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Mutual Abiding

Editorial..... 

GOD AND US: MUTUAL ABIDING



- Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad

As one meditates on this important theme taken from John chapter 15, it may be helpful to draw insights from the following illustrations drawn from the internet:

Abiding is a Relationship

The planet Mercury is hot. Pluto is cold. Why is Pluto cold and Mercury hot? Mercury is really close to the sun and Pluto is a long way off. The farther you get away, the colder things become, but the closer you get, the hotter things are. You may say that you are not a Pluto Christian or a Mercury Christian. Maybe you are an Earth Christian where things get hot and cold. You may be a seasonal Christian who has changes depending on whether it is wintertime, summertime, springtime, or fall. God is looking for some Mercury Christians. He is looking for some folks who want to get close and stay hot all the time because they stay close to the S-o-n.

Abiding is a Purifying Relationship

A dinner plate left out overnight will be hard to clean in the morning. An alternative to scrubbing is soaking the dish in hot water and dishwashing liquid. Letting a dish abide in the solution will allow a hard cleaning job to become a lot easier. This is what abiding does for Christians. We are much easier to clean up when we've been hanging out in the right environment. Religion says "Scrape off the dirt." It tells us to apply elbow grease to fix a problem. Relationship says "Soak." Just sit in the hot water for a while. Abiding will set you free.

Abiding is a Fruitful Relationship

The reason why sunflowers are called sunflowers is because they follow the sun. The sun rises in the east, the sunflower will point east. The sun sets to the west, and the flowers will point west. These flowers throw off a lot of seeds. They are productive because they are always looking for the sun. They always locate the s-u-n, and because they always are looking for the s-u-n, they're always growing. When you and I look for the S-o-n, like the sunflower looks for the s-u-n, then we will find the effects of His rays softening our hearts so we can throw off new seed, new life.

Abiding is a Transforming Relationship

When you want to grow a certain type of pear, you take a common wild pear tree and hack into it and into that wound which you have made in the tree, you insert a graft or shoot. Then you bind them together. And eventually you will have a wonderful pear tree, producing nothing but your chosen variety of pear. What happens is that the strength and the power, as it were, the life and the sap that comes up through that wild pear tree, will enter into this shoot and it will produce fruit. Yes, but below the level of the grafting, the wild pear tree will still tend to throw out its own wild shoots and branches and want to produce its own fruit. So you have to lop off these natural branches. You have to cut them, prune them right down and, if you do that, a time will arrive when the tree will produce only this wonderful type of pear that you are anxious to grow.

You see, at first you seem to have two natures in the one tree, but if you prune off the old, the new will gradually master the whole and you will eventually have a pear tree which is producing the type of fruit that you want.

May we this Christmas open our hearts to Jesus, and continue to abidingly grow in Him! ■

[Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad is presently the General Secretary of National Council of Churches in India (NCCI) and is stationed at Nagpur along with his family. He was also the first Pastor of the English Congregation.]

“ABIDE IN ME AND I IN YOU” (John 15:4)

A Biblical Reflection



- Rev. Dr. H. Vanlaluata
Pastor, E.C.

In John 15, Jesus describes Himself as the true vine and His Father as the Vinedresser. The true vine was a way to contrast Jesus with Old Testament Israel. The hearers would understand that He was saying that He was *the* Messiah and the fulfillment of the covenant because of the Old Testament references to a vineyard. (Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-6).

Jesus explains that the branches that do not bear fruit are taken away, but the branches that bear fruit are pruned to bear more fruit. To bear fruit simply means to grow in character – to become more like Christ and reflect the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). And this is where we come to His command to abide: “*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*” (John 15:4).

The word “abiding” is a verb, which is an action and means to continue, remain, dwell, live, or lodge. Jesus says that just as a branch needs to be vitally connected to the vine, so believers need to be vitally connected to Him. Just as Jesus could do nothing outside the Father’s will, we can do nothing on our own. Jesus had an intimate abiding relationship with the Father, and if this relationship was necessary for His ministry, then such an intimate abiding relationship with Jesus is needed if we’re going to live fruitful, effective lives here on earth.

In John 15 we can see what it is to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Let us realize that the phrase “personal relationship” is not found in the Bible. But that is not to say the Scripture does not reveal to us how it is that we may have a close union with Christ. That we might have a relationship with the Lord that goes beyond just an acquaintance. A relationship that goes beyond just knowing about Christ, but knowing Christ, and what is equally important, Christ knowing us.

‘To abide in Jesus’ means to keep His commandments, and to keep His commandments means to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22: 37-39). One way that we display our love for God is through our trust, prayer and devotion to Him. We abide through relationship. We pursue in love. We pray in love. We obey in love.

We can then say that to abide in Christ is to remain and continue in, to live and dwell in Christ. Thus, the key to abiding in Christ is that out of our love for Him we obey His Word, and when we do, we’ll become fruitful and live fruitful, effective lives. And then as an added bonus, we’ll experience the love and joy that only an intimate abiding relationship with Christ can provide. When we learn how to abide in Christ, He will provide life and strength so that we can live productive and effective lives. But even more, we can experience intimate fellowship with God and become part of His family. Jesus tells us that we are His friends if we obey His command to love, and that command is fulfilled through abiding. As we abide in Him, we will bear the fruit of righteousness.

The fruit that Jesus speaks of is simply evidence of a relationship with Him. It is a relationship that He initiates through and by His sovereign love. We need this vital connection, and then we can say like the Apostle Paul, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13).

