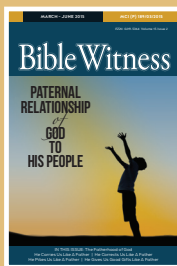


# Bible Witness

## PATERNAL RELATIONSHIP *of* GOD TO HIS PEOPLE



IN THIS ISSUE: The Fatherhood of God  
He Carries Us Like A Father | He Corrects Us Like A Father  
He Pities Us Like A Father | He Gives Us Good Gifts Like A Father



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# The Fatherhood of God

PRABHUDAS KOSHY

The Fatherhood of God is a commonly mentioned truth in the Scriptures, especially in the New Testament. It is one of the grandest and most endearing truths about God that the Scriptures teach us. The Fatherhood of God engenders in us both reverence and affection towards Him.

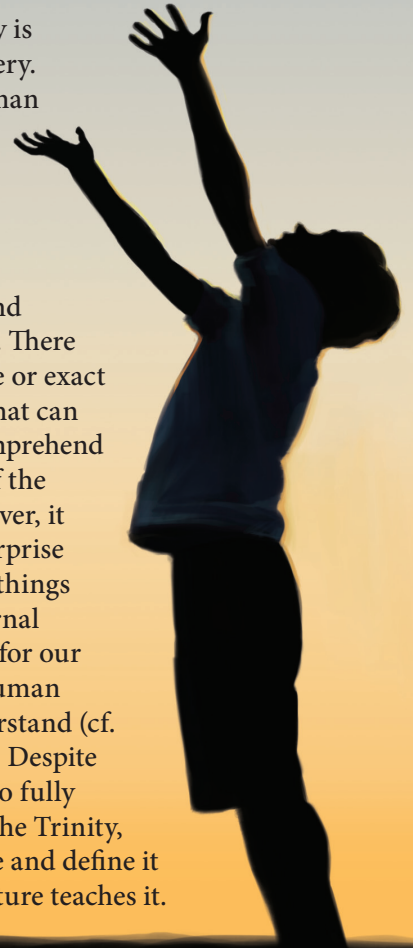
While the title “the Father” designates the First Person of the Holy Trinity, “the Fatherhood of God” refers to the essential, divine nature (or attribute) of the blessed Triune God. It further reveals God’s nature as Creator of all things, as God of the covenant and as Adopter of a people whom He has redeemed through the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

## God, the Father: The First Person of the Trinity

There is one and only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Isaiah 44:6-8; 45:5-6, 21-22; Romans 3:30; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Corinthians 8:6; James 2:19). Yet, Scripture clearly indicates that there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead, namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-

6; 1 Peter 1:2). In the Godhead, there is Trinity of the three divine Persons.

The Trinity is a sacred mystery. From our human viewpoint, we cannot fully understand how God can be one God and three Persons. There is no complete or exact comparison that can help us to comprehend the concept of the Trinity. However, it should not surprise us that many things about our eternal God are hard for our puny, finite human mind to understand (cf. Isaiah 55:8-9). Despite our inability to fully comprehend the Trinity, we can believe and define it because Scripture teaches it.



In the Trinity, the Father is not the Son; the Father is also not the Holy Spirit – these three are distinct Persons. These distinctions are clearly seen in the passages cited above. However, there is a oneness in essence in the Trinity. The apostle John recorded, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7). The three Persons are of the same divine nature and substance, so there are no degrees in the Godhead – one Person is not God more than the other. The three Persons of the Trinity are co-eternal and co-equal: all alike are uncreated, omnipotent and eternal. Each one of the three Persons is fully God.

The three Persons are so united that one Person is in the other, and with one another. Hence, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has said, “the Father is in me, and I in him” (John 10:38; cf. John 14:9-11; 17:21). Jesus also said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30); “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

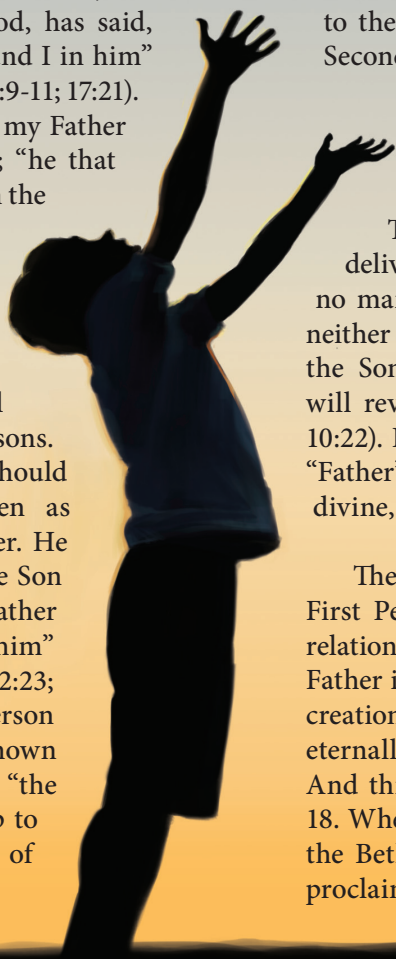
There is an order in the Godhead, but no degrees, hence we must give equal worship to all the Persons. “That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23; cf. 1 John 2:23; 2 John 9). The First Person of the Trinity is known in the Scriptures as “the Father” in relationship to the other two Persons of the Trinity.

## Eternal Fatherhood of God to the Son

During His earthly life, Jesus Christ frequently addressed or referred to the First Person of the Trinity as “My Father”. It was His most common designation for God, but He used it to designate a relationship that was uniquely His. In the Gospels, Christ referred to the First Person of the Trinity as “My Father” more than 60 times. Jesus also called Him “Abba” (Mark 14:36), an Aramaic word that denotes filial affection and tenderness. Also, in the epistles, God as Father and Christ as Son often occur together, as in the phrase “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus” (cf. Romans 15:6; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 11:31; Ephesians 1:3, 17; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 1:3). We understand from our reading that the name ‘Father’ very particularly belongs to the First Person in His relation to the Second Person.

Jesus used the term “Father” to express His intimate relationship with the First Person of the Trinity. He said, “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matthew 11:27; cf. Luke 10:22). Here, Christ’s triple reference to His “Father” emphasises the uniqueness of their divine, eternal relationship.

The name “the Father” is applied to the First Person of the Trinity in His eternal relation to the Second Person. God the Father is Father not merely by virtue of His creation of us and of the world, but He is eternally Father because of His eternal Son! And this truth is made clear in John 5:17-18. When Jesus healed the impotent man at the Bethesda pool on the sabbath day, He proclaimed, “My Father worketh hitherto,





and I work.” This made the Jews fume with murderous anger “because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.” By saying that God was His Father, and that He was the Son of God, He was claiming to be divine. The words “My Father” asserted the unique, divine relationship and thus His perfect equality with the Father!

We must not think about the Father’s begetting of the Son like that of a human father begetting a son. It is not a relationship assumed at a particular stage of time: it is an eternal relationship. God the Father begets His Son from eternity of His own essence and nature. The Son is begotten of the Father eternally and hence, is “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Hebrews 1:3). In theological terminology, this is referred to as the eternal generation of the Son. The Father’s begetting of the Son should not be viewed as His creative activity, which some have erroneously taught. As the Father eternally begets the Son, He also (with the Son) eternally sends forth the Holy Spirit. The three Persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – are of the same divine essence, not divided or separated.

Theologian Louis Berkhof says, “The first person is the Father of the second in a metaphysical sense. This is the original fatherhood of God, of which all earthly fatherhood is but a faint reflection.”

## General or Creational Fatherhood of God over His Creation

Scripture teaches that God is the Father of all things, being the Creator, Provider and Sustainer of everything in existence. The general Fatherhood of God based on His creational relationship with His creatures is

an undeniable Scriptural truth. God asked Job rhetorically, referring to Himself, “Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew” (Job 38:28)? No man can claim to have caused the rain, or regard it as his offspring. The idea is that rain is caused by the wisdom and power of God. In that regard, God is the Father of rain and all such phenomena in the universe.

