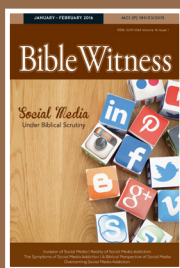


Bible Witness

Social Media Under Biblical Scrutiny



Invasion of Social Media | Reality of Social Media Addiction
Symptoms of Social Media Addiction | Biblical Perspective on Social Media
Overcoming Social Media Addiction

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CONTENTS

Social Media Under Biblical Scrutiny

- 3 Editorial *Prabhudas Koshy*
- 4 Invasion of Social Media
- 8 Reality of Social Media Addiction
- 12 Symptoms of Social Media Addiction
- 15 Biblical Perspective on Social Media
- 18 Overcoming Social Media Addiction

*All the articles in this issue
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Children's Page

- 23 Bible Trivia - Exodus 25 *Sarah Yong*
- 24 Amy Carmichael (1867-1951) -
Missionary to India (Part 2) *Jenny Lok*

About the cover design

Emphasising the necessity of biblical circumspection in these days of hyper-connectivity through social media.

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USE OF ARTICLES

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EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

We are not surprised that the modern world has readily taken to the relatively new phenomenon known as social media. Man has always been keen to communicate, for he is created as a social being, with an innate need and ability to relate to others. God created us in His own image and has instructed us to communicate with one another in truth, love, wisdom and purity. Jesus said, “But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” (Matthew 5:37).

As man constantly invents and embraces new and effective methods of communication, “evil communications”, being propagated by the same means, also become rampant. This is particularly the case with social media. The Bible warns us in Colossians 3:8, “But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.” In this issue of Bible Witness, Elder Richard Tiu (academic dean of Gethsemane Bible Institute, Cebu, the Philippines) scrutinises social media in the light of Scripture.

We pray that our readers, both young and old alike, would benefit spiritually from the articles inside. May our communication with one another be always God-honouring and mutually edifying!

On a different note, I would also like to keep our readers informed that this year, two retreats on the theme “Christology” are being planned by Bible Witness Media Ministry – the first in March (16th – 18th), and the other in September (7th – 9th). We hope many of you will be able to join us in these retreats for a blessed time of fellowship, prayer and study of the doctrine of Christ.

The glorious truths about Christ are not mundane matters which Christians can ignore or neglect. Clarity of understanding concerning the Person, Natures, Works and Offices of Jesus Christ is very crucial to proper worship, spiritual growth and spiritual fruitfulness. Moreover, there is an urgent need to give Christians a biblical grounding in the truths of Christ, for much of the preaching of Christ we hear today is seriously flawed, with some being even outright heresies! Let us be sure that the Jesus whom we trust and preach is the real Jesus whom the Bible reveals to us.

Here is an excellent opportunity prepared for you in the upcoming Bible Witness Retreats to learn about the foundational truths concerning Christology. So, come and rejoice in the truths about our Lord Jesus Christ so that you, “being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord” (Acts 13:12b), may truly believe.

Heartily in His service,
Prabhudas Koshy



INVASION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

To say that we live in a “connected world” would be an understatement – we are now living in a “hyper-connected world”! Increasingly, we see practically every event and issue under the sun being given coverage online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Thanks to the internet “information explosion”, society is being bombarded with loads of information and news, which are so readily available “at the click of a mouse” or “by the touch of a screen”. Indeed, the ubiquitous digital media is relentlessly transforming the way people live, learn, work and interact.

PARADIGM SHIFT IN SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

Just like leaven which “leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9) by permeating and puffing up the whole loaf of bread, digital media (and in particular, social media) has now pervaded and become deeply entrenched in the thinking and lifestyles of people in every stratum of society. Real-time news-feed and live updates, for one, are a daily staple of many netizens which all and

sundry have come to take for granted. On top of the regular hours spent in school or at work, many easily spend an equal amount of time surfing the internet. Needless to say, even Christians are not unaffected.

Nonetheless, God’s people should not be overtaken by surprise by this pervasive and almost unstoppable social media “onslaught” in these perilous last days. The Bible has already specifically hinted to us that towards “the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased (i.e. multiplied exceedingly)” (Daniel 12:4). This exponential increase in information (on practically every and any subject) is evidenced by the existence of various so-called “social media networks”, such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Google+, MySpace, Snapchat, Instagram, Vine, Tumblr, and several more others! Such networks allow billions upon billions of total profiles to be combined and connected together – certainly no lack of connectivity!



PRACTICALLY 'ALONE' IN CYBERSPACE

Yet the irony of it all is that the more we try to be “connected” through these networks, the more we get detached from real connection. Imagine spending 4 years of your life interacting with social media on those essentially lifeless gadgets (like iPhone, iPad and laptop). By touching screens, we are somehow induced to believe that we are bonding with some faceless recipients, whereas in actual fact, it makes us lose touch all the more with one another! Together with all the selfies, “likes” and seeming applause we receive from distant (and sometimes unknown) audiences, all we care about is “I, me and myself”. To describe this cyber-activity and its associated media as “social” is a contradiction in terms.

Even from a humanistic viewpoint, there is acknowledgment of a problem with the wrongful use of social media. Check your “friend” list. Isn’t it true that many in that list are actually mere acquaintances, with not a few being total strangers? This came

about because we clicked every invite from every friend’s “friends”, and every relative’s “friends”, and every classmate’s “friends”, and every co-worker’s “friends”, plus their relatives, classmates, co-workers and so-called “friends”. It is truly laughable to believe that we are socializing just because we have a large network of followers. If only we take a moment to look around, then we will be struck with the reality that we are all alone – just me and my computer or tablet or phone!

Really, social media is one that can be pro-self and anti-social. It transports us from the physical, real-life world of people to a virtual cyber-world of profiles and avatars. Indeed, it can degenerate into a world of “digital insanity”, where we get caught up (practically all alone) in a world of our own.

BE VIGILANT!

