

Voice



White Buttercup (Turnera trioniflora)

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Voice

Voice is produced with the intention of inspiring, igniting and initiating thought, prayer and action. **Your views and responses are crucial to this process.** Please e-mail your responses, rejoinders and reflections to

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The voice of one calling in the wilderness;
Prepare the way of the Lord; Make
straight in the desert a
highway for our God.

Isaiah 40:3.

Editorial

December 2014

Dear friends,

This issue of Voice is dedicated to focus on the Christian doctor in the context of his/her family. Sunil Abraham writes about the foundations, the frustrations and the functioning of the Christian family. The article on stress in doctor's families, speaks of the need for balance and responsibility in the doctor's life. Under the Lordship of Christ the Christian doctor will be guided to make choices that will keep the needs of the family especially young children in mind and not merely the need to advance career. Mr L T Jeyachandran is no stranger to Voice and his thought provoking article on 'Spirituality and Materiality' is here reprinted for the benefit of the EMFI readership. MC's article on communicating with the child highlights for us the need to use every opportunity to form the child's mind as Paul says in Galatians 4:19 '... I labour until Christ is formed in you.' We look forward to hearing your responses and comments on the various thoughts raised in this issue.

Amidst the controversies raging in our country at this time of Christmas, the message of our Lord's birth rings clear and true with the angels proclaiming, "Do not be afraid for behold I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.." *Luke 2:10, 11*. Christ is born and He is Immanuel, 'God with us'. His presence is with us as we grapple with the issues of life. He has paid the price of our sins and has bridged the gap between God and man. He is now risen! His peace pervades our hearts as we ponder on the many sad things that confront us every day in the world around us. May we be moved by the stories of self-giving love like the mother in Andi and Sheba's story. They are the rays of hope in the darkness. Love that does not count the cost but gives and forgives. For as Rev. Millar says, 'It's where the stars don't shine that Love is present; and even in the blood and tears is the One who suffers and heals; not somewhere else, but in our midst, as on the first Christmas morning'.

Wishing you a blessed Christmas and happy New Year! Anna



The Christian Doctor's Family

Sunil Abraham



As I write this, I am quite aware of the inadequacies and difficulties in my family life. I do not write as someone with all the answers of the perfect family life, but as a fellow struggler, who looks to the grace of Jesus Christ Who promised that His grace is sufficient for us, that His strength is made perfect in our weakness. What a joy to know that He is our hope, the One who is alive and the One who works - even in our homes - to teach us and transform us – to live as families that will bring glory to His Name.

I would like to focus on three aspects of a Christian doctor's family life

- I. The foundation of the Christian family
- II. The frustrations in the Christian family
- III. The functioning of the Christian family.

I. The Foundation of the Christian Family

The family is an institution and we need to consider the perspectives and foundational principles of the family, laid out for us in the Bible.

Who instituted the family in the first place? This is a very important question as the very foundation of the family is under attack and there is a worldwide movement to undermine the basic principles of family life that have sustained this institution for centuries. The question of the origin of family naturally leads us to the question of the origin of man. Did man come out of a big bang ... order out of confusion and random movements ... over millions of years? Or was he created, fearfully and wonderfully made by a wise and loving Person, God Almighty, Who is real and alive today?

How can we really know?

The purpose of this article is not to defend Creation, yet, the most important evidence for the existence of God is the transformed lives of those who have believed and have received Christ into their lives. As we see this happen around us and hear what the living God is doing through His people, we cannot deny His existence. He is alive, He works and He is our Creator. Man is not an accident, but the crowning glory of the creation of God.

The most important evidence for the existence of God is the transformed lives of those who believed and received Christ into their lives.

The world was perfect and beautiful when God created it. After He filled it with plants, birds, animals and every other living creature, God saw that it was good. Genesis 1:25. He wanted someone to manage, rule over and have dominion over this brand new beautiful creation and decided to make man in His image, to be the ruler of His creation, to take care of it, be a good steward and build the Kingdom of God on the earth. "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" Genesis 1: 26-28. That was the vision of God - a network of families, under God, ruling and exercising the dominion of God on the earth. The purpose God intended for the family was to worship God, to submit to Him and to build His Kingdom.

The centre of the Christian family is God, because ultimately it is not about us, but about Him.

So the centre of the Christian family is God, because ultimately it is not about us, but about Him. When He becomes the foundation of the family and when He is given the appropriate place, many things fall into place.

Why do we need this foundation?

It is when our marriages are built on the solid foundation of God that they will stand the storms that will surely come. Any married couple will acknowledge that marriages will face storms and that they will crumble without the strong foundation of God. So what is the best preparation to get married? It is to make your life rooted deeply and firmly in Christ. Let Him hold you before you enter marriage, cover you as you get married, uphold you as face trials in marriage and bless you with the true blessings of married life that come from Him. Let God, not your spouse, not your children, not your parents, be the centre and foundation of your marriage. Marriage is God's idea and we need Him to guide us, lead us and to teach us, how to live the Christian family life.

The purpose of the family was to worship God, to submit to Him and to build His Kingdom.

II. The Frustrations in the Christian Family

Anyone who has been married for some time will agree that the family life is not always a joy ride. Though it can be a ride of joy, it is not always smooth and has its own humps and pot holes. If a couple says that they do not have any conflicts at all we need to suspect how alive their marriage is. It is only dead people who do not have any conflicts at all.

I have heard the story of a man who lived very long and someone asked him the secret of his long life. He said that soon after he got married he made a decision that if he had a conflict with his wife he would remain on the terrace of the house till the issue was resolved. "All those years of breathing fresh air on the roof of my house, is the secret of my long life"!

Why do we have conflicts in the marriage? The main reason is our sinful nature. The tendency in our nature is to rebel against God's standards. This is because the 'I' factor in each of us is strong and the 'self' wants everything to be done in its own way.

We bring our unique personalities and backgrounds into the married life. We have our own likes and dislikes, ideas, expectations; how the sambar should taste, how my mother made it etc. This is natural but they can create conflicts.

The fairy tale understanding of the "perfect Christian marriage" can leave men wondering, "Where is the Proverbs-31-wife I had dreamed about?" The imperfection of your spouse hits you some time after you get married and it is important that couples are prepared to accept and receive the spouse as they are. We can unknowingly glamorise married life, without sharing the ground realities and this can cause newly wed couples to have unreal expectations leading to frustrations. Young couples must be helped to anticipate both the joys and the struggles of married life.

The root cause of frustration in the family life is the sinful human nature. If this frustration needs to change, I cannot wait for the other person to change, the change must begin in me. The Bible says, "First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." *Matthew 7: 5*. Jesus calls His disciples to take up the cross daily and follow Him. That process extends to all areas of life, including family life. The frustrations will not end until I deny myself, give myself completely to the hands of God and walk with Jesus.

I cannot wait for the other person to change, the change must begin in me.

So what do we do when there are frustrations and conflicts?

Expect them

We should not be taken by surprise when conflicts arise. When two unique individuals live together, there are bound to be differences. However we need to deal with them and work through them in a healthy way.

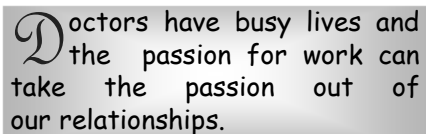
Examine them

Seek to understand the cause of the conflict. Is it because of a lack of forgiveness - the vital requisite for any healthy relationship?

Is there healing required for a painful memory - a word that was spoken years ago that can continue to destroy a relationship? Now is the appointed time. A decision has to be made to forgive, resolve the issue and move on.

Is it a lack of communication? Doctors have busy lives and the passion for work can take the passion out of our relationships. Time just to be with your spouse is so important and it has to be planned and scheduled.

Is it a lack of acceptance of the spouse? Acceptance of your spouse is crucial for the relationship to grow and to reduce frustrations.



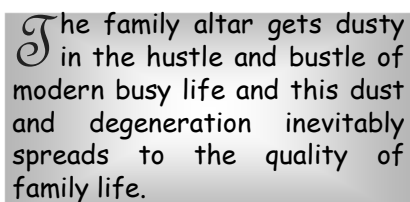
Doctors have busy lives and the passion for work can take the passion out of our relationships.

