

YEAR OF EXCELLENCE

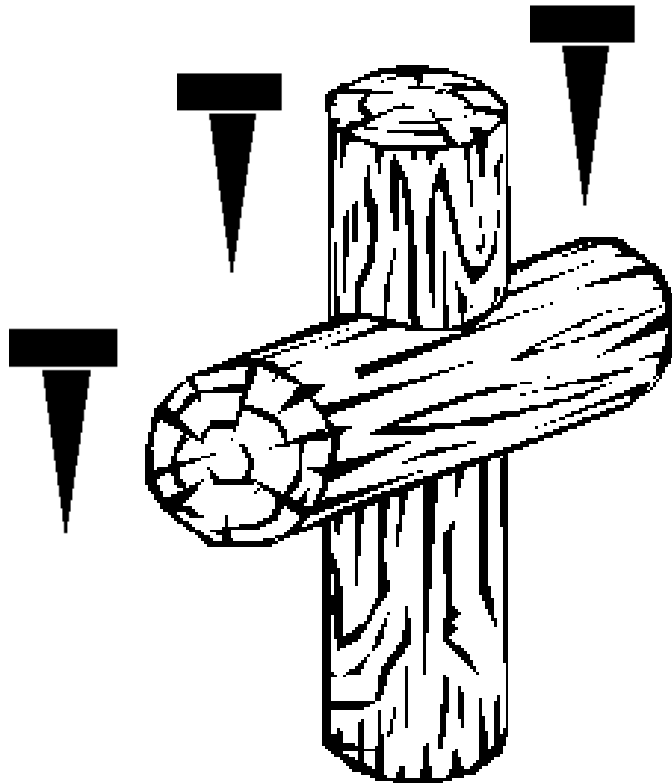
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Blessing

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Say, 'Yes' to the Cross!



**“IF ANYONE SHOULD COME AFTER ME,
HE MUST DENY HIMSELF AND TAKE UP HIS
CROSS AND FOLLOW ME!”**

(Matthew 16:24)

Say, 'Yes' to the

Dr. Mrs. Lilian Stanley



THE cross has been widely touted as a talisman rather than a grim reminder of what the Lord Himself carried on His gory climb to Golgotha. May be a golden cross is hanging in your chain—a cute little symbol of style and status rather than the reminiscence of cross-bearing.

Nobody wants to carry a cross. David cried, “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest” (Psa 55:6,7). He felt, to stay in a desert would be better. Job lamented that he wished he had been miscarried in his mother’s womb (10:18,19). Paul’s idea of death was gain (Phil 1:21). Simon had to be compelled to carry the cross (Mt 27:32). But Jesus did not have a jot of self-pity. He told the women not to weep for Him. Then why do we slip into self-pity and stagnate? Why are we allergic to the cross? Why can’t we carry the cross faithfully, patiently, joyfully, silently?

On close observation, we will find, the suggestion to circumvent the cross comes to us from three angles—

- À Our close friends
- À Our own self
- À Our enemies

Peter was a close friend of Jesus. He wanted Christ but not the cross. When revelation came to him that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus patted him on the shoulder. But what followed immediately was a downright shameful experience for Peter. Jesus made it clear to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to submit to an ordeal of suffering at the hands of the religious gurus, be killed and then on the third day be raised up alive. Peter’s innate aggress-

siveness prompted him to remonstrate, “Never, Lord. This shall never happen to you.” Peter got a tongue-lashing from Jesus: “Get behind Me Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” Then he taught His disciples, “If anyone should come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for Me will find it” (Mt 16:16-25).

Already Jesus had infused the same principle in Matthew 10:38,39. “Anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” But the message of the cross had gone over Peter’s head. Later on Peter himself was put through a baptism of fire and history says he died an ignominious death on the cross.

Why did Peter have difficulty integrating Jesus and the cross? On close study one will understand that he was an Old Testament Christian. Even many years later he had difficulty understanding the teachings on circumcision by Paul. God showered promises for the Jews that He would remove sickness from them, that their flour and oil would not decrease, they would be lenders, never debtors, heads not tails etc, etc. They could not shift gears. Suddenly the same God spoke about the cross, suffering and death. That meant they would be less than others, poorer, weaker, mocked. How could that be?

Even today most of us are Old Testament Christians. We want flashy promises of physical and material

wealth all the time from prophets, calendars, TV and every other source of hope—and that’s what we pray for. These are things accepted as norms in today’s society but nauseating to the true Christian conscience. Ours is not a what-can-I-give-to-God religion. Satan knows he has no chance till he tempts us down from this blessed religion to the what-can-I-get-from-God religion.

But there is a total shift of emphasis from the Old Testament to the New Testament. In the New Testament our promises are by and large spiritual blessings. Paul writes to the first generation Christians in Ephesus: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3). When we read the prayers of Paul, we can see the shallowness of our prayers. Have we ever prayed like Paul that God may give us the Spirit of Wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, that the eyes of our understanding be enlightened to know the hope of His calling, the greatness of God’s power, that we may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God, for all patience! (Eph 1:17,18; Col 1:10,11). The very terminology sounds like jargon to our ears. See our emphasis? Our religion is like any other religion—will God give me? How are we different?

Is my longing to give my money or property to God? Can I go to a God-forsaken place to serve? Can I leave my parents and go for God? Can I allow my son or daughter to serve God? Do I pray, “Lord, what would you have me to do? Where do you want me to go?” Do we bless God for the sufferings we go through for His name’s sake? New Testament religion is a religion of the cross.