To be sure, it cannot be denied that social networking websites can provide numerous advantages and opportunities in witnessing for Christ. We can use Facebook to promote

"...there exists a real problem with social networking in that it can be abused. When we use it for nothing more than unnecessary babbling and unwholesome talk, it can become all about self and the world. When it entices and lures us into ungodly friendships, and ungodly speech and obsessions, it will consume our lives and open the way for untold sin and temptations."

the Gospel and share devotions and sermons from God's Word. We can also use it to communicate (for free) with family members who are away and with friends near and far. Furthermore, having social media presence is helpful for parents in monitoring their children's online activity. Certainly, ignorance is not bliss in this case; allowing our children access to social media unsupervised, where evil is just a link and a click away, is foolhardy, to say the least.

Nevertheless, there exists a real problem with social networking in that it can be abused. When we use it for nothing more than unnecessary babbling and unwholesome

talk, it can become all about self and the world. When it entices and lures us into ungodly friendships, and ungodly speech and obsessions, it will consume our lives and open the way for untold sin and temptations.

Granted, social media is here to stay. In itself, it is neither wrong nor immoral. It is when we misuse and abuse it that makes it dangerous. May we be discerning in the needful usage of this indispensable communications tool called social media, which has invaded almost every aspect of our public and private lives. And never (not even for a moment) shrug off the potential harm it can cause our generation!

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Reality of Social Media Addiction



If anyone doubts that internet and social media usage is addictive, one just need to search the Web and one will discover that there are a number of books, institutions and programmes that deal with this abnormal behaviour.

The fact that Time Magazine recently published an article, “It’s Time to Confront Your Facebook Addiction” by Kayla Webley, tells us that it is a growing problem which cannot be ignored. It is also instructive to note that the book, “iDisorder” (by Larry

Rosen), is written with the target audience being people obsessed with gaming and social network sites on the internet. Then there is a place in northern California, USA, called “Digital Detox”, which is supposedly a “tech-free” wellness-retreat facility for “recuperating” clients suffering from compulsive dependency on modern technological and digital devices. There are even computer software applications (or apps for short) designed to block the internet and social media websites, like “Freedom” or “Self Control”, which are designed to wean

addicted users from their harmful habit. And the list goes on.

Unwitting but “Willing” Victims

The above are all secular efforts that seek to address this particular problem. What do all these measures tell us? It can only mean that the danger of social media addiction is real, and it will enslave and control any unsuspecting person being caught unawares.

Sadly, most people will think, “Nah! I’m not addicted, I can quit anytime!” The subtlety of this problem is that it leaves no obvious marks on our physical features (unlike drug addiction which causes one to shrink in size). The person addicted to social networking sites may not even realise that he or she is already addicted. Regardless of the excuses we make, the fact remains that we have been lured and sucked into this ensnaring game. In effect, we are unwitting “players” being manipulated by the system.

Many would still remember that online game called “Farmville”, the game that popularised Facebook. The world has never seen so many children and adults suddenly become “virtual farmers” in such a short time. The game became so addictive to so many that if all their harvest combined were only real food, there would be no more famine in this world! The truth of Galatians 6:7 has never been more emphatically demonstrated – “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The tragedy of it all is that the real “harvests” reaped were poor grades in school for the students, burnt food in the kitchen for housewives, workers missing their bus to the workplace, and even preachers turning up at the pulpit with “half-baked” sermons!

So, with all our surfing, scrolling, posting, “liking”, texting and tweeting activities in

social media, do know that these are all part and parcel of keeping us in the “game” and holding us longer than we like to. Remember that these sites are built to make money from advertisements at the expense of our time. To log in is free; but the moment we do, it begins to cost us so much of our precious time. It is a literal “hold-up” of our time, to which we have become all too willing victims!

A Distracting yet Deeply Entrenched Social Trend

Undeniably, social media has become a daily distraction and the trend is moving towards more distractions. It all began with the onset of desktops. Over time, it became portable to use in our laptops, and then literally mobile in our hands and pockets. It has even morphed into something wearable – over our eyes (such as “Google Glass”), and now on our wrists as well (like “Apple Watch”). And who knows how soon it will be before it gets embedded inside our very skins! These are proofs that digital distractions are becoming more intrusive. Not only are they handy, these have become built-in as well (on cars, planes and even refrigerators). So much so that it is no exaggeration to say that many are virtually “living” in Facebook. Disturbingly, while the gadgets may have become smaller and lighter, the challenges posed by their usage have grown bigger and heavier.

Even our language is not spared. The world of social media has changed the way people of our contemporary times communicate and also affected our vocabulary. This inadvertently gives rise to a “language barrier” between people who are “hi-tech” and people who are “un-tech”. Older folks would often ask the meanings of certain words they read or hear in the news. What is “download”, for instance? What about “upload”? How about “YouTube”? “Blog”? “Vlog”? These are terms derived from cyberspace – internet lingo

and jargon which, through common and constant usage for social and commercial purposes, have gradually pervaded and made entrenched inroads into our lingua franca. As can be perceived, there may arise no small, insignificant gap when it comes to communication between the older folks and the internet-savvy generation!

An Alluring but Ensnaring Trap

One inevitable side effect is that many among the older folks will be left in the dark concerning the social media behaviour of their own kin. Unfortunately, some even among the pastors or elders or deacons have not the slightest idea how their wives and children have been growing their social

another and soon everybody is doing the same – and the whole church will be clicking and viewing, commenting and “liking” something which has nothing to do at all with God and His Word. Sadly, we also hear of some parents who sign up to social media just to monitor their children’s accounts, only to end up becoming ensnared by unwholesome internet activity and behaving even worse than their children online!

