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God, an Ever-Present Refuge



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ILLUMINER

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A World Without Christ



Emmanuel

Loneliness is one of the most significant problems many face in these COVID times. Many try to overcome it with affections for the virtual world, whereas some try to drown it in alcohol and drugs. All human attempts to fill the void of loneliness fail miserably since God's vacuum in man's heart cannot be filled with anything of this material world. But God has devised the Only way, which is to not only help us conquer loneliness but also give us everlasting joy and eternal peace. Such is made possible by God with us (Emmanuel), who fills our life with joy inexpressible by His Presence.

People have searched on earth to find the answer for peace but to no avail! Unless the search is in the proper place, the answer received is nada. The peace we often search for is the absence of trouble, but true peace is the Presence of God, which assures us of security even when situations are not favorable. We will find Him and His peace

Sleepy little Bedford Falls is the home of George Bailey—the good guy with a big heart who feels it is his responsibility to help everyone in town with their problems. Meanwhile, the villain in It's a Wonderful Life is Mr. Potter, who owns practically everything in town except the Bailey Building and Loan.

While going to make a bank deposit for the Building and Loan, George's Uncle Billy loses the money, and Potter finds it. George's life quickly unravels as the bank examiner makes a pre-Christmas visit, and it appears George has stolen the missing money.

In desperation, George calls on God to rescue him. The answer to his prayer is Clarence—an angel who has yet to earn his wings. George tells Clarence that everyone would be better off if he had never been born.

George is granted his wish—he experiences what the world would be like without him, and realizes it would be a much darker place.

A MINISTER'S NIGHTMARE

In Streams in the Desert, Mrs. Charles E. Cowan describes a Christmas card depicting a clergyman who falls asleep on Christmas Eve and dreams of a world without Jesus Christ. There

are no stockings waiting to be filled and no churches filled with worshipers.

The pastor is asked to visit a dying woman, but when he opens his Bible, he is horrified to discover it ends with the Book of Malachi. It contains no New Testament.

Suddenly, he wakes up and hears the choir singing in the church, and realizes he had only been dreaming. However, he is left to consider what the world would be like if the Son of God had not been born in Bethlehem.

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The Vision : To illuminate God’s Holy Word through Spirit-filled insightful pen.

The Mission : Provide the reader with guidance for life and godliness through inspired authors.

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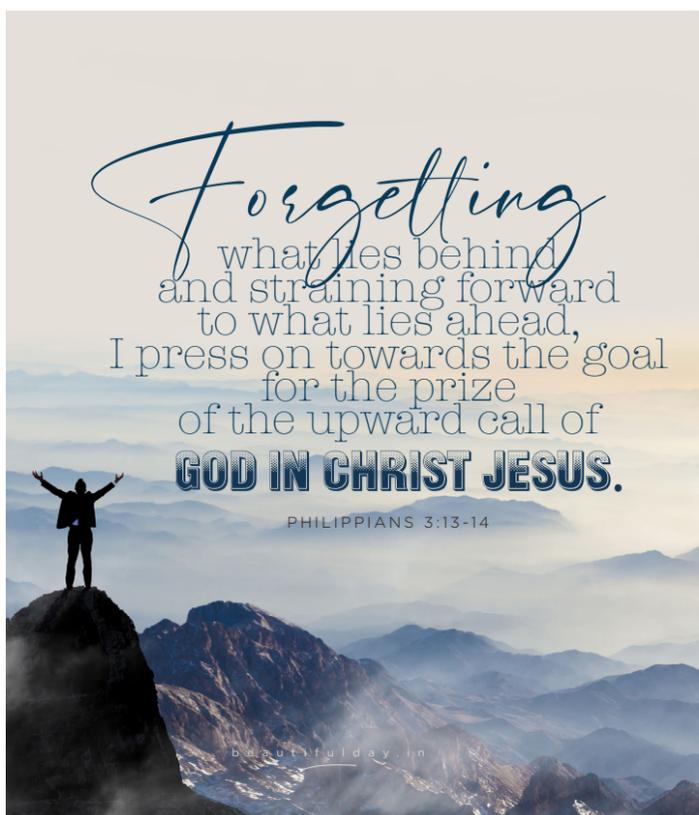
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FROM THE **editor**



WELCÔMED HÔME!

“ There is a place called the house of God which is the home where Christ is the head and we are accepted by the Father in the Beloved Son.”

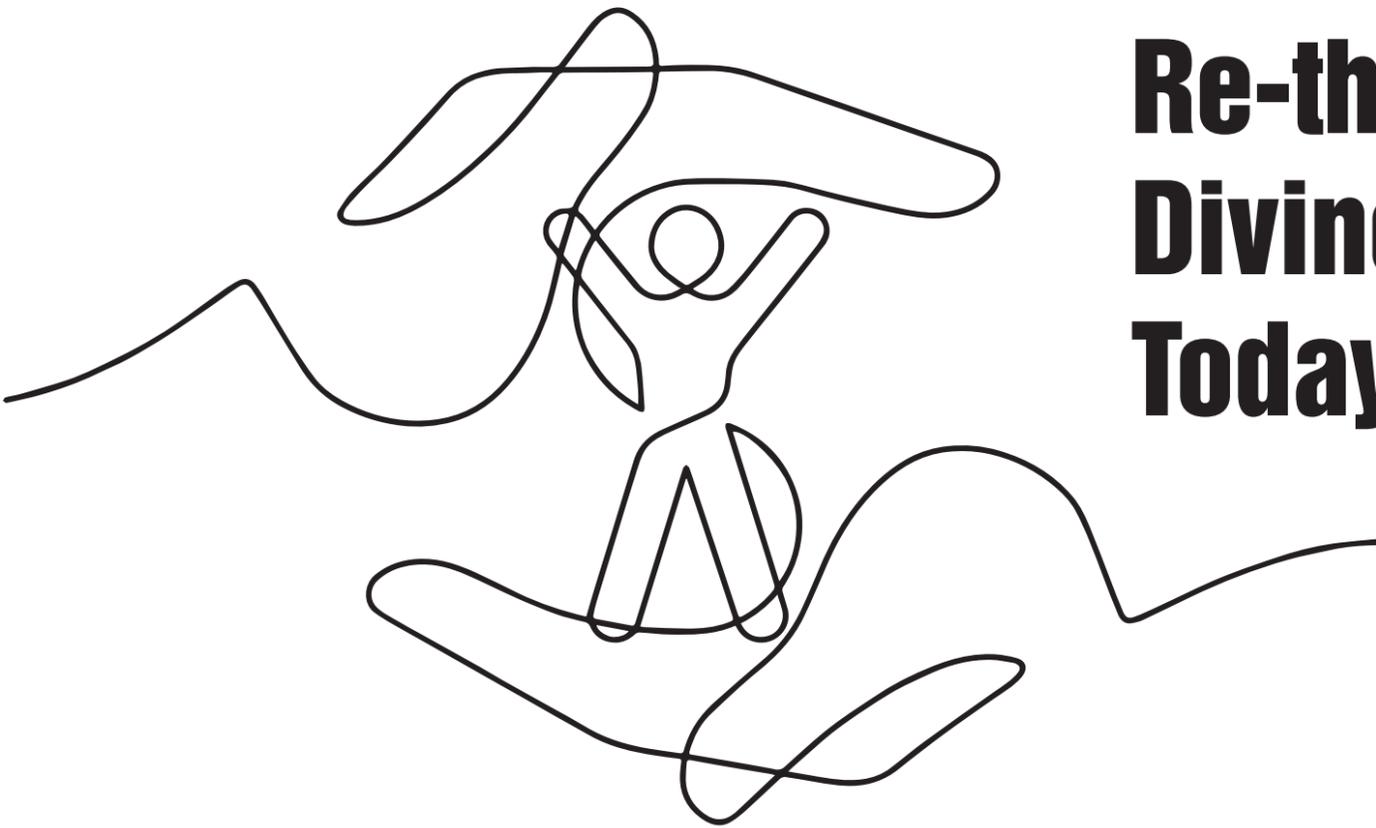
One of the greatest joys of any person living in any culture is having a home to come to (even if they do not have a house to live in). Home is where one lives permanently, and love and acceptance are given to its members. But not everyone needs to have such a place on earth to call a home where acceptance of being a son is granted graciously. Nevertheless, there is a place called the house of God, which is the home where Christ is the head, and we are accepted by the Father in the Beloved Son to be His sons and daughters.

