological problems associated with them. For example, common physical disorders like diabetes and →

hypertension can affect our brain and mind, but we seldom recognise that. We may also not recognise that psychological problems such as chronic stress, worries, and anxiety can cause physical diseases such as heart problems and brain stroke. They also interfere with immune functions, and increase our risk for various other physical illnesses.

It is also possible that we may not recognise certain problems as illnesses. For example, we often wrongly think smoking, alcohol dependence, excess use of electronic gadgets and screen-time are mere habits whereas they are behavioural disorders. Contrary to the popular belief, they are not amenable to ‘will power’ alone and need professional guidance to manage them.

The above examples should tell us that health means both physical and mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has been talking about it for the last 73 years. According to the WHO, health is feeling good physically, mentally, and socially and even spiritually. So we need to recognise that there is no health without mental health.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH?

Recognise that mental illnesses or psychological disorders are common:

According to a national-level survey in 2016, for every 100 people in our communities, there will be approximately 10 people with emotional and behavioural problems. These figures will go up if we add alcohol or tobacco related problems to these numbers. So we need to understand that mental illnesses are common. They can affect us irrespective of gender, economic status or occupation.

Create a safe environment to talk about psychological distress: Most of us do not openly talk about mental health needs for fear of stigma and isolation. People become all the more guarded if the problem appear to be somewhat related to habits

and character (e.g. smoking, drinking, anger control, sexuality issues). According to Dr Siang-Yang Tan, a senior pastor of First Evangelical Church in Glendale, CA, and professor of psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, many members could get good help from the church for their psychological issues, but they refrain from seeking services for the fear of lack of confidentiality and judgment. The church leaders can ponder what kind of support they can provide to the needy—*a lending ear to feel heard, an empathetic soul to feel understood, a helping hand to feel supported and*

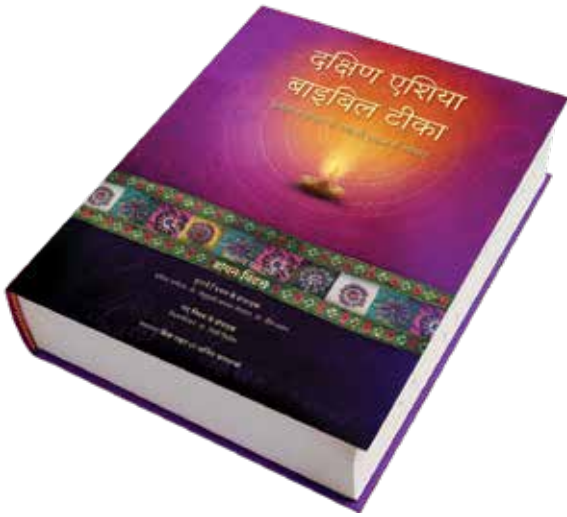
a group to experience belongingness. Any committed congregation can provide these simple yet powerful means to support its members. If there is a possibility, we can look out for professional counsellors, trained mental health professionals or wise people within the church and community to spare their time and resources for these services in varying capacities.

Promote healthy habits: Some of the common factors that cause chronic diseases including mental illnesses are lack of adequate sleep (i.e. 6-8 hours of night sleep), skipping breakfast and irregular food habits, smoking, excess use of alcohol, chronic stress, lack of physical activities (i.e. less than an hour of rigorous physical activity). In addition, obesity and hypertension have become very pervasive threats for both physical and mental health. In this context, church leaders can *model* and *adopt* various measures to encourage its members to embrace healthy lifestyles.

At a very basic level, if there are difficulties related to sleeping, eating, and mood irregularities for two days to two weeks, we need to →

“Prayers, meditating on the Word, praise and worship and participation in organised community work can be very powerful tools to change the meaning we attach to our experiences and facilitate a new perspective and encourage effective, positive behaviours.”