Extend them to God

Prayer works. It changes people, hearts, situations, relationships. We should go beyond reactive prayers - reacting to difficulties and needs when they come; we need to have proactive, preventive prayers. Our married lives need to be covered with prayer because whether we know it or not, like it or not, we are in a spiritual battle and the powers of darkness will constantly try to destroy our marriages. As God begins to build and extend His Kingdom of love in and through families, Satan will fight it and work against it. We must pray. The family that prays together, indeed stays together. The family altar gets dusty in the hustle and bustle of modern busy life and this dust and degeneration inevitably spreads to the quality of family life.

III. The Functioning of the Christian Family

The foundational principle for the effective functioning of the Christian family is love. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." *Ephesians 5: 25*.



The family altar gets dusty in the hustle and bustle of modern busy life and this dust and degeneration inevitably spreads to the quality of family life.

John 3: 16 does not say that God so liked the world, but that God so loved the world. God did not like many things about man, yet chose to love man and He calls us to do the same in our relationships. A husband may not like many things about his wife, but a Christian is given a divine call to love his wife. This is so counter-cultural; this love is not dependent on appearance or performance, but on the grace of God, the grace through which the unconditional love of God comes to us and is extended to our marriage.

This is a call to a supernatural love, a love that wishes and wills the best for the other person, and is impossible without the supernatural work of God in our hearts to be filled with Christ and His love. This is not about a feeling. It was His love which kept Him on the cross for us, even when we were sinners who rejected Him. His act of love made Him groan in pain and sweat blood on the cross in agony. Love can involve feelings, but it is much more than that. We also read, “.. he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh...” *Ephesians 5: 28 & 29.*

If I do not love my wife, I hate myself! I actually do myself a favour by loving my wife. It is not only good for her, but also for me!

I do myself a favour by loving my wife. It is not only good for her, but also for me!

Now that we know what we should do, how do we do it?

How do we love, as God wants us to love? In Galatians, we read that love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. *Galatians 5:22.* It is not the fruit of the Christian, but of the Spirit. We don't have to struggle to love, but will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to love as we walk with Him and as we open our lives more and more to His enabling grace.

This is not to say that to love is easy. The fruit of the Spirit also includes longsuffering, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, all of which are needed in abundance for a loving married life. *Galatians 5:22.* We may have to patiently suffer and wait for years, empowered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, till we are enabled to accept with joy some of the distinctive qualities of our God-given partners. Only the Holy Spirit can help us to have a married life that is truly blessed by God and a blessing to others.

What is God's plan for the family today?

In a world with increasing pain, hurt and darkness, God is looking for families where He will be welcome to live, rule and extend His Kingdom of love, beginning within the family, overflowing from there to all around - touching lives, transforming situations and bringing healing and wholeness in its wake - not by might nor by power, but by His Spirit.

Stress in Doctors' Families

Source. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1982/03/08/style/relationships-the-stress-in-doctors-families.html>>

The spouses and children of doctors, have always been envied for their high status, their high income and their high-achieving style of life. But according to researchers who have studied them, and in the opinion of psychiatrists who have treated them, life in the medical family isn't always a permanent vacation in Camelot. These investigators have found that the stress in doctors' lives can be damaging not only to their children and their marital partners, but also may affect the quality of patient care and the level of medical costs.

"Why do intelligent and successful physicians tolerate the failure of an unrewarding family life?" wrote Dr. Jack D. McCue of the University of North Carolina in a study of doctors' stressful lives in 'The New England Journal of Medicine.' He asserted that 'marriages and relationships are often unsatisfactory for physicians,' that a doctor's home life can evolve into nothing more than 'a professional support system,' and that 'a progressive emotional separation from family life in the early years of practice becomes a de facto divorce.'

To some doctors, the needs of their wife or children can seem terribly pedestrian, dwarfed by the need to rescue seriously ill people.

Dr. McCue cited studies showing that the suicide rate of physicians is two to three times that of the general population - equal, he said, "to the loss of about two medical-school classes yearly" - and that drug addiction may be 30 to 100 times more common among physicians than in the general population.

"It is certain that physicians who harm themselves also directly or indirectly harm their patients" as well as their families, stated Dr. McCue, and such physicians offer "poorer quality or uneconomical care."

The primary pressures on physicians' lives, according to Dr. McCue, include the emotional toll of constantly working with sickness and death, the responsibility for decisions that can cause pain and suffering, and the high expectations of demanding patients in an era where medical knowledge is far from unlimited.

"To some doctors, the needs of their wife or children can seem terribly pedestrian, dwarfed by the need to rescue seriously ill people," commented Dr. Robert T. London, director of the short-term psychotherapy unit at New York University Medical Centre, a psychiatrist who has treated other doctors.

"Many people believe doctors are godlike, and some doctors start to believe their own myth," he said. "They become perfectionists, and they wonder why their families don't run with the precision and orderliness of their medical practice. "The figure of the doctor is revered," he said, "and their own families can find it hard to see them realistically.

Furthermore, Dr. London believes, doctors as a group tend to deny the seriousness of their own problems. "They may resort to the 'elevator consultation' for themselves i.e. encountering another doctor in the elevator and asking for quick advice). So, entirely too often, all they ever get is an elevator response."

For women doctors, the pressures on family life can be even more intense, according to Dr. Helen A. DeRosis, a New York psychiatrist who has treated women physicians and who has studied the effects of stress on women in general. "It's hard for any woman to juggle dual career and family roles," she said, "but it's often harder for women physicians because they have always attained such a high level of achievement.

As a group, women physicians are highly intelligent, resourceful and energetic. If they can't do something, successfully, even something like child care, they blame themselves. To not succeed is to fail."

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Many people believe doctors are godlike, and some doctors start to believe their own myth.

Dr. DeRosis cited a study of 85 women physicians which found that a third had no domestic help at all, and that 75% of them did all their own cooking, shopping, money management and child care.

"It is possible to do this - I know, I did it myself," said Dr. DeRosis, who raised two children while practicing medicine. "But it can cause tremendous amounts of stress and, in some women, depression."

Many women physicians marry other doctors, she said, and although their husbands may sympathize with their situation, this may not translate itself into any practical help.

"If a woman's partner is a physician," she said, "he may be over-involved in his practice and he may not be supportive at all. So not only do these women have the difficulty that any doctor has in finding time for family life, but they also have the problem of being married to a doctor as well."

Dr. London believes that medical school training doesn't prepare doctors very well for dealing with people, or for dealing with their human responsibilities. "Doctors have to make it clear to their patients that they are human beings," he said, "and they have to let themselves become more human."

Spirituality and Materiality

L T Jeyachandran



India is in the middle of a phenomenal economic growth. We are the second fastest growing economy in the world and in the foreseeable future could be one of the largest economies on this planet. We are also witnessing drastic changes in lifestyle where a basically conservative society is abandoning its values of marriage and family in order to accommodate itself to the pace and pressures of a new civilisation. Christians are rightly concerned about the obvious decline in morality that accompanies this phenomenal growth.

Glitzy shopping malls and expressways with clothes and cars to match will impose new challenges on Christians who would strive to live and teach as disciples of Jesus Christ. In this short article, I would attempt to point out ways in which we can develop a Biblical world-view on the material world and how we should be able to communicate the Gospel in the context of the world in which we live.

In this article, I have suggested the use of the word, Materiality, an obscure term that means 'material nature or quality' or 'something material.'

It came into use in 1520-30 AD and was adapted into the English language from the Middle Latin word '*materialitas*'. This word has been in use only in purely academic, philosophical articles. I think the time has come for us to rescue it from pure academia and incorporate it into our understanding of the Biblical narrative and therefore in fashioning a truly Christian world-view.

The word materiality can be used in a way similar to the use of the word rationality in apologetics. We reject rationalism – the view that reason is the only way to true knowledge without any need for revelation – but we affirm rationality – the view that affirms the rightful place of reason in the created world order. In the same way, we reject materialism – the pursuit of material prosperity without reference to any transcendent reality – but we affirm materiality – the rightful place that material world occupies in God's creation.