Like Peter we want Christ without the cross, an easy religion that pampers us. Jesus emphasised the narrow gate and the difficult way to life. Very few find it. Why? Because the majority wants the easy crossless way. This difficult way is the way of the cross and death. There is no other way to be a disciple of Christ but to take the cross and follow Him. A disciple without a cross will develop into a twisted personality. When we have a “desire” to follow Him we must deny ourselves, take up His cross and follow Him (Mt 16:24). Non-Christians are the masses; Christians are the little flock and cross bearers are the small little flock!

While chiding Peter, Jesus spoke explicitly of two things, the things of God and the things of men. He said Peter’s mind was full of the things of men and not the things of God (Mt 16:23). What does this tell us? It means we should take the path of the cross behind Jesus, renouncing the comfortable crossless religion. It is saying, ‘No’ to self and following Jesus upto death.

When some Greeks, seekers of wisdom came to see Jesus, Jesus spoke of the death of a grain of wheat and about hating one’s life—His favourite theme. I am sure those fellows never made their appearance again. The ‘follow-up’ teaching for the new disciples by Paul and Barnabas to continue in their faith was, that anyone signing up for the Kingdom of God has to go through plenty of hard times (Acts 14:22). The cross took precedence over every teaching. What do we teach now? “God will bless you, God will heal you, don’t worry, fear not” are the assurances we give them rather than to prepare them to face adverse circumstances.

For Jesus, the temptation to shun the cross came through His friend Peter. Paul faced a similar situation

while longing for wider horizons. Agabus prophesied the persecution of Paul in Jerusalem. Paul's team and the local friends pleaded with him not to walk into his certain death. But Paul dug in his heels. There was not a wisp of fear in his voice. He tried to shrug off the depression that fell on him and announced, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When his friends saw that they weren't making even a dent in his resolve, they gave up and said: "It's in God's hands now" (Acts 21:8-14). If we had been in Paul's shoes we would have nodded in sage agreement to escape the cross. It is our own kith and kin, friends and fellowship members who may discourage us from taking the path of the cross. Let the dare-devil spirit of Paul catch us.

The temptation to reject the cross may come from our own self too. It is a solitary battle. As Jesus was just one step away from the cross, with all His strength whooshed out of Him, the temptation assaulted Him, to make Him run away from it all. His future hung in the balance that night. His will and His Father's will violently swung up and down on either side. Thrice He interceded with God to remove the cross from His life, if at all that was possible. Wrung out and exhausted, His agonized prayer was: "Oh My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will..." (Mt 26:39-44). His wail of pain echoed down the garden of Gethsemane to the disciples, clear enough to be heard in their drowsiness and minuted.

What if He had rejected the Cross? He would have continued to be the Son of God enjoying the bliss of heaven. Then why did He accept to go through it? He loved the Father, trusted His

will, and wanted us with Him in heaven forever and ever. Jesus came out of the mist and finally the balance tipped to His Father's side. He couldn't let down His Father, not when He was so close to winning.

Jesus knew He had come down to earth to die. When He came into the world, He said, "Behold, I have come—To do your will, O God" (Heb 10:5-7). But the humanity within Him cried with all its might to abandon the cross.

Paul had a similar experience. Concerning the thorn in his flesh, the angel of satan to get him down, thrice he begged God to remove it. He did not praise God for his handicap. Thrice His prayer was not positively answered. But God said: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness" (1 Cor 12:7-9). Later, despite the thorn, Paul became a whirlwind of activity through the all-sufficient grace of God. I suppose, the angel who descended down to uphold Jesus said these same words that God's grace was enough and that was all He needed to die on the cross.

The third angle from which we receive suggestion to reject our cross is our enemies. "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Mt 27:40). Even the chief priests, scribes and elders mockingly said, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe Him. He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said: 'I am the Son of God.' Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing" (Mt 27:41-44).

Think of it. How many times we put down our head in shame when we face a barrage of criticism while carrying

the cross? Our enemies holler, “He saved others, he counseled others, now he is unable to save himself. If God delivers him then we will believe that He is a child of God.” How we cry, “Why Lord this for me? Why do I have to carry this cross? Is there no other cross?” The world says that it would accept us if miraculously we are delivered from our trial. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (1 Cor 1:18). I often wonder why the cross does not have a more powerful impact on the world today. But it was the same 2000 years ago.

Paul who had a wealth of experience in the cross writes to his brothers, “If I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased” (Gal 5:11). If Paul had preached circumcision he would have been embraced by one and all. But when he dismissed the idea and faithfully preached the truth friends began to ostracize him. That was his cross and he decided to carry it to the end. If life had used him hardly, he was compensated in the end. Same was the fate of Martin Luther who refused to recant realizing that he could not turn his back on God.

Paul warns about the enemies of the cross of Christ in Philippians 3:17-19. “Brothers, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, as I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.”

These are friends of Christ, but enemies of the cross of Christ. They want Christ without the cross. Two kinds of walk are described in this passage. You can either walk as Paul and his friends carrying the cross or

you can walk as the enemies of the cross of Christ. Mind you, their end is destruction. Today churches, conventions, TV, radio, books all preach prosperity and shower promises of blessing on us. But less is said about the cost of discipleship. Peddlers of spiritual wares take advantage of fortune hunting Christians and prophesy good fortune. We have reduced Christianity to a crutch to help us through life. We are taught what God can do for us—get us better jobs, make us beautiful and strong, help us build a house and buy a car!