The reason why social media usage has become so compulsive today is largely because it is like a “one-stop” shopping mall, where you can talk to and chat with people, play games, watch movies, go shopping, order food, pay your bills, etc.; you can

"Instead of edifying spiritual things being posted, most of what we get to see are posts of every smile, every pose, every dress, every hairstyle, every vacation, every meal, every birthday and just about every vain thing under the sun."

media presence online, to the extent that they have become the more visible and active ones on Facebook. In other words, those church leaders’ families can become so caught up in this alluring media game right under their noses!

The addictive and compulsive inclination of this unwholesome game is clearly manifested. Instead of edifying spiritual things being posted, most of what we get to see are posts of every smile, every pose, every dress, every hairstyle, every vacation, every meal, every birthday and just about every vain thing under the sun. With every unnecessary post, we also make other people waste their time by compelling them to view, comment and “like” that post. One follows

even “attend” church services! Social media websites have become all that and more – right in the comfort and privacy (and even secrecy) of our room. To top it all, many of what they offer are free! This is what makes social media websites extremely obsessive and compulsive, especially to young people. These cost them nothing, as it were – except their time, not to mention their “heart, soul, mind and strength”.

So, Christian readers, beware of the reality of social media addiction and be not deceived by the exciting lure of the seemingly innocuous, endless network of “contacts” awaiting your cyber-acquaintance. Do not fall for the deadly ensnaring clutches of social media addiction!



Good old truths and music on the Internet

“Ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.” – *Jeremiah 6:16*

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Bible Witness Bookroom

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Singapore 050531

- Present Topic: The Book of Zechariah
- Teacher: Prabhudas Koshy
- Every Wednesday @ 1.00pm-1.30pm
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learning of God's Word!



Symptoms

of Social Media Addiction



In using social media networks, how often is too often for one to be considered addicted? The symptoms can vary from mild to severe. Some skip meals; others forget meals outright till they faint. Then we have people who can't even go to sleep without checking their profile "one more time". Basically, there are three major telltale signs of social media addiction.

Overuse

Firstly, there is overuse – this is evidenced by an increasing appetite for worldly things and activities in the Christian's life. There will be more fellowship with the world than with God's Word; more time will be spent on Twitter and Facebook than on God's Book, namely the Holy Scriptures. Spiritual things gradually get neglected and in no time, ungodliness takes over his life.

Misuse

Secondly, there is misuse – we obviously misuse social media if we play along with their game of vanity, profanity and obscenity. There is also another kind of subtle "misuse". Let us be honest. Do you enjoy taking pictures of your meals more than actually taking your meals? Would you rather record them in your phone's storage system than "input" them in your body system? Many precious moments are ruined because we would rather spend time uploading them than taking stock of and enjoying those very moments. Incidentally, how many of us really take the trouble to dig out and view those uploads ourselves? In the end, all our efforts would just be in vain!

Before you post a status update or a photo, it is good to check yourself and question

your motive: are you just trying to show off something or engaging in some kind of self-glorifying exercise and going on an ego trip? Ask yourself: is this the umpteenth time you have posted a picture of yourself lately? Must you post all those various "angles" of your face on your profile? In not a few instances, many allow themselves to expose so much skin and appear in immodest attire. That is not something to be taken lightly or brushed off casually – it is tantamount to "indecent exposure"! Didn't the Bible warn us to "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22)? The Christian's honour and testimony will certainly be brought into disrepute by such offensive images and misuse of social media.

Attention Deficiency

Yet another symptom of social media abuse is what they call "attention deficit disorder". There is a lack of sustained attention; attention spans of social media "addicts" are woefully and worryingly short. According to studies at Microsoft Corporation, there have been findings that the average attention span of a human being has dropped from 12 seconds in year 2000 to 8 seconds in 2013, apparently the result of wide usage of and high dependence on digital media. (Shockingly, the goldfish has a better average – an attention span of 9 seconds!) It is thus not surprising to read reports that Facebook users are said to garner significantly lower GPAs (grade-point averages) in academic performance than their non-Facebook classmates. To take the matter further, could this be also one reason why we have people in the pews who have great difficulty sitting through a Sunday sermon? Do all these symptoms describe you and me?

Do Not Rationalise Away Symptoms

Some may say, “So what if I am obsessed with social media networks? Anyway, there is not one Bible verse that explicitly tells us to keep away from these!” This so-called controversial issue arises because most people see nothing wrong with spending hours upon hours scrolling chunks of tweets and profiles and news-feed. But they conveniently forget that all sexual sins, as well as sins of covetousness, the sin of pride, the sin of ungodly friendships – and more – are lurking around those web pages that they have been staring at all along. They fail to realise that they are making themselves very vulnerable and exposing themselves to their souls’ enemy’s “line of fire”, which can effectively weaken their spiritual defence. In unguarded moments, everything that is of the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life – will be in plain view on these social media sites for them to see, read and consume (and ultimately, be consumed by).

