



THE PARISH PULSE



"And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11)

Vicar's Message : Pulkoodu(The Crib)

"Glory to God in the highest and peace among whom he is pleased" - Luke 2:14

The creator designed the first crib, and for the same reason, the crib is beyond human understanding. We all know that God chose a humble and simple pulkoodu for his son to be born. It was a holy night, with the sky full of twinkling stars, shone a little more bright and vigilant at the promised sight. The entire nature around the mountain valley, the trees and the rivers were silent and still eagerly waiting to gaze at the God who took the shape of a man in the womb of a simple woman. This was a night when women were glorified for being mothers as well. This Pulkoodu was a meagre tiny shed like any other just enough for the animals inside. However, it could easily accommodate Mary and Joseph. When Jesus was born, this little shed could include the baby placed carefully in a manger.



Angels were singing heavenly songs for Baby Jesus. Apart from this, it included the common men, the shepherds. Thus, Pulkoodu was a beautiful sight with God himself as the infant, glorified mother, the chosen man – Joseph, heavenly beings, the simple common men and even the animals in a beautiful bliss of nature and the sky. It was a well-designed picturesque representation of love, interconnectivity and tolerance by the creator himself.

Even at this age where business happens at the speed of thought, every year this first Pulkoodu is recreated again and again worldwide during the Christmas season. No matter whether in a mansion or a hut, every Pulkoodu is still a Pulkoodu reminding us of the simplicity the provider chose to be in. It also gives a loud and clear message of tolerance, amalgamation and coexistence between heaven, nature and mankind. Everyone had a place here.



Blessed Christmas and a Wonderful New Year 2025
Fr Liju Koruthu Thomas
Vicar/President



St Thomas - Apostle of India



H.H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, The Ninth Catholicos of the East in Malankara Metropolitan - Asia Pacific Diocese



H.G. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros
Asst Metropolitan - Asia Pacific Diocese





“Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, come and give it.” (Acts 13: 15)

A Blessed Second Life – Surprising Death Escape

(A real incidence revealed, especially for Sunday school children, from a member of Singapore Parish)

This real incidence happened around in 1977. I am the fourth among five siblings and lived in the village of Piralassery, Chengannur (Kerala State-India). During rainy seasons in Kerala, the water level usually increases to 6 to 10 feet high in my area in the paddy fields and its surroundings. During this season, most children learn swimming and play in water.

My younger brother and I tried to learn swimming with the help of a banana trunk. We would place this banana trunk in between our thighs. My younger brother would watch me from the shore and wait for his turn. Once I slowly drifted quite far from the shore, due to the force and flow of the water, the banana trunk went out of my control and moved away. Suddenly, I realised that I was drowning in water. The second time I went under water and came back up to water surface, I managed to shout to my brother, who was still at the shore, to bring someone to rescue me.

By this time, my only sister who was at home heard my screams for help but she thought that someone was making fun or playing around as usual. When I was drowning for the third time and swallowed the water, I thought that I would no longer be in this world.

My younger brother, who is four years younger than me, stood shocked and helpless. I then made the **SIGN OF THE CROSS** and surrendered to the Almighty God. Then, the miracle happened: I ended up on a levee (narrow, raised muddy pathway, it's called varambu in Malayalam) of the paddy field. At the same time, an elderly lady came there for a bath. My brother explained her the situation, then she swam up to me and stretched out her hand to hold me and helped me to walk safely to shore.

When this incident happened, both of my parents were in Tamil Nadu. I lived with my grandparents and siblings. I was quite fearful of my eldest brother, as he was very strict. I knew that I would be punished for learning to swim without getting any adult supervision or guidance, so I decided to stay away for a day.



I went to my maternal house and visited one of my best friends nearby. Even while at my friend's home, I felt that I was not alive and my soul was visiting him. My story ends here.

[A few years later, another related surprising incidence occurred when I was a high school student. A small group of students just watching the incident and was helpless. I just **prayed in mind** and stretched out my right hand to grasp a drowning boy to rescue him from the River Pamba during a School lunchbreak time. **“How amazing is God's love to His creation.”** *The fact is that even today, I do not know how to swim. Maybe, after the initial incidence, I never took any initiatives to learn swimming.*

(By reading the above blessings I have received from Almighty God, let it be to strengthen your spiritual belief, strong rooted rather than to evaluate me)

The insight of this real story

- A prayer is answered in 3 ways: (1) Yes, it's granted. (2) NO (3) Wait
- Even though our parents, siblings or friends are not with us in our trouble/needs, the Almighty God is always with us if we really seek Him.
- God have no boundaries. We are protected with unconditional love.



Harnessing the Power of Mind, Body, and Spirituality for

Optimal Well-being

The human experience is a complex interplay of the mind, body, and spirituality. These elements, when nurtured and balanced, can lead to optimal well-being and a fulfilling life. In this article, we will delve into each aspect and explore how they are interconnected.

The Human Body: A Complex System: The human body is an intricate web of interconnected systems that collaborate harmoniously to support life's essential processes. Maintaining optimal function requires a multifaceted approach, including physical exercise, a balanced diet, and adequate sleep.

Physical Health: Physical exercise plays a vital role in reducing stress hormones, such as cortisol, and stimulating endorphin production, which act as natural painkillers and mood elevators. Moreover, other neurotransmitters like dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine are also positively affected by exercise. A well-balanced diet is crucial in fueling physical and emotional processes. Serotonin, a neurotransmitter responsible for mood regulation, is produced primarily in the gastrointestinal tract. Eating healthy foods, avoiding processed items, and managing stress are key to maintaining good gut health and serotonin levels.

Mental Health and the Brain

The brain, as the control center, interprets our senses, initiates body movement, and regulates behavior. It manages stress by determining threats and coordinating behavioral and physiological responses. Unmanaged chronic stress can lead

to imbalanced brain circuits, resulting in behavioral changes, nervous system imbalances, and metabolism disruption.

Quality sleep is critical for overall well-being, as it enhances cognitive abilities, emotional regulation, and immune system function. Sleep deprivation can impair cognitive performance and contribute to chronic diseases.

Why do we stress?

There are various reasons why we stress, some of the factors are environmental, Childhood experiences and genetics.

Mental stress can produce physical symptoms, like tenseness of muscles, pain and gut symptoms.

Why do we need optimal sleep?

Sleep is an unconscious rest which is vital for physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. It enriches our ability to learn, memorize and make logical decisions. It also recalibrates our emotions and restocks our immune system, fine tunes our metabolism and regulates our appetite.

If we don't get enough sleep it can impair of cognitive functions and can lead to Chronic diseases.