Note: “Who set their **mind** on earthly things” (v19). Do you remember what Jesus told Peter? “You are **mindful** of the things of men” (Mt 16:23). It is in the mind. What mind should we have?

“Let this **mind** be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who ... taking the form of a bond servant... humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” What was His end as against the enemies of the cross? “Therefore God also highly exalted Him” (Phil 2:5-9). Hallelujah! If you are carrying a cross, stop brooding and move into high gear. Our mind needs a total transformation to be mindful of the things of God, the path of the cross. Jesus humbled Himself not just to the point of death but to the point of the death on the cross.

Jesus suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city but we seek one to come. Therefore say, “YES” to the cross.

*Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus,
Anywhere, everywhere, I will follow on;
Follow, follow, I will follow Jesus,
Everywhere He leads me I will follow on.*



MESSAGE FROM THE RISEN LORD!

Dr M. Arthur John

Jesus of Nazareth who divided history into B.C. and A.D. two thousand years ago died on the cross for the salvation of mankind. He was buried and the tomb secured with a seal and reinforced by a guard. But on the third day He rose again from the dead. The power of His resurrection transformed the lives of countless people through centuries. Even today as we read the resurrection history with devotion, He is sure to transform our lives as well. The resurrected Saviour's deep concern to reach out and transform the different cross sections of people He encountered has some significant lessons for us. Detailed here below are seven such groups of people who were touched by the resurrected power of our Lord.

1. People in Sorrow (Jn 20:15).

“Woman why are you crying?” This clearly illustrates the response of the resurrected Saviour towards those in sorrow. One can very well imagine the depth of Mary Magdalene's sorrow. She had faced the bitterness of life, perhaps to its full measure when tormented by seven demonic spirits that ruined her life (Mk 16:9). It was Jesus who compassionately delivered her from the clutches of the evil one. Since then she became an ardent follower of the Saviour. She was one among the small group of women who served Jesus as He moved from place to place during His ministerial campaigns (Lk 8:1-3). She never expected such a cruel and painful death for her Master. The arrest, the cross examinations, the ridicule, the ill treatment rendered to Him on the path to Golgotha and finally the scene of crucifixion—all broke her heart and hardly had she any strength to cry out. She must have had the final hope of at least seeing the dead body of her Saviour in the tomb. Alas, when she looked inside the tomb, it was empty. The grief that gripped her cannot be expressed in words. She was distraught, her hopes dashed, her faith shaken and her inspiration quelled, her life seemed to have come to a grinding halt. It was then, the resurrected Lord appeared to her with these gentle, soothing and comforting words, “Woman, why are you crying?”

Beloved, are you going through such deep valleys of sorrow? Is there no strength at all

even to cry aloud? Cheer up! The resurrected Lord knows your grief and pains. He assures you from His Book, “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev 21:4).

2. People in Fear (Jn 20:19).

“Peace be with you!” The disciples of Jesus locked themselves in a room out of fear. On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” He repeated the same words for the second time. Jesus could not tolerate His children being fearful. He knew His disciples completely and often He encouraged them saying, “Do not be afraid, little flock...” (Lk 12:32). Once, they mistook Him for a ghost and cried out in fear (Mt 14:26). On another occasion when a furious storm came up and the disciples were filled with fear, Jesus rebuked them saying, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” (Mt 8:26). When encountered with the crisis of arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, all the disciples were terrified and they deserted Him. Peter denied Him thrice out of fear. Their fear was real, the circumstances beyond their control. The situation had been given a political twist and Jesus charged with a political coup! The Lord they had trusted appeared to have suddenly become powerless and incapable of performing any miracle. In such a torrid back drop, they decided to lock themselves inside a room fearing arrest, imprisonment or even a death sentence. It was a time when no one would even venture to pronounce the word, ‘Peace!’

When human mind fails to think of any hope, there comes the resurrected Jesus with His comforting and consoling words of peace. Dear friends, have you lost all hope in life and are you in a situation similar to that of Jesus' disciples? Cheer up! The resurrected Jesus stands amidst us and affirms, “Peace be with you.”

3. People who Lack Power (Jn 20:22).

“Receive the Holy Spirit.” said Jesus. He saw their condition, their calling and their need. Their calling was to go out and boldly witness for Christ. Their condition was powerlessness. Their need was power from above. The solution could be fully achieved only after His glorification (Jn 7:39). But the resurrected Lord sympathetically approached their helpless condition by spelling out their calling, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (Jn 20:21) and gave them the promise of divine power saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22). Later on prior to His ascension He instructed them to wait for this endowment of power from above (Acts 1:5-8).

On the day of Pentecost, those weak and timid disciples did experience the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit in their lives (Acts 2:1-4). Peter, who denied Jesus thrice before crucifixion and the same Peter who locked himself in a room along with his associates in fear, “stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd” (a big crowd) (Acts 2:14). His words were so powerful that the people who heard him, “were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers what shall we do?’” That powerful anointed message resulted in the conversion and baptism of three thousand souls! (v 41).

Friends, are you sitting where those disciples sat on that day with a desperate sense of powerlessness to witness for the One who shed his precious blood to redeem you? The resurrected Lord is by your side with His gentle, but firm admonition, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” There lies the secret for bold witnessing for Christ. Do not wait any longer. Kneel down and pray for God’s gift of the Holy Spirit, claiming His promise in Luke 11:11-13.