In this chapter, Jesus reminds us that there is no greater love than someone laying down his life for his friends. He then says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14). Abide in Him, and He will abide in you. He who began a good work in you will complete it (Philippians 1:6). He who called you is faithful; he will surely do it (1 Thessalonians 5:24). ■

A REFLECTION ON THE INCARNATION



- Sam N. Jacob

In the Old Testament (O.T.) we hear Job's desperate cry, "I want someone to plead with God for me, as one pleads for a friend" (Job 16:21). As if in answer to that, the Son of God became a human being to be a mediator for humankind before God. For that, the Son of God had to become Son of Adam. So, He "was made a little lower than the angels ... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9). Through Christ's mediation we have received great blessings from God.

At the beginning of their creation, Adam and Eve enjoyed being with God. But the moment they sinned they became terrified of God's presence and hid themselves from Him. Later, Israelites were even scared of hearing God directly speaking to them (Ex. 20:19). So God spoke to them through Moses and His presence among them was limited to the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle. Only the high priest could enter that place, that too, only once a year. But Christ has changed that situation altogether. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the incarnate Son of God is interceding for us continuously in the presence of God as our High Priest. But the speciality of it is that Jesus, the High Priest was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin," So He is able to sympathise with us in our weaknesses. That gives us the boldness to enter the Holy of Holies always, without fear (Heb. 10:19).

When Moses sought to see God, he was told, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live" (Ex. 33:20). When Solomon built the temple, the glory of the Lord filled it and hence even the priests could not continue to minister in the temple. But we see a marked difference in the New Testament. When Philip asked the Lord Jesus to show the Father, the reply was, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). In plain language, Jesus was telling him that he was looking at God. That is what the incarnation of God has done for us. God living with us in a non-threatening form.

Apostle John tells about his experience with the incarnate God, "we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father" (Jn. 1:14). In his epistle, John further describes their experience and interaction with the eternal Word: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled..." (1Jn. 1:1). Through the incarnation, the eternal God brought Himself within reach of the experience of human physical senses; the disciples could hear, see and touch Him.

The writer of Hebrews gives us further insight into the benefits of the incarnation of the Son of God. In the O.T. times God spoke only through prophets who in turn spoke to the common people. But with the coming of Christ, ordinary men and women, farmers, fishermen, social outcasts were all able to hear His gracious words and interact directly with Him (Heb. 1:1-2). He broke down all the human social barricades of who could come to God and who could not.

Further, the incarnate God provided us the way to become children of God. But that is only the beginning of a series of blessings that followed. As we are children of God, Jesus is not ashamed to call us 'brothers' (Heb. 2:11). Wonderful indeed! As brothers of Jesus Christ, we are also "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17).

We also experience the blessings of His incarnation in our daily life. Jesus has experienced human life with all its poverty, heartaches, sorrows, problems and temptations. Life on earth was not easy for Him. But He overcame all those situations without using His divine powers and without sinning. That makes Him our model and gives us the confidence to face our difficult life situations.

God becoming a human in Jesus Christ has brought God close to us. We have been given wonderful blessings for our life on earth and the after-life. So let's boldly come to Him and enjoy His fellowship. ■

(Mr. Sam Jacob is a former E.C. Committee member. After entering Christian ministry, he is serving the Lord in various capacities, and currently resides in Bengaluru along with his wife.)

Youth Page

WHAT THE BIRTH OF JESUS MEANS TO YOUTH LIKE ME

Christmas – synonymous with the joy of Christ’s birth, winter and a festive season all round. It’s meaning and impact on my life has definitely changed over the years.



- Isak L. Tochwawng

As a missionary kid, I would dream of Christmas day when we’d get to open presents, share wonderful meals and spread the gospel through carol singing and charity. The day was a day of wonderful events and programs centered on Christ’s birth with the sharing of the hope and salvation He brought for all mankind.

The current world we live in doesn’t allow us to freely express ourselves as Christians, removing or restricting anything to do with Christ under the guise of “political correctness” or more blatant means. We see immorality and sin excused, citing various forms of discrimination (whether real or imagined), and the Christian faith constantly challenged and ridiculed as a fairytale.

This has led my peers and I to taking the birth of our Savior seriously, looking at the facts, past all the unrelated traditions and cultural practices that many times dilute the wonder of our Savior’s birth. The nature of our inter-connected, global social circles has challenged us to defend our faith, and also prove it on a personal level.

This is why Christmas is no longer just a social construct of events, nor a time to party, for a growing number of youths. It is now a time to get ourselves serious with the “Word” and reality of our faith. We need to be able to define it but also use this time to clearly share/show the great hope, joy and wonder of the birth of our Lord and Savior.

An example of the wonder of Christ’s birth is even found in His genealogy. Because when God finally pronounced a “blood curse” on the royal line of Jeconiah (Jeremiah 22:30) the line through which Christ was to come, the enemy must have thought he’d won.

I imagine at this point God turning to His angels, saying, “Now watch this!” – The solution is revealed in the different genealogies of Jesus Christ recorded in the Gospels.

Matthew, as a Levite, focused his gospel on the Messiahship of Jesus, and presents Him as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Thus, Matthew traces the legal line from Abraham (as any Jew would) through David, then through Solomon (the “royal” line, through the first surviving son of Bathsheba) to Joseph, the legal father of Jesus.

On the other hand, Luke, as a physician, focused on the humanity of Jesus, and thus presents Him as the Son of Man. Luke traces the blood line from Adam (the first man) through to David—and his genealogy from Abraham through David is, of course, identical to Matthew’s. But then after David, Luke departs from the path taken by Matthew and traces the family tree through another son of David (the second surviving son of Bathsheba), Nathan, which carries it down through Heli, the father of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Joseph is the son-in-law of Heli.