The Biblical opposite of the word natural is spiritual *1 Corinthians 2:14,15*; the English opposite of the same word is artificial.

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.¹⁵ But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. *I Corinthians 2:14, 15. (KJV)*

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God - this is your true and proper worship. *Romans 12:1(NIV)*

I suppose many Christians behave in an artificially affected way and delude themselves into thinking that they are spiritual! We need to discover, in the light of the total Biblical revelation and the life of our Lord Jesus, that to be truly spiritual is to be truly natural – the way God had created us to be; and that kind of naturalness expresses itself through the material aspect of our lives. Paul's advice to the Christians in Rome that they should present their bodies – material and natural – as a living sacrifice *Romans 12:1* would have resulted in some Christians influenced by Gnostic ideology suffering heart attacks! The Gnostics believed that the physical body was inferior and evil by its very nature. The Bible, by contrast, tells us that it is our nature that is sinful. True holiness is expressed through our physical bodies.

Christians hold two opposing views about material prosperity. In some Christian circles, material prosperity is spoken of as the only sign of God's blessing. Bible verses, that encourage cheerful tithing are converted into a Christianised stock-broking with promised yields quite disproportionate to the investment! *Malachi 3:10*

Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. *Malachi 3:10. (NIV)*

Bible verses on prevailing prayer, such as 'If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. *John 14:14*, are stretched to promote theologies of the 'name and claim' variety. Christians looking for material prosperity are simply to name what they want and claim it from God; thus we could pressurise Him to accede to our demands.

In a not-unexpected reaction to this prosperity Gospel, some well-meaning Christians propound what can be called a poverty Gospel – the poorer you are, the more spiritual you are likely to be – and reduce the Christian faith to nothing more than mere asceticism. Because the devil sends errors in pairs, *C.S. Lewis*, the Bible rejects both positions as poor responses to God's creation of the material world and human creativity with which He has endowed us.

He (the devil) always sends errors into the world in pairs--pairs of opposites...He relies on your extra dislike of one to draw you gradually into the opposite one. But do not let us be fooled. We have to keep our eyes on the goal and go straight through between both errors." *C. S. Lewis*

One of several reasons for this unbiblical dichotomy is that the orthodox evangelical theology of redemption in Christ is not anchored in an equally strong theology of creation. Our pragmatic understanding of Biblical revelation unfortunately begins with Genesis 3 (The Fall) and ends with Revelation 20 (The Judgement). We leave out four very important chapters of God's Word, Genesis chapters 1 and 2 dealing with the present creation and chapters 21 and 22 of Revelation, that describe the renewed creation.

These are the book-ends that contain the drama of redemption and anchor it in material reality. While we justifiably defend the fact of creation of the material world by God against the onslaught of the evolutionists, we abandon our understanding of the material creation at the end of Genesis 2 and speak of the spiritual life without any reference to material reality. I suspect that the creation-evolution debate (which has its own rightful place) has distracted us from developing a proper theology of creation.

It is important for us to note that the Bible begins, not with spiritual or moral dogma, but with the creation of the material world. God, who is Spirit, creates the heavens and the earth (which are matter) *Genesis 1:1*. God takes the dust of the ground (matter) and breathes His own Breath (spirit) into it and the first human being comes into existence *Genesis 2:7*. Thus, humans are the only beings in God's creation that are a unique combination of matter and spirit. The command that God gives to the first human pair is about responsibility for the material world and accountability to God Who is Spirit. *Genesis 1:28*

When we quote a verse such as, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul" *Mark 8:36*, we ought to emphasise the value of the human soul for whom Christ died, but not imply that the body is unimportant. The word 'world' (*kosmos in Greek*) in the New Testament has to be understood in three distinct ways depending on the contexts in which the writers use the word: the created world, the world of people and the fallen world-system.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. *Genesis 1:1 (NIV)*

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. *Genesis 2:7*

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground. *Genesis 1:28.*

i. The created world

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. *Mathew 5:14. (NIV)*

ii. The world of people

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. *John 3:16. (NIV)*

iii. The fallen world-system over which satan presides

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will. *Romans 12:2 (NIV)*

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:15-17 (NIV)

Even the phrase SOS, 'Save Our Souls', should not be taken to mean that bodies are unimportant. Paul affirms that to be away from the body is to be present with the Lord and at the same time, expresses his longing to be clothed with the resurrection body! *2 Corinthians 5:1-10.*

We need to reflect long and hard on the continuity and the discontinuity between the present creation and the new creation; these Bible passages, *2 Peter 3:10-13, Revelation 21, 22, Isaiah 65:17*, should be part of our daily delight. At the centre of the New Creation would be the slain Lamb in His glorified physical body which will still bear the marks of the cross. *Revelation 5:6.*

In stark contrast to the Christian position, many eastern philosophies and some eastern religions deny the reality of the material world itself; they think that this is the only way to reject materialism and thus employ a popular Sanskrit word *maya* (illusion) to connote the status of material reality. Some Christians tend to do the same and read the Bible in platonic, escapist terms! The redeemed creation in Revelation 21 and 22 is more concrete than the present creation under bondage. *Romans 8:19-22.*

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. *Romans 8:19-22.*

To illustrate how inadequate our view of the renewal of creation was, I recently asked a tongue-in-cheek question to a Church worship group in Singapore – “What do you think of the New Creation? Will we be worshipping God, floating around like ghosts holding invisible guitars with intangible strings producing inaudible music?!”

God's invasion of this planet to redeem sinful humanity begins with the virgin birth of Jesus. When Mary says to Archangel Gabriel, “May it be to me as you have said!” *Luke 1:38* the fullness of the Deity begins to live in bodily form as a unicellular zygote in Mary's womb. *Colossians 2:9* Thus, in the incarnation, the Lord Jesus Christ takes upon Himself a material body. He is raised from the dead in a glorified material body. Paul is at pains to prove this point as he devotes an entire chapter to it. *1 Corinthians 15*. At the right hand of the Father, there stands a Man as our intercessor *1 Timothy 2:5*. God has therefore put his seal of approval on the material world and will be renewing the world itself to be the ambience for our glorified resurrection bodies as He brings our redemption to a grand climax.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.
Colossians 2:9

For there is one God and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 2:5 (NASB)

The ‘arranged marriage’ (!) between Christ and the Church, though mysterious *Ephesians 5:32*, is constitutionally compatible only because the Bridegroom is God Who has forever become human and the Bride is redeemed humanity that has come to participate in the Divine nature. *2 Peter 1:4*. One cannot believe in the true humanity of Jesus without a Biblical view of materiality.

This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:32,

But He Himself is judged of no man. *2 Peter 1:4 (NIV)*

It is pertinent to note that our rebellion against God in Eden results in a breakdown of relationship with nature and the material world; the woman will find child-bearing painful and work will be toil for man. *Genesis 3:16-19* This link between human beings and nature is consistently maintained in Scripture as Moses and Isaiah call on the heavens and earth to witness. *Deuteronomy 32:1,2; Isaiah 1:2,3*.

God's promise to Solomon is that forgiven sin and answered prayer will result in the healing of the land. *2 Chronicles 7:14*.

The most explicit connection is from the passage in Romans 8:19-22 where we are told that even creation is groaning waiting for the redemption of the children of God. It is also not surprising that many of the signs accompanying the second coming of Christ have to do with nature.

When we disconnect the drama of redemption from the equally spectacular divine act of creation, our message of salvation in Christ loses its moorings in the reality of the external world. One of the reasons our message of Christ's work fails to connect with the happy pagan in the marketplace is because it uses the word spiritual in such an unnatural way. The secular atheist assumes that he alone has the last word to say on the material world and salvation in Christ is another form of nirvana or yoga where the devotee loses her/his identity in the infinite divine. Thus Christianity, for the secularist, is nothing more than a Christian form of escapism. How shall we then live in God's material world in joyful enjoyment of all that He has given us without falling into the serious error of materialism? A few biblical pointers are suggested below:

1. The answer

The answer to the prosperity Gospel is not poverty Gospel but a Gospel of contentment. Paul makes it clear in this passage that he knows how to have plenty and how to suffer a lack of things. *Philippians 4:12, 13.*

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Philippians 4:12, 13.