4. People who Doubt (Jn 20:27).

“Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas, one of the twelve disciples was not with the group in the room when Jesus appeared and said peace to them. But those who saw the resurrected Lord proclaimed that they saw Him. But Thomas said to them, “Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe it.” Jesus did not condemn the doubting Thomas, instead, he

took great pains to clarify the doubts and provide assurance to a weak faith, and demonstrated an indepth understanding. Regarding John the Baptist, Jesus testified once, “I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John” (Lk 7:28). But even such a great prophet like John doubted and sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask Him, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Jn 7:19). Instead of finding fault with him for his lack of faith, Jesus replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard” (Lk 7:22). It is interesting to note that Jesus testified about the greatness of John the Baptist only after the latter had raised the doubt!

Similarly Jesus did not find fault with the doubting Thomas, instead, he appeared to Him and said, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” A gentle corrective admonition! May be, some of you have genuine questions in your minds concerning your Christian faith. Don’t worry. The resurrected Christ is by your side and ready to clarify the doubts and ready to accept you into His fold.

5. People who Delay Witnessing (Jn 20:17)

“Go and tell my brothers.” Mary Magdalene was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ. She was around the tomb till the Lord appeared to her, addressing her, ‘Mary.’ When she turned toward Him in great excitement, she could not control herself but cry out, ‘Rabboni’ (which means teacher). She was immersed in the excitement of meeting her Master and being with Him in deep devotion. In the words of Jesus, ‘she was holding on to Him’ (Jn 20:17). But her primary responsibility was to go and tell others that she saw the risen Lord! Mary did not realize the urgency or the seriousness of spreading the good news to others. She forgot about those fellowmen who were in great depression, dejection and desperation of being left alone without their beloved Master. Mary was supposed to relieve them of their grief and despondency by sharing the good news of the risen Lord. But she lingered around Jesus.

In the Old Testament time, Lot delayed to escape God’s impending judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:16), while the lepers

who plundered the goods of the Aramean camp took a wise decision not to wait until daylight to share the good news of the plunder with their fellow brothers (2 Ki 7:3-9).

We, Christians must take serious issues seriously. Enjoying the blissful experience of God's presence in worship services is certainly covetous for a believer, but if he would linger around the compassionate Christ, the Commander-in-chief who ordered the Great Commission to the church would certainly rebuke, saying, "go and tell my brothers that your Lord is risen from the dead and is alive for ever and is willing to enter human hearts who would call upon His Name!" (Read Romans 10:13-15).

6. People who Toil in Fishing (Jn 21:5-12).

"Bring some of the fresh fish you have just caught" (v 41). Simon Peter told his associates, "I am going out to fish" and others responded, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing (Jn 21:2-3). Jesus stood on the shore and watched them in the early hours. He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" The reply came in the negative. Jesus said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some" (v 6a). When they obeyed His Word, they had a good catch of fish, 153 large fish. When the disciples landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it and some bread. Jesus prepared a breakfast for the labourers and said to them, "Come and have breakfast" (vv 9,12). Further He added, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught" (v 10). Here we have an excellent portrait of the resurrected Master's heart concerning the work and the workers involved in fishing. Jesus watched the fruitless efforts of the workers for the whole night. He was concerned about their fruitless labour and got closer to them on the seashore. He guided them to correct their fishing site. Jesus, mindful of their hard labour and the resultant physical need took initiative to cook their breakfast and extended a warm invitation to eat it. He showed interest in the fresh and latest catch of fish (v 10).

How many lessons for the fishers of men and for the leaders! When the labourers lose heart finding no fruit of their labour, the resurrected Lord is by their side watching all their labour and disappointments. He offers corrections and guidance for a good catch.

Only if we yield and obey Him, we are certain to have a good catch. When we are tired and weary of our labour, the risen Lord is ready with good food prepared for us. The Lord of souls also is very anxious to see fresh and 'just caught fish.' A soulwinner has to be on the job and should be able to present fresh souls to the resurrected Fisher of souls.

7. People who Love the Lord (Jn 21:16).

"Do you truly love me?" Peter did love Jesus. He confessed, "I will never fall away even if all fall away on account of You" (Mt 26:33). But we know that he miserably failed and denied his Master thrice before crucifixion. His serious lapse broke his heart and he wept bitterly as a sign of repentance for his backsliding. Jesus wanted to ascertain the true love of His disciple. How gently Jesus dealt with this backslidden and then restored disciple! On the first two appearances of the risen Lord, Peter would have expected a rebuke. But the Master did not raise the issue at all. Now, during the third appearance, after giving a (personally cooked) breakfast, the Master gently broached the issue: "Peter, do you truly love me more than these?" Thrice he repeated the same question. The third time it hurt Peter and he came to full surrender, saying, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you" (v 17). Peter had three responsibilities to carry out on account of his love for Jesus: to *feed the lambs*; to *feed the sheep*; and to *take care of the sheepfold*.

I think, Jesus wanted Peter to follow the example of the Chief Shepherd who laid His own life for the flock and not to choose the path of the hired hand who runs away from feeding and taking care of the flock during crisis (Jn 10:12). Another lesson to Peter was that he must follow Jesus not minding about other shepherds (Jn 21:22). Peter questioned about his associate, John and asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus retorted, saying, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that for you? You must follow Me." The resurrected Good Shepherd's wish concerning His under shepherds is that they feed the lambs, the sheep and take care of their flock's welfare while following the Master's foot prints.