The creational Fatherhood of God over all of mankind is also emphasised in the Scriptures. In Numbers 16:22, He is called “the God of the spirits of all flesh” and in Hebrews 12:9, “the Father of spirits”. When Isaiah pleaded with God, he acknowledged the creational Fatherhood of God – “But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isaiah 64:8). Malachi wrote, “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us” (Malachi 2:10)? The apostle Paul declared, “But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things” (1 Corinthians 8:6a).

However, man has not honoured God’s creational Fatherhood. In Malachi 1:6, the LORD God frowned at the sins of the people: “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour?” Scripture makes it perfectly clear that God is the Father of even unbelievers by virtue of creation. But alas, by their rebellion, they have become His enemies (cf. Romans 1:28-32; 8:7-8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Colossians 1:21a), even “children of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:6) and “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3; cf. Colossians 3:6).

At Mar’s Hill, in order to show the absurdity of the Athenians’ worship of idols made of wood and stone, the apostle Paul mentioned God’s paternal relationship to them as their Maker. Quoting one of their

poets, he said, “we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:28). Then he went on to say, “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:29-30).

However, the unrepentant unbelievers are said to have another father. The devil is spoken of as being the father of unregenerate men. In His severest condemnation of the Jewish leaders who opposed Him, Jesus said, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44). The apostle John delineates the two mutually exclusive “families”, the children of God and the children of the devil, in 1 John 3:8-10 – “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

## National or Covenantal Fatherhood of God over Israel

God has declared over and over again His paternal relationship to Israel, based on His covenant with them. He instructed Moses to tell Pharaoh, “Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn” (Exodus 4:22). Through Moses, God said to Israel, “Is not he thy father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee”

(Deuteronomy 32:6)? By the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD said, “For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn” (Jeremiah 31:9).

God told the nation of Israel that “as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee” (Deuteronomy 8:5; cf. Proverbs 3:12). Like as a father, He told them how their conduct and practice should be different from other people (cf. Deuteronomy 14:1).

King David blessed the LORD, acknowledging Israel as His covenant people: “Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever” (1 Chronicles 29:10). Isaiah, on behalf of the nation of Israel, confessed, “Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting” (Isaiah 63:16).

God also promised that Israel will return from all her backsliding and will enjoy the future blessings of His paternal, covenantal relationship. “Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me” (Jeremiah 3:19b).

## Redemptive Fatherhood of God over All in Christ

The Scriptures record wonderful good news for man, who had gone astray from the Father through his rebellious ways and had become a child of His wrath. God has planned to redeem a lost people and adopt them as His own children. Galatians 4:4-6 delineates the divine plan to redeem us so that we may have God as our Father – “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were

under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”

Ephesians 1:3-5 declares, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will”. Likewise Galatians 3:26 affirms, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” John 1:12 repeats that joyful message, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

Only to those who receive Jesus Christ by faith as their Saviour and Lord, is the right to become children of God given. It is through the work of Christ that God invites us to call Him “Abba, Father” (cf. Romans 8:12-16; 1 Peter 1:3-4). Christ is by nature the Son; we are “sons” through adoption. What great news it is that the Father-Creator is also the Father-Redeemer, and that He adopts every sinner who believes on His Son! So the apostle John exclaimed, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1).

The Son of God teaches us to call God, “Our Father which art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). Likewise, the Spirit of God also teaches us to come to God by calling Him “Abba,

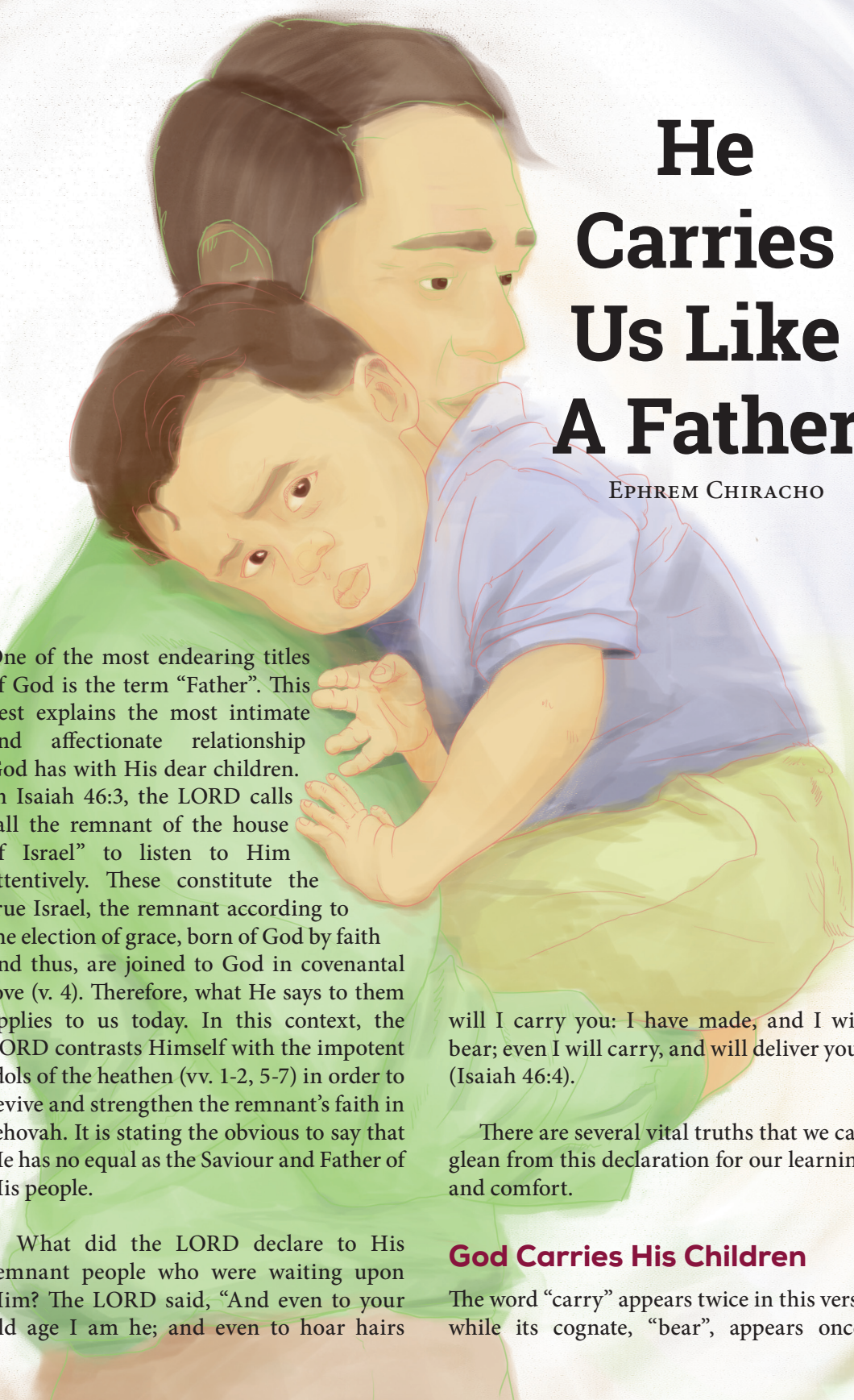
Father”. Galatians 4:6 tells us, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.” Furthermore, Romans 8:15 reiterates, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” The word “Abba” is an Aramaic word that expresses an intimate relationship of a child to his father. It is a child’s appeal to all that is paternal and loving in his father. It was used by Christ in prayer to the Father (cf. Mark 14:36). We are further reminded that it is the Spirit who maintains the consciousness of this relationship in our hearts: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16).