The greatest temptation facing the Christian in our over-heated, over-valued economy is to crave for more than what one has, and not to find contented enjoyment in what God has provided. Ambition does have a legitimate place in the life of the Christian only when it is brought under the value-system of the Holy Spirit. We should reject outright all teaching that equates prosperity with God's blessing in a simplistic manner.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1 Timothy 6:6-10. (NIV)

Paul would define materialism as the love of money, *1 Timothy 6:10*. which militates against true contentment.

1 Timothy 6:6-8.

2. True contentment

True contentment is not possible until we learn true enjoyment. Paul's advice to young Timothy is in affirmation of all that God has materially blessed us with. *1 Timothy 6:17*. A killjoy approach to life that is advocated in some Christian circles has no place in the Biblical economy. As a matter of fact, such an attitude could lead us into the terrible sin of ungratefulness on the one hand and hypocrisy on the other.

3. Jesus' Terms of Discipleship

We need to take seriously the terms of discipleship that Jesus lays down.

Luke 14:33. I think Mahatma Gandhi mistook this and similar statements of Jesus to be clarion calls to asceticism.

But, if we study carefully the whole section from *Luke 14:26* onwards, we cannot but draw the conclusion that Jesus is pointing to relationships at all levels – to others, to oneself and to the material world.

Jesus prescribes one's cross as the instrument through which all our relationships have to be processed and redeemed. They include our relationship to others *14:26*, to oneself *14:27* and to the material world *14:33*. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the cross-experiences of one's life direct and discipline us to true self-denial and thereby redeem and elevate all relationships to a Godly level – and that includes our relationship to the material world.

4. Pilgrim, Stranger, Steward

Very early in my Christian life, I was introduced to three Bible words that should characterise the Christian in her/his relationship to the material world: pilgrim, stranger and steward.

Sf anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.' "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Luke 14:26-33.

Their opposites are: settler, citizen and owner. While the opposites are not wrong ethically or morally, they could display attitudes that are not Christian. As far as our attitude to the material world is concerned, we need to see ourselves as stewards and not owners. Paul intends this lesson for us in *1 Timothy 6:18*. A good steward is one who does not hoard things for oneself (as if he or she is the owner) but as a good manager, shares what one has with others. There is no better antidote to materialism than liberality!

5. A True Disciple of Christ

In our evangelism, we need to bring out and emphasise the fact that our view of material reality gives us a true basis for fascination with God's created world and the appreciation of true human creativity. Alongside these, we need to point out – and it is not difficult to demonstrate the contrast – that we fallen beings are not able to handle either God's creation or our human creativity because of our innate rebellion against our Creator.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away and there is no longer any sea.
²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:1,2. (NASB)

The only possible way to be a responsible steward in this world is to become a true disciple of Christ. Thus, salvation in Christ is not only the right way to die, as some Christian reductionists make it out to be, but the right way to live here on earth as followers of Jesus so that we shall ultimately come down from heaven as the Bride of Christ to continue our stewardship of the New Creation *Revelation 21:1,2*. It is only within this context that life is lived meaningfully and the significance and identity of the individual person will not be lost in today's extremely competitive and materialistic world.

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Humour

Ha.....ho..
 Ha.....ha
 He.....ha

Newly married husband puts a notice in front of his residence:

FOR SALE

- * Computer and Encyclopedia both in good condition.
- * Reason for selling: No longer needed. Got married.
- * Wife knows EVERYTHING ...with backup server called, "MOTHER IN LAW"

A Mother's Love

Andi & Sheba Eicher



Sheba came to the Jeevan Sahara Care Centre late in the night to do a night round with the man with HIV admitted there.

He was brought to us in a terrible condition - emaciated and coughing. The diagnosis made was extensive tuberculosis causing severe damage to his lungs, complicating a long history of schizophrenia. He was semi-conscious and very sick.

When Sheba entered his room this is what she saw: The sick man's aged mother was lying in his bed. Sleeping next to him..... her head close to his face, though he was often coughingher hand gently on his shoulder. Sheba asked her why she was sleeping so close to her son.

Her response was passionate. Her son was scared and the presence of his mother close to him comforted him.

What love this mother has! Undeserved and unreserved love. Love in action. Love in deed. Love given to a son who has lived such a shambles of a life..... to whom life itself is an open question.

We are deeply privileged to be able to facilitate this man's recovery. Our hope is that he will be healed in body, mind and spirit - and be able to thank his dear mother for the love she has poured into him. And for him to be a blessing to others too.

In the mean time, he fights for life and his mother loves him.



Source: [www.http://andi-sheba.blogspot.in/](http://andi-sheba.blogspot.in/)

EMFI Conference, Ludhiana



The CMC Worship team leading the worship.



The participants take part in worship.



Listening to one another.



Praying together with one accord.



Meaningful Focus Track Seminars



Brisk business at the EMFI stall.



EMFI Conference, Christian Medical College, Ludhiana, 1st - 4th October 2014..

My life, my work for the King!



Sing along with Deva



Praise and worship time



Cheerful, ever helpful volunteers



Children in Action



Food and Fellowship



Sumptuous Punjabi food



The next generation - our children with the Beyond Barriers team

When Parental Misconceptions Harm the Child

Arpit Mathew



This is a clear and somewhat unbelievable situation where clan tradition and ignorance caused grievous harm to an infant which almost led to her death.

This incident happened when we were working in a mission hospital in the North-east of India, three winters ago. I was called to the Emergency in the middle of the night a few days before Christmas. Now, as anyone who lives in a cold place (or who has read Jim Herriot!) knows, when a call comes in the night, it is a mighty big struggle to drag oneself out of a warm bed to face the bone-chilling blast of icy wind that hits you as you open the door. The hope is always that it will be nothing surgical. A quick examination and a perfunctory word with the family are all that separate you from a return to the warmth of the bed and the person sleeping peacefully in it, who

never complains about the regular disturbances or the freezing feet that snuggle up to hers in an attempt to get warm!). But that was not to be!

When I reached the emergency after a freezing walk up the hill, one look at the baby's abdomen was enough to tell me that I could say goodbye to my sleep for the rest of the night! The tiny little infant was only seven days old, severely de-hydrated, with obvious septicaemia and with a tummy that looked like a balloon.

The story the mother told me was vague. The baby had been fine, sucking well. Then suddenly three days earlier, the baby had stopped feeding well, begun to develop abdominal distension and had gradually deteriorated with no apparent cause it seemed. As an afterthought, the mother mentioned that she had fed the baby some bananas.... I did a double-take!



Fig. 1. I am holding one end of the ruptured stomach in my fingers and the other one with the forceps.



Fig. 2. The contents of the stomach and abdomen removed during the surgery.

What!! Bananas to a neonate?!!

The mother explained that it was the local custom to start feeding the baby bananas from the third day and that was what she had done!! And she could not understand my consternation - after all, she had done the same for each of her earlier nine children and they were all fine! Believe me, I am not making this up!! Considering the sick baby, I let matters lie and moved on to more pressing matters.

Whenever there is a baby to be resuscitated, the first thing I do is to call our paediatrician, Dr. Susil Longtraï, who pretends not to notice my complete ignorance in such matters and kindly advises me on exactly what to do, right down to the doses of the drugs. Once we had the lines and the antibiotics in, I took the baby for an x-ray. It showed a large amount of gas under the diaphragm, which signifies a bowel perforation.

Having not heard of this in such a small child, I made a quick phone call to Dr. Lurstep, my colleague in the surgery department, after posting the baby for surgery. He said, he had seen a neonate with a similar history a month before and had found at surgery that the baby had a burst stomach.

Sure enough, on the operating table, I also found the stomach had burst right along the greater curvature (which is the longer, outer curve of the concave stomach tube) from the oesophagus

nearly upto the pylorus (the other end!). In the pictures taken on my mobile phone, I am holding one end in my fingers and the other one with the forceps.

But even more interesting was the contents of the stomach, some of which had spread throughout the abdomen. It was a congealed, foul smelling mass of what was obviously bananas mixed with milk that had blocked the exit of food from the stomach, causing it to bloat up and burst like a balloon!