May the Risen Lord minister to our hearts even today as we celebrate His resurrection during this Easter season. f

EXPERIENCES OF EXCELLENCE!

IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE...

The year was 1986 and as a Literature student in the American College, Madurai, Tamilnadu, I could manage only 56%, 4% less than what I had promised my parents.

While I have been involved in many ministries (writing, preaching, leading youth groups, translating, etc.), the ministry I enjoyed most was the Vacation Bible School. That year I went as VBS Director to one Centre from May 1-10, another Centre from 11-20 and finally one more from 21-30. After the final day program I reached late in the night, followed by a short nap headed straight to College. The semester exams were to begin in five days flat. I did my best and prepared in those few days that were available and went for the exams. Let me admit, a thought suddenly passed my mind, if I should have avoided the last lap of VBS I could have prepared well. I was getting a bit nervous. However, as usual I went to the chapel, prayed and went to the exam hall. After the exam, when my professor asked how I fared, before I could respond, my friend Shenbaganathan said, "Sir, he will get 80%!!!. Getting 60+% in Literature was a big thing. Hence everybody laughed at it and left for the day.

I came the next day as usual at about 12.00 for the exam at 2.00 pm. My professor, Mr. R. Kalidas met me on the way and said that I had brought laurel to the department and college. The external evaluator Dr. Krishna Ponnusamy had wanted him to specially congratulate me. With blood pumping and heart gushing, I ran to the department. There was a crowd with so much commotion near the notice board, surprised voices, shocked looks and shaking heads in disbelief. Since I had joined last in the department my name could find a place only in the last of the attendance register. I managed to squeeze in and looked at the last number against which read 80%. My joy knew no bounds. Needless to mention that I went to the chapel with an emotional and grateful heart and entered the

exam hall all the more rejuvenated. The following year when I received the James M. Hess prize for the best outgoing student, I was also informed that 80% was a record of sorts in the college, especially in an external evaluation and what happened in 1989 continues to be a record till today 2006. My God is no one's debtor.

Later, I saw an envelope from GREMALTES Hospital. Few months ago they had organized a State level essay competition and I had sent my entry for the same. The letter informed that mine was the second best entry and I was invited to receive the cash prize. While thrilled, I could not prevent that thought flashing across: second, again. With all those mixed emotions I went off to sleep.

The next morning while I was walking to my department not so normal, Vinayakamoorthy my batchmate ran to me saying, "They have selected you, go and see the board at the bursar's office." I went there and to my pleasant surprise I saw my name selected for the Church of Scotland Scholarship for the best outgoing PG Student for 1989. It was a citation combined with a cash award of Rs.1000.00. Knowing one more time that God is in control of people, situations and our lives, I did thank the Lord profusely and asked for His forgiveness on my attitude of complaining and reasoning. I also sent a telegram to my father urging him to take the next train or bus to Chennai and be part of this honour.

The same year I joined a major Christian Organisation and did my best for almost 13 years in various States. In 2004 we were led to move to the Eastern part of India and we responded as a family. We are new to this area, language, culture and not many friends around, but trying to do our best and attempting everything *in pursuit of excellence...* Because the One who has called is faithful!

—D.G. Jebaraj, Country Director of
Compassion East India, Kolkata

EXCELLENT DOCTORING!

Everything started one fine day when I, as the Nodal officer of Pulse Polio programme, Bangalore Mahanagara Palike—was looking out for volunteers to adopt uncovered areas which belongs neither to corporation nor to municipality to take up health activities where no Government hospital or even a clinic exists.

I participated in a regular Bible study in an apartment in that area and requested the prayer group to help me in the Pulse Polio programme to be conducted in their area. The group rejected my humble request outrightly giving the reason that Corporation has to look into the matter as it is collecting the taxes from the Public, at the same time complaining about bad roads and unsafe drinking water in their area.

I took their denial as a challenge and worked hard to arrange the programme and succeeded in achieving the goal. Till date not a single child below 5 years is left unimmunized in that area. The programme was appreciated by the WHO authorities who came for inspection.

Among those who encouraged me was a local Baptist Church which sent 4 volunteers from its youth group to take part in the programme and the food for the volunteers was also supplied by the congregation for all the 4 days in all the 4 rounds. Another CSI Church allowed us to use their parish hall to be used as a booth during the programme.

Once during the programme the food meant for the Volunteers was side tracked by local anti social elements for their personal function and I could only stand and helplessly watch the drama.

It is so funny that the area is flooded with social workers. 5 Nursing colleges and 5 MSW colleges exist in that area. But they show no interest in putting their studies to practice.

We have 44 cases of TB who were walking upto 10 kms a day to get the daily dosage of free medicine supplied by Government. So, I am happy in announcing that we have made a DOT centre within the community.

We identified 2 cases of Aids affected pregnant women. Ofcourse, protection is given to them so that they do not pass on the

disease to their children. But what will happen to these children later on when the mothers die of this disease?

So day by day my work is increasing and I feel the touch of God as I come across tribulations and success in my endeavour.

One of the Hindu religious institutions recognized my work and recommended my name to the Tamilnadu Government and I received the award for Best Social Worker on 4th December 2005. Yes, one obedient woman can make a dent!