“What great news  
it is that  
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the Father-Redeemer!”

Oh, what glorious profound truths are depicted in the Fatherhood of God! God’s Fatherhood is much more than just in the creational sense. Wonder of wonders, God is Father in a special sense to His redeemed people! Jesus assures us in Matthew 6:31-32, “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (cf. Matthew 6:8; Psalm 103:13; Luke 11:11-13; 12:30). Truly, “what manner of love” this is indeed!







# He Carries Us Like A Father

EPHREM CHIRACHO

One of the most endearing titles of God is the term “Father”. This best explains the most intimate and affectionate relationship God has with His dear children. In Isaiah 46:3, the LORD calls “all the remnant of the house of Israel” to listen to Him attentively. These constitute the true Israel, the remnant according to the election of grace, born of God by faith and thus, are joined to God in covenantal love (v. 4). Therefore, what He says to them applies to us today. In this context, the LORD contrasts Himself with the impotent idols of the heathen (vv. 1-2, 5-7) in order to revive and strengthen the remnant’s faith in Jehovah. It is stating the obvious to say that He has no equal as the Saviour and Father of His people.

What did the LORD declare to His remnant people who were waiting upon Him? The LORD said, “And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs

will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (Isaiah 46:4).

There are several vital truths that we can glean from this declaration for our learning and comfort.

## God Carries His Children

The word “carry” appears twice in this verse while its cognate, “bear”, appears once.



This repetition intensifies the meaning of this particular action of God. It means that not only will He surely carry without fail, He will also carry us with tender love and unswerving commitment.

To show the surety of His care, God says, “I am he” (v. 4a). That is to say, He is the ever living and unchangeable Jehovah, the author and finisher of the covenant. He is the One who is almighty and omnipresent. He is constantly by the side of His people each passing moment of every day. As their caring heavenly Father, He knows their frame and empathizes with their frailty (cf. Psalm 103:14). Accordingly, He commits Himself to tend to their problems arising from their weakness and to attend to their various needs of life.

As a compassionate Father, God carries His children in His bosom with all intense supervision and protectiveness. He not only supports and sustains them, but also raises them (when they sometimes unwittingly fall) out of the “horrible pit” of turbulent turmoil and distress. He further undertakes to set their feet upon a rock (high above the raging waves and, therefore, a place of security), establishing their footing and directing their steps in due course (Psalm 40:2; cf. Proverbs 3:6). Oh, what privilege and honour we have as God’s children, being assured of His constant care and nourishment!

## God Carries Even to Old Age

“And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you” (v. 4a, b). God’s carrying extends from the womb to the grave (vv. 3-4; cf. Psalm 22:10). Our God is not limited by time. He ever lives to nurture and sustain His people. Our sojourn on earth comprises different seasons of life (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:1-11), with each appointed season inexorably descending upon us

with its share of joy and sorrow, success and failure, health and sickness, bounty and want, etc. Yet as an affectionate Father, God promises to carry His children in all seasons of their lives (cf. Deuteronomy 1:31). Just as our natural life is constantly sustained by His providence, our spiritual life is necessarily sustained by His grace. Therefore, in the midst of life’s uncertainties and unforeseen turn of events, we can depend on God’s providence and grace to safely carry us through.

Dear children of the heavenly Father, He is unchangeable! His love and care for His people remain the same at every age. He never fails His children! At every stage of our life (be it childhood, adolescence, adulthood or old age) and in various conditions of life’s journey (whether we be wealthy or deprived, full of mental / physical strength or infirm and disabled, at the peak of success or in the valley of distress), we can securely cast ourselves into the everlasting arms of our heavenly Father. He is ever committed to help, nourish and sustain us right to the end (“even to ... old age”). Indeed, He has covenanted with His people: “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5b).

## God Carries to Deliver

“I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you” (v. 4c). The Almighty God, who is the unchanging and faithful Guardian of our soul, is also the tender Father who carries His people in order to deliver them from all physical or spiritual adversities through all the vicissitudes of life. He delivers us from every enemy of our soul. He delivers us from the many devices and snares of the devil every moment of our sojourning as “strangers and pilgrims” on this earth. Come what may, God’s power and love is ever available to secure the safety of His children constantly.



Our heavenly Father also delivers us from spiritual dejection. He delivers us out of the “miry clay” (Psalm 40:2) of wicked men’s contempt and smearing disdain. Admittedly, their false accusations and scandalous insinuations could so easily discredit our testimony and stain our good name. Though God’s people may be called all sorts of unflattering names and evil spoken of, God will deliver and vindicate them in due course. This comforting assurance of God’s careful attendance to His children’s deliverance is affirmed by the words of the psalmist: “The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore” (Psalm 121:7-8; cf. Isaiah 63:9).

Therefore, in the midst of trials and temptations of all sorts, we can confidently call upon the LORD to deliver us. He is the compassionate Father who sympathizes with us, the omniscient God who knows our every situation, the omnipotent Sovereign who delivers unerringly, and the faithful Friend who comes to our aid at any time and in any place. Let “all the remnant of the house of Israel” (i.e. the true Israel of God, the true disciples of Christ, the committed members of His body, the separated servants of Jehovah) trust in the living and true God. He stands by His Word (Isaiah 46:9-11)! And this is our firm security through all the changing scenes and seasons of this transient life. Amen.



# Bible Witness

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*"And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up,  
and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the  
LORD's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation,  
and for all his service, and for the holy garments."*

*Exodus 35:21*



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# He Corrects Us Like A Father

PAUL CHENG

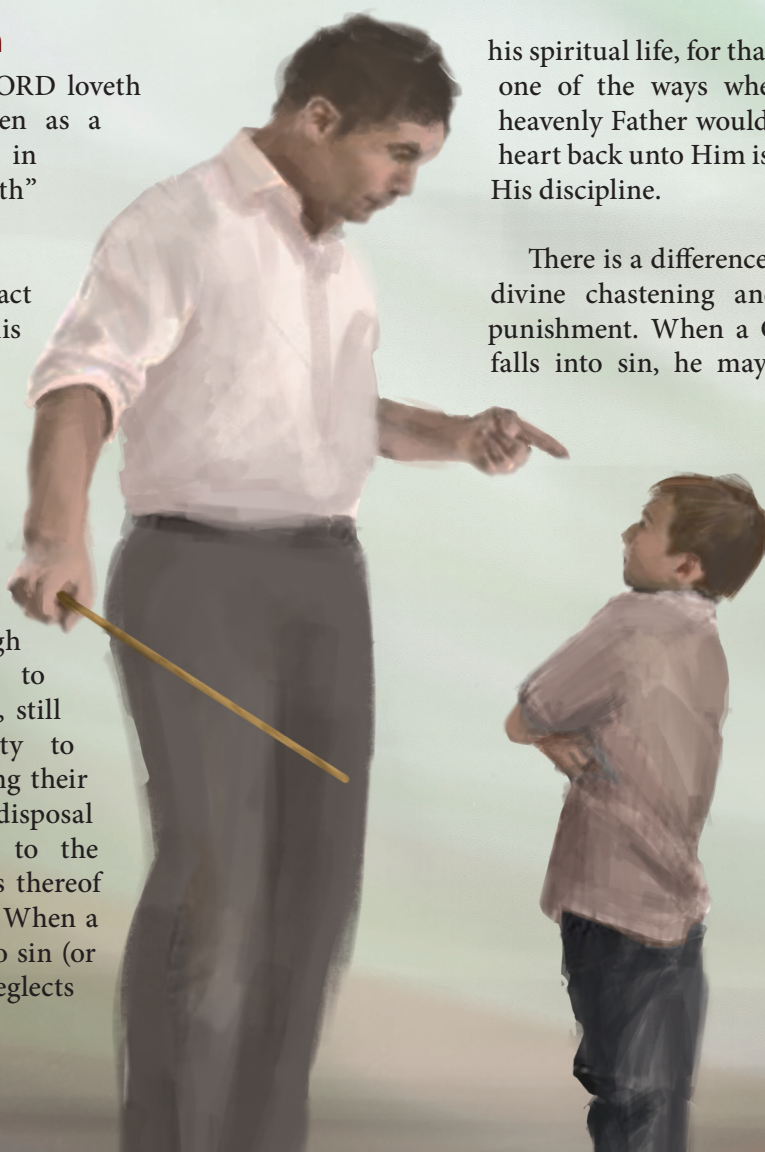
## Introduction

“For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Proverbs 3:12).