There was much prayer sent up for this sick little baby that night. But the value of an excellent anaesthetist, paediatrician and a good neonatal ICU were brought home to me as the baby gradually improved and was able to go home. This is one of the things I love about mission hospitals - patients who would have surely died surprise us by getting well and going home. The hand of God surely rests on these hospitals.

As for the mother, she remains unconvinced about our theory that the bananas blocked the stomach and caused the blow-out. She believes it must be some weakness of this particular baby that caused it! I am sure if she does have another baby (which is quite possible!), bananas are sure to be on the menu just as they always have been! I just feel sorry for the poor surgeon who has to deal with the stress of taking care of the sick baby over Christmas and New Year!!

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Parent Child Communication for Building Relationship

M C Mathew

I had the opportunity of addressing parents of kindergarten children at the beginning of each new academic year, when Anna and I were living in Chennai from 1983 to 1997. During these sessions, I took time to meet with children for conversation. One question I often asked them was, 'What would make you happy at home?' A little girl once told me, in an almost choking voice, 'Tell my mummy and daddy to play with me. They are too busy to talk to me, take me for outings or birthday parties'. It was a surprise for me that even a four years old child could actually express her need to communicate with her parents. In fact this formed the substance of the introductory talk I usually gave parents on building a relationship with their children.

Let me summarise my reflections on making the parent-child communication process a means for building relationships in the family. Parent-child interaction includes the following dimensions:

1. Parent-child identity
2. Conversation times
3. Dialogue sessions
4. Instruction, correction, reinforcement
5. Briefing and de-briefing times.

1. Parent-child Identity

Anna and I were immensely delighted that we were able to spend a few days with our grandson a few weeks ago. What encouraged us most was the way his parents used his wakeful periods to communicate by singing and talking to him. There was reciprocity from the baby with heightened auditory and visual alertness even from the first week. All children are naturally conditioned for communication. When a baby cries and a parent pays attention to his/her needs, the baby is assured that he/she is in the midst of people who care. This consciousness is essential for the healthy emotional development of an infant.

Jesus of Nazareth separated himself from his parents during a family visit to the temple, to listen and dialogue with the religious leaders on matters of the law and the prophets. His mother had to return to fetch him when he was not found with the family caravan. Jesus responded to his mother, by stating the intent of his heart, "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" *Luke 2:49*. Although He did accompany His mother back home, His parents did not understand the meaning of His statement.

A child has an identity far beyond his/her physiological identity. In fact this enhances the value of every new born baby from being just the fruit of the physiological union of parents to being divinely called into being and formed in the mother's womb for a purpose.

This incident gives us an insight into parent-child identity. Parents naturally have an overseeing role, as children are physiologically their offspring. The consciousness that the apostle Paul had that God, '... had set him apart' even from his mother's womb *Galatians 1:15* tells us that every child has an identity far beyond his/her physiological origin. This suggests that every newborn child is not merely the fruit of a physiological union of parents but also divinely called into being. "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" This shows us that every baby has a 'belonging' beyond the home to which he/she is born. Parents are the providers but God is the keeper.

The parental role is to nurture children and then set them free to fulfil their calling as soon as they are mature enough to make a choice. Though we beget them, we do not 'own' our children. As they pursue their calling, they are to honour their parents and engage in a mutually edifying relationship of 'belonging' that creates intimacy and bonding between them.

It also offers freedom to parents and children to view the relationship under the sovereign purpose of God the Father, from whom all families on earth come into being. So both parents and children grow in a self-giving relationship, both actualising their identity in mutual acceptance and support without dominating over each other.

The Abraham-Isaac story *Genesis 22:1-19* throws more light on the parent-child identity. Abraham set out on a journey to sacrifice his son according to God's command. Abraham and Isaac 'walked on together' *Genesis 22:8* till they reached Moriah, but when they reached the place for the sacrifice, Abraham bound his son and placed him on the altar for the sacrifice. *Genesis 22:9*.

Then the angel of the Lord called out to Abraham and asked him not to lay a hand on the boy. Our children are ours by birth, but belong to God by calling. Parents need to surrender their children to the purposes of God, so that they can actualise their calling and children in turn respond by regarding their parents with love and warmth.

When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."⁹ When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. ¹² "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." *Genesis 22: 9-11.*

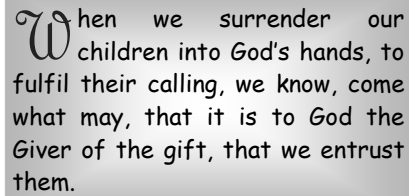
I remember a conversation with a ten years old boy who had lost a costly fountain pen given to him by his parents on his birthday. I asked if he would get scolded by his parents for losing the pen! He replied, 'the gift may be lost but the giver's heart is always kind'. This boy knew that his parents had a giving spirit that would be kind. That is what all parents need to emulate. When we surrender our children into God's hands to fulfil their calling, we know, come what may, that it is to God the Giver of the gift, that we entrust them.

This frees us from clinging on to our children and burdening them with our expectations. The Biblical call is, 'Freely you have received; freely give'. *Matthew 10:8*. It is this openness that will continue to make the parent-child relationship a life long adventure of being mutually supportive anchors.

2. Conversation Times

The many times the family sit together and have conversations are invaluable opportunities for communication. The conversation times may be entirely unplanned or they may be during family meal times, during an outing or play-time, while doing some activity together or during family celebrations.

These times are usually spent talking, sharing views and information, listening to each other's opinions and ideas. They form the most important link between parents and children to strengthen the ties between them and so we need to guard such times.



When we surrender our children into God's hands, to fulfil their calling, we know, come what may, that it is to God the Giver of the gift, that we entrust them.

We may not make the most of these opportunities if we are preoccupied or distracted. One comment I heard from a seven-year-old girl about her parents was, 'Even when they are with us they are busy thinking about other things. Sometimes they don't even hear what we say.' This perceptive child could see her parents were not 'present' and was expressing her longing for more communication with them.

Children learn many concepts when there is conversation in the home such as expressing what is going on in their minds, speaking by taking turns, showing respect even while disagreeing, sandwiching criticism between complements, listening to what the other person is saying, learning from the experiences of others, understanding values and acceptable behaviour.

A psychologist whom I personally know for fifteen years, who studies the content of family conversations recently told me that the subjects of family conversations these days have shifted to films and film stars, new products in the market, holiday resorts, investment and savings, etc. These adult oriented conversations, do not contribute to the formative development of children.

If children try out smoking, alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling, stealing or cheating, it is likely that their minds have not been soundly formed through person-building conversations at home.

A child who has discussed the consequences of Bilbo stealing the Arkenstone in 'The Hobbit' (*Tolkien*) would find it harder to take what belongs to someone else than one who has never talked about stealing in a non-threatening family context. Anna used to read to all of us stories, biographies, etc. during our meal times, picnics, outings and long car travels and then encourage conversation around those themes. They formed a substantial part of our efforts to build an inner fabric of values and sound thinking in our children.

I find that listening is a challenge to most of us, as many interests and needs compete for our attention. So I was pleasantly surprised to see a parent attending to her daughter's conversation while she was entertaining guests in her home. This three years old girl brought a dead butterfly from the garden and said to the mother, "The poor butterfly is dead. Where can I bury it?" The mother after hugging the child excused herself from her guests and accompanied her daughter to the courtyard. She buried the butterfly in the place her daughter chose.

Children need to get the message that they are heard and their concerns are valued.

Later this mother told me that, the conversation was all about growing more flowering plants in the garden so that butterflies would not starve to death. The family had watched a documentary on the children of the world, the day before, which had some scenes of refugee children in Somalia suffering from starvation.

This is how a young child's mind is being formed. As children are stringing ideas together, they are looking for coherence and clarification. If a thought or question arises in their minds, they need to clarify it at once or else it will be lost as they cannot keep it pending in their minds till another occasion arises. Their questions need responses also because they need to get the message that they are heard and their concerns are valued. When they are denied adequate interaction, they may press their point by throwing a tantrum, nagging or sulking. Even worse, lack of due attention because of parental preoccupations, may cause the child to grow up with the feeling of being less valued, with the unintentional message that, 'I do not matter to my parents'.