God’s home is the place of acceptance of the repentant! Rev. Billy Graham’s daughter Ruth made mistakes in marriage, which led her to flee from her second husband in fear, and with nowhere else to turn, she drove to her Father’s home in North Carolina. As she got out of the car, Billy Graham wrapped his arms around her and said, “welcome home” without shaming or condemnation. The younger son we call the prodigal of the Father was welcomed home when he returned with a contrite and repentant heart

after forsaking his former ways, giving no self-justification of past mistakes.

God’s home is the place of safety and security. Shaking earth is a place of worry, for we find our stability in its immovability. But even if those that are deemed immovable and unshakeable shift from their place, resulting in chaos, there is a place of steady refuge in Christ for the child of God. Even when natural forces and evil spirits are against the disciples, there is the assurance of security since Christ is in the boat.

God’s home is the place of having Christ as our own! The greatest blessing of a follower of Christ is not anything materialistic but is the possibility of having Christ as one’s own. When boiled down to its core, Apostle Paul desires to possess Christ! In gaining Christ comes the possession of hope, faith, and glory of Christ, which Peter and James understood. With Christ as ours, no matter what happens around us, we find comfort and boldness that the Eternal God is our refuge and His everlasting arms underneath us.



Re-thinking Divine Refuge Today

The word ‘refuge’ conjures up a variety of meanings depending on its application. In a general sense, it is a reliable place of protection from fatal dangers and troubles. The survival instinct is embedded in both flora and fauna to preserve them from lethal threats of nature. The plants prepare themselves to withstand rough climatic conditions caused by the changing seasons. Similarly, birds and animals protect themselves from their predators in numerous ways. Proverbs 30:26 depicts it well, “the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make their houses in the rocks.” With technological advancement, human beings also have accentuated skills and means to reduce mortality rates and extend the life span. For instance, child mortality rates are drastically dropping as the years pass by. The aging population is increasing in the world with improved conditions of life. Enhanced research techniques facilitate immediate solutions for ever-increasing threats of deadly diseases and pandemics. Despite the sophisticated protective shields humans have created against physical, economic, and social threats, the current generation is susceptible to much more toxic perils. Numerous communities globally encountering unprecedented life-threatening challenges are seeking refuge. The new generation is treading on the slippery ground of moral decay manifested as xenophobia, ethnophobia, intolerance between communities and various groups. Neo-Marxism and postmodernism play a significant role in contributing to the ideological war, identity confusion, and hatred towards ‘others.’ These pervasive vices have weakened the sense of morality, social justice, and above all, faith in God. Regrettably, the conversation around Christian life and ministry in church circles rarely grapples with these issues with much-needed profundity. The discourse on ‘God as the refuge’ is often reduced to common problems of life that governments and institutions tackle.

The Bible does point towards the broader challenges of life. The psalter expresses the theme ‘refuge in God’ using metaphors: rock, stronghold, fortress, or dwelling place. (Ps 27:1; 46:1; 71:3; 91:1), indicating protection from attacks of national and personal enemies, sickness, and other life-threatening situations. Nevertheless, the New Testament goes further warning about the dire need for rescue from the “evil age” (Gal 1:4) from the “warped and crooked generation” (Phil 2:15) that addresses the broader and more crucial issues that affect individuals and societies. The gospel of John termed this plight as “loving darkness” (John 3:19). Peter asserted that believers are called out of the darkness (1 Pet. 2:9). The apostles did see beyond the temporal threats and

“The antidote to chaos is not staging a communitarian fight and defending with weapons but unleashing the virtues of God’s kingdom through life and ministry of the Church”

addressed the devastating effect of the evil that crippled society. They portrayed Christ as the ultimate beacon of hope that guarantees rescue from the disastrous influence of the present evil age (Gal 1:3, 4). Christ, the Servant King, set the example of establishing justice without violence and strife (Mt 12:19, 20). Jesus paved the foundation of the Church as an agent of liberation from systemic evil rooted in a narrow vision of humanity as communities and groups. Sadly, unfaithful servants of the Church today permitting some of these elements of the evil age - institutionalism founded on money, power, and status - to enter the Church under the guise of spirituality is an aberration. Eliminating these elements from the Church will make it a solace for those bogged down by the burden of hatred and rivalry; rejection and ridicule, abuse and violence. The antidote to chaos is not staging a communitarian fight and defending with weapons but unleashing the virtues of God’s kingdom through life and ministry of the Church.



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Pastor Thomas Samuel is Minister at Word of Hope Christian Fellowship Luton (affiliated to AOG, U.K.), and Chaplain at NHS Bedfordshire Hospitals U.K.; online Discipleship Coach with Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. He is married to Praisya, and they have three children.



Under God's Wings

“He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings, you shall take refuge;
His truth shall be your shield and buckler” (Psalm 91:4).

Home is where our heart is. No matter how far we go and how old we grow, our home will always be the place of our greatest affection. It is a place of love and warmth for most people. A home is a refuge or a safe place that protects from the elements and external threats. Yet, many people in this world do not have a home or loved ones. There is a place where all of humanity can take shelter and find refuge. It is under the wings of Yahweh, the God Almighty! ‘Under His wings’ is a metaphor for the protective shelter of God’s presence. The imagery alludes to a mother bird keeping her hatchlings under her wings to nurture, protect, and train them. Considering God as a ‘sheltering refuge’ is a beautiful allegory. Being protected by the Creator, Himself is a great honor and solace. The thought of God as our refuge creates absolute fearlessness. The worries of this life give way to happiness and joy as we enjoy God’s protection.