It is a biblical fact that believers this side of heaven do get tempted and can be drawn away of their own lusts, and get enticed and fall into sin (cf. James 1:14-15). Christians, though spiritually “dead to sin” (Romans 6:2), still have the capacity to serve sin by putting their bodies at sin’s disposal and by yielding to the flesh and the lusts thereof (cf. Romans 6:12). When a Christian falls into sin (or backslides or neglects

his spiritual life, for that matter), one of the ways whereby his heavenly Father would turn his heart back unto Him is through His discipline.

There is a difference between divine chastening and divine punishment. When a Christian falls into sin, he may have to





suffer painful consequences, but he will never suffer divine punishment. The punishment for his sins was borne by Christ completely on the cross at Calvary (cf. Romans 8:1).

It is often hard for believers to see the good in God's act of correcting us, just as it is difficult for our children to see the good in our disciplining them. But we ought to know that our loving heavenly Father will not do anything to harm us. His discipline will hurt for sure, but it is never meant to cause harm. Thus, if we have a right biblical understanding of God's discipline, we will then be able to appreciate and "endure chastening", and in the process, be profitably "exercised thereby", insofar as our fight against sin is concerned (cf. Hebrews 12:7, 11).

## It is Loving

In discipline, God is portrayed not as a Judge but as a loving Father. Divine discipline is an indisputable sign that we are in a "child-father" relationship with God and thereby being loved by Him.

An undisciplined child is an unloved, neglected and miserable child. No wise and good father would wink at the faults in his own children; how much less our heavenly Father whose love is perfect! All men are subjected to God's punishment except only His children, whom the LORD loves. And "for whom the LORD loveth he correcteth", not punishes.

An earthly father has a special obligation and responsibility to protect, provide and at times discipline his own children because of the parent-child relationship. God has a covenant relationship with His children whom He has redeemed, and He has obligated Himself to love and protect them (cf. Isaiah 54:10). God's loving paternal relationship with His children will not allow

Him to withhold His disciplining of us; His correction is deemed a proof of His love and of our sonship. As believers, we know that we are God's children not only through His leading (Romans 8:14), through the witness of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:15-16) and through our trusting in Jesus Christ (John 1:12), but we also know that we are God's children through His correcting us (cf. Hebrews 12:6-9).

## It is Corrective

There are times when God's children undergo His corrective discipline that comes directly from His love. The word correcteth can mean to chasten, discipline, rebuke or reprove. The basic meaning is to make right the wrong; the purpose is to show truth and virtue to the one being corrected, and to turn him away from things that are bad, sinful and destructive. It is something that parents would do to train, instruct, cultivate and educate their children in order to help them develop, grow and mature as they ought. It is also to cause the child to understand that there is a consequence for sin and if he does not want to pay the price, then he has to avoid it.

A classic example would be King David who committed the sins of adultery and murder. God corrected David, not out of His wrath or judgment, but out of love. Though His discipline was severe and cost David dearly [in the loss of an infant son by Bathsheba and in the numerous scandalous heartaches posed by some of his other sons' vile conduct (cf. 2 Samuel 12:11-14)], it was nonetheless for a corrective purpose. God's corrective discipline was for the purpose of restraining David from repeating the sin, to draw him closer to God and to help him grow and mature. David did learn from it and grow in grace. Consider the psalmist's words: "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word... It is good



for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (Psalm 119:67, 71). These could very well reflect the sentiments of the much-chastened David!

## It is Preventive

There are times when God’s children are made to undergo hardships, by the providence of God. This is to prevent their falling into sin. Our illness, loss of job, lack of business opportunity and other struggles may just be God’s way of preventing us from falling into some situation that is far worse. What appears to be a terrible inconvenience and privation may be God’s loving protection. Just as an earthly father would set up restrictions and limits around their children to shield them from danger, our heavenly Father similarly would use His preventive disciplining to serve as spiritual boundaries to safeguard His children.

Incidentally, God allowed the apostle Paul to suffer a “thorn in the flesh”, not because Paul was proud but to keep him from becoming proud and conceited due to the great revelations he had received (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). It was certainly not pleasant for Paul to experience the “thorn in the flesh”, which he had earnestly prayed to be removed. Yet he later thanked God for that ordeal as he realized how it had actually protected him from

falling into the subtle but ensnaring sin of spiritual pride (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)!

## It is Educational

It is instructive to note that there are also times when God’s children experience afflictions not because they have sinned or are on the verge of sinning. On the contrary, they may be doing well in their spiritual walk. Job was such an example and the Bible has this to say about him: “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1). Since Satan’s accusation insinuated that Job loved God purely because of material blessings and a trouble-free life, God, in His permissive will, permitted Satan to bring misery to Job. Yet through it all, Job came out “with flying colours” (Timothy Tow), and Satan was defeated by Job’s refusal to renounce his faith (cf. Job 19:25-26). In a sense, God allowed Job to be tried and maligned so as to demonstrate His point (cf. Job 2:3, 6). Indeed, this “educational” aspect of God’s discipline can help us to gain deeper insights into God’s holy majesty,

His unerring deliverance, His unfailing love, His immaculate power, His inscrutable counsel and His irrefutable defence.

## It is Beneficial

It is incomprehensible how a good earthly father could possibly love his child and

“His discipline will hurt for sure, but it is never meant to cause harm. Thus, if we have a right biblical understanding of God’s discipline, we will then be able to appreciate and “endure chastening”, and in the process, be profitably “exercised thereby”  
(cf. Hebrews 12:7, 11)



not correct him for his wrongdoings. If submission to the discipline of one's earthly father brings forth good things, how much more good will be wrought through submission to the discipline of the heavenly Father (cf. Hebrews 12:9-11)? God's primary desire for His children is that they be holy as He is holy (cf. 1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 19:2; 20:7). Thus, His divine discipline is always perfect, "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Hebrews 12:10b).

## It is Righteous

Every earthly father will admit that he has ever meted out unrighteous discipline at times. Sometimes, earthly fathers might have been too severe or too lax, or have shown favouritism, or even punished the wrong child. But the heavenly Father never makes such mistakes. Being absolutely needful for His children, His discipline is always right and perfect. Needless to say, it is always righteous because it is administered by a righteous heavenly Father.

## Conclusion

Appreciating these biblical facts about divine chastening will help God's children to dispel an undue dread or worse, an antagonistic attitude towards God's correction. In order to reap "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" that it ultimately yields (Hebrews 12:11b), we must submit willingly to it. Our focus must not be fixated only on the current unpleasant experience, but rather on our heavenly Father and His sovereign purpose in disciplining us. As John Owen put it, "Love precedes discipline." God loves and corrects us like a Father and His discipline is immensely beneficial for our spiritual life and growth. Thus, our response to His discipline should be: "Thank you, Lord, for sweet discipline – for You have reminded me that You love me and I am Your child!"



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# He Pities Us Like A Father

HIEU NGUYEN

A loving and responsible father loves and takes good care of his children. We must be thankful for such fathers, especially godly fathers who nurture, admonish and care for us according to God's Word. It is a sad reality that many other children do not enjoy the love, care and sweet fellowship from their fathers in this cursed and sinful world, all because of men's sinful and selfish human nature. We are painfully aware that there are miserable children (who have been abandoned by their fathers) begging on the streets or doing hard manual work in order to subsist. Some turn to gambling or drugs or gangs due to their fathers failing to properly instruct and discipline them. In extreme cases, some others are even abused and beaten by drunken or violent fathers. To such disadvantaged children, the picture of a loving and caring father is an alien idea to their hearts and minds.