—Dr. Sushila David, Bangalore f

(Contn. page 11)

> God enabled us to start “NAMBIKKAI” (Meaning—Hope) ministry through which the name of Jesus is proclaimed.

> We were invited to Israel as special guests to share our testimony in many places. We could share the love of Christ to about 1500 non-christians and dignitaries from the Rotary club platform. We were awarded the Gandhi Award for sacrifice. In Kodaikanal Rotary Gathering we shared the dais with political leaders like Mr. L. Ganesan and Mr. Vaiko. When BBC, CNN and Jeya TV interviewed us, lakhs heard of the love of God. Many telephoned us and said, “we have never seen Jesus. But we see Him in you.” May God’s name be glorified. f

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I, J. D. Sapphire, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

J.D. Sapphire

April 2006

Signature of publisher

From Tragedy To Triumph!

Mrs. Choodamani Parameswaran

On the black Sunday of 26 December 2004 the playful waves of the sea rose up in a furious rage to engulf thousands of people. My dear husband, our three children and seven of our relatives were caught up in the mayhem. The only survivor was my husband. But I believe God chose us to wipe away the tears of many and give them hope.

Looking back... God who chose me before the foundation of the world is completing that for which He chose me. We were married and settled in Nagapattinam as non-Christians. Having heard about Christ in school and college we surrendered our lives to Christ one fine morning.

Thereafter every Sunday we visited Samathanpettai, a fishing village and preached the love of Christ. We used to celebrate Christmas and distribute clothes and food in the village. Our vision and burden was to raise Christians among the community who will preach Christ to their own people.

After Tsunami took away our three children, my mother-in-law observed our closer walk with God, fellowship with God's children and our faith that children are resting in the bosom of God; and at last placed her trust in Christ. Seven months after Tsunami she died at the good old age of 86 declaring to everyone that she was going to Jesus to be with her grand children.

The tragedy taught us the vanity of life. Where was God? Should I live or die? For three days I convulsed like a worm thrown in fire. Then I heard God's voice:



BLESSING/April 2006

“When I saved your husband among the thousands who perished, could I not have saved your children? I have purpose for your life.”

That filled me with comfort and divine peace. We dedicated our lives to bring hope to millions who are broken hearted. We channelised our sorrow to bring salvation to Tsunami orphans. We have taken in 18 of them under our roof as our own children. Today the love of Christ shines in our Home of Hope. God is healing our wounds. He has made us witnesses for thousands.

> On the 100th day after Tsunami the documentary of our life was telecast by NDTV and the news was beamed across the nations that the love of Christ and the hope of resurrection were the strength of this couple.

> March 2005, India Today rolled off the press bearing our news, comforting many.

> The former President of USA, Mr. Bill Clinton, during his visit to Nagapattinam on 27.05.06 met us. With astonishment he asked, “How could you rise up from such a great loss?” Our answer was, “The secret is Christ



in us the hope of Glory according to Colossians 1:27.” Not only that, in TV and Newspapers Mr. Clinton's words were, “I can never forget in my lifetime the most courageous couple I've ever met.” Further, *Aananda Vikadan, Kumudam, Kungumam, Aval Vikadan, Junior Vikadan, Times of India, Hindustan Times and other journals* in many languages, many States, all over the world published our faith and the name of our Lord was glorified. (Contd. page 10)

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 Praise God for the 187 youth who were blessed by a three-day special meeting conducted in Nangpah, Meghalaya. Missionaries J.J. Selvaraj and J. Gnanapragasam challenged the participants for holy living. One of the participants of **Jabalpur Blesso 2005** organized this programme.

Â 75 young people committed their lives for the victorious Christian living in a youth meeting conducted in Borjulie in which, missionary Leence Joel shared the Word of God.

Â A Blessing Readers' Meet was held in Kohima, Nagaland. Missionaries V. Chelliah and L. Stephen Dhanaraj ministered. Pray for the follow up.

Â Pray for the following to experience a healing touch: Ruth Gomes (Eye injury); Dr. Bapphine (Lump in the throat) and Mrs. Swapna Makhanlal Das (Kidney Problem).

ANDHRA PRADESH

Â Fifteen people committed their lives to Christ in Vizianagaram after watching the Gospel TV Programme arranged by our team.

Â The youth in Guntur are showing keen interest to study the Word of God. Pray for Mr. Madhukar who is leading the prayer cells.

Â The missionaries in this State gathered for a time of prayer and planning for this year in which our Chairman Dr. M. Arthur John exhorted them from the Word of God to excel in life, family and ministry.

Â In a Sozo conducted in Warangal, missionary Manivannan challenged the participants to

reveal the beauty of Jesus through their life style. 140 youth turned up for this call.

Â Eight thousand tracts *Blessing for you* were distributed in a festival in Vijayawada. Pray that the Lord may open their eyes to understand the truth.

Â Pray for missionary Saroj Kumar Apat to get a suitable life partner.

GUJARAT

Â 200 people in Aakroal and Mitral villages heard the gospel with keen interest. Pray for their salvation.

Â Praise God for the 45 youth who have attended the Halo follow up meeting in Nadiad and assured their involvement in youth ministry.

Â God enabled our team to start a new missionary prayer cell in Nadiad. Fifteen people earnestly prayed for the nation in the first gathering.

Â Pray for the salvation of Raju and Vishnu of Sampapura village who are genuine seekers.

Â Pray for suitable life partners for Mr. Sallins, Ms. Shilpa and Ms. Philomina who are our youth leaders in Nadiad.