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HEALTH

pause and reflect what best we can do to overcome the same. If it does not help, one needs to meet mental health professional for help. If one is hearing voices when there is nobody around or refusing to eat at all or aggressive and violent, the person needs immediate help. Mental health professionals such as psychiatrists or clinical psychologists can be of reasonable help in such circumstances.


Provide positive avenues to deal with distress: Stress is common in everybody's life. To a certain extent stress can fuel us to become proactive in dealing with our problems. Let us imagine, if there is no stress for a student before the exams, he or she may not prepare well for the exams. But too much of stress can create anxiety and spoil the performance in the exams. Prayers, meditating on the Word, praise and worship and participation in organised community work can be very powerful tools to change the meaning we attach to our experiences and facilitate a new perspective and encourage effective, positive behaviours.

Understand and propagate the indices of mental health: Under general conditions, productive activities (e.g. work, school, caregiving, home management), fulfilling relationships and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity indicate positive mental health. So we need to regulate our behaviours to achieve these. But, we can also strive for higher indices such as, love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control to reflect a real transformation (see, Galatians 5:22-23).

In conclusion, mental health problems are common. But not many openly admit them for various reasons including stigma and lack of support. Across the globe, it has been found that many people prefer to go to their faith


leaders for emotional support and guidance in matters related to mental health. In this context, churches and its leaders do have unique opportunities to address the mental health needs of its congregation by way of providing safe environment to people for venting their feelings and seeking appropriate support, promoting healthy lifestyle and providing

positive avenues to deal with stress. They can also lead the congregation by being exemplary in these matters. This can potentially contribute to healthy families, healthy communities and strong nation.



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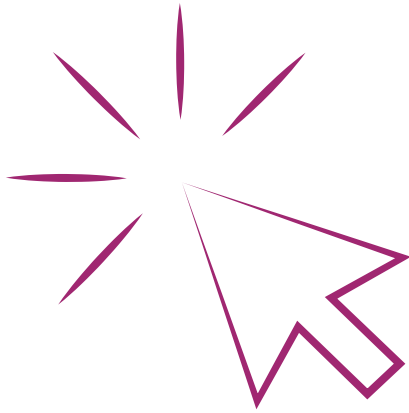
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PARENTING IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC

COVID-19 IS TAKING AN UNPRECEDENTED MENTAL TOLL ON PEOPLE, INCLUDING YOUNG ONES; BUT FOR A TENDER MIND NOTHING IS MORE CALMING THAN TO SEE OWN PARENTS SHOWING STRENGTH OF CHARACTER AND MIND



Sayanora Sathyadass is a homeschooling mom for about fifteen years. She has just recently published her book, *Precious Pain*.

The present global pandemic has heightened unsurmountable chaos within and across nations, bringing out the best and worst, in and among people. While some work with prescribed guidelines, braving the consequences and reaching out to sufferers who lack daily sustenance for themselves and their families, others diligently stay cooped up indoors in adherence to the law and the lockdown regulations. Amidst all this, we hear reports of the rampant rise in domestic crime and self-destructive behaviour. Coping with the 'new norm' has proven to be challengingly difficult for some and more fatal for others.

Even as we face the stark reality of this present crisis, we cannot deny that for centuries, many people have, and continue to go through mental health problems. Most often, mild symptoms are unconsciously resolved while others are there to stay. In some cases, milder symptoms become more pronounced, conspicuous and sometimes uncontrollable over time, landing the individual in a specialised institution to the care of experts, others to the confinement of a tucked away room within their own home and still others even land themselves on the streets. Various traceable and

unknown factors as well, contribute to the mental and emotional imbalances, more so among teens and young adults these days, and has become a thing of great concern to many parents.