The Role of Spirituality

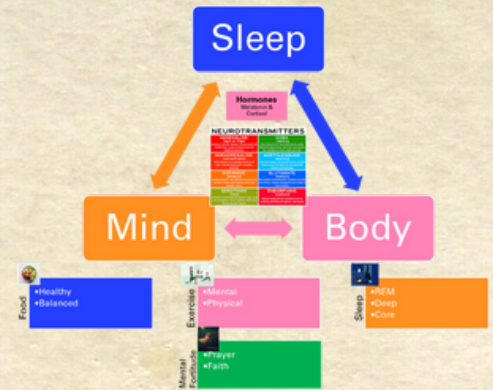
Spirituality, practiced through faith, prayer, or meditation, has numerous benefits on mental and physical health. Prayer is the practice of trusting the almighty.

It offers a sense of purpose and meaning in life, fostering resilience and enabling better coping mechanisms during challenging times.

Prayer and meditation lower stress levels, improve sleep quality, and support mental health.

Neurobiological correlates during meditation and spiritual practices

Koruthu Kurian - Ko10



are linked to improved mental well-being. There are many studies which suggest that spiritual practices can have a positive impact on mental well being

Integration for Optimal Well-being

Achieving optimal well-being necessitates a comprehensive approach to managing mental, physical, and spiritual health. **Practicing mindfulness through prayer & meditation** and maintaining healthy habits in physical exercise, sleep, and nutrition contributes to a balanced life.

Integrating physical health, mental wellness, and **spirituality & prayer** promotes a fulfilling life. By nurturing each aspect and acknowledging their interconnectedness, we can harness the power of **mind, body, and spirituality for optimal well-being.**





Beyond the Veil

Anything which is restricted, hidden or concealed always elicits a sense of curiosity in all of us. When in church, Altar is no different. What happens behind the curtain when Bishops and Priests enters the Altar and it is veiled? What are they doing inside during good Friday service saying Kurielaison? and that too, for so long? What are they doing during 'Hearken gracious' and why can't they do, what they do without closing the curtain? Seeking answers to these simple questions or a liking to participate in something which is part of but still apart from congregation are some reasons why many youths like to be Altar assistants.

During the initial days after entering the Altar, there is always a sense of anxiety when asked to read something or to help with any activities in the Altar. Am I doing it correctly? Am I going to make mistakes while reading? Did I disturb Achen while doing that? Is it a sin that I forgot to kiss the Thronos while taking the candle from it? When everyone enters the Altar, they will be asked to read shorter diptychs or ring a bell or hold a candle etc. After couple of months, boredom starts to kick in. Some folks ask, Achacha, what is the progression in the Altar like? When can I take the censer? I see that guy has been in the Altar for a while and is not assigned any major (read: Noticeable) tasks. Many times, we see that after few years when the young Altar boy grows older, the initial curiosity dies off and repetitive tasks with no visible results leads to loss of interest.

Many give up or stop coming. University studies, coursework, project submissions, exam preparation, part time jobs, work commitments are all good enough reasons to convince themselves for their visible absence in altar. Many genuine life demands can come in the way and is understandable but if the reasons are self-made (which is difficult to identify) it deserves some serious introspection. Most of the time, the real reason is that the young kid who entered Altar with all excitement, is slowly becoming 'of the world' (John 15:19) getting influenced by what is happening outside and becomes disinterested in the 'mundane religious activities. When approached to write this piece of article, despite the lack of worthiness, knowledge, credibility or authority it was this need of self-introspection that urged to this humble attempt. I leave all the shortcomings of this attempt to the benevolence and kind heartedness of the reader and welcome any thoughtful corrections

How to stand apart from the crowd, standing for oneself, how to make yourself visible, how to 'create an impact' are all areas in which we receive training from personality development coaches. They have a lot of tips and tricks to accomplish this and that too in a subtle way. And all these skills are to empower ourselves and our team to contribute to the company or society we are in. In short, all these trainings equip us to show the best side of our 'self' for success in different circumstances in life. 'Changing lives', 'creating an impact', 'For the common good' etc are all tags that are associated with this.



Vasanth Koruth Abraham - Vo22



When these new skills are applied in our life, we see positive results and it gives us a very good and positive feeling. A feeling of change. When there is a feeling of change and it seems or feels good, we are naturally inclined to think that it is good. Applying these newly acquired skills in church and especially in the Altar is not going to yield the same results. To put it in another way, it may yield a 'self-desired' result but not the 'correct' or 'appropriate' result taught by the Holy fathers. Because church and especially Altar is not a place to 'create an impact' but be impacted. Not to stand apart, but along. Not a place to display your 'self' but heal your 'self'. It is very common to hear comments like, the church services should be made shorter to accommodate the changing times and younger generations. What is the purpose of such long and lengthy services? Things should change. One thing we forget to recollect while saying this is, when prostitutes, tax collectors and other sinners came to Jesus Christ, they changed. Change happened to them and NOT Christ. So, the right question to ask is, should the change happen to 'The church' which is the body of Christ or to us?



Assigning varying degree of importance to each task in our own mind inside altar is another common problem seen everywhere. Censer is more important than ringing bells. Reading a particular diptych is important than shorter ones etc. This comes from a secular way of thinking where bigger, larger, best, faster etc are strived for. Progression is a 'must have' and being stagnant is frowned upon. Christ and the fathers of Holy Orthodoxy teaches us differently. Walking an extra mile, give the extra tunic to someone else and the best of all, God becomes Human (isn't that a demotion?) and the examples goes on. Almost all of it are contrary to what we are taught to do in our present day. The Holy fathers advocate humility, repentance and obedience to the elder, than creating impact, standing for oneself and being noticeable. They consider the improvement in humility, denial of self, and obedience (submission of one's own will) as progression and not necessarily the improvement in performing any particular task with great expertise. There is a famous story from the desert fathers in which an Elder asked his disciple to plant a log of wood in sand and water it. The disciple did as he was told. After 2.5 years, a miracle happened. One morning they saw the log of wood had sprouted and it had leaves and fruits. The elder took those fruits and showed it to the other disciples and said, "this is the fruit of obedience". The disciple was saint Paul the 'Dwarf'. If the same story happened in the modern context, we would be tempted to ask a lot of questions. Why should I plant a log of wood? Shouldn't we try to find the seeds instead? Why should I water this dead piece of wood?

Isn't it obvious that's its futile? How long did you say, I should water it? What will I get by doing it? Tell me what are you trying to accomplish and most importantly the objective of the task? I don't think it's a productive way to use my time.

In this context, of us having an opinion on everything along with what the church and Holy fathers are teaching us, I will try to take the example of two articles in the altar which teaches us a lot by not speaking much.

The "Mshamshoniso"

This holy vessel used in the Altar is one of my favorites. The 'Mshamshoniso'. It teaches us with its insignificant but very essential presence. The 'Mshamshoniso' (meaning: the server) is the small little cup which holds water for the Chief celebrant to wash his fingers. There are three important aspects of it that I believe is relevant for us to emulate.