Thus, Jesus is “of the house and lineage of David”, but not heir to the blood curse pronounced upon the descendants of Jeconiah. ■

(Mr. Isak was born in Nepal to Mizo missionary parents and is in full time ministry since 2006. He is an Associate Member of E.C. and is currently associated with Ellel Ministries, U.K.)

Music Page

THOU DIDST LEAVE THY THRONE AND THY KINGLY CROWN

1. Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown,
 When Thou camest to earth for me;
 But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
 For Thy holy nativity.
 O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
 There is room in my heart for Thee.



- Vanlalhruii Walters

2. Heaven's arches rang when the angels sang,
 Proclaiming Thy royal degree;
 But of lowly birth didst Thou come to earth,
 And in great humility.
 O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
 There is room in my heart for Thee.



3. The foxes found rest, and the birds their nest
 In the shade of the forest tree;
 But Thy couch was the sod, O Thou Son of God,
 In the deserts of Galilee.
 O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
 There is room in my heart for Thee.



4. Thou camest, O Lord, with the living Word,
 That should set Thy people free;
 But with mocking scorn and with crown of thorn,
 They bore Thee to Calvary.
 O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,
 There is room in my heart for Thee.



5. When the heavens shall ring, and the angels sing,
 At Thy coming to victory,
 Let Thy voice call me home, saying "Yet there is room,
 There is room at My side for thee."
 My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus,
 When Thou comest and callest for me.

Continued...

About the Hymn: Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly crown...

The author of this hymn, Emily Elizabeth Steele Elliott (1836-1897), was the daughter of an Anglican clergyman, Rev. Edward Bishop Elliott, rector of St. Mark's, Brighton, UK; and the niece of Charlotte Elliott (1789-1871), the author of the famous hymn, "Just as I am". E.S. Elliot published a collection of 48 of her hymns called *Under the Pillow*, to use especially for those who are sick in the hospitals or at home. "Thou didst leave thy throne" was separately printed, for the children and the choir in her father's parish. It was written to clarify the meaning of Advent and the Nativity. The theme of the hymn was based on Luke 2:7- "but there was no room in the inn for them." A special tune, called Margaret, was composed for this hymn by Timothy Richard Matthews (1826-1910).

The first three verses contrast the poverty of Christ's birth with the splendour of heaven. In verse one we are reminded that in heaven Christ had a kingly crown, but on earth no room in the inn, and in verse two we are reminded that angels sang in heaven but He was born in great humility here on earth. In verse three we are told that Christ wandered the deserts of Galilee, and in verse four, that although Christ came as the living Word, here on earth He was offered mocking scorn and a crown of thorns. The fifth verse directs our gaze to heaven where the risen Christ will declare that "There is room at My side for thee."

This hymn teaches us, and children, that the coming of Christ at Christmas points to the second coming; it also places the Nativity within the broader picture of Christ's life here on earth, and as we meditate on the words of the hymn, this hymn becomes a personal commitment.

May this Christmas, 2017, help us to recommit ourselves to our Saviour and make room in our hearts for Jesus afresh as we live our daily lives and await His return. ■



Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!

Sources : umcdiscipleship.org; hymnal.net; hymntime.com

(Mrs. Vanlalhrui Walters, wife of Mr. Philip C. Walters, is an Associate member of E.C. She is a Homemaker, currently living in Aizawl.)

The essential fact of Christianity is that God thought all humanity worth the sacrifice of His Son.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF SERMONS – ANNUAL CONVENTION 2017

ROOTED AND ESTABLISHED IN LOVE

The letter of Paul to the Church at Ephesus starts and ends with the word **love** ('*agape*' 1:4; 6:24). The word "love" appears 16 times (1:4, 15; 2:4; 3:17,18,19; 4:2,15,16; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; 6:23, 24), but the prayer of St.Paul for the Christians at Ephesus that grasps the true meaning of the love of Jesus in 3:17,18 & 19 makes it a central theme of this letter. No wonder John's apocalyptic writing in Rev 2:4, where the Lord directs John to write to the angel of the church at Ephesus, warning them that they had "forsaken the first love." Paul's prayer was therefore, appropriate and relevant for the Church at Ephesus and it is also applicable to our context.



- Rev. Dr. A. K. Lama

John Mackay considered Ephesians as "the most contemporary book in the Bible," while John Stott regarded it as the "the gospel of the Church." Every time I have preached from this letter, I have found people coming to me and telling me that the message was very relevant to them.

To understand the background of this letter, it is good to read through the following passages in the Bible: Acts 18:19- 20:38; 1 Cor 15:32; 16:8-9; 1Tim 1:3; 2Tim 1:16-18; 2Tim 4:12; Rev 2:1-7. These passages help us to understand the context of the Church at Ephesus and the relationship they had with Paul. One must have a better understanding of the life and convictions of Paul. This helps us to understand why Paul says what he says.

Paul strongly believed in the communal nature of the new faith found in Jesus. He believed that God was uniting the divided humanity into one new humanity in Christ (2:5) by forming the Body of Christ, the Church. Hence his spirituality did not lead him to become a loner but a co-worker with many. Some of these were Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:19), Apollos (Acts 18:24), twelve disciples (Acts 19:5-7), seven sons of Sceva, the chief priest (Acts 19:14-17), Timothy (1Tim 1:3) and Erastus (Acts 19:22), Gaius and Aristarchus (Acts 19:29), Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia (Acts 20:4), Elders of the Church (Acts 20:17), Onesiphorus (2Tim 1:16-18), and Tychicus (2Tim 4:12).