As a parent of two young men and a teenager, and with adequate experience among youth, I have had the privilege to some extent, of entering their world of perspectives. Their fears and anxieties are deathly real! The pressures they face, feel much bigger than their minds can handle. Their vulnerable and impressionable minds can crack at the hint of one thoughtless remark or hurtful comment, especially from the ones closest to them. On the other hand, they sometimes respond with resistance to our genuine affections and concerns. The truth is that true parenting was never meant to be a 'cakewalk', especially if we desire to see our children grow in physical, emotional, and mental stability like Jesus did. →

“MANY EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTE HEAVILY TO THE MENTAL WELL-BEING OF INDIVIDUALS, WITH THE MEDIA PLAYING A CONSIDERABLY HUGE ROLE. **DESPITE ALL THE BENEFITS THAT MEDIA OFFERS, ITS UNTETHERED USE CAN WREAK HAVOC ESPECIALLY ON YOUNG TENDER MINDS.**”

FAMILY

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man (Luke 2:52).

Many external factors contribute heavily to the mental well-being of individuals, with the media playing a considerably huge role. Despite all the benefits that media offers, its untethered use can wreak havoc especially on young tender minds. Besides this, my conversations with some young children indicated that their parents seem frozen in time, unwilling to think outside of their timelines, leaving no room for neutrality even on seemingly harmless matters. The heated battle of power and position versus priorities and passions can eventually result in a cold war of painful battles of the mind.

While governments, welfare organisations and concerned parents, brainstorm the possibilities of particularly addressing and resolving this issue, it is imperative that we examine the powerful testimonials in the Bible, of people who experienced release, after their hearts and minds were held captive for many years. In the extreme case of the infamous demon-possessed man in Mark 5:15, we read of how he was transformed and was seen 'seated there, clothed in his right mind'. In John 4:46-47 we read of a noble man, a desperate father who begs Jesus to heal his dying son and experiences the miracle for himself. The Gospels narrate several instances of healing and restoration. Jesus promised his disciples then, and still extends that same promise to us today. The responsibility of raising our

children free of loneliness, abuse, negativity, depression, and many other struggles can greatly weigh us down and rob us of our sleep and peace. God did not intend for us to face this humungous task all alone. He desires for us to display to our children, the source of our peace and sound mind. They need to see that their parents love the Lord their God not just with words, but with their heart soul and mind! Many of the challenges we and our children face from day to day are inevitable. However, showing our children how we rise above them with God's enabling, is crucial to how they will face up to theirs.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).

Jesus replied, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind' (Matthew 22:37).

As I began to conclude this article, I threw a question at my fifteen-year-old. "What would you consider as the key to a child's healthy mind?" His prompt reply was, "Parents with healthy minds!" On asking him to elaborate, he used the example of a flight attendant's instructions before take-off. He emphasised the 'oxygen mask rule' just in case the cabin loses air pressure. We are to first put on our own oxygen mask before trying to help anyone else. I thought his was in fact an insightful example. Apparently, the idea is not about being selfish but to be wisely productive and have what it takes to help many others in need. In the case of our children, we cannot help them if we are ill-equipped. God has indeed blessed us as parents to raise our own children. He has given us all that we need to raise physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally healthy children. Every child and every challenge should be an opportunity for us to see God for His wisdom.

While there remains so much more

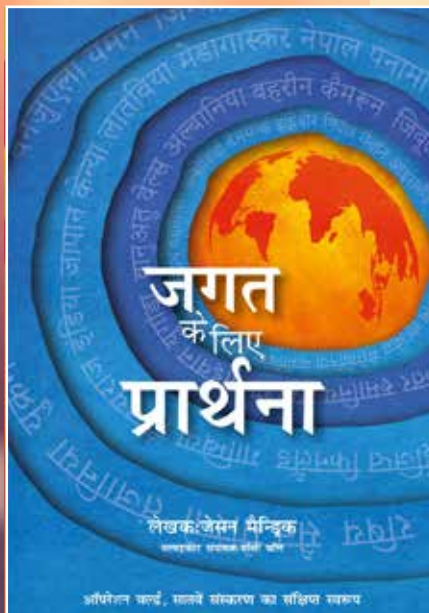
"Many of the challenges we and our children face from day to day are inevitable. However, **showing our children how we rise above them with God's enabling, is crucial to how they will face up to theirs.**"

to discuss and discover in our quest to raise healthy minds, may we be reminded that the spirit God has put in us as parents is that of courage to dauntlessly defend the cause of our children while teaching them life principles affirmatively, with a sound mind ourselves.