JHARKHAND

Â Building up ideal and witnessing Christian families is the need of this hour. Having this focus in mind, our missionaries prayerfully organized a *Blessing Family Camp* in Hazaribagh. 500 people pre-registered for this special programme and altogether 600 people participated from various denominations. Missionary couple John Thomas-Rebekah fruitfully ministered in this camp. God motivated the local people to meet all the financial needs of this huge camp and there was left over too. Special sessions were conducted to encourage the participants. Many decided to live a God pleasing family life. The enthusiastic involvement of the local volunteers was appreciable. All the participants testified that this family camp was an unique experience.

KARNATAKA

Â 50 people in Gudigeri village heard the good news for the first time. Pray that the power of the gospel may deliver them from bondages.

Â Shobha, one of our contacts shared the gospel to 75 colleagues. Pray that all our contacts may become fishers of men (Mt 4:19).

Â God miraculously delivered Shanthi Naik from demon possession. Pray for her salvation.

Â Our contacts in Vidhya Nagar are facing severe opposition. Pray for God's intervention.

Â Pray for the divine deliverance of the following: Ruzaria and Bascoval (alcoholism); Ganesh and Chinnammal (family disharmony); Hema (Asthma); Ravi Shingadi (depression); Parmesh Javoor (financial need for his studies).

Â A three-day fasting prayer was conducted in Alnavar in which sixty believers fervently prayed for the revival.

Â Praise God for Gemmu, a representative of Banjara people group who is burdened for the salvation of his own people. Pray that God may honour his desire and bring the people into His fold.

Â Pray for God's miraculous healing touch on the following: Missionary Hanna Gently (cancer); Pillai (Bone cancer); Anand (brain injury).

Â The night meetings in the Gowli villages have been restarted. People are so eagerly participating in these meetings.

Â Missionary S. Regunathan lost his father recently. Parting with the dear ones is always painful. Pray for the salvation of all the family members.

KERALA

Â God helped our team to start a monthly missionary prayer in Vattapparai. Pray that many more people may become prayer warriors in this prayer cell.

Â More than 2000 people were blessed by the challenging message of Bro. R. Stanley in IPC Convention in Kottayam and 50% of the participants committed their lives when he gave the call. Rs. 30,000/- worth of literature was sold in these meetings.

Â Pray for the people who attended the revival meetings conducted in Balaramapuram and Kazhunad, so that they may bring the revival flames in this State.

MADHYA PRADESH

Â The seekers from Deori and Banda villages were called for the special meetings conducted in which 21 people participated. Pray for their salvation.

Â Praise God for Jagar who has restored his faith in Jesus after eight years. Pray that he may continue to stand firm in his commitment.

Â 300 people heard the gospel through *Jesus* film in the Rachai village. Pray that they may find and follow the Truth.

Â Many of our prayer cell students in Jabalpur are showing keen interest to learn more about the Word of God. Pray that the Holy Spirit may enable them to understand the Bible in a proper way.

Â 80 unmarried youth were blessed by the counselling seminar conducted in Jabalpur in which missionary couple Malarselvan-Jyothi gave profitable and practical counselling.

Â The students who participated in the Exam Goers' Meet in Katni and Jabalpur were greatly encouraged by the Word of God.

Â In order to develop the local leaders a Deacons' Training Programme was conducted in Shahgarh. The teaching of missionaries Raja and Anantharaj benefited 18 elders.

Â Roshan of Jakther village is facing severe problem in his family. Pray that God may intervene and deliver him in this situation.

MAHARASHTRA

Â Praise God for the 200 children in Gargoti who are studying the Bible lessons with much interest. Pray that the richness of God's Word may flourish through these tender hearts.

Â In order to develop the ministry among children in our fields, a training programme was held in Jath where 20 believers participated and decided to help in teaching the children God's Word.

Â 21 people in our fields have recently obeyed the Lord in water baptism. Pray that they may grow in the Lord.

Â Pray for the salvation of the 80 youth who listened to the Gospel in a special meeting conducted in Wardhaman Nagar, Nagpur.

Â God answered the prayers of our missionaries and performed a miracle in the life of one of our contacts in Nagpur who was bedridden for the past ten months. Praise the Lord.

Â Mrs. Manoharam Sigamani, the dear mother of missionary S. Mohan had her home call on 25 February. Praise God for the fruitful life of this godly mother.

ORISSA

Â Praise God for the 200 youth who were blessed by the 'Blessing Youth Retreat' conducted in Diptipur in which Prof. Robinson challenged the participants. 75 committed their lives for holy living.

Â God enabled our missionaries to organize a medical camp in Bargarh area with the help of Medivision. More than 3,000 people were treated in this camp. 303 people were operated and given lens in the eye camp.

Â In an exclusive fasting prayer conducted for the key persons of this State, 50 people participated and experienced God's presence. Mr. J. Santhakumar & Mr. Ezekiel shared the Word of God.

Â 500 people joyfully participated in the Blessing camp held in Balimela and 240 people committed their lives to Christ in this meeting.

Â God anointed five of our prayer cell girls in Cuttack with His Holy Spirit. Pray that they all become active witnesses for Christ.

Â Annapurnam, Mandagini, Puspha and Chenndi have accepted Christ as their personal saviour. Pray for their spiritual growth.