Toward this goal of one new humanity in Christ (2:15b-16), without barriers of division, God has blessed the Church at Ephesus and all believers in Christ with seven spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ. Paul praises God for those spiritual blessings (1:3):

He describes those seven-spiritual blessings as follows:

- (i) **God chose us (v.4);**
- (ii) **God chose us as His sons/daughters and not as slaves (v.5);**
- (iii) **God has freely given the glorious grace (v.6)**
- (iv) **God has redeemed us by making available forgiveness in Jesus (v.7)**
- (v) **God has lavished knowledge and wisdom (v.8)**
- (vi) **God has made known to us the mystery that was hidden (v.9)**
- (vii) **God has sealed us with the mark of the Holy Spirit (v.13)**

In addition to these seven spiritual blessings which are sufficient and wholesome (as the number seven represents), Paul makes the following four prayers.

Paul is praying for **(Notice in 1:17 I keep asking/1:18 I pray):**

- (1) the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation
- (2) the eyes of heart to be enlightened so that all Christians may see two HOPES:
 - (i) the hope of the riches of His glorious inheritance
 - (ii) the hope of His incomparably great power for us (v.19)
 - which is far above all rule and authority, power and dominion (v.21)

[Again, notice in 3:14 I kneel/3:16-17 I pray]

- (3) for Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith
- (4) for all Christians to be filled with the fullness of God through **being rooted and established in LOVE** by grasping how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ by knowing this love that surpasses knowledge (v.19)

After praising, thanking, praying for the Church at Ephesus, St. Paul urges them to live a life worthy of their calling (4:1), live a life of love (5:2), live like children of light (5:8), and live wise (5:15).

In the context of Ephesians, living a life worthy of their calling, required putting effort to keep the unity of the Spirit of Unity (4:3) by being completely humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love (4:2). Paul underlines the reasons for this unity in diversity. And therefore, Christians must put off (4:22) certain things and put on certain things (4:24).

Living a life of love necessitates living pure and holy not only in our relationships but also in our talk, behavior and the choice of our associations (5:3-7). Similarly living wise required the Ephesians to make the best opportunity of time, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead them, and mutual submission (5:15-21).

According to Paul, the Christian living has to impact our homes first. It must transform the relationship between husband and wife (5:22-33), parent and children relationship (6:1-4), and the employee and employer relationship (6:5-9). Paul equated the sacred relationship of Jesus with His Church to the relationship that is between husband and wife, calling every husband to love his wife as Jesus loved His Church sacrificially, and calling every wife to submit and respect her husband as the Church must respect Jesus. This description of relationship is unique and a marvelous example to follow.

While describing the relationship between master and slaves, Paul was addressing the historical context in which slavery was an accepted social evil. He did not necessarily approve of the slavery or disapprove of the practice of slavery, but he aimed to reform the wrong attitudes that made it evil. Abolishing and making a law might help to overcome social evil to some extent, but reforming a wrong attitude will do much better.

Finally, Paul exhorts Christians to be strong by standing – standing firm and withstanding all oppositions and attack to accomplish what God has called them to do. They are asked to put on the **full armor** of God.

Paul describes seven pieces of Armor that the Christians at Ephesus must put on:

- with the belt of truth buckled around your waist,
- with the breastplate of righteousness in place (v.14)
- with your feet fitted with the readiness
that comes from the gospel of peace (v.15).
- [with] the shield of faith (v.16)
- [with] the helmet of salvation and
- [with] the sword of the Spirit, (v.17)
- [with] the prayer in the Spirit on all occasions (v.18)

While concluding, Paul urges the Christians at Ephesus to pray for him so that he may fearlessly present the good news (6:19-20). Despite, the impending danger to his life, Paul was preoccupied with the concerns for the spiritually dying world that desperately needed the continuity of the gospel through the preaching and through the life witnessing of the faithful Christians that might come after him.

For a simpler classification, the epistle of the Ephesians can be divided into two big sections: First, what is invested in the life of believers at Ephesus (chapters 1-3). Second, what the believers at Ephesus should do now as a result (chapters 4-6). But to make it more elaborate one may also see following four big themes emerging:

- A. *God transformed our lives through Jesus Christ (1:3-2:10)*
- B. *Our life is transformed for a new humanity in Christ (2:11-4:32)*
- C. *Our transformed life must be lived in four ways: worthy, life of love, as children of light, and as wise (4:1-6:9)*
- D. *Our transformed life must put on the full armor of God (6:11)*

May God bless you as you study Ephesians.

Blessings. ■

(Dr. Lama, Director of Transforming Leaders in Asia (TLA) Ministries, was the Preacher for E.C. Annual Convention, Oct. 2017 and resides in Guwahati along with his family.)

PRACTISING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:1, 2)



- Nimmi Joseph

Today there is a growing hunger for God and the things of God. The Spirit of God is moving all over the earth as was prophesied in the Bible. The world though, is getting steadily out of control, causing many to question the very reason for their existence and to search for meaning in life. It is said that there is a God-shaped vacuum in every human-being, that nothing and no one but God can fill.

The presence of God in our lives therefore becomes very important. In my own life, ever since I can remember, I have felt this comfortable closeness to God. Having lost our beloved dad when my two brothers and I were still in middle/primary school, I told God that since he had taken away my earthly father, He would be my heavenly Father, on whom I would depend. Since then He has been such a wonderful heavenly Father, and so much more besides. Today I thank God for His presence all along, and I shudder to think of a life outside of God.