The words of Jesus, '... "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." Luke 18:16 is an invitation to adults to revise their attitude towards their children.

A senior consultant who leaves home early and returns only at night mentioned to me that he feels distant from his teenage son and daughter and feels distressed about it. He attributes it to the lack of conversation time he had, when they were growing up. I encouraged him to spend his leisure times with his children to break the ice. Three months later, he was ecstatic about the new found freedom of conversation with the children. Therefore, it is never too late to start the practice of conversation times. In most instances the intimacy between parents and children can be redeemed, if they can prayerfully create unhurried times of discerning, listening and talking.

The words of Jesus, '...."Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." *Luke 18:16* is an invitation to adults to revise their attitude towards their children. As parents it is our responsibility to make children feel that they have access to our time, and attention and that they are welcome to have short or long conversation times.

3. Dialogue Sessions

Dialogue sessions are structured times, usually about 20 minutes each time on a topic that children would like to discuss and explore. They can be topics, which get discussed at school in and outside the classroom. This works best when both parents are present. The dialogue can be planned for all the children together or for one child at a time on a topic previously agreed upon.



The primacy of such times is to give an opportunity for children to express themselves and feel valued irrespective of their opinion.

The dynamics of this dialogue is that each person gives his/her opinion on the issue in the first round followed by questions, clarifications or disagreement in the second round. The third round is used to express what has become clear and what is not clear in which case one of the parents could sum up the time with a plan to meet again sooner or later to continue the dialogue if necessary.

The idea is to help children to discuss matters logically, rationally and critically. The purpose of such times is to give an opportunity for children to express themselves and feel valued for their opinion. Most children settle down to make these times useful for themselves and their parents, once they know that their opinions are listened to. There may be impulsive responses, loud disagreements, expressions of anger and interrupting others but these usually settle down over a period of time. If each child takes turns to moderate these dialogue-times they learn to state their own point of view and also allow others to express themselves and are thus introduced to leadership skills. This is a roadmap and there may yet be challenges along the way which parents need to prayerfully discern and work through with God's grace.

It is during such times, self-disclosures take place directly or indirectly, which is another value addition to these times. In fact parents would be glad to have had an access to the thought world of their children through these dialogues, without having to intrude their privacy.

Many parents form their opinion about their children from what they hear from their teachers, friends, neighbours, etc. Sometimes parents do not make an effort to explore the truth with their children and stay biased by what they hear from others. They can then make the children feel guilty by their accusational attitude. The dialogue times can also be used for private conversations with one child. This gives parents an opportunity to draw near to a hurting child to offer comfort, which is what a child would need when he/she is guilty of an act of commission or omission.

As children go through the transitional ages of preadolescence and adolescence, dialogue times become even more important. Many children are under pressure to conform to peer behaviour and would have much to hide from their parents. It is the fear of reprimand and punishment, which make them hide the truth from parents. Children would be more comfortable if parents would give them concessions and understand the pressures under which they function. If parents can accept that these years are a turbulent period, they will be able to be understanding and accompany their children as they make the transition to adulthood. Parents need to continue to affirm their child even when they do not conform to all their ideals.

The story of the boy who gave away his five loaves and two fish to Andrew is an illustration of the way a child can be made to think and respond. When Jesus asked the disciples to provide food for the five thousand, Andrew came across the little boy. Normally children would like to hold on to what they have. This child was willing to give away his food because it was Jesus who was asking for it. Andrew's friendly demeanour would have helped the child to do what was ordinarily difficult. This is a lesson for parents. The parental involvement with children is to lead them to do what is right and desirable even when it appears initially difficult. A child consents to kindness and engagement more than to reason and logic.

A Catholic Father who is involved in rehabilitating children living in the streets once told me about his way of weaning away children from substance abuse, stealing and criminal activity. He has daily meetings with them in the evening around a meal. For weeks he would have to listen to a child before he can encourage them to change. The dialogue times in a group or in private, facilitate the building of trust between him and the child. Only after building up trust through these sessions of dialogue does he find that children are ready to change and he can then help them in the process of change.

The parental involvement with children is to lead them to do what is right and desirable even when it appears initially difficult.

Anna and I recall several dialogue sessions we have had with our boys when they were growing up. One particular question from our older son, who enjoyed singing with the students who visited our home, opened a new chapter in his life. He was around five years old, when he asked us one day, 'Can we have a piano at home?' It became a part of his prayer every day and daily dialogue in our home. We were all surprised when a piano teacher living near us offered us a piano on rent and also piano lessons. He went on to do the piano examinations with the Royal College of Music in his school years and now uses his musical skills creatively to bless and inspire others.

It was during his late teen years we had several dialogue sessions with our younger son about his desire, to own a motorbike. It took a while before we could come to an agreement on the conditions attached to the use of a bike. He reciprocated well to our trust and is now a versatile cross-country biker. He is an example to others on good practices for safe biking. The aspirations of children get expressed when we create occasions of dialogue to listen to their spoken and unspoken needs.

4. Instruction, Correction, Reinforcement

All children are learners right from their infancy. As a four-month-old-baby is asked to wave his hand and father says 'bye-bye' or a mother allows a nine-month-old child to sit at the table and feed herself with a spoon, the baby is receiving instruction on social skills and self-help skills.

When an infant at nine months tries to stand up on his own or take a step and receives acknowledgment for his effort, he is encouraged to make more attempts even though it takes a while before he is able to stand or walk on his own. The child hears us speaking and singing to him/her and learns to speak. We offer instruction in an array of domains and the child responds and learns. When a child is ready for formal learning, the instruction to read and write is offered. The child also picks up unsaid and hidden messages that are conveyed, unintentionally. The setting and ambience in which the instruction is imparted also contributes to the child's attitude to learning. The writer of Proverbs says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it. *Proverbs 22:6 (NASB)*."

If the child is growing up in an atmosphere where acceptable behaviour is complimented It will also be possible to suggest correction when he/she could change such as spilling food on the table while eating, leaving clothes lying around after returning from school, telling a lie, refusing to stop playing at a previously agreed time, postponing home work or being quarrelsome etc.

When the milieu of the home is encouraging, it is possible to communicate to the child in a friendly and appealing way about undesirable behaviour. The correction is intended to influence the child's thinking and attitudes and to inspire him/her to effect a change in behaviour. Parents can creatively use dialogue sessions for this correction process.

Often suggesting alternative behaviour is all that is needed. I remember watching a parent correcting a four years old child when he returned home angry after a quarrel with his friend during a ball game. The immediate response of the father was, 'If you go back now he would let you play with the ball'. The child went back and for the next half hour till I left that home, the boy was playing happily in the neighbour's courtyard.

On another occasion, during a visit to another home, a mother was trying to impress on her three-year-old child the need to use water sparingly while having a bath. The little girl had left the water running and had no notion of the water restriction that was in existence during the summer months. I listened to that conversation of the mother with her daughter, when she explained the need to use less water. I was most encouraged by the creativity this mother exercised to win her daughter over to change her behaviour.

To make up for the loss of the fun-time playing in the water, the mother allowed her daughter to play with a bucket of water in the garden so that the plants also would get watered automatically. Both the mother and her daughter looked pleased at the end of this corrective conversation.

Some parents lose their cool when their child does something undesirable. This can lead to impulsive behaviour with anger, verbal, physical abuse or confrontation, all of which would cause a souring of relationship.

Is there a role for punishment to correct behaviour? When a five-year-old child did not return from play after he was called three times, the mother decided to deny him 20 minutes of TV viewing time. This mother took time to explain the reason for her decision. Here she used a dis-incentive to establish that the behaviour was undesirable. It was a message to the child that he will be denied good things if he does not modify his behaviour. The core purpose of punishment should be to generate compliance and change rather than to inflict injury or arouse reaction.

All children need reinforcement of good behaviour through honest compliments, favours and encouragements - verbally, emotionally and materially. There used to be a cupboard in our home where Anna would have a collection of 'goodies' and 'fun-things', which she presented when one of our sons needed a special 'compliment'.