King David is the best example of someone who understood God as a refuge. He was on the run for most of his life from those who wanted to kill him. But he always found safety in the Lord and said, “My salvation and my honor rest on God, my strong rock; my refuge is in God. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts before Him, God is our refuge” (Psalm 62:7–8). David urges us to pour out our hearts to the Lord and trust in Him. In

God’s presence, there is security, safety, care, and guidance.

Psalm 91:1 says, “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.” Not everyone can enjoy the protection of the Almighty God. Those who willingly take the initiative to abide with Him can enjoy His rest, peace, and safety. In the wilderness journey, the people of Israel worshiped God in the tabernacle. Only the high priest could go once a year to atone for the people’s sin in its holiest place. However, by Jesus Christ’s death on the cross, anyone who believes in Him can now have salvation through Him. They can enter into the shelter of the Most High and enjoy the protection and care of the Almighty God. This does not mean that all is always well for those who believe in Christ. Jesus told us that we would have troubles and tribulations in this world (John 16:33), but He promises to be present with His children always, to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:20b), and they can find peace in Him. Our life is hidden in Christ (Col 3:3). Neither death nor life or anything else will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:38). No matter what our circumstances are, the safest place to be is always under the wings of the Almighty God. He promises to be our refuge and says, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ (Heb. 13:5).

“Being protected by the Creator, Himself is a great honor and solace”



JOSSY BINZ
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Josy Binz is a student of M.A Theology at IPC Theological Seminary. She has done her Master’s degree from Alagappa University (M.A. English Literature). As a Teacher, she has worked at St. Brittos Academy, Chennai. She is presently at Al Khobar, KSA with husband Binz Varghese and two kids.



Lead me Home!

“We should find a place and time in our lives to devote to our Lord for getting a ‘fresh direction’ for our onward journey”

When one is in trouble, can he still delight in the Lord? In the spiritual perspective, the answer is a firm ‘yes.’ But the world is full of unexpected events, most of which make one sad, and therefore everyone feels unsafe and unhappy. The rich and the poor alike would say in one accord that there are no places or things in this world, which can provide long-lasting joy and peace to man. Problems one after another affect man and make him sad, which continues perennially. But those who have faith in God and lead a life according to His words will surely reach eternal happiness.

Our God gives numerous promises. These promises keep the believers hopeful and alive and provide strength to go through trials and tribulations. Indeed, we are all here in this world for a short time, and God has already made an eternal abode for those who believe in Him. Sometimes, our attitudes towards problems are a bit tricky because we may try to solve many problems and end up in more trouble. Unlike an erring machine that is fixed, God, being our Creator, knows our body and its inherent drawbacks. All the same, he has never promised life in this world without problems. Psalm 139:16 corroborates this “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in Your Book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”

The moment we come to know that we have a God who knows us well and navigates us into a shore of happiness; there will be no room for us to worry. But things go topsy-turvy when we choose to lead a life fully conformed to this world. Whereas, to remain glued to Him, we should find a place and time in our lives to devote to our Lord for getting a ‘fresh direction’ for our onward journey. Once He takes control of us, there is nothing to worry.

The psalmist in Psalm 84 expresses the longing of both “for the courts of Yahweh” – the temple in Jerusalem and “the living God” (Yahweh). He showcases the temple in this Psalm because it was God’s dwelling place—the place where people could make their closest approach to God’s presence. This Psalm was written to highlight the immense joy and happiness derived when spent in the house of the Lord. The Israelites needed to travel to

Jerusalem to worship and sacrifice God. It is very clear from the verses that they enjoyed every moment spent in His presence. It is also clear that one day spent in His presence is better than a thousand days spent elsewhere, and it is this inspiration that helps us go back to our Home to lead a successful spiritual life.

If such happiness is available in the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, how much would be our happiness when we reach our eternal abode, where our Savior and Lord Jesus will be with us?

Let us pray to our God and sing:

Precious Lord, take my hand
Lead me on, let me stand
I am tired, I’m weak, I am worn
Through the storm, through the night
Lead me on to the light
Take my hand, precious Lord
Lead me home

(The lines of the famous song written by Thomas A. Dorsey)



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Dr. Binu Daniel is a management consultant, teacher, author, and educationist. He has written numerous articles in well-established English dailies on Economics and Management issues. He lives in Germany with his wife, Reena, and two daughters.



Calling of Matthew

What an evening I had! Checking on how many views and likes I got for the pictures I posted last night on Facebook and Instagram of my Best Employee Award ceremony at FTA (Federal Tax Association), I realized what I was awarded did not make much difference to me. I still feel lonely, hopeless, and hated. People hide their faces from me and I do not have a good companion whom I can share with what I go through. I am lost, worried, corrupt, and often despised as a traitor. Truly, I am! Nobody cares for me - colleagues, siblings, or even my parents. My name, Matthew in Hebrew, means “gift of God.” I wonder how I am His gift in this hopelessness. Can even God make a difference in my life? I feel I am the only person in the whole world with the same job, calculations, collections, but without a shoulder to cry on. I recently learned about the transformation of my Regional Manager, Zacchaeus, in Jericho when he met the Messiah, Jesus. I wish I, too, could meet this Jesus someday. Well, if He can teach me how I can be content, I am in!

I picked up another file of those who were yet to pay their taxes in my city Capernaum with all these thoughts. Hours later, I had an unusual visitor in a long robe with other men. He spoke to me so dearly. His eyes were filled with compassion and love. His name was Jesus. No one had ever spoken or even dared to come near me because I turned into a total disgrace in society. But His words, gift wrapped in mercy, penetrated deep into my heart. He said, “Follow me” (Matthew 9:9). I felt like a feather flying in the majesty of His voice. It was powerful, and I was drawn to Him like an irresistible magnet. I left my ledger on my desk and grabbed my pen and a new book instead. Little did I know that that pen would be used to compose the first handbook of the teachings of Jesus (Barclay). Overwhelmed with happiness and filled with hope, I exited the tax office forever.

The same evening, I threw a grand farewell party at home, inviting all my friends and former business associates so that they too could meet Jesus (Matt 9:10 NIV). As we dined, He taught us many things which brought hope and joy into our lives. From that time on, instead of collecting tax money, I started to collect souls for the kingdom of God.

I was released from the Roman government, and having a new Master changed my life. Now I realize how Zacchaeus was transformed after meeting Jesus to give away four times the amount he cheated while collecting taxes. Money was once everything to him, and he traded it with JESUS. Similarly, Jesus has become so much to me in a short time. Teacher, Master, Healer, Friend, and above all, He is the Messiah, the promised savior who would save the world. I started to pen down everything about Jesus and was astonished to find the prophecies from the Torah being fulfilled at His birth, through His ministry until His death and resurrection. Jesus loved me and saved me. He forgave my sins and showed compassion when no eye turned towards me. I was worthless, but He told me I was worth more than many sparrows. He called me blessed and asked me first to seek His Kingdom and righteousness. He taught me to forgive and pray for my enemies so that

“He taught me to forgive and pray for my enemies so that His kingdom may come and His will be done”



VINEETHA JOHN
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Vineetha is a passionate woman of God working in the Department of Education in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Her motto in life is to be blessed and be a blessing. She resides in UAE with her husband Anish Rajan and their two children.