Granted, there are conscientious earthly fathers who love their children and work

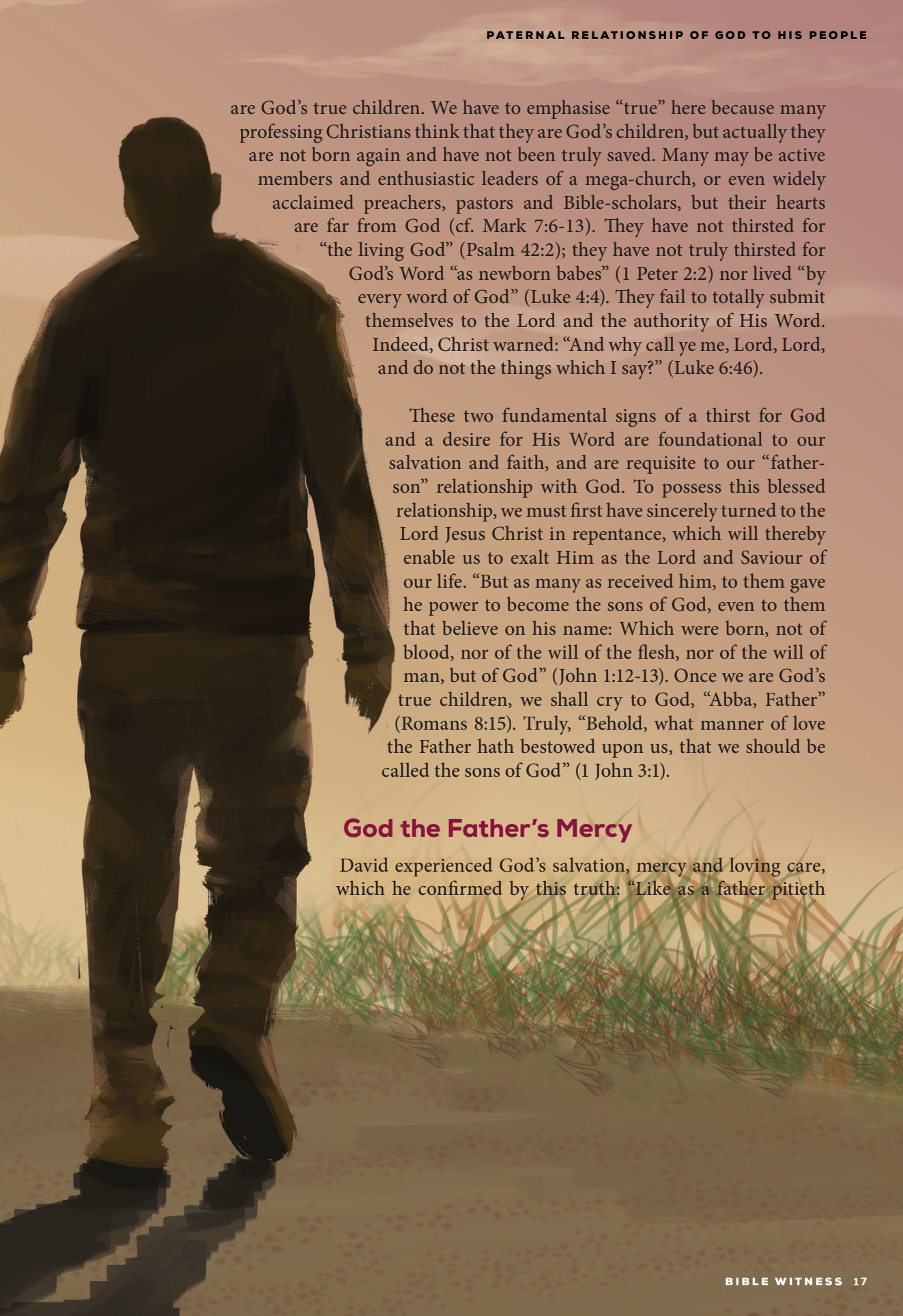
very hard to take good care of them and provide for their every need. Yet they are but a far cry from God the Creator, who is always a good, loving, caring, merciful and almighty heavenly Father to His children. How blessed are they who have tasted the love and care from God their Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ their Saviour! They can say like David: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up" (Psalm 27:10). They do not feel abandoned or forsaken at all, for they have a blessed "father-son" relationship with God!

## The Father-Son Relationship

It is a great blessing to have a Christian father who is God's true son, as well as to have Christian children who







are God's true children. We have to emphasise "true" here because many professing Christians think that they are God's children, but actually they are not born again and have not been truly saved. Many may be active members and enthusiastic leaders of a mega-church, or even widely acclaimed preachers, pastors and Bible-scholars, but their hearts are far from God (cf. Mark 7:6-13). They have not thirsted for "the living God" (Psalm 42:2); they have not truly thirsted for God's Word "as newborn babes" (1 Peter 2:2) nor lived "by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). They fail to totally submit themselves to the Lord and the authority of His Word. Indeed, Christ warned: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

These two fundamental signs of a thirst for God and a desire for His Word are foundational to our salvation and faith, and are requisite to our "father-son" relationship with God. To possess this blessed relationship, we must first have sincerely turned to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance, which will thereby enable us to exalt Him as the Lord and Saviour of our life. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Once we are God's true children, we shall cry to God, "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). Truly, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1).

### God the Father's Mercy

David experienced God's salvation, mercy and loving care, which he confirmed by this truth: "Like as a father pitieth

his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him” (Psalm 103:13). The Hebrew word translated as “pity” comes from the root verb *rukhamāh*, which means “to have compassion, to have mercy”. Quoting from The Complete Word Study Dictionary (AMG), “the word pictures a deep, kindly sympathy and sorrow felt for another who has been struck with affliction or misfortune, accompanied with a desire to relieve the suffering. The word occurs forty-seven times in the Old Testament, with God being by far the most common subject and His afflicted people the object ... Though the Lord showed compassion, it was not because of any meritorious work the recipient had done; it was solely due to God’s sovereign freedom to bestow it on whom He chose (Exodus 33:19; cf. Romans 9:14-16).”

Indeed, God has shown His common love, grace and mercy to all mankind, and “left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). The unsurpassed climax of God’s mercy was demonstrated when “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). For those who have been saved and born again in Christ, God’s special mercy is manifested in the following (though not exhaustive) ways:

### **Loving Care**

God, as our heavenly Father, loves and cares for us, just as our earthly fathers do so for their children. Unlike our earthly fathers who sometimes (or rather, oftentimes)

cannot care for their children sufficiently (thereby causing them to feel a tinge of guilt in their hearts), our Almighty Father’s loving care is always great and perfect. “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matthew 6:31-32). Let us wisely seek God’s Kingdom and His righteousness first (v. 33), and learn to cast “all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

### **Loving Comfort**

Just as it pains our heart when our children suffer illness, accidents, afflictions or trials, our merciful God is also “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15). While we usually try to comfort them to soothe their sufferings and pains, God the Father, ironically, may allow His children to go through tough times to mould them and let them experience more of His love and mercy. Job’s pitiful plight (by the permissive will of God) is a classic case in point. Man’s comfort may fail like that of Job’s three friends (or rather, “miserable comforters”), but God’s loving comfort is sweet, tender and perfect. As “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3), He will surely show His mercy to His children in their afflictions. And in His Son, “what a Friend we have in Jesus, (who) all our sins and griefs to bear”. God knows our frame (which consists of nothing but weaknesses and infirmities), and His grace is always sufficient for His children (Psalm 103:14; cf. 2 Corinthians



12:9). Let us, therefore, run to our merciful Father to receive His comfort in our times of troubles and trials, “that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

### **Loving Guidance**

Earthly fathers who truly love their children will want them to make wise choices and decisions in various aspects of their life and to walk in the right way. How much more God our heavenly Father in regard to His children! God gently directs and guides His children to walk in the narrow way that leads to life, and to do His Will according to His Word. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:14). Let us fear God with a humble and meek heart to receive His loving guidance in this world that is filled with confusion and deception. Truly, “The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way... What man is he that feareth the LORD? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose” (Psalm 25:9, 12).