1. The 'Mshamshoniso' knows its place.

The Mshamshoniso is usually kept near the left hand side of the Celebrant. It is used to measure the water to be poured along with wine to the chalice during 'Thuyobo' service. The Mshamshoniso never takes the centre stage. It is never kept on the "Tabalitha" along with the Chalice and Paten which carries the Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Many times, if our struggle/temptation from secular upbringing is how to make ourselves seen, the attitude of this little cup is very much an example. It is very difficult to discern our objective and motive of performing each tasks in Altar or church because Vanity lies hidden beneath the surface of "Serving Altar" or "Serving Church". Satan entered the garden of Eden, and he has entered heaven too (Job 1: 6). This is where we must be diligent. Ephesians 6:12 "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

The only objective of serving in the Altar should be the Glorification of Christ and nothing else. If not, we will be bombarded with alternating thoughts of elation and hopelessness in the arena of our own mind all the while keeping a humble demeanour externally.

2. The 'Mshamshoniso' accepts the bits fallen of the 'children's table.'

When the celebrant does the fraction of the bread, tiny bits stick to his hand, and he washes his fingers in the Mshamshoniso to avoid the bits falling outside the Paten. The celebrant also keeps the spoon to avoid spilling of the Holy blood outside the Chalice. It is always ready to accept the tiny and less important. If we struggle with doing the seemingly less important tasks, we must meditate on this. There are no greater or lesser tasks. All tasks in Altar have the same purpose. Bells ring, censer perfumes and the candle burns for the glory of God. Also, the Mshamshoniso has always got the bits, and bits only. No words of appreciation or change in position. Many times, we would like the meat of things or the salient part of everything. A due recognition of a service rendered acknowledgement, or an appreciation of our effort is very much craved by most of us. If publicly, even better. If that is not duly acknowledged, negative thoughts sprout in our heads, and we find ways to show our displeasure or at least loose heart. This is where Mshamshoniso shows us a great example where it performs its assigned duty with no expectation of anything in return. It is a good example of living the bible verse "In the same way, when you have done all that you were commanded, you should say, 'We are worthless servants; we've only done our duty'" Luke 17:10.



3. The Mshamshoniso rests inside Christ.

Once the Holy Qurbana is completed for the day and the Chalice and Paten is wrapped and kept, the Mshamshoniso is kept inside the Chalice until the next Qurbana. Inside where the Holy blood of Christ was. Having performed its duty well, it rests inside Christ. This rest is very much needed and resting at the right place. The rise of social media has made our life less free. We think that we are always engaged in meaningful activities. There are instances where people check their updates during Diptychs and service of 'breaking of the word'(sermons). Our attention and time is being grabbed by these companies even without our permission. We have an urge to use their platform frequently. Why? Social media companies spend billions of dollars to understand and cater to the innate needs of human mind. They cater to what we secretly desire. Being 'Liked', 'Viewed' or reading the opinion of others gives a sense of satisfaction. After a post is made, people check frequently on how many people have viewed it, liked it, commented on it etc. The excitement of being 'liked' or 'Viewed' by many are temporary boosters. These appreciation fishing activities are energy drainers. Similarly, if the Altar is used to feed these innate desires of being liked or viewed it is not going to provide us with the strength. It won't supply the energy to take the crosses we are presented from family, schools or from work. I will state two bible verse to find meditate on and to help us find the right resting place.

Isaiah 30:15: *This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength."*

Mathew 11:28, 29: *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

We also have the good example of St. Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus sitting at the Lord's feet as a great example which was even commended by Christ himself.

The Wax candle

The Wax candle used in the Altar is my second article for some reflection. For many years now, it is very common to see the old wax candles in altar replaced with the new electric candles. There are many reasons given by those in favor of it. And all reasons are valid. Electric candles are very efficient and good looking. It doesn't make the Altar dirty with wax drippings. There is no need to clean it every week. The altar assistants don't have to run around trying to light all 12 wax candles when 'Velivu Niranjoreesho' is sung. A switch is turned and Bingooo!....ALL 12 Holy apostles are ready for action. Any sane person will choose the electric candles over their wax counterparts due to these benefits.

The journey of a wax candle starts with being the tallest ones on the steps of the throne. As it has burned and shared its light and warmth for few Qurbana, it reduces its 'self'. Having attended the Holy Qurbana for few weeks, there is a visible change for the wax candle unlike most of us.

Usually, the experience of attending few Qurbana in the Altar, gives us a hang of things and instead of reducing the 'self', we have more of the 'self' trying to create an 'impact/change' on how things are done.

But as discussed earlier we are to be impacted rather than create an impact. Next, the wax candle has a new role. Its size is perfect to fit inside the candle stand of 'Holy evangelion' table. After few weeks, it finds itself in other candle stands for normal Altar use. Secondly, another attractive feature of Wax candle is, it lights and gives life to its fellow candles who are extinguished at significant moments. A slight and timely bend towards them and that's it. The other candle is back to life with full Vigor and strength. During its life's journey, how many candles have it given life to? Not a single electric candle has given life to its fellow candle which is flickering. Usually, the flickering candle is left alone to die or turned off and discarded. Thirdly, the wax candle having shared its light, gives way to the next candle. It knows that it is not the most important, or the most special. It doesn't think that when it is not there in the Altar or church, the Holy Qurbana suddenly stops or get affected. This is a perfect example of what Christian life demands of us than being efficient, independent, and good looking.



Why should I do it? What is the significance of all these when I can choose to do it more easily. Denying of self, obedience, humility, carrying your cross etc sounds too complex, absurd and irrelevant. I will go to church/Altar, sing some songs, ring bells, hold a candle or do whatever I am asked to do and go home. What is wrong with that? We can quickly identify what is wrong with that by taking a quick look at the fruits we produce.

Mathew 7:17: "A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit." Are we producing fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control for ourselves? Not for others, but for ourselves? If yes, good job. But commonly seen fruits are stress, worry, anxiety, sleeplessness etc. And we take solace at places and persons incapable to address these issues. Jesus Christ himself has said why we go wrong. Mathew 22:29 Jesus answered, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God." So when the world spend billions to grab our time and attention, we have to invest in our 'self'. 2 Timothy 3:16 says "16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."



Again Mathew 7:24,25: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock".

So, let's strive to implement these teachings from Christ, Church and Holy fathers in our life in the appropriate manner to navigate our daily life and withstand the storms and rains it presents. Let the **"Serving Altar/Serving Church"** given **opportunity** to serve help in this endeavour.



May Lord have Mercy and Help us All.



The Importance of the Word of GOD in Christian Life

With the Baptismal vow one enters into a Covenant relationship with GOD. One is born of GOD. One begins life in CHRIST.

Being born is only the beginning of life. To live a healthy physical life, one needs to partake of essentials like food, water, breathing, rest, relationships, exercise, cleansing, etc. Likewise, there are essentials needed to live a healthy spiritual life – prayer (Phil 4:6,7), the Word (Josh 1:8), fellowship (Heb 10:24,25), bearing the Fruit of the SPIRIT (Gal 5:22,13), bearing witness to CHRIST (Mt 4:19), serving others (Mk 10:45), etc. In the Holy Qurbana where we refresh our Covenant relationship with GOD, many of these elements are involved, but just as we cannot confine eating food to just once a week, we need to partake of the spiritual essentials regularly.