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God is our Stronghold and Refuge

The word “Refuge” in Webster’s dictionary is defined as a shelter or protection from danger or distress. In Hebrew, the word is machaceh - a place where someone flees for protection. The word refuge is found 88 times in the Bible and repeatedly in the Psalms.

Did you know that there is a comprehensive network of Mountain Refuge all over the French Alps? These refuges provide shelter and protection to climbers and mountaineers. They were created as spaces where one could escape from danger - providing shelter from a harsh environment and respite from the bitter cold. There are around 20 located on the high mountain passes.

As Christians, we also have a refuge - a haven to flee to when we are afraid, distraught, confused, and overwhelmed. Psalms 46:1 says that God is our Refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. God is not “a” refuge, but He is “the” Refuge. He is our Refuge from loneliness and brokenness, from shame, from adversaries, and only those who trust in Him can receive this shelter.

Some words in the Bible are life-changing, and Refuge is one of them. For the past two years, people worldwide have been going through unprecedented hardships because of the pandemic - sickness, death, loss of jobs, etc. But we do not have to face anything alone. If you calm your heart, you can hear Him in the stillness whispering, “Here I am.” All we need to do when our hearts are filled with anguish and uncertainty is to run to our place of Refuge. He is accessible at all times. He does not put you on hold or ask you to get in line.

Psalm 46 is a Psalm for uncertain times. Amid the chaos, no matter what happens, God is our Refuge. This Psalm is one of Confidence. We have total and permanent security in Him. He is our chasah - a very present help in times of trouble. What comfort that brings! This means that He is in the midst of the situation that you are facing. We don’t have to go in search of Him. He is always there. We can stop fighting in our own strength and rest in Him. He promises to be our Refuge and will not fail us.

Martin Luther was inspired to write the wonderful hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”

after reading Psalm 46. “A mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon; He helps us free from every need that hath us now overtaken.”

So, in the place of anxiety, worries, and sorrow, remember that the Lord is our Refuge. He surrounds us and protects us. Make God your Refuge. Ask him for the strength that you need for the day. Even though things may crumble and unravel around us, we will not fear. God is our stronghold. We have hope in His strong, comforting presence as our Refuge.

**“He is our
Refuge from
loneliness and
brokenness,
from shame,
from
adversaries,
and only those
who trust
in Him can
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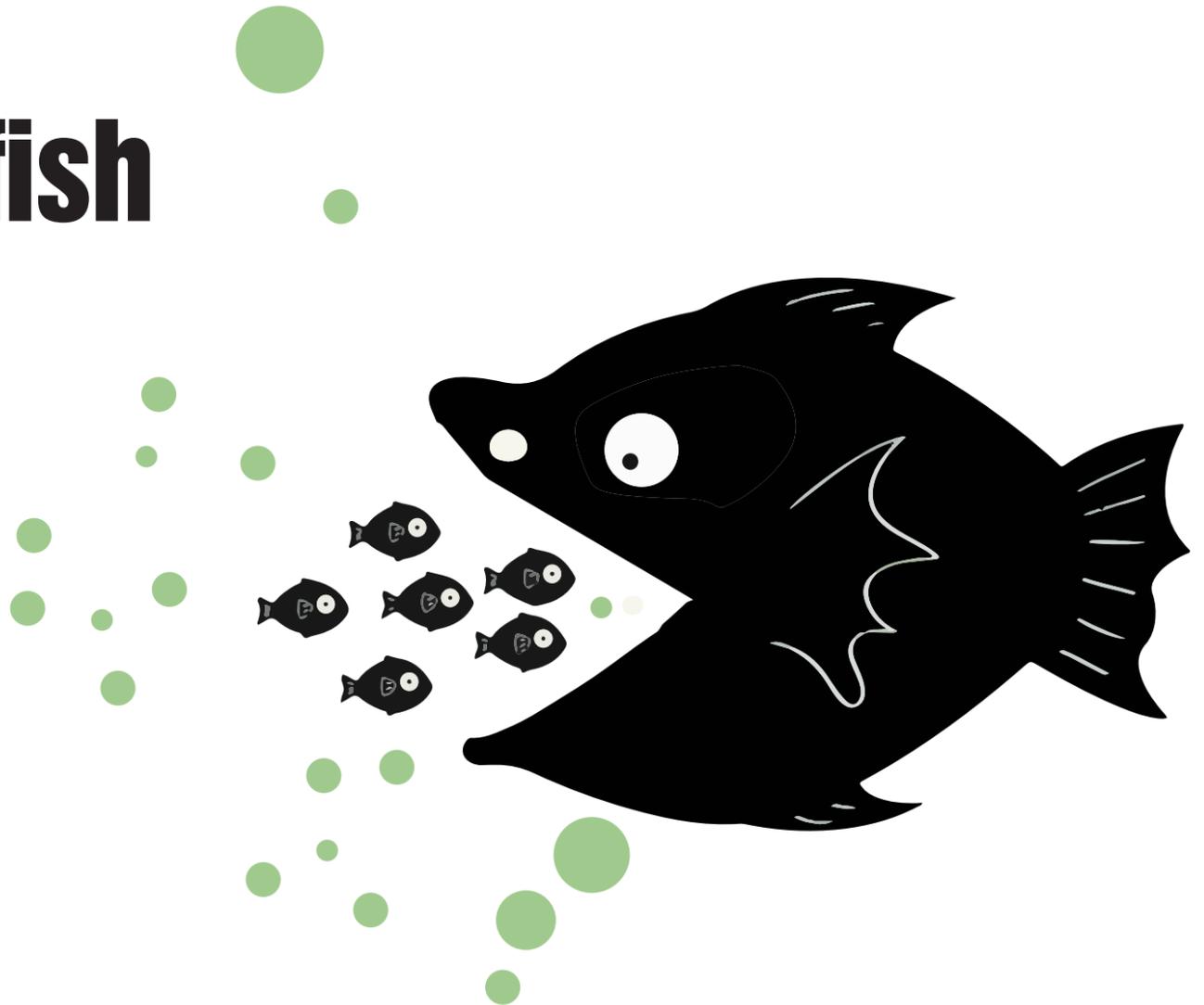


ELIZABETH JOHNSON
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Elizabeth Johnson lives in Secunderabad, India with her husband Shibu Johnson and their three children. She holds a Master’s Degree in Personnel Management and is an online Communicative & Corporate English Trainer. Elizabeth serves God by playing the flute for the worship team at New Life AG Church in Secunderabad.