Reinforcement of good behaviour can be done in different ways, such as special meal, an outing, a story or fun game, extra play time, family indoor games, weekend cycling tours, etc. The most important outcome is that the child learns the need to behave in acceptable ways without dampening creativity and choice.

I would not recommend corporal punishment as a pattern as it creates more fear and anger than genuine attitude change.

5. Briefing and debriefing times

Children respond and react better if they are prepared for unexpected events.

The core purpose of punishment should be to generate compliance and change rather than to inflict injury or arouse reaction.

We cannot always predict what to expect but where ever possible, if children are briefed, they are better able to make the most of the experience. I remember, Anna preparing our children for a holiday trip, by telling about the train journey, walks in the mountain, out door play, board games, walks through tea estates, activity times during the day, etc. We showed pictures of the place and friends we would meet there. For about a week the post dinner excitement was to talk and prepare for this holiday. This helped children to choose books or toys they wanted to pack in their travelling bags. There were times set apart for conversations about the weather, meal times, sleeping hours, etc. During the holidays, we realised that our boys were able to enjoy the time and adjust even when inclement weather forced us to stay indoors. This to me is the benefit of briefing times before an activity or event for which parents solicit the participation of their children and so minimise the adjustment stress.

After our return to Chennai, the talks about the holiday experiences continued during our conversations at meal and post meal times. As the four of us took turns to share the joys and discoveries of the time, there was a recurrent mood of celebration and treasuring of those happy moments. It is good for children to ruminate, recall and integrate happy memories they can treasure. This also gives them an opportunity to express their reactions to the denials or corrections which were given - a way of catharsis. We, as parents could explain again the reason why some things had to be done as they were. We have found that the emotional reaction gets diffused as the

conversations about the issues continue for a few occasions. Displaying photos of happy experiences on the bulletin board help to bring them back to mind and besides reinforcing memories of happy times provide themes for family conversations. These debriefing times nurture children before and after every event and as they are enabled to reflect on the experiences, it contributes to their personal development.

All children need the formative moments of intimate parental engagement with them. I find that doctors have a legitimate excuse for not having time to do so. In fact, some children of doctor couples choose against studying medicine, because they feel that their parents had less time for them when they were growing up. These children may have the ideal aptitude and temperament to be caring doctors! Here the decision not to do medicine was a reaction to what they felt they had missed from their parents rather than a considered choice.

This calls for greater commitment on our part as parents to offer quality time for our children. Our involvement with them will vary according to the stages in life - the younger ones needing more time and the adult children needing more affection and heart-level interaction!

Jesus of Nazareth lived with his parents for thirty years, sharing his life with them. As parents let us prayerfully pay attention to communication within the family so that we may build meaningful relationships with our children, which can enable them, by God's grace, to learn to walk in His paths and choose His ways for their lives.

We Play a Part in God's Orchestral Masterpiece

Adapted from Stories for Preaching

Sir Michael Costa, the Italian born composer became a naturalised Englishman in the mid nineteenth century and received a knighthood in 1869. He was the conductor of the London Philharmonic orchestra from 1846 to 1854. He was known for His concern for discipline and accuracy and compositions of orchestral pieces. Ensemble was a novelty in his time and earned him much admiration.

On one occasion Sir Costa was conducting a rehearsal. The orchestra was joined by a great chorus and the melody was awe inspiring. About half-way through the session, with trumpets blaring, drums rolling, and violins singing their rich melody, the piccolo player felt he was not being heard.

He muttered to himself, "What good am I doing? I might just as well not be playing. Nobody can hear me anyway." So he kept the instrument to his mouth, but he made no sound.

Within moments, the conductor cried out, "Stop! Stop! Where's the piccolo?" The player thought no-one would miss the piccolo but It was missed by the ear of the most important person of all, the conductor.

When our hard work or small voice does not seem to be noticed, we can take heart in knowing that no task He has given us to do, is insignificant in God's view. Each calls for our hearty involvement. The Great Conductor needs us where He has placed us to bring out the richness of His orchestral masterpiece!

Source: <http://storiesforpreaching.com/>

As on that First Christmas Morning

Peter Millar, Iona, Edinburgh

It's easy to despair as we think of the world this Christmas.

The conflicts that mark our age, the beheadings we can watch,
The myriad hatreds running deep, the millions dispossessed as a planet groans in pain.

And rightly we ask, does the old tale hold against such odds?

That story of Light, of Love, of Hope - is it still around?

"It's there in the darkness" says a tender voice.

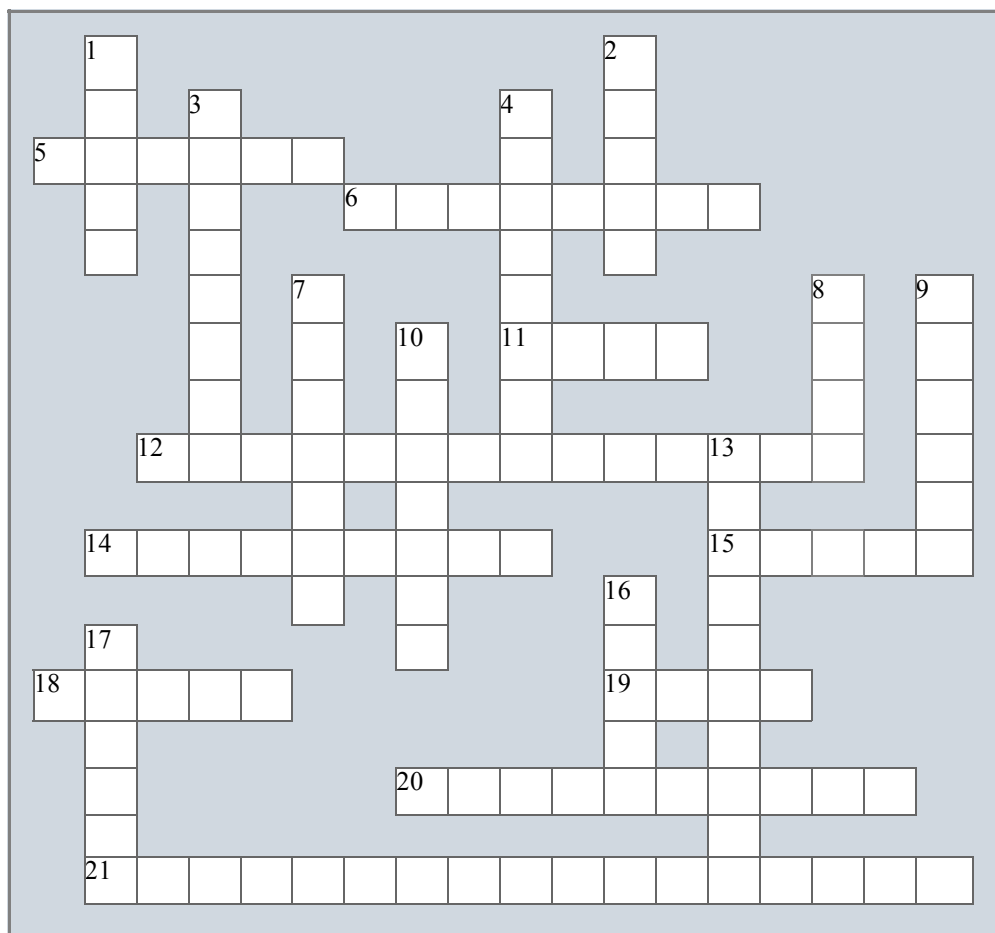
For it's where the stars don't shine that Love is present;
and even in the blood and tears is the One who suffers and heals;

not somewhere else, but in our midst,

As on the first Christmas morning.

The Christian Family

Bible Crossword



CLUES ACROSS

5	Paul says it is the practice of piety to care for these in the family. (6)
6	Paul asks us to do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with this spirit. (8)
11	It is said of this woman that she loved her mother-in-law better than seven sons. (4)
12	Jesus said, This happens when a man and woman leave father and mother and cleave to each other. (6,3,5)

Contributed by Dr. Anna Mathew, Kolencherry. Answers on page 36.