Really, often the difference between spiritual victory and defeat comes down to

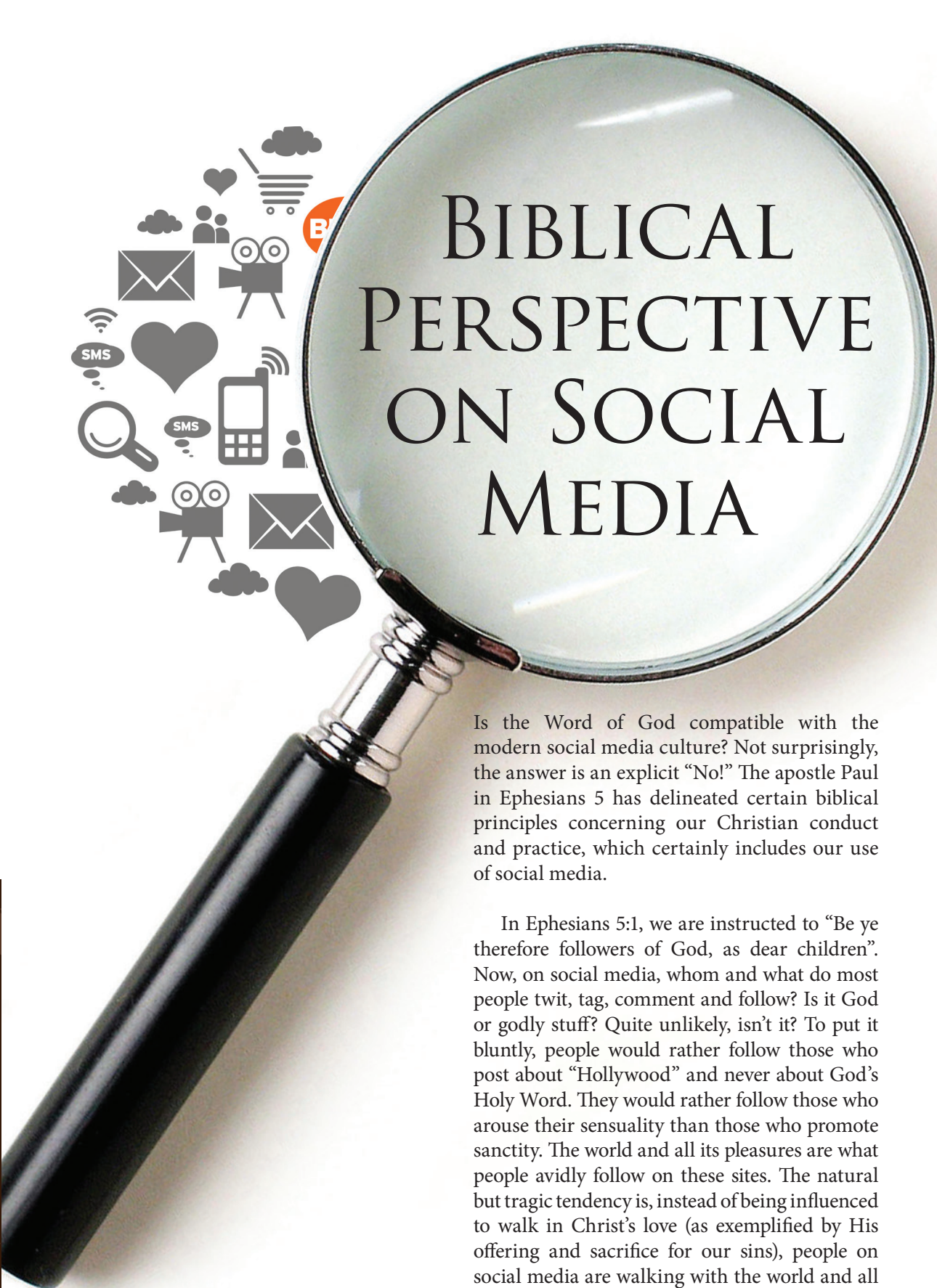
just one single “mouse-click” or “screen-touch”. Why subject ourselves to such undue, intense temptation and undesirable influence that inevitably come with obsessive and compulsive social media usage, if we can help it? A strong, flourishing spiritual life or a thwarted, defeated Christian existence may well hinge very much on this vital step (made even in the quietude and privacy of our room)!

Christians, beware! Be aware of the symptoms of social media addiction; if you see any of these exhibited in fellow Christians, “ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). Above all, if you yourself are struggling with any of these symptoms, know that “now it is high time to awake out of sleep ... The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; ... not in chambering and wantonness ... But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:11-14). May we be diligent to escape “the corruption that is in the world (of social media) through lust” (2 Peter 1:4b)!

Bible Witness Media Ministry

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to continue spreading the Word around the world
through its publication, Internet and media ministries.
Please send your love gifts to “Bible Witness” (see page 2).**

Spreading the Gospel throughout the world, and edifying the body of believers.



BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Is the Word of God compatible with the modern social media culture? Not surprisingly, the answer is an explicit “No!” The apostle Paul in Ephesians 5 has delineated certain biblical principles concerning our Christian conduct and practice, which certainly includes our use of social media.

In Ephesians 5:1, we are instructed to “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children”. Now, on social media, whom and what do most people twit, tag, comment and follow? Is it God or godly stuff? Quite unlikely, isn’t it? To put it bluntly, people would rather follow those who post about “Hollywood” and never about God’s Holy Word. They would rather follow those who arouse their sensuality than those who promote sanctity. The world and all its pleasures are what people avidly follow on these sites. The natural but tragic tendency is, instead of being influenced to walk in Christ’s love (as exemplified by His offering and sacrifice for our sins), people on social media are walking with the world and all

that is in the world. They are anything but “followers of God”!

BE NOT PARTAKERS WITH WORKS OF DARKNESS

To be followers of God, we are to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour” (v. 2). Our lives ought to display Christ and diffuse the “sweetsmelling savour” of the Gospel of salvation. Christ, who knew no sin, has laid down His sinless life as a “once-and-for-all” atonement for our sins. As the Sin-bearer for all mankind, He has paved the way for us to be plucked out of the depths of our sins and be called out of darkness into God’s marvellous light. Our aspiration to walk in Christ’s love is not compatible with our allowing ourselves to be bombarded and enticed on social media by all the evils mentioned in v. 3, – “fornication”, “all uncleanness”, “covetousness”. These are certain temptations, which are so prevalent in the social media culture, that divert our attention away from the Gospel of Christ.

Notwithstanding the benefits of proper social media usage, this is a common sore point among all social networking sites. We cannot escape the obscenities and filth of what ungodly people post there; neither can we evade the allure of commercial advertising posted all over their pages. Yet these are the most likely things that catch our attention as we scroll up and down the pages of social media – things that should “not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (v. 3b). With these dangers lurking everywhere on social media, waiting “in ambush” for the gullible and willing victim, people are prone to devour the sensual rather than the spiritual content of social media.