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7 KJV).

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WOMAN, ARISE AND SHINE!

HAVE YOU RISEN TO THE PLACE WHERE GOD WANTS YOU TO BE,
ESPECIALLY IN THIS DEFINING PERIOD OF HISTORY?

“True liberty is not about arguing over petty issues, whether women can lead or preach; **it is about being a woman after God’s own heart.**”



Dr. Latha Christie is a Senior Scientist with about 31 years of experience in the Defense Research & Development Organization (DRDO), Ministry of Defense, Bengaluru.

Humility is not about hiding from the world. Holiness is not about living a dull life. Live a courageous and pure life that inspires and ignites others. A truly liberated woman is one who has risen to the place where God wants her to be, amidst all odds. She will be the voice for the voiceless, strength to the underprivileged, and a light to the dark world.

We need a broader picture of womanhood. True liberty is not about arguing over petty issues, whether women can lead or preach; it is about being a woman after God’s own heart. It is to be like Martha for whom service was initially drudgery but changed to delight after her encounter with the Master. It is all about rising to that higher calling as planned by God to live a life of excellence wherever God has called us to be.

Mary Magdalene was liberated by the risen Saviour, and that is the reason she reached an enviable place in human history. She was liberated from the seven evil spirits living within her by one powerful Word uttered by her Master. All her rottenness, her greed, her pride, her pain, her hurt, her loneliness, and all her bitterness were gone forever by that Word. She was liberated to tell the story of the Lord’s resurrection power.

Mary Magdalene became a woman of faith, a gentle follower of Jesus Christ, and a living monument who lived to tell the story of her Resurrected Saviour. Her devil gaped eyes reflected God’s glory; her lips twisted by evil spoke gentle words of the love of her Saviour, and the body crooked with pain and bitterness beamed with the marks of rebirth. Her purposes were renewed, her discouragements were replaced with hope, and her sense of loneliness and isolation was replaced with joy.

The Deborah of the Bible was a liberated woman, a singular biblical figure to become a female military leader. She was a judge, a prophetess, and a seer. She was looked up for her position in society and for the authority she had. She was able to articulate her voice to advocate on behalf of others, and rightfully made an impact for the kingdom of God. She arose and challenged the status quo amidst cultural conflicts. Her courage had indeed inspired other women, such as Jael. When we use our voices, our influence, and rise beyond our own feeble strength to fulfil our callings, others are strengthened,

invited, and empowered to do the same. Just like Deborah and Jael, who served their nation during wartime, we are also living in one of the most important periods in human history.

Let us use our voice, our time, and even our vulnerability to establish God’s kingdom on earth. Let us not dismiss our vulnerability, our emotions, our tears as a sign of incompetence to disqualify our self because it can promote others to be vulnerable in their lives too. Let us be bold and take our position in God’s kingdom without fearing anyone except God! Let us be peacemakers and speak love, life, truth, and courage into others. Wounded healers are the best healers. Let us be transformed by the power of God without being afraid of our own wounds. Our wounds can eventually become the scars of beauty that will be used by God for His glory. Let us become the liberated women we are called to be!

“Deborah was able to articulate her voice to advocate on behalf of others, and rightfully made an impact for the kingdom of God”

**POST-TRUTH
PANDEMIC**

**WHERE JUSTICE
HAS DIED**





Mark Raja is a digital product designer in the software industry. He is a graduate from the Fine Arts discipline and the founder of the Integrated Arts Movement.

IN CONCLUSION OF THE ARTICLE *POST-TRUTH HOSPITAL—WHERE TRUTH HAS DIED* PUBLISHED IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE OF CT, READ WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE REJECT TRUTH...

