

YEAR OF EXCELLENCE

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"When he came to his senses, he said,  
I will set out and go back to my father  
and say to him:  
Father I have sinned against heaven  
and against you"  
*(Luke 15:17,18)*

# PREPARATION FOR EXCELLENCE

*Dr. M. Arthur John*

This year, God has given us a wonderful theme, **'Excellence'** to meditate and reflect in our life and ministry. Church history reveals that following a revival, evangelism is triggered and the church grows numerically. But as days go on, a kind of slackness and liberalism enter the church and results in lukewarmness and backsliding in the lives of believers including the leaders. God's people begin to pray and God in His mercy initiates to restore the church. This cycle gets repeated. Those of us who have experienced revival fire in our lives which drove us into active ministry for the extension of God's Kingdom in the past, must sit for a while in the year beginning to take stock of our life and ministry. Where do we stand today is a question to be answered after an analysis. While contemplating on the theme and the year, the Lord drew my attention to God's **SIX** calls to prepare our hearts for excellence in our life and ministry in the year Two Thousand and **SIX**.

## **1. REMEMBER** (Neh 4:14; 2 Tim 2:8; Josh 1:13)

We are living in a world that is crowded with several things that draw us astray from God. Human tendency is to leave the head and catch the tail. God knows it very well and that is why He said, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery;" "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Ex 20:1; Dt 6:5). During the course of activity for God, we may forget the Lord. That is why Nehemiah, the great builder of Jerusalem wall, after a hectic activity in chapter 3 told the workers, "... Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes" (Neh 4:14). Jesus asked His disciples to observe the Holy communion in remembrance of Him (Lk 22:19). The master builder in the New Testament, apostle Paul also knew this truth and while writing about various ministerial activities to his young disciple Timothy did not forget to add, "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead" (2 Tim 2:8).

King David was calling the 'chosen ones' to remember the past 'wonders' and past 'miracles'

(1 Chro 16:12). Let us not forget the wonders and miracles the Lord performed earlier in our personal, family, ministerial and our professional lives. Another important thing to remember is His commandments / teachings through His servants: "Remember the command that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you" (Josh 1:13). Praise God that we, who are associated with BYM have received much with regard to teachings from God's word. Blessing books, video/audio tapes and CDs are known for their rich spiritual truths given in a balanced way. Have they gone into our lives? Or, has satan snatched away those truths from our minds? God's complaint against His people has been that they have forgotten His decrees (Hos 4:6). Why not bring them back fresh to our memories and keep practicing them? Remedy for forgetfulness is to 'remember' the Word. In the New Year, let's double up our efforts to remember the Lord, His mercies and also His teachings.

## **2. REPENT** (Rev 2:5)

One of the basic requirements for entry in the kingdom of God is repentance (Mt 4:17). 'Repent or perish' was the teaching of Jesus (Lk 13:3). When the people of Nineveh repented, God relented from His fierce anger against them (Jon 3:9,10). But Revelation 2:5 is for the believers and leaders of the church. This is a direct message from the Lord Himself: "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first."

The Lord of excellence once saw us in certain 'height' in our convictions, principles, spiritual virtues, operation of gifts of the Holy Spirit, Spiritual exercises like Bible meditation, prayer, witnessing, soul winning, ministry, so on and so forth. And now, does He see us fallen from that height? Once we refresh our memories as to the teaching we received, it is easy for us to remember the height from which we fell. Sliding down a mountain is easy. To go up to the height is our uphill task. Let us sweat, struggle and scamper to attain the early height of integrity in personal, family, social and ministerial lives.

If we have to excel in our life and ministry as God expects, the Lord's call is to have a genuine repentance and to do the things that we did at first in the heights of our spiritual life and ministry.

Genuineness in repentance is very important. Pharaoh's repentance is a good example for fake repentance. He said to Moses, "The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Pray to the Lord, ...I will let you go." Moses discerned him rightly and said: "...I will spread out my hands in prayer to the Lord. The thunder will stop... But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the Lord God...When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again..." (Ex 9:27-35). This is not a genuine repentance and God is not pleased with this kind. Are we faithful in our repentance even after the rain, hail and thunder have ceased? Samson's power leaked out without his knowledge. It was too late and he lost both his eyes by the time he repented. His life and ministry is a warning for us. Shall we resolve to repent from our fall?

### 3. RENOUNCE (Dan 4:27; Ezek 14:6)

The dictionary meaning of the word 'renounce' is to give up voluntarily by formal declaration. Daniel was calling king Nebuchadnezzar to "renounce his sins by doing what was right." King Nebuchadnezzar prospered beyond measure and his heart became haughty. He did not have either the wisdom of Job who wrote: "To God belong power... He takes off the shackles put on by kings and ties a loincloth around their waist. He leads priests away stripped and overthrows men long established. He silences the lips of trusted advisers and takes away the discernment of elders... what He tears down cannot be rebuilt; the man He imprisons cannot be released" (Job 12:13-20) or the wisdom of Daniel who declared: "He changes times and seasons; He sets up kings and deposes them" (Dan 2:21). God's decree of judgment was revealed to him in a dream, but out of God's mercy one more chance was given him for repenting and renouncing his sins by doing what was right (Dan 4:27).

But tragically, the king did not listen to the divine counsel and uttered these proud words: "Is not this the great Babylon I have built... by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" Immediately, the heaven's declaration came to

him: "Your royal authority has been taken from you" (Dan 4:28-31). It is God who anoints kings and it is God who takes away that anointing. We should not despise the chastening and warnings of God to mend our ways and to renounce sins of all kinds from our lives.

Another thing that we must renounce from our lives is detestable practices. People of Israel had several secret idols in their lives. God demanded them, "Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices" (Ezek 14:6). God's word is very clear that His mercy is only for those who 'renounce' their sins and not to those who conceal their sins (Prov 28:13). Let us be bold to renounce every kind of sin from our lives as an act of preparing our lives for excellence.