But what do we understand by the presence of God in our lives? Once we accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord of our lives and get saved, God lives in us through His Holy Spirit. What an awesome thought! You may question, what difference does God’s presence make in our lives? A whole lot – but we need to be aware of it. Hebrews 13:5b says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” In Matthew 28:20b, Jesus promises His disciples (which hold good for us too today), “Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age.” Amen. This is our God promising to be with us always. Very comforting and reassuring. But we need to believe and claim these verses for ourselves, only then can God work through them.

I recall a crisis situation when our daughter Lavi who suffers from this rare, incurable disease (according to doctors), MPS Type IV, was critically ill with a very severe respiratory infection. She was having breathing difficulties, a very bad cough etc. There was no one else at home, when suddenly her eyes rolled back and it looked like she was choking and almost gone. I was helpless and panic-stricken. I called out the name of Jesus, and was desperately trying to reach her doctors, when my eye fell on the small wall plaque in front of me which read ‘God Emmanuel’ – just 2 words, meaning, ‘God with us’. I relaxed completely knowing that God had reminded me that He was there and I did not need anyone else. Lavi recovered and I praise God.

So, what is ‘**practising the presence of God**’? To me it simply means to let Christ into my everyday life. To be conscious of Him and sense His presence with me. To seek to please Him each moment because of my love for Him and my awareness of His nearness. I have this ongoing conversation with God all through the day, where I share my innermost thoughts with Him. My mother was a good example of practising the presence of God. But there are those times that I forget His presence and the circumstances loom larger. Things often go wrong then. When I do practise His presence, life is much richer and so much more blessed. In His presence there are all the blessings that we need. He is more than enough.

Even Moses realized the great value of God’s presence and was panic-stricken when God refused to let His presence go with the Israelites, due to His anger against their sin. Moses said, “... if thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.” (Exodus 33:15). David in Psalm 51:11 pleads, “Cast me not away from thy presence O Lord...”. God is omnipresent – that is He is present everywhere at the same time. When we sin we need to remember that He is there and He knows, and we cannot escape, as the Psalmist puts it in Psalm 139:7 – “... where can I flee from your presence?”

Finally, Brother Lawrence, the Carmelite monk, born in France, sometime around 1605, is a great example of practising the presence of God. He was a man of unusual serenity and devotion to God. Even if he disliked something, he turned drudgery into devotion to God. He said, “It matters not to me what I do, or what I suffer, so long as I abide lovingly united to God’s will – that is my whole business.” According to him – “The practise of the presence of God is the shortest and easiest way to attain Christian perfection.”



Let me close with 2 questions:

God is always with us – Are we with Him?

God’s presence is always near – Are we aware of it? ■

(Mrs. Nimmi is a Homemaker and serves God in various ways.)

Sunday School Page

- Jed Lawma

I am the vine and you are the
branches. (John 15:5)

(Jed is a former E.C. Sunday School student. He is presently in class 6 at Capstone Community School, Bengaluru.)

A - ACKNOWLEDGE - In all your ways acknowledge
Him. Proverbs 3:6



- Bathsheba Badding

B - BEHAVE - Let us behave valiantly. 1 Chronicles 19:13

I - INCREASE - Increase in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:10

D - DO - Do His will. If anyone does His will, He hears him. John 9:31

E - ENDEAVOUR - Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in
the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3

[Miss Bathsheba is in the Senior Class of the E.C. Sunday School and is a student of Class XI in the Mizoram Institute of Comprehensive Education (MICE).]

Sunday School Page**TESTIMONY***- Anisha Ann Daniel*

Praise be to the LORD.

With immense gratitude I stand before the Congregation to speak about my Sunday school life. I joined the ECSS when I was 2 ½ years, along with my older siblings. Throughout the period of more than 12 years in the EC Sunday School, I enjoyed the good pleasure of the Lord's divine providence. I learnt to persevere in prayer and obtained many great values in my life. My teachers taught me Bible stories and guided me to learn the Word of God. Being a member of this great family is one of the greatest blessings of life, where I'm loved and accepted simply for who I am.

At this time, I would like to remember my mentors - Miss Denling, Miss Cecilia, Badding uncle, Grace aunty, Tlana uncle and Miss Silme for guiding me in learning to trust God with my deepest longings and revive my hope in life. Thank you teachers for teaching me to start the day with devotion and for uplifting me with the belief that the good news is the ultimate hope in life. I was blessed to participate in the Vacation Bible School (VBS), Recitation, Singing and Quiz Competitions conducted every year. All those activities enriched my knowledge about the Lord. The Sunday School blessed me and explored my talent of singing praises to the Lord. The competitions helped me learn the Word of God and the memory verses learnt have helped a lot in my troubles and joys and I pray to the Lord that He will enable me to continue to depend on His living Words throughout my life.

I give thanks to the Lord every moment for the gift of life. I believe in the Lord as He commanded Joshua in Joshua ch. 1 verse 9: "Be strong and courageous, do not be terrified, do not be discouraged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

None of us knows what the next change is going to be, what unexpected opportunity is around the corner waiting a few months or a few years to change all the tenor of our lives but I believe in the song of the Psalmist, "Lord your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

I thank the Lord for guiding me on this uncertain journey called life and for all the people who are associated with my life, and continue to pray for me. Lastly, I thank every member of the congregation, past and present, including my parents for their appreciation and encouragement towards me.