### **Loving Protection**

As loving fathers, we want our children to be protected from all harm and danger. We become anxious and worried when we cannot protect them as we should. Not so for our Almighty Father. He is completely able to protect us by His loving and omnipotent Hand. Like a father who holds his child’s hand while they walk together, the heavenly Father will also hold the hands of His people along life’s treacherous journey (cf. Isaiah 41:13a). The father holds the child’s hand in

order to protect the child from falling and to provide assurance of safety. Likewise, God also mercifully promises to protect His people, saying, “Fear not; I will help thee” (Isaiah 41:13b). Realising this truth should make us run to Him for His loving protection. “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29).

### **How to Enjoy God’s Mercy**

God shows His mercy to those who fear Him [“so the LORD pitieth them that fear him” (Psalm 103:13b)] and to those who acknowledge their sins and come back to God in repentance [“but whoso confesseth and forsaketh (his sins) shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13b)]. We see this truth manifested in the prodigal son’s repentance of his sins: he decided to come back home and was duly welcomed by his merciful and loving father. “And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

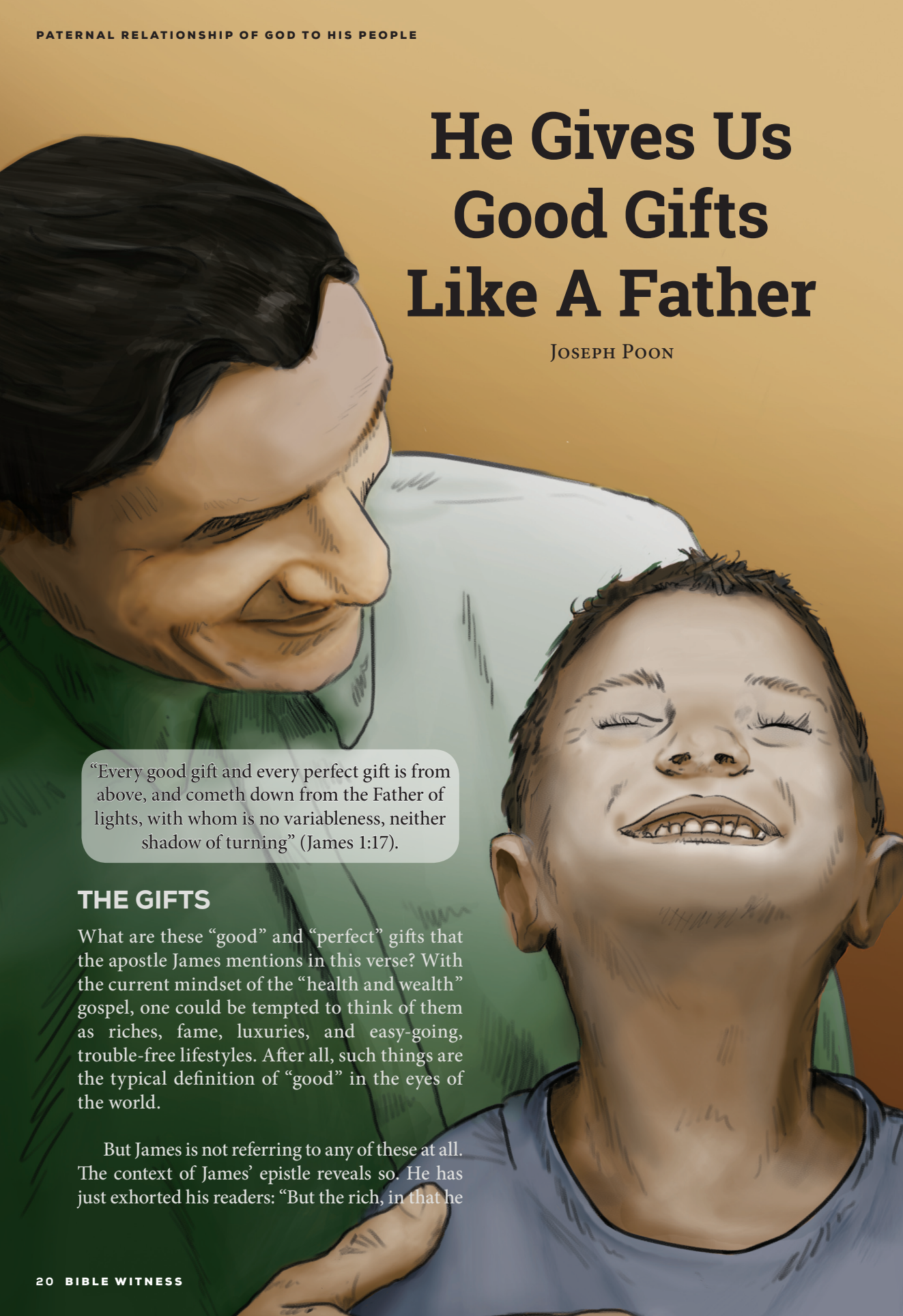
Let us fear God, and depart from sin and evil. Let us come back to God our merciful heavenly Father in repentance, and let us always abide in His Presence to enjoy His “pity” or mercy, together with all the attendant loving care, comfort, guidance and protection that come with it. Amen.





# He Gives Us Good Gifts Like A Father

JOSEPH POON



“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

## THE GIFTS

What are these “good” and “perfect” gifts that the apostle James mentions in this verse? With the current mindset of the “health and wealth” gospel, one could be tempted to think of them as riches, fame, luxuries, and easy-going, trouble-free lifestyles. After all, such things are the typical definition of “good” in the eyes of the world.

But James is not referring to any of these at all. The context of James’ epistle reveals so. He has just exhorted his readers: “But the rich, in that he

is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways" (James 1:10-11). God, in no uncertain terms, says that fame and riches of a man are but momentary and their glamorous lifestyles are but temporary. All these things which men lust after do not last and are short-lived.

Hence, we know what "good" and "perfect" are not. So, what are they then? Turning to the context once again, it is noted that James twice mentions the same word "perfect" when addressing how to deal with the trials of life which God allows. "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:4). He then wraps up this segment of his exhortation concerning trials by reminding us that the blessed man who endures these trials "shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him" (James 1:12). Herein we can gather that the "good" gifts have to do with the "perfecting" (i.e. bringing to spiritual maturity) of believers, which must necessarily be spiritual and eternal in value.

It must be mentioned in the same breath that James is in no way saying that riches are evil and cannot be good for the perfecting of saints. Rather, what James warns against is the lust from within a man, especially his love for money that can so easily entice him; when he succumbs to that lust, it inevitably causes him to sin (James 1:14-15). It is not money, but "the love of money" that is evil (cf. 1 Timothy 6:10). On the contrary, money can be used to forward the work of ministries for the training and "perfecting" of saints. Be that as it may, we are to examine ourselves as to what "good gifts" we are seeking. See to it

that we desire godly things and not lust after sinful ones!

## THE GIVER

James describes God, the Giver, as "the Father of lights". It points the believer to God being the Creator of the bodies of light, such as the sun, moon and stars. Man not only considers the rising and setting of the sun as dependable and its rays stable; man also trustingly makes use of the moon and stars as navigation aids to guide him in the right direction.