Here, we will look at one essential, the Word of GOD, the Scriptures, the Holy Bible.

The best place to begin is to look at what place the Word had in the life of our LORD JESUS CHRIST. The following points are not in any logical / theological order, but roughly following the sequence as we look at the LORD JESUS' life.

A. Wisdom (Compare with Ps 119:97-105.)

At the age of twelve, the LORD showed HIS deep desire to know about GOD when HE stayed behind and was found “in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.” (Lk 2:46,47, NIV). HE must have continued doing so, as it says in Lk 2:52, “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” (NIV).

B. Bread In Mt 4:4 we read,

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (NIV).

By this the LORD declares that the Word is as essential to the spirit as food is to the body.

C. Sword, for spiritual victory

In the passage in Mt 4:1-11, we read of the LORD quoting three times from the Bible. Mt 4:4 (above) referred to Deut 8:3; in Mt 4:7, HE quotes from Deut 6:16, and in Mt 4:10 HE quotes Deut 6:13.

There is a lesson to be learnt here. JESUS was going through a major test. HE was being tested and HE overcame the temptations by remembering the Scriptures, showing the importance of the Word in having a victorious spiritual life, and the importance of memorizing verses as JESUS our LORD did. HE was using what St Paul called the “Sword of the SPIRIT” in Eph 6:17, an essential component in the Armour of GOD, and the only component for attacking the enemy.

D. The LORD's Example

After HIS forty-day fast and temptation, when the LORD returned to Galilee,

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Thomas George - To23



20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Lk 4:16–21) NIV

There are a few lessons to learn from this passage:

- (1) It was JESUS custom /practice/habit to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath days.
- (2) HE stood up to read the scriptures in the synagogue, which meant HE had some training/practice in it.
- (3) JESUS unrolled the scroll of Isaiah to pick a particular passage which we can today identify easily as Isaiah 61:1,2.



However, in JESUS' time there were no divisions into chapters and verses. (Chapters and verses were introduced only around 1227 AD and 1555 AD respectively). Moreover, in Hebrew there were no vowels or punctuation. So, the text would look like: THWRDSWRWRRTTNCNTNSLY (= The words were written continuously). In this type of text, finding a specific passage is possible only if one knows its meaning and its context.

This shows that the LORD JESUS had a very deep understanding of the Book of Isaiah (Scriptures).

(4) After closing the book, and returning it to the person in charge, the LORD declared that the passage that Isaiah had written was being fulfilled (NOW) in the hearing of the congregation. JESUS was declaring that HE is the Person spoke of in the passage – the Anointed ONE, the Messiah, the Fulfiller of the prophecies! HE understood how the Bible fits into human history.

Please note that the LORD had to read and learn the Scriptures just we have to: HE was not born with the knowledge pre-programmed into HIM.

E. Avoiding ERROR

In Mk 12:18-27, the Sadducees challenge JESUS about the resurrection /life after death by bringing a story of seven brothers and a wife.

In the LORD's reply, HE tells them that they were "in error" because they "do not know the Scriptures" and "the power of God". Not knowing the Word (correctly) can lead us astray.

Further, to show them that there is indeed a life after death, JESUS quotes from Exodus:

26 Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" (Mk 12:24-27) NIV

The LORD was basing HIS answer/reasoning on the present continuous tense in the words "I AM the GOD of...". For GOD to be the GOD of Abraham while speaking to Moses, Abraham (and Isaac and Jacob) had to be living and worshipping GOD then.

Note the emphasis, "You are badly mistaken". That's what happens if you don't know the Word.

St Paul emphasizes this:

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16,17 (NIV).

F. KNOWING GOD, having Eternal Life

To the Jews who were struggling to understand HIM, the LORD said, "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me" (Jn 5:39) NIV

After HIS Resurrection, the LORD told the disciples on the way to Emmaus:

25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (Lk 24:25-27) NIV. Likewise, in Lk 24:44.

In verse 45, it says, 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. (NIV).

The Scriptures, the Old Testament (Moses and the Prophets) have prophesied about JESUS. But to understand it, we need the LORD to open our minds.

Why do we need to understand the Scriptures? The LORD made it clear when HE said:

Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (Jn 17:3) NIV

Knowing GOD and CHRIST is eternal life. This is not knowing about GOD, or an intellectual knowledge, but a personal and living, knowledge and experience, of GOD, and a growing relationship with GOD. This is the only option for those who want eternal life.

Here are some more reasons we must study the Word of GOD, from the Old Testament.

G. CLEANNES, PURITY

9 How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. ...11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. (Ps 119:9,11) NIV

This is an area of struggle for the young (and older!). Memorising Scriptures will make them readily available for the HOLY SPIRIT to use to help you stay on the right/pure path.



H. SUCCESS

When Joshua was about to take up leadership over Israel after Moses, he is advised:

7 "Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Josh 1:7–8) NIV.

Everyone wants success. GOD's way for success is to carefully follow HIS Word. Joshua the leader had to find time to do this – no excuses.

Pray and ask GOD to teach you

The Word of GOD is deep enough to drown the biggest philosopher, but shallow enough for a baby to wade through. It cannot be understood by intellect but requires the AUTHOR to reveal its meaning. So, one must be like Mary Magdalene who chose to sit at the LORD's feet and learn. Pray and ask GOD to teach you.

18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. (Ps 119:18) NIV

33 Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. 34 Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. (Ps 119:33–34) NIV

We have the HOLY SPIRIT in us, and HE is the Best TEACHER.

27 As for you, the ANOINTING you received from HIM remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as HIS ANOINTING teaches you about all things and as that ANOINTING is real, not counterfeit—just as it [= HE] has taught you, remain in HIM. (1 Jn 2:27) NIV, emphasis added.

Make it a Habit

Make it a habit to read the Bible every day, preferably continuously from beginning to end. It would be good to read a passage from the New Testament and one from the Old Testament. It may be convenient to read one in the morning, and the other at night. The number of verses can be chosen to fit your schedule but make it consistent.

Set a time, may be once a week to study the Word. You could follow some study system, or just take up a passage, or a topic, or a book of the Bible and study it. Studying involves reading the passage, and its context (passages before and after), looking up meanings, asking questions, and making your own notes. You could refer to resources (including online ones).

What can I learn about the character / person of GOD (the FATHER / SON / HOLY SPIRIT)?

What can I learn about our relationship with GOD?

What can I learn about what GOD expects of me / my relationships / etc. ?

What / whose example can I follow?

What /whose errors should I avoid?

Etc.

When you come across very meaningful verses, commit them to memory, and review them periodically. It is good to give a short title and learn- Title, Reference, Verse and Reference.

All this will not be useful unless you also meditate on them. Think about the verses that you read/studied/memorised when you are travelling, relaxing, walking, washing dishes, etc.

As you progress you will find GOD transforming your life.

2 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. (Rom 12:2) NIV.





How can our Church support caregivers of children with special needs?