Glory to God. ■

(Miss Anisha shared this testimony at the Sunday School Closing Day Function, December 2016. She is now doing her graduation, B.Com (Finance), second semester in Assumption College, Changanassery, Kerala.)

THE FRUIT OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” John 15:4 ESV

On the way to Gethsemane, Christ used a grapevine to describe Christian service and the need of a good relationship with Him if one is to serve well and live well as a believer in Christ. One of the key words of John chapter 15 is “abide”, which is mentioned 10 times in six verses (vs. 4-10). The Gospel of John chapter 15, talks about the secrets of Christian living, the secret of Christian life is bearing fruit, the secret of bearing fruit is abiding in Christ, the secret of abiding in Christ is obeying, the secret of obeying Christ is loving and the secret of loving Christ is knowing Him and the secret of knowing Christ is glorifying God.

However, to live a fruitful or successful Christian life is challenging. Most likely we have tried countless times, each time wishing we had a little more of everything about being fruitful or successful but usually, we are left wondering how to get it. We have tried just so hard to be more loving, more gentle, more faithful, more spiritual and humble. But surprisingly, the answer is somewhat yes or absolutely no.

Jesus revealed that the secret of growing God’s fruit in our life is being at home with Him. That’s the true definition of the familiar word “abide.” Let’s try to understand how He described what that means in John 15:5 *“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”* We grow more of God’s fruit not when we try harder, but when we stay connected to the Source. When we abide in Christ, we invite Him to live with us, not just in eternity, but even each day of our lives on earth.

Through the vine and the branch, Jesus illustrated His secret to godly growth that results in fruitfulness. When a branch stays connected to the vine, it bears the kind of fruit the vine grows. If Jesus is the Vine, we will grow the fruit that looks like Him when we live with Him. Since God is love, we will grow love and bear love. Because God brings joy, we will reflect joy. Because His life is peace, we will emit peace. The closer we grow to the Source, the more complete His life grows in our life. But we have got to abide in the relationship. If we want to look more like Christ, we have got to make our home in Christ.

Two Requirements for Growing God’s Fruit

Time. Like the fruit on the tree, growing God’s character in our life takes time. Day by day, we can watch Him grow His character in us as we make our heart at home in Him. And just as fruit grows from within, out of an abundance of water, sunshine, and nutrients, so does Christ’s life grow in us.

The care of the Vinedresser. Since God is the Vinedresser, it’s His job to grow the fruit. Let Him decide what characteristic He grows in us. Like a tree with many branches, a growing Christian life contains the fruit of all nine characteristics listed in Galatians 5. It’s our job to stay close and be completely at home with Christ as He does His work in and through us, but must allow ourselves to remain humble, vulnerable, and teachable in the process of pruning and dressing. ■



- Jacob Rasaily

(Mr. Jacob is a missionary with India Campus Crusade for Christ, and is currently in Manila, Philippines, along with his family, and is studying in the seminary, at International Graduate School of Leadership.)

E.C. HAPPENINGS

- I. E.C. ANNUAL CONVENTION (20th – 22nd October 2017) :** The Preacher for this year's Convention was **Rev. Dr. A.K. Lama**, Director of Transforming Leaders in Asia (TLA) Ministries. He was accompanied by his wife, Dr. Asangla Ao. Dr. Lama encouraged the listeners to be '**Rooted and Established in Love**' (Ephesians 3:17), which was the theme chosen for this year's Convention.

The three evening meetings and Sunday morning Worship service were well attended. On Sunday afternoon the different groups had their individual sessions – Youth session – led by the Preacher, Rev. Dr.A.K.Lama, Women's session – led by Dr.Mrs.Asangla Ao, who did a power point teaching on 'Balancing Family, Ministry and Work', and Men's Session – led by E.C. Pastor, Rev. Dr. H. Vanlalruata. There was a Discussion and Question time with the Preacher which was open for all and this was followed by the final evening meeting. At the start of each Convention meeting, the Worship team BURN 24 – 7 led the Congregation in meaningful worship, through their songs. There were also many special numbers by various groups/individuals in the meetings. Apart from the spiritual nourishment, those who attended also enjoyed physical nourishment through the delicious meals prepared by Mr. Harish Bajaj's team. The Convention meetings concluded with the vote of thanks by Secretary and benediction by E.C. Pastor, Rev. Dr. H. Vanlalruata.

- II. COMBINED FELLOWSHIP:** On 5.11.17, The English Congregation (E.C.) and Naga Christian Fellowship (N.C.F.) had a combined fellowship in the Sunday morning worship service, the first of its kind, in the E.C. church building. E.C. Pastor, Rev. Dr. H. Vanlalruata was the Chairman and the Preacher was Mr.Keci Siang, Chairman of N.C.F. There were special numbers from N.C.F. as well as E.C. Youth. All had a blessed time.

- III. GUEST SPEAKERS:** (a) **Rev. S. Nengzakhup**, Director, NECTAR, Shillong, brought God's Word to the Congregation on 12.11.17. It was a blessing to have him with us and also meet his son, Thangsianmung. The Congregation continues its prayer and financial support to NECTAR. (b) **Rev. Dr. Vanlalnghaka** of Shillong also brought God's Word to the Congregation on 26.11.2017. It was a blessing for all those who attended.

- IV. POSTED BACK TO AIZAWL ON PROMOTION:** Former E.C. member, **Mr. K. Kire** left Aizawl in the year 2000 due to his job transfer. He has returned to Aizawl on promotion as Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest, Mizoram, and has revived his membership at E.C. The Congregation is really happy to have him back. His family will join him soon.