### 4. RESOLVE (Psa 17:3; 39:1)

New year beginning is a time for resolutions. It is quite possible that we have failed in keeping up many resolutions in the past. But apostle Paul says, "We have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling" which calls for repeated resolutions (Phil 2:12). The Psalmist David took a noble resolution: "I have resolved that my mouth will not sin" (Psa 17:3); "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth..." (Psa 39:1). When the prodigal son 'came to his senses', he resolved to put an end to his sinful way of life (Lk 15:17-19).

There is a remarkable record about Daniel's resolution in the Bible: "Daniel resolved not to defile himself" (Dan 1:8). We are God's holy people living in an unholy world which is under the control of the evil one (1 Jn 5:19). This world has its own push & pulls; pressures & persuasions and snares & traps to defile us. The best quality royal food and royal liquor came to Daniel under compulsion by a royal decree. To defy the king's defiling orders, Daniel had to use his will power gifted by the King of kings, by an act of faith through that resolution. How many of us fail in this area out of pressures and persuasions! Resolutions are needed for the areas of thought, word and deed.

Apostle Paul had taken several resolutions for his life and ministry. He wrote: "I resolved to know nothing...except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). His life's goal was focused on Christ

alone. So he resolved to make Christ the sole subject of his teaching and preaching. Paul encouraged the saints in Rome to “resolve not to put a stumbling block” in the path of other believers (Rom 14:13).

Resolution means firm determination. Resolutions help us to be stable and unwavering in our life and ministry. A man without resolutions is doubleminded, and we know that a doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways (Js 1:8). Resolutions make a man. Those who make resolutions will become brighter and brighter like the noonday sun. But the irresolute gradually dim and die down. Let us begin the year with renewed resolutions of renouncing the ways of the prodigal; of resisting the pressures and persuasions of the world and resolution to lead a life that will not stumble anyone.

#### 5. RETURN (Joel 2:12,13; Mal 3:7)

God is not happy when His chosen ones go astray from Him. He goes after them with His gentle call to return to Him: “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love...” (Joel 2:13). But God is also particular about wholeheartedness. We are called to love Him with all our heart, with all our souls and with all our strength (Dt 6:5). He will be delighted in us and make us prosperous only if we turn to Him with all our heart. So God gave His call through prophet Joel to His people to return to Him with all their heart (Joel 2:12).

Jesus always accepted the straightforward group who acknowledged their sinfulness and returned to Him. Peter was one who denied Him, but as he reposed his wholehearted love in Jesus He accepted him readily and restored his life and ministry (Jn 21:15-17). The Lord’s complaint against Judah was half-hearted return: “...Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense, declared the Lord” (Jer 3:10). It is sad that today the world witnesses mostly a pretense in Christendom.

The prodigal did not stop with his resolution of, “I will arise and go” (Lk 15:18). Had he stopped with that his life would not have turned around and what a loss that would have been! But, “he

arose and came to his father.” That made all the difference. There is no backsliding from which we cannot return. We are never far too gone. We are not hopelessly lost. There is hope. Our God is a God of second, third, fourth and many chances! But let us make sure that we return ‘whole heartedly’ to the Father, who is waiting for us to fall on our neck with a kiss and celebrate a feast.

#### 6. RUN (Heb 12:1)

Christian life and ministry is compared to a RACE. We are called to run the race that is marked for us. Here again the call is to throw off everything that hinders and ‘the sin’ that so easily entangles us and then to run the race. Running will exhaust us at times and we may faint. But the Word of God calls us to run the race that is marked for us with perseverance. But this is not very easy. Even a spiritual giant like prophet Elijah fainted and made up his mind to resign and retire (1 Ki 19:3-5). But God sent an angel and encouraged him to run his race. He said to the depressed and dejected prophet, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.” (v 7). Elijah was supposed to anoint kings, and raise next line prophets to continue his ministry after him (vv 15-17). Once he realized it, he corrected his course.

God has a specific ministry for us to be completed. We should not resign or retire from it before completing it by the grace and enablement of God. The call is to take courage and run with perseverance. Apostle Paul said that he had an aim in the Christian race. He decided to run the race in such an excellent way that he would receive the prize at the end (1 Cor 9:26,27).

So beloved, let us run in such a way that we get the prize (1 Cor 9:24). As the Lord has chosen us to be entrusted with ministerial responsibilities, in this year of excellence, let us take to our hearts these six calls of God for our life and ministry: **REMEMBER** the Lord, His wonders and miracles, His teachings; **REPENT** from our lapses and falls; **RENOUNCE** all sins and detestable practices from our lives; **RESOLVE** to part with sinful ways; **RETURN** to the Lord wholeheartedly and **RUN** the race with perseverance to complete the task that the Lord has entrusted with us. **f**

# Love Like Jesus

Dr. Mrs. Lilian Stanley

Love is a profound topic. We all love love. But in spite of the Bible teaching on love from cover to cover, Christians often remain lackadaisical about putting it into practice. Let's see it through the eyes of Jesus. Jesus gave a new commandment to His disciples. He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34,35).

What is new about it? We all know that from time immemorial we have been taught to love one another (Lev 19:18). Jesus added a new dimension to the old commandment and made it a new commandment. Earlier, it was love that was humanly possible. But Jesus raised the standard and said, "as I have loved you," setting a pattern of divine love. We must learn His ways and imbibe His spirit. Teaching is pretty thin stuff unless mixed with experience and we know the love teachings of Jesus are amalgamated with love experiences.

Love is abstract, an intangible factor, a mysterious something that turns your heart. You cannot see love unless you show it. It is like water in an overhead tank. You don't see the water up there unless you open the tap down here. How do we show our love?

A full fledged grin will erase the gulf between two. Running over to someone to take his / her hand in ours will result in immediate bonding of hearts. A happy prattle, a hug with ardour, an uplifting compliment, a help in need, a drop of tear for those in trouble will open the tap to reveal the reservoir of love flowing out. You never run out of ideas to express love. Such love in bloom will reveal to the entire world that we are truly the disciples of Christ.