After the ‘post-truth hospital’ episodes that I wrote about in my previous article, my friend and I are concerned about what the future holds in this post-truth pandemic. Will the court of law, pharmaceutical companies, media and the other institutions uphold truth and justice?

But before going any further, my friend wanted me to answer his question: How do you know what truth is. I don’t know if I was rude to him, but I did not give him an answer. Instead, I told him, “You are a medical scientist, you know how to investigate it better. The only question is, are you really seeking the truth? If yes, then you will do your homework.” I said so because I wanted him to search and find truth by himself.

Anyone who wishes to test truth seeks logical consistency, empirical adequacy,

and experiential relevance of it. That applies to morality as much as it does to science.

Coming back to post-truth. Cambridge dictionary defines *post-truth* as “relating to a situation in which people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs, rather than one based on facts.”

In the media or the political sphere today, we call these *truths* as narratives. The Chinese narrative of the pandemic, the World Health Organisation (WHO) narrative, The American narrative, the Hindutva narrative, etc. The WHO congratulates the Chinese in their narrative. The Americans condemn the Chinese in their narrative. Are we satisfied with these narratives? Since we have rejected the truth, aren’t we left with narratives that ultimately deceive us?

Thinker and historian Yuval Harari said, “The truth is, ‘truth’ has never been high on the agenda of Homo sapiens. If you stick to unalloyed reality, few people will follow you.” Does Harari presume that he is speaking the truth?

Harari is right that humans have been fascinated by myths from the beginning. But just because false beliefs and superstitions thrived, does that make truth non-existent or irrelevant? Stories and legends captivate →

the human imagination and can even bypass logic and reasoning. Stories and legends are beautiful when their substance is truth and love. But they are dangerous when corrupted with deceit.

When a popular journalist from *India Today* news channel asked Harari over a call for his comment on India's response to the COVID-19 crisis, he was hoping Harari would praise the Hindutva narrative. But Harari rightly spoke against the fascist narrative that vilified Muslims as the spreaders of the virus in the country. But if Homo sapiens are wired to believe narratives, why is he condemning one story over the other? Is he not trying to lean towards what he believes is the truth? Yes, otherwise, his philosophising will be self-defeating. That is why even Nietzsche confessed: "I am still too pious that even I worship at the altar where God's name is truth."

If you observe carefully, in post-truth times it is not really that truth is relative and we all can live in harmony with our personal truths. It is a false narrative to legitimise our own way when we are not at the receiving end.

The conversation with my friend that I am writing about is fictional, but through a story I am truthfully arguing my point.

Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias spoke at UN prayer breakfast 2016. He mentioned speaking to a person at the venue who had spoken with all the ambassadors there individually, and had asked them one question, 'do you have any hope for future'. Everyone gave him a long speech on what they thought the future may hold, but none gave an answer in the affirmative.

I asked my friend the same question way before the ongoing pandemic hit us. He said he did not see any hope. "We are doomed," he said. Why have we lost hope? Is it because we don't trust others anymore? Is it that when we reject truth, we find it hard to trust others?

In this post-truth pandemic, truth is killed in the halls of scientific laboratories, politics, judiciary, governance, academia, hospitals, religious centres and in the secret recesses of our hearts.

However, there is an ultimate cry for justice in every heart when wronged. And, justice counts on truth. Without justice and truth, civilization will crumble. The post-truth narrative is another deceit of the post-truth species. Until we begin to seek the truth in our hearts, the future for humanity will look grim.

George Orwell said, "In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act." So what does it mean to speak the truth? To speak the truth, we first need to know the truth. Our Indian sages sought it in a prayer in the *Bṛhadaranyaka Upanishad*, which says, "Lead me from the untruth to the truth..."

The reason my friend initially thought truth does not apply to morality or belief as it applies to science is that materialism has taught us to believe that our reality is mere material. We rejected transcendence. As love transcends chemistry, so does truth transcend the physical, i.e., the body.