As a person who has worked extensively with differently abled children, I have frequently encountered parents and caregivers of children asking me for advice on how to “cure” their children of their condition. They are curious to know the cause for their child being different and want to find ways to make the condition go away.

Parents and caregivers of children with special needs face anxieties that many other parents find hard to identify with. They might also experience self-blame that they were somehow responsible for the child's condition. Some caregivers even experience denial regarding their child's condition and hope that the child will outgrow their condition as he/she grows up. Taking care of a child with special needs can lead to immense caregiver stress and sometimes even marital discord. This made me wonder - How can we as a church better support parents and caregivers of children with special needs?

What were Jesus' view towards disability and children who were differently abled? In John 9 verse 12, Jesus saw a man who had been blind since birth. His disciples asked him, “*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*” Jesus replied, “*Neither this man nor his parents sinned... but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.*”

Jesus also said, “*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.*” (Matthew 19:14)



Divya Mammen - Jo6o



To summarize, Jesus asks us not to ask why a child was born different. He also clearly states that neither the child nor the parents should be blamed for the child's condition and that this was God's will to bring glory to His name. As a church, Jesus urges us to welcome all children, whether neurotypical or neurodiverse. We also need to acknowledge that parenting a child who is differently abled can be extremely overwhelming. We need to understand the challenges these caregivers face and whenever possible, lend a helping hand. Instead of hoping for a “cure” for the condition, we should celebrate neurodiversity and include children who are differently abled in our community as they are also God's children.





Ruth John - Poo6

Embracing Servant Leadership: Lessons from Jesus on Humility and Service

Jesus did what no spiritual teacher of His time, or indeed at any time in history, could ever conceive. He demonstrated a divine superiority. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" He asked. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too should wash one another's feet." He set an example, saying, "I have given you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:12-17)

What Jesus taught was 'Servant Leadership,' which rejects the pursuit of power, position, and possessions. He taught that such desires are directly opposed to the essence of discipleship and genuine leadership. Leadership, he asserted, is not about titles, positions, or power; it is about action and serving others.



In Palestinian homes of that era, foot-washing was a customary act of hospitality. Typically performed by servants or the wives of hosts, it catered to guests who had traveled on dusty and rugged roads. *During the Last Supper, just before His crucifixion, Jesus profoundly surprised His disciples by washing their feet. When Peter protested, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus responded, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter insisted, "You shall never wash my feet." To which Jesus replied, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Peter then said, "Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well."* (John 13:4-9)

We must reflect upon our actions:
• Am I exerting undue control over those I live or work with?

- Do I boast about my educational qualifications, experiences, or the positions I have held? A
- Am I driven by a desire for popularity and fame?
- Do I believe that I do not need anyone else's advice or guidance?
- Do I look down on others?

If these questions arise, it is a call to follow Jesus' path and become a true disciple and a genuine leader.



Let the weavers weave: Rekindle faith in marriage

Let us visualise the picture of two weavers weaving threads to create a fabric. They work slowly with both pairs of hands, patiently holding the thread, and carefully running the needles. An inconvenient knot sometimes disrupts the flow, but they get to the task of unknotting it and guard their fingers and needles to minimize the error. The weavers recognise that this is a journey, need short breaks to rest their tired hands, pausing a bit, freedom to create and recreate colours in the process. Their perseverance and discipline that a beautiful fabric will be created keep the momentum strong and steadfast. This picture comes to my mind as I think about the role of two individuals in a marriage.

The institution of marriage is a work of art, mind, and wisdom. Legally it can be described as a contract or a covenant to nurture kinship, a formal union creating offsprings along with legal, economic and emotional unity. The Bible declares it as a union of Christ and the Church with all its reverence as a sacrament. From a more modern perspective, we call it a partnership. But unlike business partnership, the degree of mutual care and respect, trust, and loyalty is astounding as it goes into the core of human emotions

Should we say that we are losing faith in this institution with fewer marriages and more divorces or more work needs to be done for this phase of life? It is pertinent to note that it is a journey of mutual respect and a mind and heart to sing and dance to the music needs to be nurtured.

To build a strong and healthy marriage, what are some of these crucial elements that need to be addressed?

Needless to say, first and foremost, good spiritual growth is a prerequisite. The energy to support each other with God beside gives the couple an unseen strength because it was God's plan that man and woman should unite. No other relationship in the Bible is described as a single union with this magnitude. Not even your relationship with your parents or your siblings.

One of the underlying reasons for conflict and divorce among couples is the inequality of financial resources and management which looms like a shadow. Discussing financial allocation, empowering one another, setting goals and budgets, minimizing materialism and being good stewards of God's resources can help strengthen marriage. Conflicts are inevitable but conflict resolution is how you handle them consciously. You may stumble but taking a step in resolution can go a long way.

One strategy would be to listen to each other's perspectives, seeking compromise and preventing bitterness from taking root.

Another area where marriage takes a challenging is the planning and raising of children. We often forget that children are a heritage from the Lord and they are his reward. We are simply tasked with nurturing the beauty of God's greatest creation. Family planning, raising children in faith, and dedicated parenthood must be discussed and weaved with care to avoid any potential disagreements.

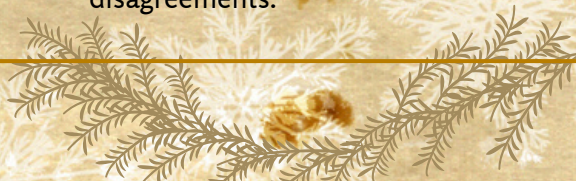


Rajani Thomas - T032

Lastly, forging a harmonious relationship with both sides of the family. Discussing boundaries and expectations, honouring family members, and unnecessary interference in another's home can keep tensions and conflicts at bay. The wisdom to weave this connection and blend them into the marriage is a conscious step. Seek support and give support to your children and parents only when needed, thus fostering trust and confidence



The family and community play a large role in rekindling faith in this institution. There is no harm in exercising your choice of not getting married, but it should not be at the cost of a belief of the lack of faith in this institution because as husband and wife, we are reflecting God's love and glory through unconditional love, patience, perseverance, and respect. As the weavers dream about the beautiful fabric, couples in a marriage should also dream of weaving a heavenly union. But be prepared not to be deceived by the celebration because the road ahead requires careful planning and nurturing of emotions that one may not have experienced before.





St Gregorios Youth Fellowship – 1971

As I turn the pages of my life, 1971 stands out to be the most memorable year. It was the year that our church had the first youth fellowship. A youth committee was first formed that year by Mr P K Koshy (Mani Uncle) and his wife, Daisy aunty. It was their dream to have these activities in our church for the youth who would be the future of our tomorrow.

We had a short meeting in church after Holy Qurbana in January 1971, and a few of us were elected as office bearers. The first youth fellowship, known as St Gregorios Youth Fellowship, was held at our church on Topaz Road. Many of our youths were in their teens and early twenties then. With great enthusiasm, we had several meetings to decide on the year's activities, including picnics and excursions.