The baby fish in its safe place



Kids wonder why some mother fish eat their babies. Approximately 30% of the 500 known fish species show parental care. Tilapia is a species of fish that shows parental care by mouthbrooding. These fish species continue to protect their young after hatching in a unique way by using their mouths as a protective shelter, alerting them of danger, and allowing them to swim back into their mouth to hold them safely away. They feel safe and secure within their mother's mouth, knowing she will take care of them.

Home is our comfortable place from which we leave each morning and return each evening, reducing stress from the world outside, just as we feel safe and secure when we are home with the people we love and those who love us. Our homes create an emotional refuge - a place where we feel protected, secure, private, and able to establish our identities.

In the world we live in today, where is our refuge? Psalm 46 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." The reality is that we will face troubles

and challenging times, but God Almighty is our home where we can take refuge. Our home is God, our safe place where we can open up from being closed-off to sharing our whole selves and being more willing to be vulnerable. The people in our home accept our mistakes and weaknesses as they are. Despite this, they are always ready to stand up for us whenever we mess up. Likewise, God knows everything you have ever done, thoughts, spoke or will say, yet He still loves you completely.

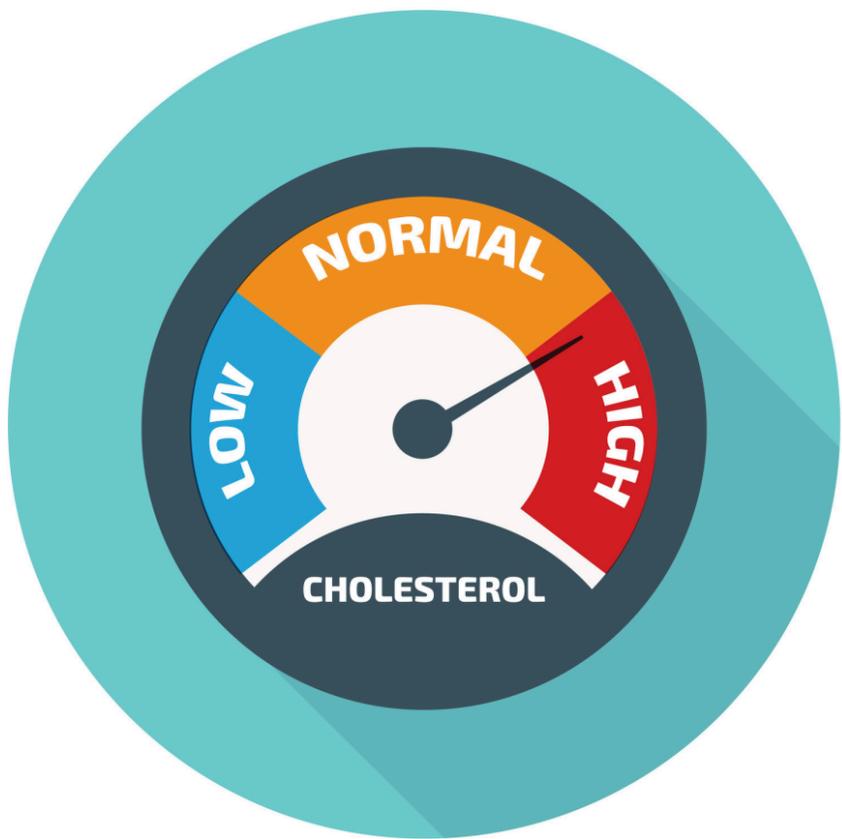
The tilapia fish babies trust their mothers to protect them from harm. Are we confident that God will protect us as His children? "The battle belongs to the Lord" (1 Sam 17:47). You can either fight your battles with your own strength or turn to God and trust in His strength to fight it for you. If you go into battle on your own, you will fail since God cannot fight for you. We may be tempted to seek protection in things other than God, yet doing so would only present us with a false sense of security. Remember, God is the only real refuge we'll ever find in times of trouble.

"WE MAY BE TEMPTED TO SEEK PROTECTION IN THINGS OTHER THAN GOD, YET DOING SO WOULD ONLY PRESENT US WITH A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY"



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WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT MY CHOLESTEROL LEVELS?

“God’s promises are not just words written in a book. They carry so much power.”

About one in three Americans has high cholesterol. The body needs cholesterol to function normally, but too much of this waxy, fat-like substance builds up in the arteries and may lead to serious problems like heart attack and stroke.

WHAT IS CHOLESTEROL?

Cholesterol is a waxy substance. It’s not inherently “bad.” Our body needs it to build cells and make vitamins and other hormones. There is good cholesterol, called HDL, or high-density lipoprotein which travels through the bloodstream, picks up the bad cholesterol, and delivers it to the liver, where bad cholesterol is removed from the body.

Bad cholesterol is called LDL, or low-density lipoprotein. LDL travels through the bloodstream, deposits in the walls of blood vessels, and narrows them. Eventually, this can cause a heart attack or stroke. Triglycerides are the main constituents of natural fats and oils, and high concentrations in the blood indicate an elevated risk of stroke.

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT’S HAPPENING IN OUR BODY?

Not enough exercise and too many unhealthy foods make our body produce more LDL or bad cholesterol. And though some people’s high cholesterol is a result of genetics, unhealthy behaviors are the significant contributors.

Total blood cholesterol score = HDL + LDL + 20 percent of triglyceride level.

A simple blood test called a lipid profile can measure your cholesterol levels.

Desirable Cholesterol Levels (CDC)

Total cholesterol	less than 170 mg/dL
Low LDL (“bad”) cholesterol	Less than 110 mg/dL
High HDL (“good”) cholesterol	35 mg/dL or higher
Triglycerides	Less than 150 mg/dL

HOW DO WE ASSESS THE RISK FOR CARDIOVASCULAR EVENTS?

The risk of each individual is calculated based on the history of hypertension, age, total cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, and smoking. Patients with chronic kidney disease, women with early menopause, or those with a history of pre-eclampsia also tend to be at higher risk. Also,

family history is a strong consideration particularly when a patient reports a family history of early heart attacks and strokes in multiple family members. For example, if a patient has several family members who all had heart attacks or died suddenly in their 30-40s. This would suggest that this family has a genetic abnormality causing their bad cholesterol to be excessively high.

HOW TO REDUCE CHOLESTEROL LEVELS?

The goal for cholesterol reduction is based on the risk factors of each individual.

Lifestyle modifications: Exercise, lose weight, cut down on red meat, fried foods, and high carb foods

If the triglyceride levels (TG) are above normal cut down on alcohol if the patient is an alcoholic. Be vigilant on the signs and symptoms of acute pancreatitis if the TG levels go >1000. Controlling the blood sugars can also lower the TG levels in the blood.

Medications: Do the periodic (every 3-6 months) blood check for lipid profile and let your physician discuss the treatment options with you.

A) Statins are very effective in reducing cholesterol levels especially LDL (side effects: muscle weakness, high liver enzymes)

B) Ezetimibe is the second drug of choice if the LDL goal is not achieved or as the preliminary drug if you are statin intolerant.