Martin Luther King, in his Nobel-prize speech, said: "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality." If this is true, where do we see this? Here is a clue. I see this on the Cross. The one who died on the Cross and rose again said, "I am the Truth."

"In this post-truth pandemic, truth is killed in the halls of **scientific laboratories, politics, judiciary, governance, academia, hospitals, religious centres and in the secret recesses of our hearts.**"

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Dr. James Levi Mathew earned his PhD (Fuller Theological Seminary) under the mentorship of world-class anthropologist Dr. Dale Kietzman in the field of Christian Leadership. He is a writer and serves as a Christian minister in Houston.

GOD SPEAKS TO US ALL THE TIME, BUT DO WE QUIETEN DOWN THE OTHER VOICES IN OUR HEAD TO LISTEN TO HIM?

“



fter the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' aide: 'Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses... As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them' (Joshua 1:1–6).

In light of this verse, I want to share what happened in one of my friends' life. It happened unexpectedly. No one saw it coming. My friend's father just died in his sleep. The family was devastated. He was the only earning member of the family. My friend and his siblings were all under the age of 12 at that time. Their mother had never worked before. She had not even handled some basic activities such as banking or getting groceries because the father used to do it all.

The death was a shocking news to all of us and we shared the family's grief. Many thought that there was no hope for the family. For months together, my friend's mother remained depressed and couldn't pull herself out of bed to even feed the young ones. When the friends and extended

“For months together, my friend's mother remained depressed and couldn't pull herself out of bed to even feed the young ones.”

“All through it, what I heard my friend saying was this: **You can listen to God even in the darkest hours of your life.**”

family left and the support extended by people almost dried up, the reality hit them.

During those days, I remember my friend picking up his guitar and strumming it for long hours. I didn't know how to help besides just hanging out with him.

Fast forward. Years went by. We all got busy with our lives.

Once there was a music festival in my city where a famous band was playing that evening. Never had I seen a crowd so excited. All were lost in the moment as each danced to the music. Young and old together were having a great time dancing to the music the band was playing. And yes, you guessed it. The band's lead guitarist was my friend.

That night, after the crowd thinned and the fans let us alone, I caught up with him. We sat into the late hours of the night. All through it, what I heard my friend saying was this: You can listen to God even in the darkest hours of your life.

He said, “When there was no hope and everything around was so discouraging, I would pick up my guitar and play some song and listen to the still voice that God was speaking to me in, to my heart.”

Joshua, the army commander, faced a similar situation after the death of his mentor and the charismatic leader Moses. Moses had single-handedly brought a massive number of people from the bondage and slavery from the hands of the most powerful army at that time. But he died before they could reach their promised land. The whole community mourned, and Joshua got paralyzed, not knowing what to do. The negative voice was prevalent all around.

Amid that crisis, Joshua listened to a different voice--one that was above and more real than the circumstance he was in. That bright and still voice of God spoke of hope, promise, and strength.

We learn three powerful lessons here:

1. Darkness around us or discouragement within or even the death cannot shut out the voice of God if we are willing to listen.
2. The voice that we hear has the power to change the situation that tries to destroy and debilitate us.
3. It is crucial in those moments to decide which voice we will allow to capture and influence our hearts.



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Aolemba Jamir from Kohima, Nagaland, is doing his MDiv final year at SAIACS, Bangalore. He enjoys singing, nature, a good cup of coffee, and found a recent appreciation for reading.

What right am I due,
That I charge and accuse You.
Why allow such a crude tongue,
To approach and confront You.
Can I even claim a minute say in any conception!

What is there that I can call my own,
That I come before You and boast.
Why allow such audacity,
To demand a justification from You!
Can I even expound infinitesimally the workings of the cosmos!