- V. NEW MEMBER :** **Mr. Isak L. Tochwang** was welcomed as Associate Member of E.C. on 19.11.17 by E.C. Pastor, Rev. Dr. H. Vanlalruata, who also prayed a special prayer for him.

- VI. SPECIAL PRAYER REQUEST:**

CLASS X BOARD EXAMS : **Master Samson Badding. ■**

Convention 2017

20th - 22nd October

Theme: Rooted and Established in Love
(Ephesians 3:17)



Speaker: Rev. Dr. A.K. Lama



Special Number by
Biresing



PRAISE & WORSHIP led by



Special number by ITI Girls



Special Number by E.C. Youth



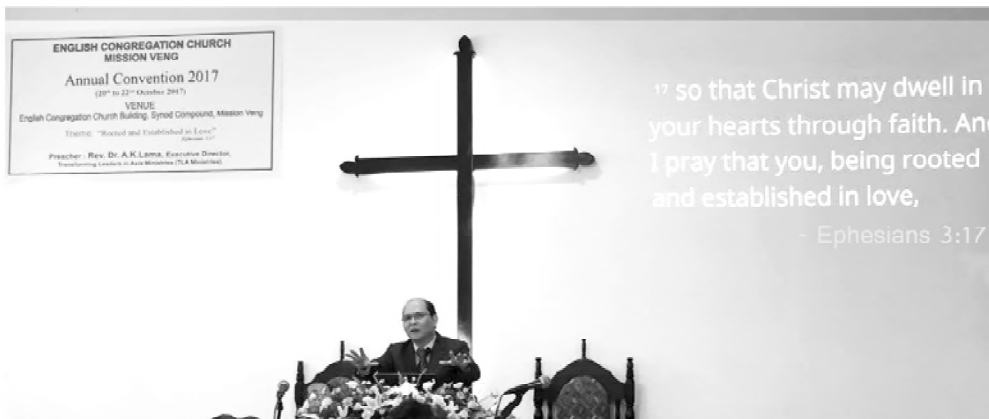
Special Number by Baptist Choir



Enjoying
Fellowship
Meal



Convention contd.....



Men's Session led by Pastor



Women's Session led by Mrs. Dr. Asangla Ao



Youth Session led by Rev. Dr. A.K. Lama



E.N.C. Combined Fellowship (5-11-2017)



Special Number by
E.C.



Special Number by
N.C.F.

We who had sweet fellowship
together Walked in the house of God
in the throng. -Psalm 55:14

Receiving of New Associate Member Mr. Isak L. Tochwawng (19-11-17)



Heather



HEATHER WHITESTONE



Heather Leigh Whitestone was born as a normal, healthy baby on 24 February 1973 in Dothan, Alabama, to parents Bill and Daphne Whitestone. Her two older sisters, Stacey and Melissa, loved their baby sister. On 14 September 1974, Heather became sick with fever and was hospitalized. The medicine prescribed to save her life destroyed her hearing and after many medical tests, the family was told that she was profoundly deaf in both ears. She was fitted with a hearing aid. Heather's mother Daphne was a God-fearing woman. She was determined to bring Heather up as normally as possible despite the deafness. Through the efforts of Heather's parents, a deaf-education program was introduced in the Public schools in Dothan and Heather was able to attend such a school right from the start of her schooling.

Daphne wanted Heather to learn how to speak, so that she could talk with normal hearing people and go to a regular school with hearing children. Through the acoupedics method, Heather was taught how to use the little hearing she had, and the right therapist was found to work with her. Speech therapy was hard work for Heather and her family too. Daphne also enrolled her in a dance class to help her in listening and speaking. Thus Heather discovered her love for dance. But at kindergarten, Heather lagged behind her age-group in language development. When in fourth grade, she came home crying one day as the other kids did not want to befriend her as she was deaf. So she wanted to go to a special deaf school and God led them to the Central Institute for the Deaf (CID), a world-renowned school in St. Louis, Missouri. Heather loved it and in those three years away from home at CID, she made up six years of academic progress. Heather was God-fearing and would often be found in her room, reading the Bible. She returned home in the Fall of 1987. But sadly in the Spring of 1988 her parents divorced.

Thanks to CID, Heather was well prepared to cope in a regular high school and got admission to Alabama School of Fine Arts and moved to Birmingham. She wanted to be a professional ballet dancer. She enjoyed her dance training, but faced huge challenges in other classes. Her mother helped her a lot and so did her aunt and grandmother. Realizing that she could not keep up with both, she chose education over dancing and transferred to Berry High School where she adjusted well. She also joined a Christian dance troupe, the Briarwood Ballet, and soon realized how she could use her dance to worship God. Daphne encouraged Heather to pursue accounting as she enjoyed math. Heather agreed. In January 1990 she began to learn sign language. In her senior year at high school, Heather competed in the Shelby County Junior Miss Pageant, but had to learn and prepare a lot for it. She not only had to practice for her own talent segment but also had long nightly rehearsals with all the competing girls for two full weeks. In November 1990, Heather won the first place in the talent competition and got the spirit award as the person all the girls voted as the most encouraging, friendly and cooperative. She won the second runner-up of the Shelby County Junior Miss Pageant and \$1,400 in scholarship that she could use for the following year's college expenses. Heather still had some struggles in her senior year of high school when her hearing impairment at times made her feel like she didn't belong and that she would have been better understood in deaf schools. Mainly due to this, she entered the Miss Deaf Alabama Pageant but was not well received by the other contestants who did not approve of her speaking instead of using sign language. She did not win any spot in the competition and was deeply discouraged by her experience there. She felt she did not fit either into the hearing or deaf world. After Daphne confronted her in love, and told her she needed to choose which world she wanted to live in, she felt perhaps God wanted her to be a bridge between the hearing and deaf worlds and that's what she chose to be.