C) Bile acid sequestrants (eg: colestipol, side effect- constipation). Caution on the timing of taking other when taking this class of drugs.

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PRIYA MATHEW
Family Nurse, Dallas, USA

Priya Mathew is a Family Nurse Practitioner and working in the Department of Endocrinology at a U.S. Government Hospital in Dallas. She has written Christian devotional songs in Malayalam. She is married to Wesley Mathew and resides in Dallas with their two children.

FROM THE HISTORY

SUNDAR SINGH'S VISION OF CHRIST

Fourteen-year-old Sundar Singh blamed the Christian God for the death of his mother. He threw filth on his Christian teachers, mocked their Scriptures, and interrupted classes. Then he made an ultimate gesture of scorn. He built a fire and, page by page, tore up a Bible and burned it. "Although I believed that I had done a very good deed by burning the Bible, I felt unhappy," he said. Within three days, Sundar Singh could bear his misery no longer.

Late at night, on December 19, 1903, he rose and prayed that God would reveal himself if he existed. Otherwise, he would throw himself in front of the train which passed by his house. For seven hours, Sundar Singh prayed. "O God, if there is a God, reveal thyself to me tonight." The next train was due at five o'clock in the morning. The hours passed. Suddenly the room filled with a glow. A man appeared before him. Sundar heard a voice say, "How long will you deny me? I died for you; I have given my life for you." He saw the man's hands, pierced by nails. At that moment, he recognized Christ. The boy who had burned the Bible became a man who would endure terrible suffering for Jesus. He made twenty trips into Tibet, where he met severe persecution.

But first, Sundar had to face his people. The Sikhs had endured severe opposition in their early history. As a consequence, they were fiercely loyal to their faith. Conversion to Christianity was considered treachery. Every effort was made to woo or coerce Sundar Singh back to his ancestral faith. His father pleaded. An uncle opened a cellar full of treasures. A prince appealed to the boy's patriotism. His own brother spread lies about him. His former gang hurled muck at him. The mission was attacked. Christians were denied service. A boy who followed Sundar Singh was poisoned to death.

Finally, Sundar realized he must break with his people. He cut off the hair he had worn long like every Sikh. Then he was told, "We reject you forever ... We shall forget you as if you had never been born. You will leave this house with nothing but the clothes you wear on your back." When painful cramps wrenched his gut, he realized that his family had poisoned his last meal. He staggered to a mission hospital.

After his recovery, he donned the yellow robe of India's holy men. Unlike many gurus, he kept himself clean and did not torture his body. Dressed in his thin yellow robe, Sundar took to the road, preaching the gospel of Christ. Over the years, many were won to faith through him.



Even his father was converted. But in 1929, a sickly Sundar set out for Tibet. He never returned. Nothing was heard from him again.

* The most trustworthy biography gives this date. Others place this conversion as early as December 6th and as late as 1904.

Source: www.christianity.com

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God, an Ever-Present Refuge

When God instructed Noah to build an ark, He was providing him and his family with a home that would essentially be a refuge. Through the 40 days and nights of torrential rain and flood, the ark served its purpose as a place of safety and comfort, but more importantly as a place where God's presence was unequivocally there.

Parenthood requires us to create a home that is a refuge for our children. A sanctuary where they can be themselves without fear of judgment, where their emotions are heard and respected, and where when all else fails, they know they can return to. Isn't this what God too is to us? A refuge in times of trouble? A shelter against the storm? Our safety net?

Take a look at David who at different points in his life, turned to God for refuge and protection. He did so knowing with utter confidence that God would not abandon him. David understood that God in Himself embodied a place of refuge. What if we communicated that same principle to our children? What if we taught them that their home is a refuge because God resides there? And that wherever God resides, is their home.

Perhaps before we teach our children the concept of their home being a refuge, we need to teach them about God being their refuge. And to do that, we need to teach them a person or a place is considered a refuge when you place utmost trust and faith in them as Noah and David did in God. So let us begin by teaching our children to place their trust in a God that

has stood on His promises time and time again! Let us teach them to call on His name no matter how big the storm or small the battle. Let us show them instances in our own life when we called upon His name and He heard our cries and delivered us. Let us model for our children what it looks like when God becomes our refuge and ever-present help in trouble. Let us equip them to recognize God as their refuge because they will not be immune to the hardships and disappointments of life.



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“LET US BEGIN BY TEACHING OUR CHILDREN TO PLACE THEIR TRUST IN A GOD THAT HAS STOOD ON HIS PROMISES TIME AND TIME AGAIN!
LET US TEACH THEM TO CALL ON HIS NAME NO MATTER HOW BIG THE STORM OR SMALL THE BATTLE”

WRETCHED OMICRÓN DISRUPTS YULETIDE CELEBRATIONS

With the winter already set in, Christmas is around the corner, but Omicron is already at the door, intending to mar the merry Christmas preparations. Omicron comes at a time when people are preparing themselves for the celebration of Christmas. Christmas trees are being decorated and put up in every home across the world, and families are preparing for get-togethers and travel when the monster comes in to mar the celebrations. Fears are already being expressed that Christmas will be affected by the arrival of the Omicron variant of the Covid virus from South Africa. However, fourteen cases of the Omicron variant have been detected by the UK government, and this has indeed given sleepless nights to the UK government authorities. Besides, face coverings have been made mandatory in shops and public transport as part of targeted measures to slow the spread of

the Omicron variant. Anyway, Christmas plans are thrown into doubt as a new Covid variant arrives in Europe that has prepared to face the Omicron threat. European Union's medical agency chief said that it is ready to deal with the new Omicron variant and that it will take two weeks to indicate whether the current Covid-19 vaccines will be able to deal with it.

Elsewhere, the condition is no better. New cases were confirmed in Israel and many African countries. Hong Kong reported that the variant had been found in travelers. Australia also found two cases as the countries half a world apart became the latest to detect it in travelers arriving from southern Africa. Israel is to close its borders to all foreigners in a bid to stem the spread of the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

So, people will have to restrict their celebrations and travel less in a bid to suppress the spreading of Omicron. In the true sense,

Christmas is the birthday of Jesus Christ, who was born more than 2000 years ago as the incarnation of God in human flesh. The Holy Scripture, the Bible had prophesied and referred to Jesus Christ right from Genesis (beginning) to the Revelation (end). He is not only the king of the Jews but the King of kings and Lord of lords. So, Jesus Christ is to be worshipped and not celebrated on December 25, every year. He is the one to be worshipped, adored, and celebrated every day in life. Accepting Him as one's Savior and putting complete faith in Him is the real celebration of Christmas. So, wretched Omicron cannot dampen the spirit of true Christians, who worship the Lord in spirit and truth.



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WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT MY CHOLESTEROL LEVELS?

D) PCSK9 inhibitors, another class of biweekly injectable cholesterol-lowering medications added usually when all the above fails.