Prior to these youth activities, I recall a great drama titled 'Life of Christ' that was planned and organised by one of our founding members, Mr K A Abraham, at the St Thomas Secondary School hall. Tickets were sold even to the public. We had weekly practices to make this event a big success. We would come to church often for the practices, and all the youths were involved. Rehearsals were fun, and we always looked forward to having a glass of chendol from the corner of Rex theatre for our dessert which cost us 20 cents and was a luxury in those days. Such small luxuries were our little joys in those days. All we have left today are those precious memories that we cherish.

It was in December 1971 that we had our first youth camp which was held in one of the buildings in Changi. The youths of St Gregorios Youth Fellowship in Singapore and Malaysia attended the first camp. Besides our convenors, Mani uncle and Daisy aunty, Achen and the youth fellowship committee were the main organisers. At the campsite, there was a big open hall where all the girls had beds next to one another. I remember we planned all kind of pranks in the middle of the night to make the experience more interesting. We looked after the sick young girls at night especially the late Anne Varghese. Bible studies, games and excursions filled the three days of camp. Our members from Malaysia also contributed to the camp. We were a close-knit group irrespective of where we came from.



Joyce Thomas - To43
Secretary (St. Gregorios Youth Fellowship) -
1971 to 1973

Our second camp was in December 1972 in Kuala Lumpur (KL). Travelling to KL by train was the best luxury we had at that time. One of our camp mates was the then Philip Achen (now Cor Episcopa), and we had a lot of fun teasing and bullying him. He was just one of us and enjoyed his time with us. We had no idea then that he would become our most loved and popular Achen one day. The guest night on the last day of the camp was memorable as all of us were out to impress our parents and friends. We did skits, dramas and singing to entertain our families. The highlight of the camp was 'confession time' as we had to confess to our Achens and the visiting Thirumeni all the pranks we did for the last few days.

Caroling was another happy event with the adult members and youth fellowship. We used to go by bus on Christmas eve as one big happy family to visit parishioners' homes and then returned to church to attend the Christmas service at 6 am. None of us were tired as we had the energy and enthusiasm; we had looked forward to this day since the start of the year.

May the spirit of St Gregorios Youth Fellowship remain with us always as we encourage our youths to carry on this legacy that was started in 1971.





Never too late for an adventure

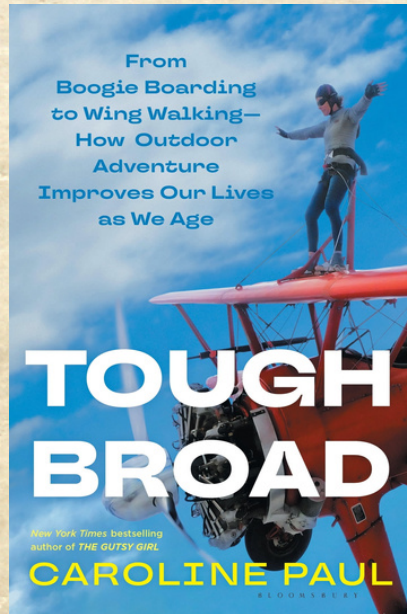
If you have ever said “Oh, ee vayasaankaalathu, inniyum enthina?” (rough translation: sigh, why bother now in this old age?) to back out of trying something adventurous, let me introduce you to 80-year-old Louise Wholey from Monterey, California

She volunteers as a scuba diver to count fish and measure kelp for a conservation organisation called Reef Check. One of her knees has been replaced, and the other needs surgery as well. Her shoulder is injured, and she has arthritis. But that hasn't stopped her from doing something she loves.

Louise is just one of the women featured in *Tough Broad*, a book by Caroline Paul that was published earlier this year. Caroline explores the idea that “outdoor adventure (can) improve our lives as we age” through the experiences of some very interesting ladies, each of whom is facing her own battle.

There is Shawn Brokmond, a 52-year-old grandmother whose hobby is to jump off buildings, radio towers, bridges and cliffs, but who still fights nerves before she hurls herself off these high places; Virginia Rose, 64, who goes birdwatching in her wheelchair and also helps other people with access challenges;

Diane Espaldon, 59, who learns to swim even though she hates the feeling of water splashing on her face – she still signed up for classes because “there was an entire area of life I couldn't participate in”; and, Cynthia Hicks, 73, a cancer survivor whose deteriorating strength has constrained her activities. She continues to look for new challenges though, googling “something fun to do here” whenever she visits a new place.



Disease, the loss of a spouse, the busyness of motherhood, and biases related to gender and race – the women in the book have faced them all, but they still dared to follow their heart. “Look, life doesn't end at 40 or 50,” Louise reminds readers. “And you have a choice. You can be a couch potato, or you can decide that whatever ails you is insignificant.”

Shameen Elizabeth Idiculla - Noo3

This is not idle advice from a kooky octogenarian. The author, Caroline, cites plenty of research proving that our outlook affects how well we age. If we think of getting old as a time of frailty, sickness and decreased abilities, we are more prone to cardiac events and cognitive decline. However, an optimistic outlook can lead to a healthier, happier and longer life. The trick is not to put brakes on ourselves as we get older, but to keep our brains active.

And, how do we do that? Various studies point to self-care such as sleep, exercise, companionship and reduced stress, of course. But also: novelty, focused attention and challenge, notes Caroline. Be enthusiastic, be curious, keep learning, she advises, to “nurture and energise our brains”.

And being outside, trying fun things that fill us with awe and excitement, can help a great deal in this regard. Even a walk in the park can be beneficial, she says, if we pay attention, stay in the moment and learn to appreciate our surroundings. “I marvel at how a sunset happens once every day, and yet, each time, when we bother to look, it amazes.” People who walk mindfully have noticed depression and anxiety subsiding, and gratitude and compassion rising instead.



Caroline is aware that some women find it hard to seek adventures outside, for reasons including health problems, phobias, financial difficulties, and societal conditioning that taught them that girls should be engaged in demure, domestic activities. "At some age, women start believing they can't or shouldn't be out there. Out there, as in the out-of-doors. Out there, as in a little bit unruly, a little off the beaten path. Out there, as in learning something new, out there as in pushing physical comfort zones... The real peril for us as we age is a sedentary life that lacks pizzazz and challenge."

But daring to step out can make a big difference. She talks of her mother, who did a solo skydive at 54, for the first – and last – time. "But that one time served as a powerful primer through which my mother filtered information about her own potential, no matter the messages from the outside world." Her mother's belief that she could "do a brave thing" lay down a "layer of confidence" that in turn affected how people treated her, which made her more confident.

"It is about bravery over fear, growth over stagnation, adventure and change over resignation and quiet," points out Caroline.

Her mother went on to try other new experiences, before she had to slow down after being diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. "Ageing is about loss. We lose friends, physical abilities, mental acuity. But it can also be about gains – taking full advantage of what we have until we don't have it anymore. Older age in women is no time to start discarding, my mother's story says. It is a time of embracing as much as possible."

Yes, we will become weaker, slower, creakier, adds Caroline, but the goal is to be our best self, and the adventure is in reaching that goal. Barbara Hillary, who skied to the North Pole at 75 years old, once said: "At every phase of your life, look at your options. Please, don't pick the boring ones."