CLUES ACROSS - continued	
14	Paul says love must be without this. (9)
15	Fathers are asked not to provoke their children to this but to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (5)
18	The love of this is the root of all sorts of evil. (5).
19	Children are to do this to their parents in the Lord, for this is right. (4)
20	One of the characteristics of the elder in the book of Titus is that he must be this. (10).
21	As Christ does this to the church - so husbands and wives must do to each other. (7,3,7).

CLUES DOWN	
1	Paul exhorts us to put on love which is the perfect bond of this. (5)
2	If you do this to a child, even when he is old he will not depart from it. (5)
3	The promise to those who honour father and mother (4,4)
4	Jesus said, "Unless you are converted and become like these, you shall not enter the kingdom of Heaven. (8)
7	The barren woman is called to do this because she will bear the children of promise (7)
8	By faith, this man obeyed God, brought salvation to His household and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. (4)
9	Children are a gift of God and like arrows, the man who has this full of them is blessed (6)
10	He was told that his wife, the desire of his eyes would die. (7)
13	Fathers must not ----- their children that they may not lose heart. (10)
16	This mother-in-law loved her daughters-in-law and gave them the choice of nearness or distance. (5)
17	Jesus said withholding from parents saying it is this invalidates the word of God. (6)

Themes for Voice 2015

The theme for Voice 2015 will be "What is the mission of EMFI.?" Please do send in your articles by the 1st of February, May, September and November for each of the four issues. The specific themes for each of the four issues will be as follows.

- i. **Profession** - a calling from God;
- ii. **Fellowship** - uniting in common loyalty to Jesus
- ii. **Witness** - to the saving grace of Jesus at home and at work
- iv. **Medical mission** - service in the name and spirit of Jesus.

Awe and Wonder

Ruth Bancewicz

All scientists get to feel a sense of wonder at some point in their career, whether it comes from the interpretation of a new data set, the observation of a surprising phenomenon or something particularly beautiful. They may come to different conclusions about what they've seen and what it points to, but wonder seems to be part of the package.

There are two kinds of wonder. You may experience the first when you look at the sky on a clear and moonless night. The universe is vast, beautiful and at times seems incomprehensible. With such wonder, ignorance is dispelled by knowledge – a process that can lead to disillusionment. But, as Einstein pointed out, when one explores phenomena scientifically our wonder only deepens as the order and complexity in a system reveals itself.

Informed wonder is more lasting than that which stems from ignorance. Wonder that comes from knowledge is a fascination with the structure of the universe and our place in it. The initial uninformed wonder is crucial in the life of a scientist. Researchers need to cultivate the ability to stand in amazement or else they may fail to identify problems and not pick up surprising solutions.

English translations of the Bible contain about twice as many mentions of 'wonder' than 'awe', which may reflect something of the way God works. Awe has its place, but we also need to use our brains. In the Old Testament, God uses 'signs and wonders' to teach people what He is like. God does wonderful deeds, and His love and His law are described as wonderful. In the New Testament, people wonder at Jesus' birth, His miracles and teaching.

Does God wonder?

Perhaps we wonder because we are made in the image of God, but if God is truly omniscient then He has nothing to wonder about, does He? The Bible describes how God delights in the good things He sees in the world, and so wonder is not just a human thing.

So why do we wonder?

Our ability to wonder could be seen as a gift from God to fulfil our commission to steward the earth. For many, wonder is also bound up with their worship of God. One way or the other, experiencing wonder is an intrinsic aspect of our humanity and plays an important role in drawing us nearer to God.

Dr Ruth Bancewicz is a Research Associate at the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, working on the positive interaction between science and faith.

The Gold Wrapping Paper

Author Unknown



Once upon a time, there was a man who worked very hard just to keep food on the table for his family. A few days before Christmas, he punished his little five-year-old daughter after learning that she had used up the family's only roll of expensive gold wrapping paper.

As money was tight, he became even more upset when on Christmas Eve he saw that the child had used all of the expensive gold paper to decorate one shoebox she had put under the Christmas tree. He also was concerned about where she had got the money to buy what was in the shoebox.

Nevertheless, the next morning the little girl, filled with excitement, brought the gift box to her father and said, "This is for you, Daddy!" As he opened the box, the father was embarrassed by his earlier over-reaction in punishing her.

But when he opened the shoebox, he found it was empty and again his anger flared. "Don't you know, young lady," he said harshly, "when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside the package!"

The little girl looked up at him with sad tears rolling from her eyes and whispered: "Daddy, it's not empty. I blew kisses into it until it was all full." The father was crushed. He fell on his knees and put his arms around his precious little girl. He begged her to forgive him for his unnecessary anger.

An accident took the life of the child only a short time later. It is told that the father kept this little gold box by his bed for all the years of his life. Whenever he was discouraged or faced difficult problems, he would open the box, take out an imaginary kiss, and remember the love of this beautiful child who had put it there.

In a very real sense, each of us has been given an invisible golden box filled with unconditional love and kisses from our children, parents, family, friends and God. There is no more precious possession anyone could hold.



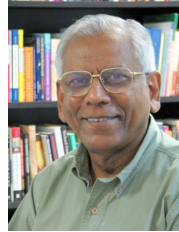
Source: <http://www.weboflove.org/i/christmas-stories/christmas-story-inspiring>

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ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD 12:3. The Christian Family

Crossword 12:3. CLUES ACROSS		
5	WIDOWS	<i>I Timothy 5:4.</i>
6	HUMILITY	<i>Philippians 2:3.</i>
11	RUTH	<i>Ruth 4:15.</i>
12	BECOMEONEFLESH	<i>Matthew 19:5.</i>
14	HYPOCRISY	<i>Romans 12:9</i>
15	ANGER	<i>Ephesians 6:4</i>
18	MONEY	<i>I Timothy 6:10.</i>
19	OBEY	<i>Ephesians 6:1</i>
20	HOSPITABLE	<i>Titus 1:8</i>
21	NOURISHANDCHERISH	<i>Ephesians 5:29</i>

Crossword 12:3. CLUES DOWN		
1	UNITY	<i>Colossians 3:14.</i>
2	TRAIN	<i>Proverbs 22:5.</i>
3	LOGLIFE	<i>Ephesians 6:2,3.</i>
4	CHILDREN	<i>Matthew 18:3.</i>
7	REJOICE	<i>Galatians 4:27, 28..</i>
8	NOAH	<i>Hebrews 11:7.</i>
9	QUIVER	<i>Psalms 127:3-5.</i>
10	EZEKIEL	<i>Ezekiel</i>
13	EXASPERATE	<i>Colossians 3:21.</i>
16	NAOMI	<i>Ruth 1:8.</i>
17	CORBAN	<i>Mark 7:11.</i>

What's in Your Spiritual Backpack?

Sharon Hinck

The apostle Paul says, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." 1 Corinthians 2:2

Each time I read this verse, I gulp. Can I really aspire to this sort of single-minded focus? Can I learn to value Christ so much that everything else becomes like nothing by comparison?

When we were newlyweds, my husband and I went on a backpacking trip in the mountains with a youth group. As we prepared, we learned about priorities. When you have to carry everything on your own back for miles of hiking in high elevations, you get wiser at deciding what matters most.

I've heard that some experienced backpackers will even cut off the handle of their toothbrush to reduce the weight of their pack by another fraction of an ounce. Before we left, I looked around our apartment. I liked our microwave, our books, our piano. I enjoyed a dresser full of clothes and a curling iron on the bathroom counter. But for our adventure in the mountains, all I really needed were the basics of survival.

Ten days lugging a tent, sleeping bag and food taught me a lot about how much is non-essential. Sometimes in our walk of following Christ, we get bogged down by the nonessentials. There are plenty of interests, activities or ambitions that feel important. They aren't necessarily bad things. But they sometimes threaten to crowd out the central purpose of life. When we're serious about following Christ through the difficult climbs of discipleship, we want to pare down to what matters most: knowing Him and His call for our lives. This will help us to focus on our priorities and not get weighed down by that which is non-essential.

This devotion is excerpted from [Mornings with Jesus 2013](#).

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Voice



*May the message of peace, joy and goodwill
that the angels proclaimed at the birth of
Jesus
bless our hearts this Christmas and
through the New Year!*