E) Fibrates, Niacin, fish oils are also used to lower triglycerides. Knowing your liver enzymes status and kidney numbers are very important as well.

No matter what we eat or drink, the physical health and mental peace to live in this world are God's provisions but we just need to follow what's advised to lead a healthy living as part of our duties. Jeremiah 33:6 says, "Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security"

Source: The 2018 AHA/ACC cholesterol guidelines & <https://www.aafp.org/afp/2007/0501/p1365.html>

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Calling of Matthew

His kingdom may come and His will be done. I was hopeless, and He gave me hope of eternal life and promised me that I would be seated with the Son of Man on the throne to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:27, 28). Without a doubt, I can now say I am the gift of God.

He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known. (In the garden-Charles A. Miles)

Jesus is powerful in calming the storm, healing the sick and forgiving sins. He is sovereign at the seas, wedding, home, and in my daily activities as well. He is in control of everything I go through in life. He is with me always, even to the end of the age. When Jesus, the Lord of lords, performed miracles and yet told people not to tell others about it and His identity, I remembered my futile attempts and desire to be praised and recognized by those around me. Being His disciple, all I need is to focus on Him alone. My interest is now to have that extra jar of oil like those wise virgins who were prepared to go with the bridegroom (Matt 25:10). With this blessed assurance and hope in the Lord, I prepare for His coming on the clouds and look forward to seeing Him face to face in His glory! Are you ready to meet Him?



10?



Questions for Examining Your Life

Examining your life is essential to your growth as a Christian believer. Seeing your own sins and failings will make it possible for you to confess, repent, find forgiveness, and grow in grace. These are the steps by which we move forward in the Christian life. If you can't see your own failings, you can't make progress.

Self-examination is also a dangerous business. Satan will try to subvert your self-examination by pulling you down into self-condemnation and despair. So be careful. While you have one eye focused on your sin and failure, keep the other eye focused on God's grace given to you in Jesus Christ.

God has given two gifts to help you examine yourself successfully. These are his Word and his Spirit. The Word will show you sins and failings. The Spirit will open your eyes to see them.

Self-examination, rightly pursued, will bring great benefits to your Christian life.

Three Guidelines for Self-Examination

1. BE INTENTIONAL

Set aside a specific time to examine your own life. Find a place where you can be alone. Bring your Bible, a pen, and some paper. Expect God to show you things that need to be confessed and changed. You may choose to tell a friend that you have set aside time to examine your life. You might ask them to pray for you, and commit to share what

God has shown you.

2. BE SPECIFIC

Ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to see what is going on in your life. Read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Work through the ten questions that follow, noting what God brings to your mind.

3. BE A BELIEVER

Bring what God shows you to him in confession as a believer. Pray, believing in the blood of Jesus Christ shed, so that the sins you are confessing should be forgiven. Pray, believing in the power of the Holy Spirit, enabling you to change. Pray, with confidence that God is gracious and loving towards you, and that he is working in your life.

10 Questions for Examining Your Life

1. GOD

You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:3)

What disappointments has God allowed in your life? How have these affected your love for him?

Pain and disappointment often reveal the degree to which we love and desire God's gifts more than we love and desire him. Your confession will begin here.

2. WORSHIP

You shall not make for yourselves an idol. (Exodus 20:4)

In what ways would you want God to be different from who he is?

The desire for God to be different is idolatry. It shows discontent or dissatisfaction with who he is or

what he does. This is sin and will be part of your confession.

3. FALSE RELIGION

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. (Exodus 20:7)

In what ways do you least reflect the image and likeness of God?

Being a Christian means that you bear the name of Christ. People make judgments about Christ by what they see in those who bear his name. Use this part of your confession to ask God for growth in areas where you need to better reflect his character.

4. TIME, WORK, AND REST

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. (Exodus 20:8-9)

How could you improve what you offer in your working life? How can you better order your life so that you complete your work and preserve time for God and for other relationships God has entrusted to you?

God has set a pattern for your work and rest in the way that he created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The pattern of God's work gives us a template for work, reminding us that God calls us to be productive and to find joy in the work that he has given us to do. Take a careful look at the vigor of your work and the balance of your life.

5. AUTHORITY

Honor your father and your mother. (Exodus 20:12)

Who has God placed in a position of authority in your life? What are they saying to you? How are you responding?

Father and mother are the first authority figures God places in your life. Difficulty in submitting to others often indicates difficulties in submitting to God's authority over your life. Examine yourself carefully here.

6. PEACE

You shall not murder. (Exodus 20:13)

With whom are you most angry and frustrated at this time? Is there someone with whom you are looking to get even? Are you harboring resentment in your heart?

Our Lord traced murder back to its roots in anger (Matthew 5:22). You may not be able to bring healing to every relationship, but you can guard your own heart. Confess any bitterness in your heart to God. Ask him to cleanse it from your soul.

7. PURITY

You shall not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:14)

In what ways have you given expression to lust?

Jesus traced adultery back to lust in the heart (Matthew 5:28). Lust will destroy your soul if you feed it and allow it to grow in your life. Your thoughts reveal who you are

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A World Without Christ

A HOPELESS WORLD

If Christ had not been born, we could never truly know the heavenly Father.

We would see Him through types, shadows, veils, and smoke. People would hear Him speak through thunder, lightning, and earthquakes.

However, Jesus did come to this world, and said, "Let Me tell you about My Father." He described His Father as an anxious parent waiting on a porch for His wayward son to return home (Luke 15:20), a tailor who clothes the lilies in the field (Matt. 6:28), and a birdwatcher whose attention is immediately drawn to a falling sparrow (10:29).

In John 14:8, Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us" (NKJV). Jesus replied, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (v. 9 NKJV).

Jesus came to earth to reveal what His Father is like. He revealed the Father's heart by gathering children into His loving arms, touching lepers no one else would touch, and eating with sinners. The Gospel of John begins by telling us Christ reveals the Father's glory: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14 NKJV).

Jesus reveals the Father's words. He prayed, "I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them" (17:8 NKJV).

Jesus also revealed the Father's plan for humanity. He prayed to His Father, "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (v. 4).

If Christ had not been born, access to the Father would be limited to a few individuals.

In the Old Testament era, only a select group of people—such as Moses, Elijah, and Elisha—had personal access to God.

Only the high priest was allowed to stand before the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies—once a year, on the Day of Atonement. The Old Testament priests had to offer the sacrifices for the sins of the people. Ordinary men and women had no access to the throne of God.

However, Jesus Christ was born into this world to open an access road to the mercy seat of God. When He declared on Calvary, "It is finished!" (John 19:30), the Temple veil was split from top to bottom and access was granted to all (Mark 15:38).

If Christ had not been born, there would be no Gospel.

We would have no record of the heavenly host filling the sky with good news of the birth of a Savior. There would be no Calvary, no forgiveness of sin, and no hope of deliverance. There would be no water of life for the spiritually thirsty, and no bread of life for the hungry soul. No joy unspeakable and full of glory. No rest for the weary and burdened.