In a village where we have a church, after the service, the tribal believers shake hands, smile, hug and chat with the fellow believers. The bemused neighbours seeing such exotic

expressions exclaim, "How these people love one another!" They were so different earlier. Now to the surprise of their old friends their lives have been transformed into a cascade of love.

"Jesus wept. Then the Jews said: See, how He loved him!" (Jn 11:35,36). Note the exclamation mark there. It was not the ordinary human love. It was something that made them utter in surprise. Jesus' teaching on love was

not mere armchair reflections. He practised it. In these days of increasing militancy towards preaching the gospel, the world is watching Christians under a microscope. Are we the ordinary thief-love-thief disciples or is there something preternatural about our love?

If we want to emulate the 'Love Messiah' first of all we must know how He loved. We shall meditate the steps which portray the unfolding development of His love.

## He first loved us

*"We love Him because He first loved us"*  
(1 Jn 4:19).

Jesus took the first step to love us. I imagine, one day God asked Him, "My Son, I've tried all possible means to get humanity back to me, but all my efforts have been futile. I have one last hope and that is You! Will You go to earth, be born as a human being, live and die for these people who have no love for God?" The answer of Jesus Christ to Father God was Christmas. Thus Jesus initiated the way—The Love-Way. Jesus first loved us.

Jesus teaches us to take the first step to love people whether they are fellow believers or unbelievers. How enthusiastic we are to meet friends and kith. We so immerse ourselves in hugging and enquiring and exchanging pleasantries that we forget about the friendless people around us. One day after the church service I noticed an young dispirited girl standing alone. When I struck a conversation with her, her eyes became

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full and lips trembled. "I have been attending this church for the past six months and you are the first person to talk to me," she said. I was ashamed of myself. For six months she had been looking around for friendship that was tantalizingly near. When I brought her home she dissolved in tears as she poured out her tale of woe. Her cup of sorrow was overflowing. My heart was wrenched with a kind of sadness I had never known. Oh how we who call ourselves believers fail to reach out to loveless lonely people!

A beatific smile is the shortest distance between two hearts. Don't skimp on love. We don't lose anything by smiling at strangers whom we would like to get to know or to whom we would like to introduce Christ. They may hesitate to smile back or look behind their shoulders to see who we are smiling at. Let your eyes convey the message. Take his/her hand in yours and introduce yourself. Start a conversation. This is how Jesus started a relationship with the Samaritan woman which culminated in the salvation of a village.

Do you cherish memories of old comradeship that sweetened life, now bitter and broken? Right now decide to visit their homes and renew the relationship before it develops irreparable breaches. If more time lapses the chasm will widen. Be bold to take the first step. Let not their nonchalant reaction throw you off. If you have an enemy, love could be the most devastating weapon of all. If you have any problem loving anybody get down on your knees and read 1 Corinthians chapter 13. When you get up from your knees you will be a transformed personality. After writing at length about the gifts of the Spirit Paul says, "And yet I show you a more EXCELLENT way" (1 Cor 12:31). Then he proceeds to speak on love (1 Cor 13). Before starting to speak on gifts again, he says, "Pursue love" (1 Cor 14:1).

Most of us are afraid to take the risk of being rebuffed when we take the first step. The love-apostle John goes to the heart of the matter when he says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says: I love God,

and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 Jn 4:18-20). John's words are like a golden chain with verse 19 hanging inbetween like a diamond pendant.

When love galvanizes you to action swallow your false ego and mop away all fear from your heart. If your love is rejected still you don't lose anything. Have in mind that some people are never going to love you back however much you love them. But as for you, remember that life is just a short dream and we are travellers floating down the river of time. There is nothing more damaging to this idyllic dream than the sharks of hatred. Develop perfect fearless love. Let His love flow through you to that person to bless him. Allow God to use you as an unrestricted channel of His love for him. If you take the first step to love and face problems you can always tackle those problems. Fear predominates only when something is beyond your control. You cannot love God without loving your brother or sister.

An adolescent girl was stalked by a married man. When she took the matter to her parents, they confronted him and the problem was settled. But whenever the pastor spoke on loving others this girl was filled with guilt. With some counselling finally she was able to sort out the ambivalence and understand that what she did was right and she truly loved him and his family by rejecting his love. You need to be wise with people who love you for the wrong reasons. Even some adults have difficulty discerning the proper kind of love and get into messy affairs. So our love needs to be sensible too.

Hatred holds the soul of many in an iron grip. There is so much of bickering among siblings, so much quarelling among husbands and wives, fractured relationship between church members and lovelessness at all levels. Do not wait for the other person to come to you to make amends. Blessed are you if you unashamedly take the first step to go to him and articulate the impossible words. Good intentions and feelings at times are of greater consequence than the awkwardness of their expression. Whoever goes down first is superman in God's sight.

The more excellent way—LOVE!

If you see non-christians, let love flow out of your heart. Give them a helping hand if they are struggling. Go near them and talk if they are aloof. Love makes the world go around. This is the Jesus love. It is because He loved us first that we fell in love with Him in response. Just imagine, if He had not loved us first! We would be lost, lost, lost forever. Just the same way many are lost because we fail to first love them. There is misunderstanding, division and disunity among disciples making the world wonder if we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ. Let us first love others.

### ***He continued to love us***

*“God demonstrates His love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom 5:8).

The Christmas story does not stop at the manger. Even though in response to God’s plea Jesus came down to be born as a human being He had to face lot of disappointments. His love was not received properly. He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him (Jn 1:11). Think of it. How will you feel if you go to your brother’s house and he slams the door on your face? Jesus did not give up. He continued to love us. There was no miraculous overwhelming response to His divine love. His own family and disciples had a hard time believing Him. Still He continued to love them.