Christian Marriage

The divine institution of marriage, is under attack, leading to family breakdowns. We focus on wedding planning but not marriage planning, affecting our spouses, kids, and culture. As Christians, we marry in Church in the presence of God but many close the door on Him somewhere along the way.

In Malachi 2:14 we read – **...though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.** Marriage is a covenant commitment before God, involving Jesus, and a lifelong promise to love and serve each other for God's glory. Since God is involved in this relationship, fighting for our marriages matters deeply to Him. A covenant is a spiritually created bond, divinely established by God to advance His kingdom. Marriage is one of the first covenants, originating in Genesis 1, where God created male and female to multiply and fill the earth. Therefore, marriage is a covenant-ordained institution that is of great importance to God.

5 ingredients of a Biblical covenant, including marriage:

1. Transcendence: ie God rules. God is in charge and should be the only third entity in a marriage. Matthew 19:6 – **What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.** God is keen to oversee and guide the relationship, protecting it from harm. This tells us of God's intention to be part of a marriage, to protect it. He wants to guide decision-making in marriage and His presence in a marriage provides an 'umbrella' of protection.

We also know how Satan constantly tries to separate couples from this under this umbrella. But God is clear that divorce and remarriage leads to adultery, a sin in His eyes.

2. Hierarchy: a chain of command or order of function. 1 Cor 11:3 – **But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.** This means that God is over Christ, Christ is over man and man is over woman. *Not in hierarchy of being, but in function.* Marriages break down when this hierarchy is ignored or misunderstood.



Jesus has all the divine attributes of God, but when it comes to executing Heaven's program or advancing God's plan in His kingdom, He always acquiesces or gives in to His Father's wish. He submits to God's will as written in John 6:38 – **For I have come down from heaven not to do my will, but to do the will of Him who sent me.**



Shobha Verghese - Soog

God created Adam first & held him responsible and answerable to Him & submit first to Him. He told him before Eve came along, not to eat from the tree in the midst, lest he dies. But we know how Satan enticed Eve and Eve made Adam sin. The fall of man was not due to Eve, as in Gen 3:9 we see God calling out to the man first – **Where are you?** In Romans 5: & 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, it says – **In Adam all die.** Not Adam & Eve! All because, Adam did not listen to the command of God, in the hierarchy chain of command!

Disregarding hierarchy leads to chaos, loss of God's blessing, and hindered prayers.

1 Pet 3:7 – **Husbands treat your wives with respect, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.** Alignment with God's hierarchy is crucial for a healthy marriage.

3. Rules: covenants have rules. In the marriage covenant, it boils down to two words. Eph 5:33 – **Husbands love your wives and wives respect your husband.** The Biblical definition of love – it is a decision, not a feeling – like we are asked to love our enemies. Husbands are to compassionately seek the wife's wellbeing. The wife must know that the husband looks after her best interest. In return, the woman must respect the husband ie wives must honour their husband, even in disagreement.



So, husbands are to prioritize wives' hearts through love and wives to prioritize husbands' heads through respect. Dishonouring rules can block God's answers to prayers. Mutual love and respect pleases God and open doors to His intervention.

4. Sanctions: are blessings and curses, benefits and loss of benefits, in relation to God's covenant.

Breaking rules leads to loss of blessings of happiness, joy and fulfillment. God favors those operating under His covenant. It is like the warranty for a product. The manufacture will cover it as long as it is under warranty and used correctly. God warrants our marriage because he wants it to last a lifetime but He only warrants it when it functions in the way He has designed it to, which is by the covenant.

5. Continuity/Inheritance: operating within God's covenant has long-term, generational repercussions.

The way we handle covenant rules affects not just us, but our children and future generations ie. a covenanted marriage leaves a lasting inheritance for children and grandchildren. Generational chaos arises when young people lack a covenanted environment, where parents are operating a marriage not reflecting the values of the kingdom of God.

Many couples expect blessings despite not following God's covenant. Then wonder why they are miserable, fight, or headed for a divorce. The truth is, outside God's covenant, we are on our own!

But there's hope! Jesus' first miracle was at a wedding (John 2), turning water into wine. No matter how challenging our marriage, God can transform it, bringing joy, peace, and excitement. Let's seek the Lord and ask Him to elevate our marriages!

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

What is God's purpose for marriage? A Biblical marriage is a covenantal union between a husband and wife, under divine authority, to replicate God's image and expand His rule.

We see this in Gen 1:28 – **Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.**

The two key words: **Replicate** – His image ie. the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, demonstrating divine nature, unity, and purpose. God wanted marriage to mirror him though male and female relationship in marriage; **Govern** – Exercise authority over their domain.

God's main purpose for marriage wasn't happiness, but rather a reflection of His image and expansion of His rule. Happiness is an intended benefit of marriage, not the purpose. When happiness is prioritized over God's purpose, marriages suffer. A shift in this understanding can open doors to benefits and God's involvement. This was established in Genesis 1 when he made man

God wants couples to rule under His authority, exercising divine authority in their lives. However, Satan interferes, creating discord and division to prevent this, because he knows God will not function in an atmosphere of discord. Satan's tactics are clear – to disrupt God's purpose for marriage, divide husbands and wives and block prayers and divine authority. But in unity, couples can fulfil their individual callings and bring heaven's power into their lives and the world. God's nature is unity. He will not function in disunity. He cannot and will not function in disunity.

He cannot and will not function in disunity. That will be contradicting Himself. Matthew 12:25 Jesus said – **Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste and any city or house divided against itself will not stand.** In marriage, unity is key, as husband and wife become one in spirit under God's authority.

When God first created man and woman and made them husband and wife, in Genesis 2:24 He says – **For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh.** The principle word here is one – oneness or unity.

Individuality is maintained, but unity is essential. In a marriage, we are to keep our individuality even as we become one in spirit. We are meant to be different. But Satan exploits differences to create destructive division. He takes complementary differences and turns them into conflicts. However, God's design is for oneness. Mark 10:8-9 – **and the two shall become one flesh; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.** Oneness in marriage is critical for God's engagement. God's purpose is disrupted when unity is lost. While God wants couples to be united, Satan seeks to keep them apart.

This is why in Genesis, Satan interferes to keep God at a distance. He goes to Eve. With the seemingly innocent question - Did God say you cannot eat of every tree in the garden?, he cleverly succeeded in disconnecting her with God with her disobedience, and she in turn influences Adam to disconnect from his relationship with God too. Adam made the wrong choice...his wife Eve over God.





We can see how quickly Satan cancelled God from both their relationships. In Genesis 3:17 God tells Adam – **Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.**

God was basically telling Adam, that no matter how much he loved Eve, she was not to overrule Him – I told you not to eat from that tree and you disobeyed me!