"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7 NKJV) would be missing from this world, and the healing that comes through the Atonement would be absent.

The lame man at the Pool of Bethesda would have stayed on his mat for the remainder of his miserable life. The woman would have died from her issue of blood. Bartimaeus would have remained blind. The woman caught in adultery would have been stoned to death. The repentant thief on Calvary would be in hell today if Jesus had never been born. Spiritual darkness would cover the earth like a blanket because the Light of the World never arrived in Bethlehem's manger.

If Christ had not been born, there would be no Easter story.

There would be no hope of resurrection or heaven. Life would be meaningless. Death would be final and eternal life a myth.

The funeral procession for the widow of Nain's son would have continued on to the graveyard. The weeping and wailing at the house of Jairus would have continued well into the night. The heart of Mary and Martha would have stayed broken because Lazarus would have remained in the tomb.

GOOD NEWS FOR EVERYONE

A manger in Bethlehem cradled hope for all people. The birth announcement pierced the night air outside of town, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).

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Emmanuel

when we search with sincere hearts, just like the shepherds found Jesus when they searched earnestly in Bethlehem.

God is not only the One who is for us and with us, but also is He who is in us. The Presence within us fills us with love for God and others around us. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son Jesus to die in our place for our sins. To give Him up for us on the cross, He first gave Him to be born miraculously in Mary. His advent on earth is the intervention of God in the affairs of men to demonstrate His great love towards us. Our advent on earth is also with a definite purpose, which is fulfilled in allowing Emmanuel to live with us and in us, so that through us the love of God can be dispensed to the lonely world around.

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in your heart. Make an honest confession to God as you examine this area of your life.

8. INTEGRITY

You shall not steal.
(Exodus 20:15)

How can I take less and give more?

God gives. Satan steals. The essence of stealing is that you take what God has trusted to someone else, but do not give what God has entrusted to you. Use this part of your self-examination to look at what you are taking from others and what you are giving back. Look especially at what you are receiving from God and what you are giving back to him.

9. TRUTH

You shall not give false testimony.
(Exodus 20:16)

What has God trusted to me?

In the ninth commandment God calls you to be a person who can be trusted. Make a list of what God has entrusted to you. Take an honest look at how you are being faithful or unfaithful

with that trust. Ask God to prepare you for what he will entrust to you in the future.

10. CONTENTMENT

You shall not covet.
(Exodus 20:17)

What are the greatest desires of your heart right now? How do these relate to God's purpose in your life?

All of our sins flow from the root problem of sin that lies in the human heart. Being a sinner, you desire the wrong things. You don't find joy or satisfaction in the right things. That is why God gives you his Spirit to change and renew your heart. Use this final part of your self-examination to look beyond sins you have committed to sins that may be growing undetected in your heart. Ask God to cleanse your heart of wrong desires and to keep you from future sins.

www.unlockingthebible.org



Some Indian cities ban eggs

The country's rising Hindu nationalist movement has spurred tensions in various cities, with the recent one being the crackdown on eggs in Ahmedabad in Gujarat state. In its wake, the authorities grabbed gas canisters, bread, vegetables, plates, glasses, stools, etc., that were used by food cart vendors who used to sell eggs scrambled, fried, or wrapped in fragrant bread. Consumption of eggs has grown in India since more families are now middle class. Indians, on average, eat 81 eggs per person per year, whereas Americans average more than twice that number. Food has drawn more headlines due to Hindu nationalism on the rise over the past two decades. The food consumption practices vary from State to State based on religion and caste system. The regulations on eating habits might prove detrimental to India's aspirations and economic goals.

Nobel Peace Laureates criticize authoritarianism

This year's Nobel Peace Prize recipients from the Philippines and Russia used their acceptance speeches to strongly criticize social media tech giants and warn against their rising authoritarianism and disinformation spread. One of the Prize winners, Maria Ressa, said that the social media companies are expected to have the responsibility to fight disinformation and its denigrating effects on public discourse and democracy. The other winner, Dmitry Muratov, pointed to the rising dangers of practicing journalism in an authoritarian state and highlighted the many journalists being murdered over the past two decades. In his opinion, investigative journalism is crucial to help people understand current issues. Even despite the risks involved, the reporters should continue to dig for facts and report them in a timely fashion.



G-7 warns Moscow of any invasion attempts

The G-7, which consists of seven leading industrial democracies, have unitedly warned Russia on Sunday of consequences and costs if it attempts to invade Ukraine. Meanwhile, U.S. President Biden's top diplomat for Europe and Eurasian affairs, Karen Donfried, has traveled to Kyiv and Moscow to address the high-stakes standoff between the two nations. The invasion, if any, will be very costly for Russia because of the likelihood of economic sanctions, heavy troop losses, and losing a pipeline to Germany. The statement from G-7 involves countries with a hawkish outlook on Russia, such as the United States and Britain, and the dovish ones, such as Italy and France.

NASA's new X-ray telescope in orbit



NASA's newest X-ray observatory has been in orbit since last Thursday to shed light on black holes, exploded stars, and other high-energy events in the universe. This observatory consisting of three telescopes in one, is expected to reveal the extreme parts of the universe as never before. SpaceX launched the spacecraft from Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. The joint operation of the project with the Italian Space Agency is supposed to begin next month. The \$188 million mission is called IXPE, short for Imaging X-ray Polarization Explorer.

World News

Russia continues to amass new troops near Ukraine's border despite Biden urging Putin to de-escalate tensions

Russia has continued to amass new troops near Ukraine's border in recent days, despite President Joe Biden urging Russian President Vladimir Putin to de-escalate tensions during a virtual meeting last week. US and Ukrainian officials have also seen evidence that Russia has begun diverting commercial air and rail systems to support the military effort, though similar air and rail activity was visible in the spring during Russia's last military buildup that was ultimately pulled back. The latest US intelligence assessments place more than 50 so-called "Battalion Tactical Groups" deployed on and around the Ukraine border with six more in transit on the way. These groups, which can typically include as many as 900 personnel each, are highly diversified and fairly self-sufficient combat units with a combination of troops, artillery, anti-tank weapons, reconnaissance and engineering units. BTGs, as they're known, played a leading role in Russian military activity in Ukraine in 2014.

COVID anxiety and depression on the rise

Anxiety, driven by new waves of COVID variants and loneliness and depression, is on the rise around the world. There is a mood of exhaustion and simmering anger across the nations. Even if the extent of the threat of the Omicron variant is not fully known, its emergence has thrown a spanner into the plans of many. The general feeling of the covid era continuing for many years has added to the depression. With intermittently shuttered schools, multiple covid tests, the closing of borders, lockdowns, and quarantines have added to the people's dwindling resilience. The countries are also facing the new challenge of whether the people will obey any new restrictions after being in the confinement of various degrees over the past two years. Even with about 47 percent of the world's population vaccinated, the case numbers remain high. As the pandemic enters its third year, the core dilemma is not only physical health but also the mental health of the general populace.