Love is the basis for any lasting relationship. To begin it is child’s play. Can you continue to love the person you started to love? To continue is a harder task. I loved the poor and started serving them. But when they lied, cheated and accused me, my love detracted and I sometimes found it hard to be civil. It is doubly hard to continue love. Alone in my room, my heart would melt for those who did not know how to respond to true love because they had not tasted the love of Christ. It took me a lot of determination and self-discipline to continue love. Jesus ought to have given up on me long long ago. But oh, no. He continued to love me and brought me thus far in Christian life. What should I have done differently in my 20s and 30s if I had known

then what I know now? For one thing, I would have loved more.

When we start a relationship there’s bound to be problems. New shoes always hurt and all human relationships have rough patches. As we come closer and closer we see what kind of sinners they are, their wrong attitudes, their deceptions, garrulousness, sharp tongue, lying and what not. May be she backbites or he boozes. Then our hearts shut down. Our initial flush of enthusiasm wanes and we think; “I never ever imagined she is so malicious and nasty. Had I known I would never have started it all. I am so disappointed and let down.” That is the rule. But you must decide to become the exception to the rule by developing a thick skin.

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the exception  
to the rule.**

Marriages have fallen apart for lack of continuing love. When they marry they know very little about each other and so love flows freely. But as days roll by they come to discover the negative aspects of each other and shrink from one another. Many come to the conclusion that they have married the wrong person and the romance wilts. But the love like Jesus’ will immediately kick them on to a much higher level and contribute to the permanence of their marriage. To continue to love your parents may be a challenge and to love your children at any cost may be a hilarious feat.

Take the example of Paul and John Mark. When Paul first met John he was taken up by that young man. Immediately, without interview he recruited the stalwart fellow in his missionary team (Acts 12:25). When they came to Pamphilia John Mark did not feel like continuing with the big brothers—Paul and Barnabas. We do not know the reason. We can only guess that inspite of cajoling and begging he decided to leave the team, incurring the wrath of Paul. You can imagine the hot-blooded Paul griping. Now the soft-hearted Barnabas had to cool down Paul. When it was time for the next trip Paul would hear none of the sweet talk of Barnabas. He flatly refused to have John go with them. It is clear as crystal that by then John had once again started showing interest in missionary work. But Paul was not ready to forgive and forget the past. There was

a sharp contention. Finally Barnabas took John Mark and sailed to Cyprus. It was Barnabas who decided to continue to love John Mark and demonstrated to Paul, the healing power of forgiveness.

**There is no end of the extra mile for love. Love is never enough, so love more and more.**

What was the effect of this love? It took some time for Paul to get reconciled to the idea of including Mark with the missionary numbers. He instructed the Colossian church to welcome him (Col 4:10). Later he wrote to Timothy, "Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim 4:11). It took a long long time for Paul to pull out the root of bitterness from his heart. May be from the lesson he learnt from John Mark, Paul treated Timothy as his son and Timothy's timid nature was overlooked. How many young people we lose because we first love them and then leave them in the lurch, unable to continue to love them after seeing their weaknesses, shortcomings and sins. Human brain has a limit but human heart does not. There is no end of the extra mile for love. Love is never enough, so love more and more. Paul matured in love and wrote to the Colossians, "Above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (3:14).

**Live well  
Laugh often  
Love always!**

Let us continue to love our coworkers, friends, children, spouses, believers, unbelievers whom we first loved. Let nothing hamper the relationship. This silent voice of love will have a profound impact.

### ***He loved us to the end***

*"Before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1).*

**The one who is in love with love is a lovely person.**

The lesson for us does not need to be spelled out. It hits us right in the heart. But the idea may sound outlandish. You may start to love. You may even continue to love with some struggle. But the apex of it all is love to the end. Jesus knew His endtime had come. There

was nothing much for Him to appreciate in His disciples. Rather He was disappointed with them. They fought among themselves. There was rivalry

and strife. They would listen to all the sermons of Jesus and yet like to bring down fire to incinerate their enemies. There was so much to dry up the last drop of love that Jesus had for them. But no. The unconditional love of Jesus for them was growing all the time. He taught us never to give up on anyone. When you say someone is useless you are slamming the door in the face of God.

Jesus knew they would sleep in the garden of Gethsemane. He knew Judas would betray Him. He chose them and called them His friends (Jn 15:15). Did the relationship change when Judas betrayed Him? Jesus called Judas His friend even after the bitter betrayal in the presence of His entourage. Probably it was this gesture that sparked the remorse that paved the path to his confession.

When the Bishop saw Jeanvalgin, he instantly loved him. Even after hearing his story he treated him with a good supper and continued to love him. That was not great. But when the police caught Jeanvalgin with the bishop's silver candlesticks, what made the bishop to tell the police that they were his gifts to the convict? It was the ultimate love of Jesus.

When friends knife you in the back, when loved ones betray you, don't post-mortem the event; but let the deep, deep love of Jesus enclose you in its embrace. We want everyone to love us as they love themselves. We want all to love us however we may be. Should we not love others the same way? 'Love your neighbour as yourself' is in our lips. It has not even come down to our throat. When will it reach our hearts, our hands, our feet?

The pinnacle of love-statement that Jesus made is in Matthew 5:44-48. "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be

sons of your Father in heaven; ... For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Exhibition of such love will make you a Gulliver and your enemy a Lilliputian in his own eyes. “What the world really needs is more love and less paper work” says Pearl Bailey.

You may be confused as to how you can love and once again forgive and trust the person who thrust the sword through your heart. Remember love, forgiveness and trust are three different virtues. You need not trust the one you forgive or love. “If the same person deceives you twice, then may be you deserve it” says Carlos Martinez Vazquez. So be wary.

How did Jesus love us? He says, “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you” (Jn 15:9). There is no comparison to the love Father God has for His Son Jesus Christ. Just imagine! Jesus Christ loves us exactly the same way. Excellent! Isn’t it? Are you thrilled? Just a minute. This is the way to love others.