Who is it that determines the path of the winds,
And the time for the rains to fall?
Who decides how quick light should travel,
And that sounds are to be heard?
Who governs where the mountains stand,
And the flows of the waters?
Who determines that birds are to chirp,
And that snakes crawl?
Who decides that grass be green,
And the sky blue?
Who decrees the stars its position,
And the planets its shape?
Who establishes the heart to beat,
And the mind to think?
Can any mortal fathom such marvels as these?
What mind can comprehend such intricacy?
Who can refrain from gazing in reverent wonder,
Awestruck at the enormity of You?
For I am, but, a creation learning to trust the Creator.

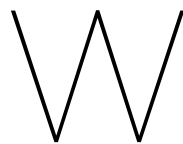


WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?

THE BEST THAT THE CHRISTIANS CAN DO IN THIS TIME OF PANDEMIC IS TO SIMPLY LEAD A LIFE OF TRUE DISCIPLE OF CHRIST, WHICH MIRRORS LOVE FOR THE NEIGHBOUR, SELFLESS SERVICE TO THE NEEDY, FAMILIAL JOY AND THE COMPANIONSHIP OF GOD



Ajith Fernando is the former National Director at Youth for Christ, Sri Lanka. He has authored several books including *Jesus-Driven Ministry*, *The Supremacy of Christ* and *Acts: The NIV Application Commentary*.



While the Bible does not dwell much on the “whys” of things like epidemics, it clearly teaches that when there is a great need, Christians must seek to be involved. Our God is a God who acts, and he often acts through us.

Let us look at some biblical principles which we need to be asking how we should apply at this time.

- Prayer is a powerful force at work in the world (Jas 5:16). Prayer can change the course of a nation (Jer 26:19); so God’s people pray for their nation (Dan 9:3–21). When my wife and I were praying a few days ago, I felt urged to pray the grand prayer of asking God to intervene and bring a stop to this epidemic worldwide. Too optimistic? No! We bow to God’s sovereignty in all things, but we also know that our prayers do influence history. Pray alone. Pray as a family. Pray as leadership groups. Pray with a group you feel an affinity with (I am part of a daily Zoom prayer meeting with a few pastors and leaders). Encourage fellow Christians to pray. May what Paul said about his release from prison be true about the world’s release from Covid-19: “I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance” (Phil 1:19). Key among our prayer requests is prayer for those serving on the front lines. We express gratitude for them and pray for their protection and their needs. Leaders who make key decisions also need our prayers.

- Many, many people are suffering financially because of loss of income. This is a time to take seriously the advice of John the Baptist, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise” (Luke 3:11). We should do this personally, with our personal contacts, and

organisationally in a systematic way (finding who among the needy we should concentrate on and the best way for us to meet those needs). Without regular offerings many pastors are struggling to pay rents and feed their children. Some needy people will not come to us and tell us how they are struggling. We must go after those that come to mind and ask about their needs. Each leader, group, and individual Christian should be asking who God wants us to be helping at this time. This is an urgent need. It should leave us restless and drive us to sacrificial giving and acting. ➔

“HISTORICALLY CHRISTIANS HAVE BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT DURING EPIDEMICS. DURING TWO EPIDEMICS IN THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES, THE LOVE CHRISTIANS EXPRESSED TOWARDS THEIR SICK NEIGHBOURS DID MUCH TO TURN PEOPLE’S HEARTS TOWARDS THE GOSPEL.”

LEAVING NOTE

- Nine times the Bible tells us “Love your neighbour as yourself.” *As yourself* makes it an extremely high priority. The isolation lockdown brings makes it a little difficult to do this. But we should be looking for ways to show love to our neighbours (not only our Christian friends). We can share food and provisions, call to see how they are doing, and meet other needs they may have. Historically Christians have been in the forefront of helping during epidemics. During two epidemics in the first three centuries, the love Christians expressed towards their sick neighbours did much to turn people’s hearts towards the gospel.

Listen to what third-century Bishop Dionysius says about Christian service during an epidemic: Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains. [From Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: HarperCollins Chap, 4), Cited by Brian Stiller in “An Open Letter to Evangelicals,” (WEA, *Dispatches from the Global Village*, April 2020)].