Sadly, social media is often the platform for gossip, slander and scandals. It has become the medium to express corrupt speech,

unwholesome talk and suggestive jokes – the very things specifically prohibited by v. 4 – “Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.” When filthiness, foolish talk, jesting, together with fornication, uncleanness and covetousness constantly preoccupy hearts and minds of Christians given to indiscriminate social media usage, there is little room left for gratitude and thanksgiving to God.

“FORFEIT” NOT INHERITANCE IN GOD’S KINGDOM

Associating with these evil practices and activities is not a light matter. The gravity of the matter is driven home by the unequivocal, strongly-worded warning in v. 5. Four types of people (who in actual fact encapsulate the sum of all these evil expressions) are mentioned, who will not “hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God”. They are the “whoremonger”, “unclean person”, “covetous man”, and “idolater”. Paul is bluntly reminding us here that if any among us is such a person who is caught up and addicted with the filth of the world in the lusts of the flesh, he may not even be saved at all! Such “mistaken” and misguided Christians have actually become “idolaters” – the world has become their god, and Facebook their church!

Such are not only mistaken, they are also deceived, as intimated by v. 6 – “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience”. Social media is also a favourite “hunting ground” for deceivers. With “vain words”, they will spread gossip, and promote all sorts of falsehood and lies. Time and again, the Bible warns us not to be deceived. Why? Well, simply because Satan, the father of lies, is the master deceiver. And his children, “the children of disobedience”, will follow his devices. Some will deceive you with fake profiles and

pictures, and “photo-shopped” images. Some others will deceive you by dishonest soliciting of favours or emotional appeals for sympathy. Social media has become the platform for all sorts of *modus operandi*, resulting in scams, extortion and even blackmail.

Furthermore, it does not take great intelligence to realize the sheer amount of “vain words” being posted, texted, or tweeted every moment of the day in social media. Well-documented statistics have shown that about 700 Facebook status updates and over 600 tweets (many of which are truly vain and idle words) happen every second! Scripture is replete with warnings against such ungodly communication – “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29); “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak (or post or text or tweet), they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36).

God’s Word is clear on the incompatibility of the prevalent social media culture with Christian living. Thus the explicit prohibition given is: “Be not ye therefore partakers with them” (v. 7), who have no inheritance whatsoever in God’s kingdom. The principle of biblical separation applies here – we don’t just indiscriminately click and “like”, tag or twit, and follow this ungodly culture!

RATHER WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Be that as it may, there is nothing wrong with social media in itself. In fact, now as “light in the Lord” and “walk(ing) as children of light” (v. 8), we see a positive and negative exhortation in vv. 9-13 that can apply to our interaction with the ubiquitous phenomenon which we have grown accustomed to living with, namely social media.

As Spirit-filled Christians using social media networks, the gauge of all that we do online is summed up in the phrases, “in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (v. 9) and “proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (v. 10). Our social media usage ought to be governed by these oft-repeated questions: Is it good? Is it righteous? Is it true? Can it be proven acceptable to the Lord? If we can answer in the affirmative, then given the potentially wide audience “viewing” our righteous and biblical online discourses, the far-reaching impact for the truth’s sake cannot be underestimated.

On the other side of the same coin, we are to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove” (v. 11) those shameful “things which are done of them in secret” (v. 12), including via social media, that these may be exposed. This brings to our attention the largely thankless but most needful ministry of correction and refutation of error. Walking as children of light and being enlightened by the light of God’s Word, we have the mandate (and therefore duty) to expose prevalent error and earnestly contend for the long-held biblical truths which are now being systematically distorted, ridiculed and misrepresented by God’s enemies within and without. Having a steady presence on social media for the purpose of being an outspoken crusader against sin and error is one way we can use social media to our advantage.

Truly, this is in line with the biblical perspective as emphasised by Paul’s exhortation in v. 13 that “all (erroneous) things that are reprov’d (and refuted) are made manifest (exposed) by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.” In the spiritual battle for men’s hearts and minds, “silent truth is no match for outspoken error”. May the Lord grant us wisdom in our needful interaction with social media “for the truth’s sake”!



<http://theologicalmatters.com/2013/04/26/why-you-should-study-systematic-theology-where-do-i-start/>

Overcoming

Social Media Addiction

In the midst of the foolish and ungodly environment which social media presents to our generation, how should we conduct ourselves online? As God's children, we are to take heed of Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 5:17 – "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." The question then is: how are we to behave wisely in the face of the prevalent social media culture? From the preceding three verses, i.e. vv. 14-16, three general guidelines may be gleaned pertaining to wise and godly Christian conduct, which of course is just as applicable to wise behaviour online.

Wake Up Spiritually

"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Ephesians 5:14).

Now, if you do have an obsession and addiction to social media, it may not be possible to overcome it if you have not "arisen from the dead". In other words, you may still be "dead in sins" (Ephesians 2:5a) and your soul still in total darkness. You first need to come to Christ, who alone can give light unto your soul. Otherwise,

with your darkness, you cannot hope to overcome those “unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11). Only light can dispel darkness! You need to follow Christ who had said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). You must repent of your sins and put your faith in Christ for real transformation to happen in your life. Otherwise, no amount of self-generated effort can cure you of your social media addiction. The same holds true for people who are addicted to drugs or, for that matter, under the slavery of any form of addiction.

The disturbing fact is, even many Christians, though not “dead”, seem to be in a deep spiritual slumber. Judging by their online activities, their souls have been lulled to sleep by cyber-attractions and distractions. To such, Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 15:34 is most needful – “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.” This is a good spiritual “checkpoint” to see if one has already been severely affected by social media addiction (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5). Are we “awake to righteousness”? Or have the lusts of the flesh / eyes, and the pride of life been awake and active in us? These are sure signs of worldliness brought about by our overindulgence in and misuse of social media. It will be to our shame indeed if we continue to wallow in the darkness and evil of social media addiction!