Here’s the handwriting on the wall— “Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Mt 24:12,13). Christians who do not practice the love of Jesus are bogus. This kind of Master’s style love is the yardstick of Christian maturity. The quagmire of lovelessness has vacuum-sucked many even active Christians. These are the last days. The love of believers is under fiery trial. The love candle is flickering in the souls of many and is already dead in some hearts. Will your love be there with flags flying when your life is done?

Taking the first step to love is school final in love. Continuing to love the person is graduation in love. To love to the end is Ph.D in love. Let us pour our whole heart into achieving the doctorate and let love become the whole philosophy of our lives. That can put the spring

back into our feet and bloom into our cheeks. The one who is in love with love is a lovely person.

The world loves its own. It stops loving the unloveable. It hates the betrayers. The world is watching the disciples to see if their love is any different. Is your love any better? Do you love like Jesus?

“When love is your greatest weakness you will be the strongest person in the world”

—Garman Wold. ‘f

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### ***Clear Thinking Means Changing***

Once a woman comes to realize God holds her accountable for level-headed, thoughtful decision making, she can never again be a frivolous, empty-minded robot going through her comfortable routine. Clear thinking means changing, and growth is sometimes painful. It may mean leaving the accustomed, familiar path everyone else follows. That is sometimes frightening, and often misunderstood.

But even here there is room for great temptation and great error. A woman haughty in spirit, who thinks she sees truth more clearly than others, can be confidently — and terribly! — wrong. Clear thinking requires a deep humility, confession that when we have tried our best to sort out the right and the truth, we may sometimes be wrong. In that spirit of humility, King David said, “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother, My soul is even as a weaned child” (Psa 131:1,2).

Our only safety is found in the Lord Jesus. He is wisdom. He is our only source of true wisdom: “Of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made to us wisdom” (1 Cor 1:30).

God gave you a mind to use to its fullest, to serve Him to the very limits of your abilities. Why not set out to use it in whatever task He’s given you to do today!

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# STRAIGHT AND CROOKED THINKING

*Elizabeth Handford*

She was in the supermarket, pushing along her grocery cart, placating a fussy two-year-old in the infant's seat, and groping for her four-year-old son, who was systematically toppling over the displays of cereals. She was pregnant, obviously overwhelmed by the demands of motherhood. On her T-shirt, stretched across her swollen tummy, the question was written, "I went to college for this?"

That harassed mother could see little relationship between the exciting intellectual challenges she experienced in college and the day-by-day demands of her home.

Too often a woman folds up her brain alongside her high school diploma. She may do it regretfully, with a sigh, wishing God hadn't doomed women always to be barefoot, pregnant, and standing at the kitchen sink. She may reach for the apron of domesticity eagerly, glad to be released from the pressure of examinations and term-papers.

But the loss to the world of those women's good minds is enormous and tragic. God created men and women in His own image, woman as well as man, with heart and body—and mind! — to be used in the challenging tasks of living. God endowed women with great creative and intellectual gifts. He expects her to use them to the fullest, no matter what her task in life is.

Ofcourse there are some God-given restrictions to a woman's role in life, just as there are for a man's. Those restrictions should not keep a woman from reasoning, thinking, deciding, choosing, and guiding others.

It's true that through the years some men have tried to keep women from getting an education. They felt a woman's "weak" mind could not handle great philosophic thought, and that if she did use her mind to muse on the great issues of life and death, she'd be discontented as a wife and mother.

But a woman must use her mind. She must learn to think clearly. She must learn to perceive clear and twisted thinking. Too much is at stake for a woman to live her life by intuition and feelings.

Muddled thinking produces muddled behavior. Illogical thought leads to poor decisions. Inevitable heartache comes when a woman lives her life without testing what she hears and interpreting it wisely by the Word of God.

✿ A door-to-door salesman told a housewife that ofcourse he was a good Christian. She certainly could believe everything he said about the vacuum cleaner he was selling. Because he used the magic word, "Christian," she bought the machine he was selling, without investigating the man or the machine. She paid an exorbitant price for a grossly inferior cleaner. The warranties were worthless and repaid service unavailable. She didn't remember that the Lord Jesus told us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Mt 10:16).

✿ A woman wanted to clean her bathroom really clean. She decided to get twice the cleaning powder by mixing chlorine bleach with her toilet bowl cleaner. The labels of both carried stringent warnings against mixing with any other cleaner, but she didn't like to bother about reading the fine print on products. Her husband came home that evening to find her on the bathroom floor, killed by the poisonous fumes created by the mixture. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge" (Hos 4:6).

✿ A mother's seventeen-year-old son was taking a biology course in school. The teacher was a witty, charismatic intellectual and skeptic who set out to destroy the boy's sweet faith. He begged his mother to help him find answers to the "facts" his teacher bombarded him with. But she felt threatened by scholarship. "Just believe, son," she kept saying. "You don't need any answers. Just believe the Bible."

There are clear, unmistakable proofs that the Scriptures are trustworthy, and the boy desperately needed them. Because he wasn't given them at a crucial time of decision in his life, he reluctantly and sadly gave up his faith. But 1 Peter 3:15 commands, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you."

❁ Two black-suited men knocked on a woman's door. They opened their "Bibles" to an obscure and unfamiliar passage which, they said, proved Jesus is not God. Because the woman had not learned to use her mind, to check up, to find out for herself, she was lured into a Christ-rejecting cult. But the Christians in Berea not only "received the Word with all readiness of mind," they also "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

❁ A woman had a mammogram and biopsy. Her doctor told her she had breast cancer, and that she needed surgery. "Your chances are very good for complete recovery, if you don't delay. Get a second opinion from another doctor if you like, but please don't delay."

But the woman's best friend told her, "Don't you know all doctors are in it just for the money? Don't let him cut on you! Try this new diet I'm on."

Frightened and bewildered, the woman did not go to another doctor, nor did she go back to her own. She died and left a grieving family because she believed a friend who was unqualified to advise her.