Yet, the sun and moon can be eclipsed while clouds can block man's view of the stars. But God their Creator is far more dependable and is without darkness. Thus with God, there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning". The emphasis here is our heavenly Father's consistency and dependability, for there is not the slightest trace of darkness in Him. Our heavenly Father who begets us is immutable, unchangeable in His goodness, mercy and truth. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is not like man who is fickle and changes his mind. How trustworthy and dependable He is in our lives!

Moreover, we are reminded that our God is the merciful and compassionate Father; He begets us of His own will (James 1:18a). So, there should never be a shadow of doubt for the believer regarding his heavenly Father's intentions towards him. Whatever He gives and, for that matter, whatever be His will for our lives, can therefore only be "good, and acceptable, and perfect" (Romans 12:2b). Our heavenly Father, being the Father of lights, will only bring His children the greatest comfort, which should cause us to trust that whatever He ordains for our lives can only be good!

## THE GOOD

Our heavenly Father gives good gifts for a purpose. In the next verse, James immediately reminds the believers that “of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (James 1:18). The implication of “firstfruits” in the sacrifices to God indicates the best being reserved for God. Hence, we must live lives that distinguish us from the world and point men to Him.

God has brought us into this world at this specific age and time, and has saved us so that we may bear fruitful testimony for Him. This is the reason why any gift is ever given to us. Are you misusing the resources, talent(s) and time given to you to fulfil your carnal pursuits instead of using them to increase your knowledge of Him, live for Him, and to serve Him? Are you living a life that draws others around you to the Lord or are you no different from them in your speech, actions and values?

The point James is making is that even trials which our heavenly Father deems fit to send into our lives have good and perfecting results. Perhaps you, like the people in the apostle James’ time, may wonder: “Why am I having such a difficult time? Oh, it is so difficult to be a Christian!” But when you

understand that God is unchangeable in His goodness, you would not murmur, or complain, or blame God. Instead, you will patiently endure, waiting for the perfecting results at the end, and in the process, bear a “firstfruit” testimony for God. In fact, these trials are so good that they will make you complete and you will be left lacking nothing (James 1:4)!

## CONCLUSION

Our heavenly Father’s constancy in His love and dependability provides great comfort and strength for the believer to press on amidst challenges in life. It also helps him to keep things in perspective. The Christian must settle in his heart that God’s gifts are not about material enjoyments which the world seeks. When we understand this, we shall stop seeking and lusting after the temporal things. Then (whether in sickness or in health, in poverty or wealth) will we be able to trust God unwaveringly and realise as the hymn-writer says: “The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine”. Finally, the purpose of God’s gifts for our lives is to point men to God and glorify Him, not to be used merely for self-gratification, much less to be abused for unholy ends.



“...the sun and moon can be eclipsed while clouds can block man’s view of the stars. But God their Creator is far more dependable and is without darkness. Thus with God, there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning”. The emphasis here is our heavenly Father’s consistency and dependability.”







# John Bunyan

## – A Writer and Preacher of the 17th Century

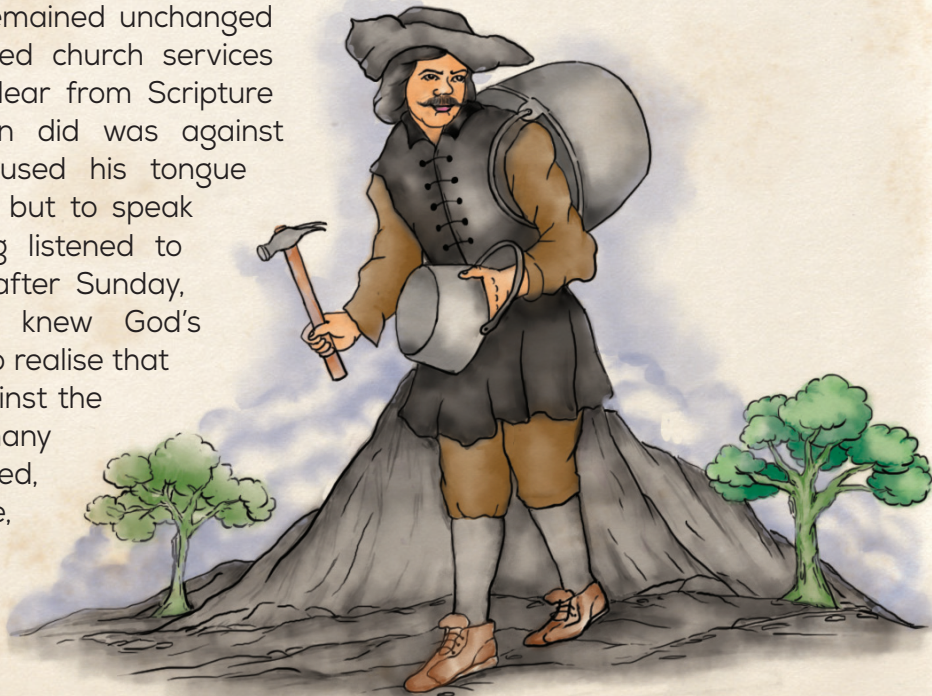
Retold by Jenny Lok

Illustrated by Linus Kok

(Retold from 'The New Foxe's Book of Martyrs, written by John Foxe, rewritten & updated by Harold J Chadwick Bridge-Logos Publishers; John Bunyan - Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia)

John Bunyan, born to Thomas and Margaret Bunyan in Elstow (near Bedford), England in November 1628, was a well-known English writer and preacher. He was best remembered for his novel, "The Pilgrim's Progress", his greatest work among many of his writings which were published during his lifetime. His father Thomas was a tinker and would often travel around the neighbourhood mending pots and pans. As for Bunyan himself, he received little education and, not surprisingly, he learnt the trade of a tinker from his father at an early age.

Unlike most young people of his day who engaged in drinking and immoral activities, Bunyan kept himself away from these vices. Nevertheless, he had great struggles with other sins in his life, which included his inability to control his tongue. Frequently, he would curse and swear, tell lies and take lightly the holy name of God. This sinful habit remained unchanged though he attended church services regularly. It was clear from Scripture that what Bunyan did was against God's Word; he used his tongue not to praise God but to speak evil things. Having listened to sermons Sunday after Sunday, Bunyan certainly knew God's Word sufficiently to realise that he had sinned against the most Holy God many times over. Indeed, "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity:





so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (James 3:6).

On top of this habitual sin, Bunyan also loved dancing and playing a game called "tip cat" (which involved using a bat to hit a small piece of wood), particularly on Sunday after church service. Bunyan knew in his heart that what he had been doing was dishonouring to God, but he could not forsake his sins. On one occasion, he heard a Sunday sermon on the sin of not keeping the Sabbath holy and his heart was deeply troubled. He wanted to give up his sins but he had no strength to do so. Thus, Bunyan was constantly pricked in his conscience and had no peace.

Then came the English Civil War, which saw fighting between the supporters of the Parliament and those of the king. Bunyan was about 16 years old then; he joined the parliamentary army from 1644 to 1647. One day, he witnessed a very shocking incident: a fellow soldier, standing on guard duty, was shot in the head and died right before his own eyes. From that moment, Bunyan was jolted into thinking about the sins in his life and the state of his soul. But he could not find a way to free himself of his sins.

Shortly after he left the army, Bunyan married a godly young woman with whom he had four children – Mary (the eldest, who was born blind), Elizabeth, Thomas and John. The family was poor but Bunyan's wife had two small books on Christianity which proved to be far more precious than silver or gold. After reading the books, Bunyan's faith in God was revived. He found that his love for the past sinful pleasures began to fade away. Most importantly, he had a newfound relationship with God. Gone were the days when he had enjoyed cursing, swearing, lying and using God's name in vain. God's Word had set him free from his sins! He grew spiritually and soon became a preacher, speaking to many in the villages around Bedford about God and --His





truths. He was so earnest and passionate in his preaching that many kept coming to hear him.