“Awake thou that sleepest ... and Christ shall give thee light.” As God’s children, we are “all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6). Only when we are awake can we be watchful and prayerful as

we become aware of our own frailties. The Lord Jesus Himself also had cautioned His disciples in Mark 14:38, “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” Those who will not pay heed to these admonitions will by and by not care about the Word of God and have no more desire to pray. Soon they are no longer seen in worship service or fellowship gatherings, and eventually, they will have no concern at all for godly living. They must “wake up” before it becomes a “nightmare” for them!

Walk Circumspectly

“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (Ephesians 5:15).

Having already called us to “awake” and “arise”, Paul now says that we are to “walk circumspectly”. This is a call for a vigilant, careful and watchful walk. The word “circumspect” is a compound word which signifies “to look round about in all directions”; i.e. we are to be in every way watchful, wary, and cautious in order to avoid danger and to discern enemies before they come too close – like how a soldier walks on enemy territory. It is not a nonchalant and aimless walk, but a sober and vigilant walk. It is no exaggeration to say that the world of social media is indeed “enemy territory”. As such, we are to “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Christians who are careless and aimless in spending their time on social media are in danger of being devoured by the evil schemes of Satan!

A circumspect walk is also a wise walk that can greatly influence others, as Paul reiterates in Colossians 4:5, 6 – “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without,

redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Our wise conversations in life can also get reflected on social media, which can be a powerful testimony towards them who are outside the kingdom of God. On the other hand, foolish behaviour can hardly lead others to believe in what you believe. In a word, to walk wisely and circumspectly is, as reflected in Paul’s prayer for the saints, to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:10).

Work Productively

The Christian walk, in order to be worthy and pleasing to the Lord, must be fruitful in doing good works. Hence the exhortation in Ephesians 5:16 – “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

The Greek word (*exagorazo*) translated as “redeem” is a compound word consisting of the prefix “*ek*” (which means “from out of”) and the root verb “*agorazo*” (meaning “to purchase”). “*Exagorazo*” gives the idea of “purchasing out of the market”. Paul is trying to tell us that time is a very precious “commodity” that needs to be purchased out of the “marketplace” of human transactions and affairs. We see how Jesus values time by redeeming it with productive work. This is clearly highlighted in John 9:4 – “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.”

If we don’t hasten to make a move, our opportunities to do good works will soon be gone, perhaps even being consumed by idleness and works of darkness. If only

we could take back all the useless hours that we have spent on the internet and social networks, and use them instead for evangelism, what great impact on the number of souls we would have made for Christ! As God’s stewards, we are not to waste time. To squander this very precious commodity is unfaithful stewardship of God’s blessing. Rather, we are to redeem the time by valuing and making the most of the fleeting opportunities that are presented to us for productive work. Yet we often hear people speak of “killing time” when they do something to fight off boredom. Now with the internet, going online will be the most convenient way to kill time. This certainly is in direct contradiction to Paul’s injunction here.

The reason why Paul says we are to redeem the time is “because the days are evil”. This observation is never more true than in our internet age of “hyper-connectivity”. We are truly living in perilous (and immensely wicked) times, which is evident from the godless and ungodly content being circulated on social media. The admonition here is not to waste time but to make our time useful, fruitful and productive for the Lord. And that includes staying away from “evil communications” on social media. “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33)! How healthy and robust our Christian life would be if all the useless time spent on social media had been spent on reading the Word of God! Likewise, how vibrant our worship and fellowship would be and how zealous our service to God would be, if our precious time had been devoted to constant and earnest prayer and intimate communion with the Lord!

The days are evil also in another sense. None of us knows what will happen

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tomorrow, but we do know that with each passing day, we continually decay in the body. Someone has said that the moment we are born, we have begun to die. Soon old age catches up with us, with all the attendant pains, sicknesses and sorrows associated with the deterioration of our health. That is how "evil" or distressing and miserable our days on earth are! We must take heed of what the wisest king of Israel has exhorted: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days (that is, of old age, as contrasted with one's youth) come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Hence the imperative urgency (before time "runs out" for us) to spend our time productively and not squander it on needless, fruitless social media usage. Recognising the harsh reality of old age and diminishing health should instil in us the need to redeem the time and order our earthly life accordingly today, and not wait till tomorrow!

Conclusion

Dear Christians, let us be wise users of time and serve the Lord to the fullest in our lifetime. Whether we are in the cyber-world or in the physical world, let us use our time wisely and engage in fruitful and edifying work for the Lord. Let us not be engaged in the foolish activities of social media. Rather, let us conduct ourselves wisely and prudently in all things. "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

So, as Christians, we are to be spiritually awake and aroused, that we may be able to walk circumspectly and to work productively as we serve the Lord. In short, we are to occupy till the Lord comes again by being waking, walking and working servants of the Lord!

Bible Trivia - Exodus 25

Sarah Yong

A) Read the 2 passages indicated below concerning a special table found in the tabernacle, and answer the respective questions.

Exodus 25:23-30

- 1) This special wood was to be used in constructing the table. _____
- 3) A word which means "to apply an external coat". _____
- 5) The _____ round about the table was to measure a handbreadth.
- 7) These (to be placed through rings in the 4 corners of the table) were to be used to carry the table. _____
- 9) The bowls, spoons, covers and _____ were to be made of pure gold.

Leviticus 24:5-9

- 2) The 7th day of the Jewish week is known as the _____.
- 4) Total number of cakes to be set in 2 rows on the table. _____
- 6) Name of the high priest. _____
- 8) An agreement between God and His chosen people. _____

B) Do you know the name of the table mentioned in Exodus 25? Write the answers above in the boxes below (*in that same order*). The word formed by the letters in the boxes with bold outline (*when read vertically*) will reveal that it is the Table of _____.