### ***God Commands Us to Use Our Minds.***

The Scriptures again and again remind us to think rightly, to avoid twisted and crooked thinking. In His own dealings with us, he appeals to us to reason rightly. "Come now, let us reason together," He says in Isaiah 1:18. The idea is, "Let us think rationally about this matter of sin in your life which you have no control over, and take the logical steps to find forgiveness."

In Romans 1:19,20, Paul tells us to draw reasonable conclusions about the power and godhead of God because of what we can see in the universe.

In 2 Timothy 2:7, Paul tells Timothy, "consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things."

Clear, unemotional thinking is a right result of maturity. "When I was a child," Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:11, "I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

### ***Hindrances to Clear Thinking.***

❁ A woman's strong intuitions can keep her from thinking clearly. Sometimes a woman will tell her husband something. He says incredulously, "How did you find that out? I just heard about it myself."

She says serenely, "I just knew it!"

A child picks up a ball, and wonders to himself what would happen if he threw — but before he can finish the thought, his mother says, "Don't you dare use my vase for a basketball hoop."

The kid thinks to himself, "How did mother know?"

She isn't sure how it happens herself. All she knows is that she knows certain things instinctively.

It isn't magic. A woman often is able to pick up subtle, illusive, non-verbal clues that a man might miss. She "puts two and two together" and gets four. Because her intuition often is right, a woman sometimes leans too heavily on it, without using her mind to verify the truth of what she's thinking. But it isn't safe, and a woman needs always to ascertain the facts of the matter before making a judgement.

❁ A woman may not think rationally because she misunderstands the meaning of faith. We know we can be saved from our sins only by having faith in Christ. We are commanded to live by faith. If we don't understand what faith really is, we might think it was squeezing our eyes shut, taking a deep breath and jumping into the dark, hoping there would be something out there to catch us. We might think faith is believing something without proof, without a shred of evidence.

But that simply is not true. We are given a strong, reasonable foundation for our faith. We are saved by believing in the literal, proven facts of Christ's death for our sins and His resurrection. The Gospel writer Luke affirmed there are "many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3).

Naivete may be charming in a four-year-old. It does not become the woman who wants to use her life well for God.

✿ A woman may not be able to think clearly because what she wants to believe is so strong it overrides the evidence plainly at hand. A mother may so passionately hope her son is not using drugs that she will find a hundred other reasons for his surly disposition and deteriorating physical condition. Our ability to think clearly can be distorted by our desires. That's why the Lord Jesus tells us we must be willing to do whatever our heavenly Father wants us to do before we can know what His will is for us (Jn 7:17).

Our background and past experience predispose us to think a certain way. How easy it is to resist a new idea because "that's not the way we did it back home" or "back in our church!"

We've laughed at the woman who said, "don't confuse me with facts. I've made up my mind." But there is nothing funny about the consequences of living by slogans and clichés rather than by the thoughtful and careful application of the Word of God.

✿ God has commanded a woman to be obedient to her husband "as to the Lord" (Eph 5:22); "in everything" (Eph 5:24); "as the church is subject to Christ" (Eph 5:24). Sometimes a woman misunderstands this and believes that she has no right to an opinion about matters in the home. She equates obedience with mindlessness.

But if a wife doesn't use her mind in everything she does, then she has defrauded the man God intended her to be a help-meet to. "Two are better than one," the Scripture says "because they have a good reward for their labour...but woe to him that is alone when he falls; for he has not another to help him up" (Eccl 4:9,10).

A wise man will want his wise wife's insight and input. A wise woman, being in submission to her husband, deeply desiring his good, will find a way to share her wisdom without violating Scripture. The heart of that husband will "safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov 31:11,12).

Sometimes a woman uses obedience to her husband as an excuse for faulty, silly thinking and

acting. But she and those she loves are greatly harmed by such sophistry.

### ***How to Learn to Think Clearly.***

Clear thinking is not the same as being super-smart or intelligent. Ordinary people can have more commonsense than someone with a high IQ. Clear thinking is conscious, careful thoughtfulness, analyzing all the facts, and then making moral, obedient decisions. A foolish man, in Scripture, is not dumb; he is a fool because he is deceived, acting on false information he wanted to believe.

Clear thinking avoids generalizations based on too few facts. Here is an example of false reasoning based on an unproved premise:

*Readheads are hot-tempered.  
Jane is a redhead.  
Therefore Jane has a temper.*

You may know Jane has red hair, but that doesn't prove she has a temper, and she'd have a right to lose her temper with you if you assumed she did!

Twisted thinking may result from applying your limited experience to everything else:

*Jane has red hair.  
Jane has a temper.  
Therefore all redheads are hot-tempered.*

Your experience with one redhead does not give you enough facts to make a conclusion about all redheads. Straight thinking means getting the facts, testing the facts, and then coming to a rational conclusion.

Don't assume that the information in your local newspaper or from your television station is complete or accurate. Writers have blind spots and prejudices just like the rest of us, and you need to evaluate information you get from whatever source.

When Satan came to tempt Jesus, he quoted a Scripture to Jesus. Jesus, in rebuking him, said "It is *also* written..." (Mt 4:7). Any reasoning based on only one part of Scripture will be flawed.

*(Contd. on page 9)*

# News from Fields

Compiled by E. L. Mathansingh, Field Coordinator

The Blessing Youth Mission has stationed 322 missionaries in 14 States of India, namely Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamilnadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, for revival ministries and cross-cultural missionary evangelism leading to church planting in churchless places. The news of various fields is compiled here for PRAISE and PRAYER.

## ASSAM

Â Young people from CNI church, Guwahati, enthusiastically joined our Missionary Lence Joel in neighbourhood evangelism and distributed tracts. *'Everyone, Everywhere'* should be the strategy to reach the community around.

Â In Dimapur, a Literature Drive Programme was organised under the leadership of Missionary Gnanapragasam, in which Rs. 58,000/- worth of Blessing books, cassettes and CDs were distributed.

Â Christian families were taught *'How to be Better Christians'* in a monthly cottage meeting conducted in Christian Basti, Guwahati.