This is a time when people are being hindered from burying their dead because neighbours fear contamination. In a time when the mood of self-preservation predominates, may Christians be known as people who love the vulnerable and risk expressing that love in radical ways.

- One of the best ways to help people these days is talking on the phone. The classic idea of a phone being for healthy conversation has been revived—thank God! Some are angry; others are sad, lonely, bored, fearful, or anxious. Many savour the opportunity of having a long chat with somebody. Jesus spent hours and hours chatting with his disciples. What used to be called “Holy Conversation” was an important part of Christian community. Long chats about issues and about life from a Christian perspective, is a Christian practice which has been lost in this busy age. This is a good time to bring it back. This is how we are going to disciple and mentor our people today. We must leave time in our schedules for relaxed conversations with those we care for.

- The lockdown can afford an opportunity for spiritual check-ups. When I ask people how their prayer and Bible study life is going, often the answer I get is that they are struggling to find time for it. Now most people have less busy schedules than before. This is a good time to return to the discipline of spending time with God. This is also a good time to do some repair work in our family life. Being with

each other for long periods would have surfaced some family-life challenges. We can do something about those. Godly members should seek to be gracious agents of love and healing in their families. With Sunday School not functioning, this lockdown also brings into focus the responsibility of parents for the spiritual nurture of their children. This is the biblical model, and it is an ideal time for parents to recapture this role.

- This is also a time when people could get addicted in areas of weakness and when addictions could become worse. I am thinking of addictions like alcohol, drugs, pornography, gaming, anger, and gossip. For overcoming addiction, we know that prayer alone may not suffice (though prayer is primary). The Bible prescribes that we “Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness... *along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*” (2 Tim 2:22). Often we are more embarrassed when our friends find out about an addiction than when God finds out! Knowing this God prescribed the help of friends. How sad that many Christians do not have trustworthy friends who can help them with their weaknesses. Leaders, it is your duty to ensure that your people are cared for with good accountability to help them in their walk with God. Check how they are faring regularly. Of course, if leaders are not accountable, it is unlikely that the people will be!

- Sexual and physical abuse of children has intensified during this lockdown. Frightening reports of the growth of this are emerging from Sri Lanka and the world. We should always be bringing up this topic in our conversation, especially in our preaching. Unless we bring it out into the open, victims will not be emboldened to do anything about it. Reports indicate that the related problem of spouse abuse has also intensified during this time. We must think hard about what we can do to protect these vulnerable people.

- The call to evangelise remains as urgent as ever. Unbelief and independence from God remain the most serious epidemics in the world. The lockdown has provided an opportunity for creative Christians to find ways of evangelising through the internet. I am so thrilled with some of the things our Youth for Christ (YFC) staff have produced in my language, Sinhala. In the history of the church, difficult times

have always produced bold, creative expressions of Christianity. Us older not-so-creative folk have the privilege of encouraging and being theological consultants for such projects.

- In in the time of crisis people try to blame groups that are different from them. These days we are encountering a lot of hate speech, unfounded conspiracy theories, and the forwarding of fake news. Some are trying to raise ethno-religious animosity by blaming some groups (e.g. Christians and Muslims) for the problems. We must warn our people against such and do our best to defuse these evil influences. The temptation to spread such stories is almost irresistible. But the Bible has stern warnings about the seriousness of false witness.

- Those who are qualified and able can add to the national conversation on the issues we face at this time. Others in influential positions could have a major role in the nation at this time, like Joseph, Daniel, Nehemiah and Esther had. Instead of criticising, as Christians often do, we should pray for them and encourage them in any way possible.

Individually we may seem to be small entities in solving the massive needs faced by the world at this time. But each of us can do our part and contribute to the work of millions who are committed to helping solve the crises we face.

“This is a time to take seriously the advice of John the Baptist, ‘Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise’ (Luke 3:11).”

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