[illegible]**ANSWERS TO BIBLE TRIVIA - EXODUS 25 (VOLUME 15, ISSUE 5, P. 31)**

(A) 1) cubit 2) gold 3) staves 4) cherubims 5) wings 6) ark 7) commune
(B) Covenant

Amy Carmichael

(1867-1951)

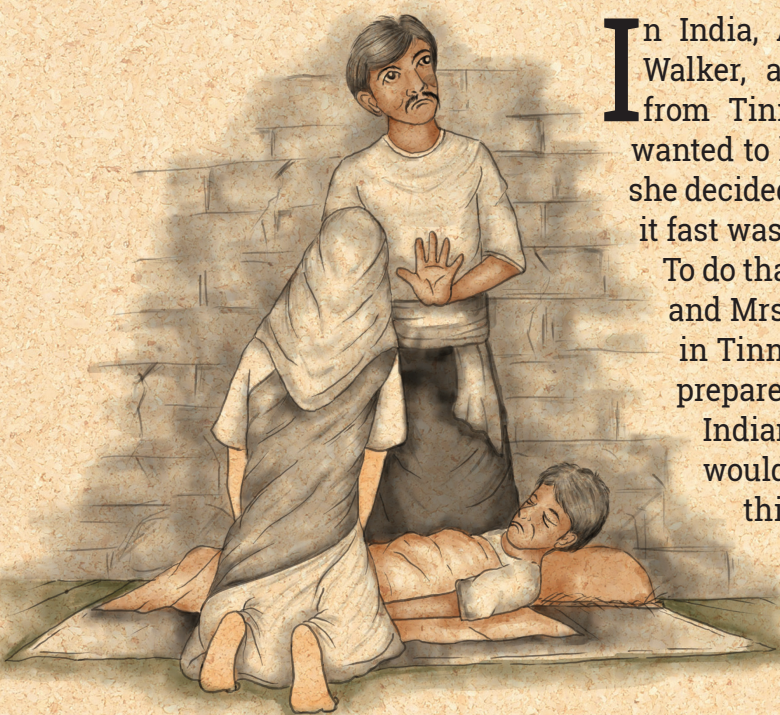
Missionary to India – (Part II)

(Retold from "Trial and Triumph: Stories from Church History", written by Richard M. Hannula, published by Canon Press;

"With Daring Faith", written by Rebecca Henry Davis, published by BJU Press)

Retold by Jenny Lok

Illustrated by Linus Kok



In India, Amy Carmichael met Mr Walker, a well-known missionary, from Tinnevely District. As Amy wanted to learn the Indian language, she decided that the best way to learn it fast was to live among the natives. To do that, it was best to go with Mr and Mrs Walker who were serving in Tinnevely then. She was even prepared to dress like the local Indian women so that they would trust her. She hoped that this would make it easier for her to share the Gospel with them.

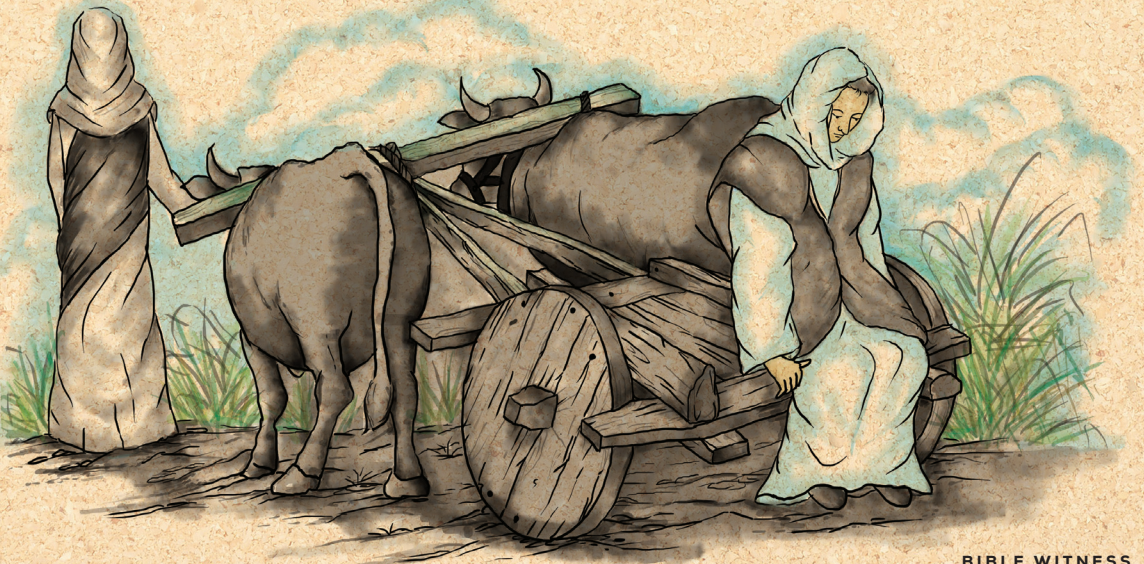
After living in India for some time, Amy discovered that the people were slavishly devoted to their idols, for they would often offer flowers and food to images of wood and metal. They failed to realise that only the living God is able to save them from eternal hell, and not those man-made idols. She found that the greatest hindrance to spreading the Gospel was in fact the cruel caste system that existed in Indian society. This caste system determined one's place in society, who one could marry, the things that one was allowed to do and also the place where one could live. If a person tried to break away from his caste, he would be persecuted by his community. Once, Amy had an opportunity to visit a poor family. She saw a little boy suffering from a very painful and serious eye disease. Unable