Remember Transcendence – God rules. Before they were naked and unashamed but when Satan disrupted their relationship with God, they sewed fig leaves together and panicked. Like many people who try to fix problems today, eg. a cruise might help distract issues by a week or two, but it is Satan that needs to be thrown out to have a permanent fix. But we see in 2 Cor 11:14 – **And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light** - Satan cunningly stays camouflaged while complicating things! So we blame each other.

Remember the repercussions of this disconnect with God and this first family – pain and anguish - in childbirth, the sweat of your brow, thrown out of the garden, sibling rivalry – one brother kills another brother and by Chp 6 of Genesis, the whole world needs to be destroyed! All because of the breakdown in the first marriage, due to the disconnect with God. Because of disunity! Unity in marriage means oneness in purpose, not sameness. Differences, apart from sin, is critical

In 1st Peter 3:7 – **Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.** Weaker partner - she might be physically weaker but she is to be treated as an equal heir, just like Jesus is equal to the Father. She is never to be made to feel inferior, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. If the chain of command in 1 Cor 11:3 – **But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God** ie God > Christ > Man > Woman is broken, God cannot hear your prayers. When this chain is broken, prayers are hindered, and Satan's power blocks God's response, because He only operates in unity, He is one.

FOR HUSBANDS

For a successful marriage, both partners must align with covenant principles. Instead of seeking external solutions, couples can often resolve issues themselves with minor adjustments, transforming what seemed like an impossible relationship.

Love

The Bible commands the man to love his wife. Paul in Ephesians 5:33 summarizes the roles of husbands and wives: husbands must love their wives, and wives must respect their husbands. He says – **However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband, so the husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.**

Biblical love as we saw earlier is compassionately and righteously pursuing the well-being of another. It is a decision, not just an emotion and is comparable to Christ's love for the Church, willing to sacrifice everything. A husband's love for his wife is stated in Ephesians 5:25 – **just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...** Thus the saying "Until death do us part". Husbands are commanded to love their wives unconditionally, providing security and commitment, even on bad days, just as Jesus never quits on us.

Understanding

1 Peter 3:7 says – **Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way...** implying that husbands should make an effort to understand their wives' emotions, words, and actions, thus acknowledging that women can be complex.

Honour

1 Peter 3:7 continues - **...showing honour to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.** This emphasizes that husbands should honour their wives, validating and valuing their abilities, calling, and feelings. A husband's role is to create an environment where his wife can flourish, grow, and thrive. If the husband is a thermostat, then the woman is the thermometer – she will display the temperature according to the setting on the thermostat. He must help set a conducive environment, so she can flourish. There cannot be a cool wife when the setting is hot. By treating the wife right, a husband can help her become the best version of herself.





If a dish has crust on it that needs cleaning there are 2 ways to clean it. One is to scrub it hard over & over again, while the other is to just soak it with soap and let it do the job of washing it away without a scrub. If men scrub hard – why are you like this, why can't you change, etc., it might take a lot of energy, frustration and time to get the work done. But if you just soak what needs to be scrubbed, it will readily slide off. Why, because the environment you created was conducive to a change in her. So husbands, if scrubbing has wasted your time, maybe an environmental shift, with some consistent love may bring about the change you want, naturally

FOR WIFE

The 2nd part of Eph 5:33 is for the women – **and the wife must respect her husband.**

Respect

Many women feel unfulfilled due to lack of love or respect from their husbands. Biblically, respect means holding someone in a privileged position and esteeming them greatly. 1 Cor 11:3 – **But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.**

A husband's need is to have his ego stroked, just as a wife needs love. Even if you disagree with your husband's decisions, respect his position as head of the home.

A wife demonstrates respect by submitting to her husband's legitimate, God-given authority as it is written in Eph 5:22 – **Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands, but notice the last bit - as you do to the Lord.**

A husband only has delegated authority over his wife and cannot overrule God's authority in his wife's life. If a husband demands something contrary to God's will, he forfeits his authority.

In a Christian marriage, a wife is to acknowledge and respect her husband's position as head, even if she disagrees with his decisions. In the Bible, we see that even though He was equal to the Father, Jesus always gives deference to his Father. Hebrews 10:9 – **Then he added, "Behold, I have come to do your will."** In return, we see in John 16:14 how the Holy Spirit always shone the light on Jesus – **He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you** – a direct deference of the Holy Spirit to Jesus.

A wife's role is not just domestic, but also as an essential collaborator and a husband must recognize and value all of his wife's contributions. The above verses also teach us that a husband's authority is legitimate only if he yields to God. A wife should yield to her husband's authority, even if she feels more gifted or intelligent, as long as the husband abides by God's chain of command and yields to God. This is required by God's covenant.

1 Peter 3:6 – **just like Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him her lord.** Sarah's obedience to Abraham, calling him "lord" is a verbal declaration acknowledging his position in the chain of command in her life. A wife's respect and honour can bring supernatural blessings, as seen in Sarah's miraculous pregnancy when she was 90 years old. If you think this happened long ago in Old Testament days with no relevance to today, the verse continues - **...and you have become her daughters, if you do likewise!**

So acknowledge and honour your husband's position in the family, for possible supernatural blessings.

A wife's respect for her husband, as seen in Proverbs 31:22-24 – **everyone around knew who her husband was because she showed him respect before others & elevated him,** elevates him and brings recognition. For God to work in a marriage, the wife must be in her proper position in the hierarchy. Even if the husband is out of order, the wife's submission can allow God to respond to her and bring miracles. A wife's priority is caring for her home Proverbs 31:27 – **She carefully watches everything in her household and suffers nothing from laziness** and using her skills for God's kingdom, while honouring her husband.

Let me end with some food for your thought -

Just as mayonnaise requires an emulsifier (egg) to combine the incompatible oil and water, God serves as the unifier in a marriage, bringing together the differences between a man and woman. By putting God and His covenant at the center of the relationship, couples can experience a beautiful, unified marriage. So let us make God our emulsifier, the only 3rd entity allowed in our relationships, for He is our divine unifier.





Knowing and Loving

“Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so” was one of the Sunday school songs we sang during our childhood. This song conveys a powerful message – we are loved.

In ancient Israel, the distinction between a true shepherd and a hired hand was evident in their relationship with the sheep. A true shepherd spent considerable time with his flock and cared for them deeply. Jesus tells us in John 10:14, 27, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

Jesus knows us and loves us! Matthew 6:8 reminds us, “Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” As we navigate the ups and downs of life, we can find rest in the knowledge that we are known and loved by the Shepherd of our hearts. Jesus tenderly loves and cares for us. Continue to trust Him in all areas of your life.



Elizabeth Mathew(Usha) - Roo6

During the Christmas season, our days may be filled with joyful moments, or we may face the loss of a beloved parent or a loved one. Regardless of our circumstances, God promises to be our light in the darkness, offering us everlasting hope and unfailing love. He knows us well.



Anushka Sarah Mammen - J060





Suju Susaan Thomas - To15



Pink, Green & Gold,

A still life oil painting of a bowl of pink apples and a potted plant done in an impasto impressionistic style with brushes and palette knives.

Alex Mani Thomas - To42





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