## ANDHRA PRADESH

Â Missionary Geetha Amalraj ministered to 250 women in a Deborah Camp arranged in Guntur. Missionary Jyothi Ratnakar spoke in a fasting prayer held in ECI Gethsemane Church and motivated the 50 people to pray for our nation.

Â Mr. Sathyaseelan of Vijayawada, brother-in-law of missionary M. C. Ponniah, suddenly passed away due to a massive heart attack. Pray for God's comfort to the bereaved family.

Â 53 people participated in a Partners' Meet organized in Kurnool. Mr. J. Santhakumar challenged the people to join together to intercede and labour for the furtherance of His Kingdom.

Â 72 youth were won for Christ in a youth retreat organized in New Covenant Church and Zion Fellowship, Vijayawada. Pray that they may stand firm in their decision and overcome the enemy.

Â God enabled our missionaries to distribute 1000 tracts and to sell Blessing books & cassettes worth Rs. 10,700/- in Kurnool.

Â Praise God for the 350 people who heard the Good News in a Christmas programme arranged in Bethlehemnagar, Vijayawada. Pray that they may be attracted towards the sacrificial love of God.

Â In a youth meeting conducted for college students in Vizianagaram 200 youth enthusiastically participated. 110 of them responded to the altar call.

## GUJARAT

Â God enabled us to release *Frank Answers Vol-1* in Gujarati, written by Mr. R. Stanley. Mr. J. Santhakumar dedicated this book in a special meeting organised in St. James CNI Church, Baroda. He also delivered God's message in the Readers meetings held in Nadiad, Surat and Baroda.

Â Mr. Nimrod has decided to conduct weekly Bible study in his house after attending the BLESSO camp in Jabalpur. Pray that the participants may be blessed and strongly rooted in God's Word.

Â Missionary R. Elisha addressed 400 boys and girls in a youth camp held in Baroda and challenged them to live an all out life for Christ.

Â Praise God for the nine student prayer cells newly formed, after the HALO 2005 in Gujarat. Pray that the students may abide in the Lord and testify Christ boldly through their lips and lives.

Â The Deborah team in Nadiad visited Degham, Palana, Daban and Gangapur villages with the gospel. Ramilaben and Gordenben are good seekers. Pray that many more may accept Christ as their Saviour in these villages.

Â Our native worker Manhar was bitten by a poisonous snake, but God saved him without any harm.

## **JHARKHAND**

Â After much prayers and counselling God delivered Niladri from psychological illness. Praise the Lord!

Â Pray for our gospel contacts Ajay, Subadh, Belash, Mahendra, Lalitha, Punam, Kiran and Sanju, to accept Christ as their personal saviour.

Â Manjukumari, a Sub Inspector of Police is showing keen interest to know more about Jesus. Pray for her salvation.

Â Our student contacts Pradeep, Ajay, Salestine and John, are waiting for the result of their Railway Exams. Pray that they may get the Job.

Â During Christmas season our missionaries shared the love of Christ among the villagers, students and professionals. Pray for the follow up.

Â Pray for Dipen Gomes, who is suffering from thyroid problem that he may experience a divine touch in his life.

## **KARNATAKA**

Â A 14 member team from Thoothukudi led by Mr. Ponpandi Inbarasu of Mission Sponsors' Fellowship visited our fields—Alnavar, Yellapur, Saundatti, Ramdurg and Jamkandi and encouraged the missionaries. This fellowship is sponsoring five of our missionaries.

Â Pray for the salvation of the following: Subburao, Madhur, Sunjeetha, Venkappa, Lakkappa, Renuka, Lakshmi, Sonu, Kamalabhai, Gemmu, Puttarra, Gangarra, Kamalarra, Raju, Ragnavendra, Parameshwar, Shankar, Shantha, Basaraj, Ravi and Pandu.

Â Praise God for the 23 people in Ramdurg and 6 youth in Kathijapur who fulfilled the righteousness of God through water baptism.

Â 210 young people were reached with the Good News in the special meetings conducted in Alnavar and Ramdurg. Pray that they may be delivered from the clutches of sin.

Â Our believers in Yellapur area are being mistreated and oppressed by some people. Pray for God's mighty intervention.

Â 9 families and 20 women are joyfully attending the newly started prayer cell in Kondamane and Kattur. Pray that they may take root in faith and bear fruits in their lives.

Â Susa, Manjula, Sakuntala, Ramaling and Vanitha are suffering from demon possession. Pray for divine deliverance.

Â God enabled our missionaries to distribute tracts, gospel packets and New Testaments in Tejpur, Tikkotta and Ratnapur villages. Pray for a mass movement to break out in this area.

Â The poor believers in Bilki area are given vocational training in order to get self employment. May the God of the poor bless their little efforts and prosper them.

Â Praise God for the showers of blessing experienced in the Blessing meetings in Dharwad, 13-15 January 2006. Speakers: Mr. E. L. Mathansingh and Mr. & Mrs. R. Elisha.

Â Pray for the following to be restored in faith: Babu, Lawrence, Basthiyar, Rama, Nagayya, Thiyya, Sanappa, Parmeshwar, Gopi, Salomi and Soma.

Â Praise God for Shivakka, Sakunthala, Lakshmi-bai, Parvathi, Donkkanavar, Chitra, Madhevi and Ananth who got delivered from demon possession. Hallelujah!

Â Through prayers, Seema conceived after four years of her married life. Her faith has increased through this miracle.

## **MAHARASHTRA**

Â Praise God for Ganapat Kamble of Murgud who gave up drinking alcohol in answer to the sincere prayers of his daughter Asha.

Â A family retreat was conducted in Gargoti, in which 180 people were given spiritual input and practical counsel to build Christ centred Christian Homes.

Â Ratna Sankhpal, Sashikala Sawant and Shakuntala, Lata, Neeta and Madhu covet prayers to withstand the stiff opposition from their family members. Pray that the entire family may come into His fold.