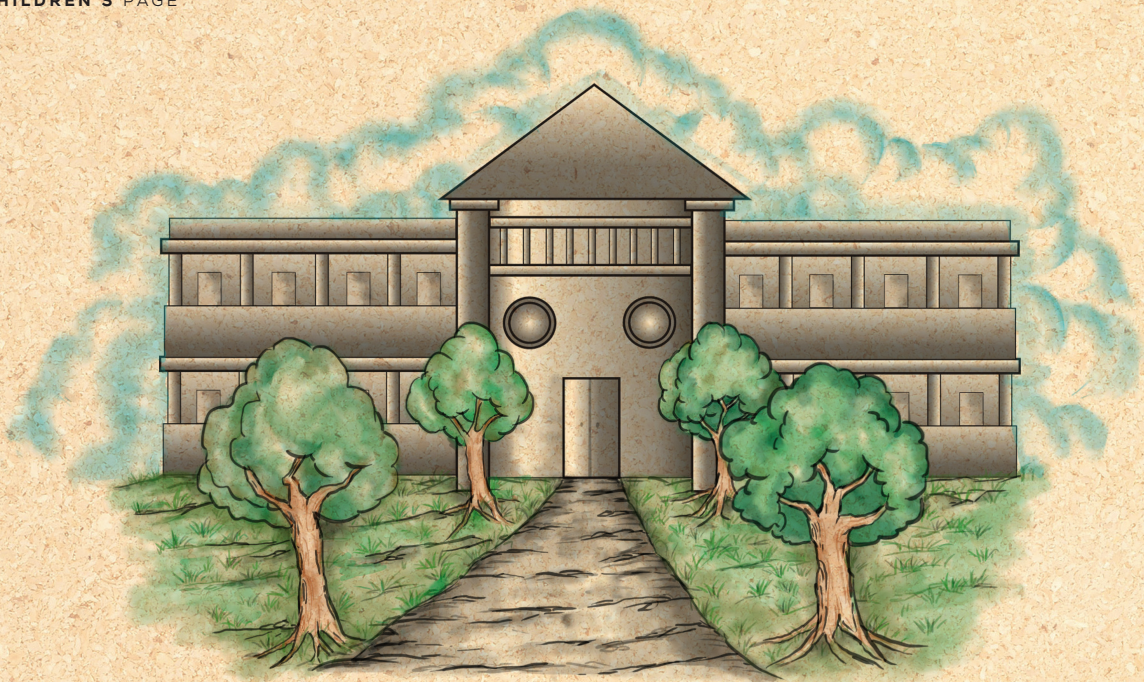
to sleep because of his puffy sore eyes, he could only cry. Amy begged the family to take the boy to the hospital. His father refused, saying that it was against their caste to do so. Amy was heartbroken to see the boy slowly wasting away!

Due to the caste system, many Indian men and women found it difficult to become Christians. If they followed Christ, they could expect persecutions and death threats from their family members and relatives. Some were actually killed because of their desire to become Christians. Despite the problems posed by the caste system, Amy's heart continued to burn for the perishing souls in India. She and her helper, Ponnammal, travelled from house to house visiting the villages in a "bandy" (a vehicle on four wheels), driven by a pair of oxen. She reached out mainly to the poor womenfolk. Many of them hesitated to believe in Christ – among the common excuses Amy heard were: "Our husbands decide our religion for us"; "What religion could be right that would make us break our caste? I could never leave the caste into which I was born."

On one occasion, one lady wanted to be a Christian, but her father issued a warning – "she shall burn to ashes first!" In another incident, a girl who accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour ran away to the mission school to escape from her family's wrath; soon after, the mission school was burned to the ground! Such was the hatred and hostility that Amy had to endure as a missionary in India and she was well aware that the only way to fight the spiritual darkness in the land was to go on bended knees, seeking help from the gracious Almighty God.

Undaunted, Amy continued with her busy schedule of preaching the Gospel among the villagers. One day, a young girl named Preena came to





Amy's mission compound. She disclosed that her mother wanted her to be "a servant of the gods", which meant that she would be a slave to the temple masters. She further related to Amy the wickedness that went on in the temple. Amy decided to dress up in her usual sari but this time, she had to stain her arm with coffee to get the proper shade of brown so that she could disguise herself as an Indian "worshipper" to find out the truth about the happenings in the temple. One of her helpers commented, "It is a good thing that you do not have blue eyes as some of the foreign missionaries do." Her words brought Amy's mind back to the time when, as a three-year-old, she had cried over the fact that her eyes were not blue. Amy's eyes brimmed with tears as she prayed, "Yes, Lord, You truly did know what was right all along. Thank you for showing me once again."

Amy's efforts were not in vain. She gathered enough evidence to convince her that the temple was far from being a holy place. It was rather a place of sin and shame! From then on, Amy began her work of rescuing many children (mainly young girls and even infants) who were sold to the temples. Countless children were thus rescued from this detestable custom of being "servants of the temple gods". Amy, together with some faithful helpers, most willingly took care of all these children. They called her "Amma", meaning mother. By then, the mission work had moved to a new site at Dohnavur. Soon, little boys joined the Dohnavur family. As the number of children increased, a school and a hospital were also built. The children were taught to be disciplined and responsible through God's Word. The whole place was constantly filled with laughter as Amy herself enjoyed chatting, playing games and working in the garden with them.

The children would often burst into songs of praise and thanksgiving too, for they were not only physically well-fed but spiritually nourished as well!

When Amy was 63, she sustained a very bad fall and was unable to walk for the next 20 years. Despite this, she continued with her writing and was ever ready to speak to the children who visited her, and give counsel to the mission workers whenever necessary. She kept in touch with the mission work although she was confined to her room. Much of her time was spent in prayer and fellowship with the Lord. On 1 January 1951, at the age of 83, Amy died peacefully in her sleep and entered into the presence of the Lord to enjoy eternal rest from her labour on earth. On the day of her funeral, the following verse was read in the presence of many of her "children" in the Dohnavur family: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).

Truly, Amy had been faithful to her calling as a missionary to a foreign land. She willingly used all her God-given talents for the Lord's work; never for a moment was she idle or did she while away her time on sinful pleasures. Her entire life was spent on sharing God's Word with those who needed the Lord Jesus to deliver them from the bondage of sin. May God call many more young boys and girls to the mission field today, as He did in the days of Amy Carmichael. Pray that you will be such a one to bring the Gospel to the lost!

"And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:15).



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