In 1660, when King Charles II regained his throne, the Church of England began to wield power again. Preachers who refused to submit to the unbiblical practices set by the Church of England would face imprisonment or death. Bunyan was one of those thrown into prison, where he remained for 12 years, with only short periods of freedom in between. When asked if he would promise not to preach again in exchange for his freedom, he had this to say: "If you let me out today, I will preach again tomorrow." Such was Bunyan's determination not to give in to the people who threatened to take away his freedom. To him, preaching God's Word was more important than anything else in this world, even if he had to pay a great price! He had to endure the miserable conditions of the prison and to bear the sadness of being separated from his family. By then, his first wife had passed away, leaving behind his four young children. His second wife, whom he married shortly before his imprisonment, was left to care for them.

In spite of his great sufferings, Bunyan did not allow himself to brood over his problems. He kept himself fruitfully occupied in the prison cell by making tagged shoelaces to support himself and his family. In addition, he pored over two books that he had brought along with him – the King James Bible and (an earlier version of) John Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" – which influenced his later writings in a powerful way. In fact, it was during his imprisonment that he wrote many religious books and pamphlets. In 1666, Bunyan wrote his autobiography entitled "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners". In this book, he described his own spiritual journey in detail, which included "the many battles with Satan", "the merciful working of God" in his life which led him to a new life in Christ, and the "divine call to preach to other sinners", which he obeyed by reaching out to his fellow prisoners with God's Word.

In 1672, King Charles II passed a law to pardon those who had opposed the Church of England. Bunyan was therefore released from prison, only to return to it 3 years later because he started preaching again without permission from the authority, which the law was still against. While in prison, Bunyan wrote the first part of "The Pilgrim's Progress", which traced the journey of a man named "Christian" who was travelling to the celestial city (which is heaven). This masterpiece, published in 1678, was in fact about himself going through many trials and sufferings to reach the "gate" of heaven. Six years later (in 1684), part two of "The Pilgrim's Progress" was published – this time on the spiritual journey of "Christiana" (Christian's wife).

Bunyan's last days were spent mainly ministering to his church at Bedford. To many, he was known as "Bishop Bunyan", being both "a national leader and teacher". However, while on a journey to help a father and son make peace with each other, he was caught in a heavy rain and was soaked to the skin. A very



serious fever developed and Bunyan was soon with the Lord! That was 31 August 1688.

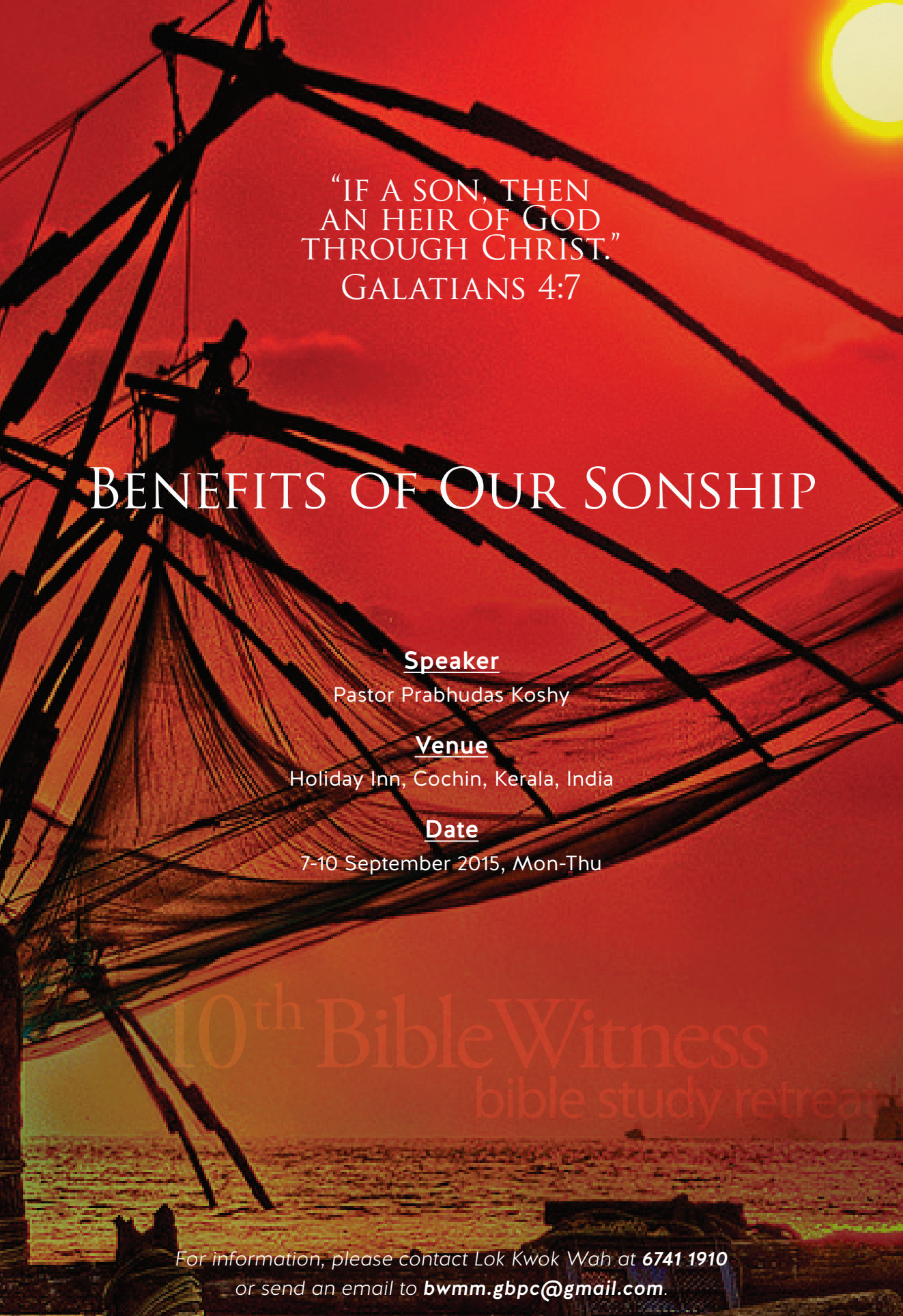
Throughout his life, Bunyan always had an earnest desire to seek God and live a holy life. He was once bound by his own sins and guilt, but the truth of God finally set him free! Though he had lost his freedom on many occasions, yet his soul was ever free. Nothing – not even the chains of imprisonment – could take away the sweetness of his newfound freedom in Christ, which he enjoyed and used for God's glory. His soul soared above his miseries to express his thoughts about God and His gracious work in his life through his writings. His writings have been a great blessing to many down the generations, for they draw attention to the glorious freedom one can have in Christ. Certainly, anyone who enjoys such glorious freedom in Christ, as Bunyan did, will surely be able to sing:

Glorious freedom! Wonderful freedom!  
No more in chains of sin I repine!  
Jesus, the glorious mighty Redeemer!  
Now and forever Jesus is mine.

Truly, our gracious heavenly Father will never turn away any child who sincerely seeks Him, for He alone can give true freedom in Christ – “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32) indeed!





A dramatic sunset over the ocean with a large fishing net in the foreground. The sky is a deep red and orange, with a bright yellow sun in the upper right corner. The fishing net, with its complex rigging and ropes, dominates the left and center of the frame, creating a silhouette effect against the bright sky. The ocean is visible at the bottom, reflecting the warm colors of the sunset.

“IF A SON, THEN  
AN HEIR OF GOD  
THROUGH CHRIST.”  
GALATIANS 4:7

# BENEFITS OF OUR SONSHIP

## Speaker

Pastor Prabhudas Koshy

## Venue

Holiday Inn, Cochin, Kerala, India

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