Â 27 elders were benefited through the church elders training programme conducted in Kurumbur. Missionary couple M.C. Ponniah & Sathiavathy taught the biblical principles for character building and church growth.

RAJASTHAN

Â God blessed the Exhortation meet for Exam Goers held in Ajmer in which 60 students joyfully participated. Mr. Swarnaraj Thomas encouraged the participants through the Word of God and his personal testimony.

Â Missionary Grace Vyas took classes for 60 Christian workers' wives on the topic "How to be a useful vessel for God in the family and the society."

Â Praise God for Major John, one of our well-wishers in Ajmer who donated his scooter for the missionary work. Two wheelers and four wheelers in good condition are very helpful to accelerate the gospel work.

Â By the grace of God a youth Bible study was started in Nim-ka-thana; eight youth have committed their lives for holy living in a recent meeting.

Â God enabled our missionaries to start two new prayer cells in Jaipur. Pray that a youth force for God may be established in this city.

Â Pray for the following: Emrin (diabetes); Rajnish Singh (met with an accident); Shelbala (ulcer); Kamala (fearful dreams); Jheeth (frequent abortion); Pratap Singh (heavy debts); (Jithu (polio & mental illness).

Â Praise the Lord for Praveenkumar who helped very much to construct a temporary Worship Shed in Srimadhapur. Pray for the missionary couple Victor Jeyakumar-Belvin who are based here to learn the local language and minister strategically.

Â The Lord graciously protected Mr. & Mrs. David P. Dhas of Khetri Nagar from a road accident. Pray for the protection of all our lay leaders and supporters.

Â The adjacent plot of our church in Nim-ka-thana is available for sale. To develop a training centre for Rajasthan, this land will be very helpful. Wanted Rs. 2.5 Lakhs.

TAMIL NADU

Â Praise God for Logamma who got the divine deliverance from demon possession. Pray for her spiritual growth.

Â God helped our missionaries to restart the children's Bible club in Kottapatti and Pungamaduvu after a long gap. 65 children are regularly coming with much interest.

Â God blessed the children's camp conducted in Sitheri Hills, in which 100 children enthusiastically participated. A team from Chennai taught the Bible lessons through skits and songs.

Â Pray for the salvation of Chennamma, Malliga, Rani, Vediappan, Murugan and Kasthuri who are coming newly to the worship service.

Â The Gospel was shared through *Jesus* film in 15 villages in and around Sitheri Hills. Pray that God may open the eyes of understanding to accept Christ as their personal Saviour.

Â Pray for God's protection for our missionaries in Palamalai where there are lots of wild bears moving commonly. 120 people listened to the gospel recently.

Â The missionaries in Tamilnadu fields gathered for a time of prayer and fellowship, in which our Chairman Dr. M. Arthur John encouraged and edified them through the Word of God. Pray that all our missionaries may work for God with much excellence this year.

Â In a special meeting conducted in Marthandam, missionary Y. Paul Dinakaran challenged 350 youth for holy living and many were anointed with the Holy Spirit.

Â The Lord blessed the Tamilnadu key persons meet held in Trichy on 11 & 12 March 2006. Mr. J. D. Sapphire, Mr. J. Gabriel & Mr. Arthur (FMPB) motivated the participants to aggressively involve in the missionary enterprise.

Â Please pray for the divine healing of our key persons: Dr. R.J.D. Sugirtharaj, Palayamkottai & Mr. D. Samraj, Kuzhithurai (Heart ailment) and Mrs. Baby Raja, Budalur (Kidney problem).

UTTAR PRADESH

Â Pray for these lay leaders who are investing their time, talents and treasure for the missionary cause: Mr. Vipul Singh of Allahabad, Mr. Avneesh Lal of Jhansi and Mr. C. Selvaraju of Lucknow.

Â Missionary couple Subhash Waghmare & Suchita have moved to Lucknow from Gargoti, Maharashtra for training and cross-cultural exposure.

WEST BENGAL

Â Praise God for the open door He has given for ministry among the residents of Army campus, Bengdubi. Three families participated in a recent Bible study.

Â Murugesan, Ramalingam, Sumir Dutta, Shanmugam and Radhakrishnan are earnestly seeking the truth. Pray for their salvation.

Â Praise the Lord for the feedback we are receiving for the *Blessing* magazine in Bengali. A computer is needed immediately to speed up the work.

GENERAL

Â Pray for all the missionary kids and the children of our ardent supporters, who are appearing for different examinations. God should provide them good careers to influence the society.

Â The B. Miss. Graduation ceremony of the first batch of field missionaries will be held in Chennai on Saturday April 8. Pray for the missiological training and the ongoing education of the servants of God, which make them stronger and sharper for God's ministry.

Â About sixty of our senior staff will be gathering for a time of prayer and retrospection in Chennai, 9-12, April 2006. Pray that all the members of this Senior Staff Syndicate (SSS) may be role models to the juniors.

LITERATURE

Â Blessing book *Jolly family* written by Dr. Lilian Stanley in Gujarati is ready for printing. Pray for the financial need.

Â God blessed the effort of our missionaries to distribute Rs. 15,000/- worth of Blessing books in Vadodara, Gujarat.

Â By the grace of God the Blessing book *The World of Youth* by Dr. Lilian Stanley was released in Kannada. Thanks to all the four translators.

Â Pray for the publication of the Blessing book *The Balanced Christian*, written by Brother R. Stanley in Garo language, which is ready for printing. Pray for God's hands on our Blessing Publications. f

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