In 1991 as she started college at Jacksonville State University (JSU), her goal was to become Miss America – a dream she had cherished since childhood. She believed that in that way she could be a witness for God, and an encouragement to others, particularly to deaf children. Former Miss Alabama, Teresa Strickland who worked at JSU encouraged Heather to take part in Miss JSU. She entered Miss St. Clair Competition and did very well but did not win as she failed to answer an unexpected question. Later she became Miss JSU 1992, which automatically qualified her for that year's June 1992 Miss Alabama Pageant. She won the overall talent portion and also got the first runner-up. In July 1992, she won the Miss Point Mallard Pageant which qualified her for the 1993 Miss Alabama Pageant. In June 1993, dancing to "Via Dolorosa", Heather won the talent portion and was named first runner-up to Miss Alabama again. Uncertain whether she would run again, Heather and Daphne attended the Miss America competition in September 1993 in Atlantic City. In November 1993 Heather won the Miss Cullman Area Pageant.

In June 1994 Heather was named Miss Alabama and finally on 17 September 1994, Heather's dream came true when she was crowned Miss America 1995. Heather had earlier designed a special program to encourage kids to achieve their best, entitled "Anything is Possible!". She created her STARS (Success Through Action and Realization of your dreamS) program. Stars have five points, so it would be easy to remember the five important points namely:

1. Have a positive attitude 2. Believe in your dreams 3. Be willing to work very hard 4. Be honest with yourself, face your weaknesses and obstacles 5. Build a support team you can depend on.

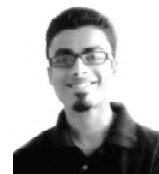
One of the main reasons Daphne wrote a book about Heather was to help people realize that we don't have to be limited by our weaknesses and handicaps. With God's help, a "limitation" can be the very thing that makes us a unique person He can use in a very special way. ■

Source: Heather Whitestone By Daphne Gray with Gregg Lewis

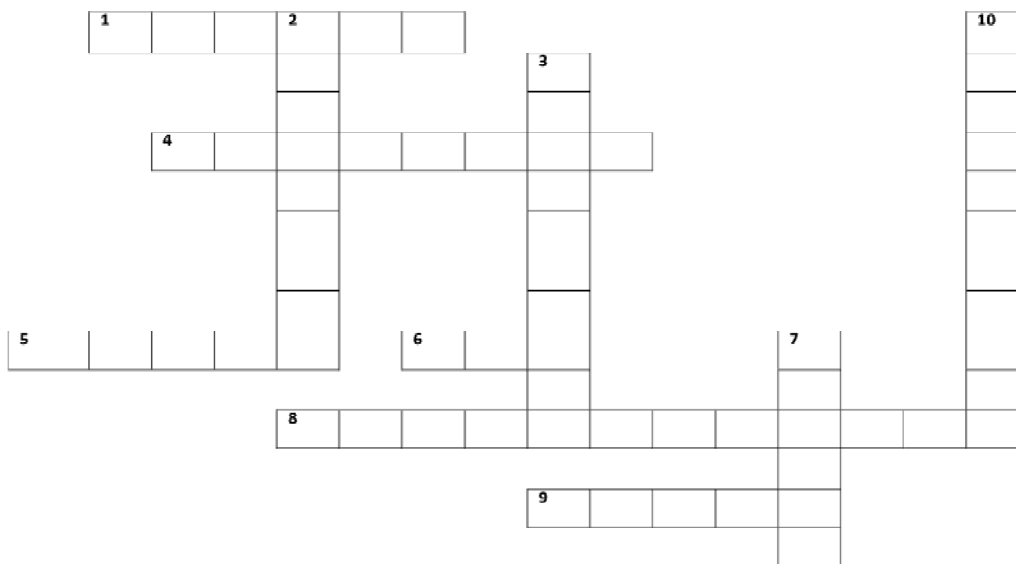
(Miss Lavi is always willing and available to use her talents to glorify God and be a blessing to others.)

BIBLE CROSSWORD

(Version: NKJV)



Jaison Joshy



Find the answers for the above crossword by finding the missing words in the Bible verses given below:

- I am the vine, you are the branches. He who [1 across] _____ in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)
- Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My [2- down] _____ indeed". (John 8:31)
- And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have [3-down] _____ and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. (1 John 2:28)
- Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the [4-across] _____ of Christ does not have God. (2 John 1:9)
- If you abide in Me, and My [5-across] _____ abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:7)
- Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the [6-across] _____ and in the [7-down] _____. (1 John 2:24)
- There is therefore now no [8-across] _____ to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1)
- These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have [9-across] _____. In the world you will have [10- down] _____; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

(Mr. Jaison has been part of E.C. for a long time and after completing M.Tech in Computer Science, he is now working as Guest Lecturer in Mizoram University.)

ATTENTION!

The English Congregation meets every Sunday for Worship at 10 a.m. in the English Congregation Church building, within the Synod Office compound, at Mission Veng.
ALL ARE WELCOME!

Editorial Team : Rev. Dr. Roger Gaikwad, Mrs. Nimmi Joseph, Ms. Lavi Joseph, Mr. Jaison Joshy
Website : www.eccaizawl.in