Â In the Literature Drive Programme conducted in Aurangabad, our missionary team visited Christian homes, Institutions and churches and distributed literature worth Rs. 33,195/-.

Â In Yeralvadi and Nidhal, villagers eagerly listened to the Good News and bought 70 Great Bible Truths. Pray that the Lord may break the bondages and enlighten their hearts.

Â Pray for God's healing touch upon the following: Deepak (heart problem), Sujatha (Stomach pain), Suresh Naik (Jaundice), Droupadi (debility) and Maryappa (Paralysis).

Â In a special youth gathering, 'Mission Maharashtra' arranged in Nagpur, Mr. R. Stanley preached the Word of God, in which about 1000 young people committed their lives to Christ and many received the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

## MADHYA PRADESH

Â The missionaries and the prayer cell students in Jabalpur went for Christmas carols in Padari and Paunia villages; they proclaimed the Good News by songs and skits. Pray for the follow up.

Â 50 Prayer warriors in Jabalpur poured out their hearts in a special fasting and prayer conducted there. Pray that a strong prayer force may be raised in the State to uphold the ongoing missionary work across the country.

Â Praise God for Rajeev Singh, Khamman, Laren, Ramlal, Dipnu and Rajesh who have decided to walk in the path of Christ.

Â The girls' prayer cell in Lakhera is flourishing. Pray that the participants may grow in the knowledge of Jesus and influence the society through their godly lives.

Â Our missionary Andrias Soni, met with an accident and fractured his right hand while going for ministry on his motorcycle. Pray for his quick recovery.

Â Mahobia, Hari, Chobey, Shukla, micky, Amit, Ashish, Bhardwaj, Ganapath, Krishna, Rita, Sonia and Dolly are earnest seekers. Pray that their eagerness to know Christ may lead them to salvation.

Â Ashish, a believer's son is losing his eyesight. Pray for God's miraculous healing touch on him so that all villagers who are teasing him may witness the power of God.

Â Pray for missionary Beulah Mohanraj, who is in the family way. Pray very specially since she had a miscarriage earlier.

Â Praise God for the 1700 people, in and around Shahgarh and 500 people in Banda who heard about the birth of Jesus through *bhajans* and dramas. Our partners Mrs & Mr. Charles from Maharashtra and Mr. Sonu from Sagar joined with our teams during these programmes. Pray that those who heard the gospel may accept Christ in the near future.

Â Three hundred and fifty believers of Shahgarh and Banda fields joyfully worshipped the Lord on the Christmas day in the newly dedicated church in Shahgarh.

## ORISSA

Â A 2-day revival meeting conducted in Koraput brought enlightenment and edification to 500 people in which missionary Elisha shared the Word of God on the theme 'Partner with God.' 52 people pledged to support missionary work through prayer and offerings.

Â Our missionaries visited the villagers of Dotalguda, Jobaguda and Donuguda with the message of love. Pray for God's Kingdom to be extended.

Â Missionary couple Elisha and Deena gave practical tips and spiritual nourishment to 435 youth in the youth retreats organised in Umerkote, Koraput and Jeypore.

Â Our missionaries and believers in Kundra area were mistreated and oppressed by the anti-Christian elements. Pray that the banner of the Lord may be lifted up in this place.

Â Pray for the systematic efforts taken to teach basic theology and missiology to all the native workers in Orissa, by the senior missionaries.

Â The medical work in our *jungle clinic* in Ramagiri has been revived after the arrival of the missionary nurse, Nithya.

## RAJASTHAN

Â In the Rajasthan Christian Convention arranged in Ajmer, Mr. R. Stanley delivered the Word of God in a gathering of 2000 people.

Â Mrs. Mali's prayer of faith healed her from the poisonous snake bite. The local eye witnesses glorified God on seeing the miraculous healing.

Â Mr. Justin shared the Word of God under the theme *God's plan for us* in a Believers' retreat conducted in Singhana, in which 35 people committed to fulfill the plan of God.

Â Six young people were added to the church in a youth meeting organised in St. Andrew's Hall, Jodhpur.

Â Praise God for Kitob and Maniram who stand for their faith in the Lord despite a great loss they incurred in their family after receiving Christ in their lives.

Â Pray for the backslidden believers in Srimadhapur to experience a second touch in their lives.

Â Missionary couple Allen and Monica has joined the Rajasthan team to accelerate the ministry among the youth.

## WEST BENGAL

Â In a one day Blessing retreat conducted in Bethlehem Fellowship, Gangtok, Col. H. K. Ghising and Missionary Stephen Dhanaraj delivered God's message and encouraged the congregation to bear fruits of righteousness.

Â Mr. Jiwan Rai, one of our native workers

based in Siliguri, ministered to 200 youth through inspiring songs, in Tezpur.

Â For the glory of God, the first issue of *Blessing* magazine in Bengali language was dedicated and released in Kharagpur. Pray for God's rich anointing and wisdom to rest upon all those who labour behind the screen for the publication of this periodical.

Â Our partner Alex, from Siliguri edified 40 believers through the ministry of God's Word in Terai village. He and his family are a great support for our missionaries in the expansion of God's Kingdom.

Â Praise God for the blessings experienced in the 3-day revival meetings in Kharagpur, 12-14 January 2006. Speakers: Mr. V. Ponnusamy, Mr. G. Rajadhas, Mr. Stephen Dhanaraj and Mr. N. K. Kusha.

Â Missionary Mariaraj joined our team in Siliguri to accelerate the revival and literature ministry in this State. Pray that he may learn the Bengali language very soon.

## HEADQUARTERS

Â The Lord blessed the Student Leadership Training Camp held in Vellore.

Â Missionaries J. J. Selvaraj and S. Saravanan participated in the workshop on curriculum designing for B.Miss course in Bangalore, organised by Indian Institute of Missiology.

Â Mr. A. Jeyaraj and team, visited Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh and helped the various branch staff in maintaining financial records. f

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Founder: R. Stanley, B.E., M.Tech.



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