

Bible Witness

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FAMILY MATTERS!





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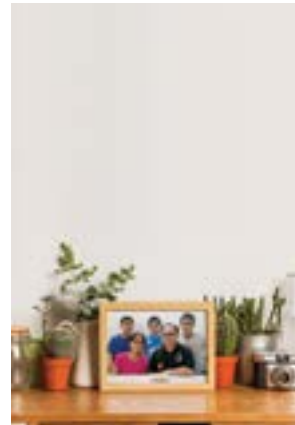
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Editor Prabhudas Koshy **Assistant Editor** Ho Kee How **Publishing & Circulation Co-ordinator** Lok Kwok Wah **Technical Editors** Jenny Lok, Lok Kwok Wah, Mah Lean Choo **Layout & Illustrations** Matthew Peh **Children's Story Illustration** Andronicus Koshy **Publisher** Bible Witness Media Ministry of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church, Singapore **Printer** Ee Tai Press Pte Ltd **Mailing Address** Bible Witness Media Ministry, 33 Ubi Crescent, Singapore 408584 **Telephone** (65) 6741 1910 **E-mail** bwmm.gbpc@gmail.com **Website** www.biblewitness.com

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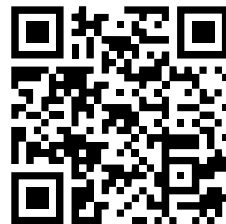
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"Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table."
—Psalm 128:3



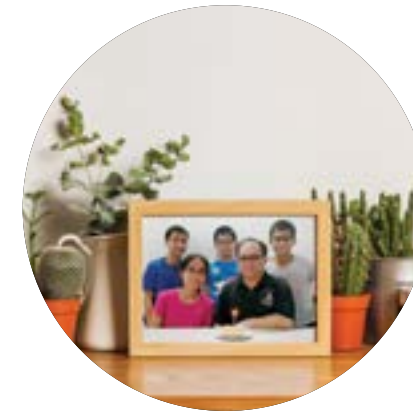
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All articles in this issue are written by Prabhudas Koshy, Pastor of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church and Editor of the Bible Witness Magazine.



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BIBLICAL FAMILY LIFE UNDER THREAT!

The concept of family—both traditional and biblical—is under serious threat in our modern society. The changing worldly ideologies seem to be making inroads in redefining Christians' mindset about family, which is God's first institution to mankind. Undeniably, God's design for the family is not only under attack from the world, it is also being undermined by Christian families' conformity to the world's pattern.

Reversal of Family Roles Brings Ruin

Traditionally, men toiled to provide for the family while their wives tended to the family at home. But increasingly in these days, men choose to be stay-home husbands and dads, while their wives are sent to work and earn money for the family. The modern culture is defying the traditional and biblical

roles of men and women in the family. Tragically, many Christians seem to have quietly accepted the incursion of such modern trends into their churches and homes. The reasoning of Christians who embrace the current reversal of family roles of men and women—stay-home husbands and dads instead of stay-home wives and mums—are economic viability and so-called pragmatic, modern-day living. There is also a strong desire and drive to break free from the traditional, biblical gender roles. Advocates of reversal of gender roles portray it as necessary for a comfortable life in modern culture. They contend that the customary or biblical gender expectations are unhelpful in fulfilling their experience of a life of material comfort and prosperity.

If we choose the pursuit of material prosperity and cosy living environments as more important than our humble and faithful fulfilling of our God-given roles, our decisions and actions will eventually undermine the family sanctity and unity. When achieving affluence becomes a priority in life, at the expense of divine wisdom and truth, we will cause our Christian families to become prey to the evils of secularism and ungodliness of our time! In abandoning the biblical pattern of family life to pursue greater wealth, luxury, self-glory, worldly pleasures, etc., Christian families are opening themselves to satanic deceptions in the world, which "subvert whole houses, teaching things ... for filthy lucre's sake" (Titus 1:11). The Bible warns us, "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house" (Proverbs 15:27).

Admittedly, in life, we may experience financial and practical struggles and difficulties in the family. But these are tests of our believing submission to God's unchanging, authoritative counsels in His Word. Joyful obedience to divine counsels even in the midst of hardships is required of us. We must endure our trials with the prayer that we may fulfil our biblical roles assigned to us by God, and thus be instruments of divine blessings in our families.

The modern culture is defying the traditional and biblical roles of men and women in the family.

Husband's God-Given Role

God-given roles of man and woman are so fashioned to be divine channels of blessings in the home. Both the Christian man and Christian woman

are equally valuable in God's sight (cf. Galatians 3:28). Though their specific roles assigned by God differ, there is absolutely no difference in their spiritual position, possessions and privilege. The roles of man and woman are different, just as the roles of God the Father and God the Son are different.

The biblical role of the husband is to lead, provide for, and protect his wife and children as the head of the family (Ephesians 5:23, 25–32; cf. Colossians 3:19–21; 1 Corinthians 11:3). Scripture's teaching of God's creation order—that man was made first, and from him, the woman—shows the divine ordaining of man's headship or leadership over the woman (1 Corinthians 11:8–9; cf. 1 Timothy 2:12–13). As part of that ordained headship, it is imperative that every house be ruled and provided for by the husband and father. Certainly, it is not a licence for the man to be cruel and tyrannical at home, but to assume his responsibility to lead, provide and protect in a godly and loving manner. Even after the fall of man, the LORD God had said to the first man, Adam, that he ought to toil to provide for his family—"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground" (Genesis 3:19a). In other words, God has told man that there will be no easy, trouble-free way of caring and providing for his family in this sin-marred world. Every man must be prepared for hard labour through fatigue and weariness, to earn a living and provide for his family.

Assuming responsibility for one's own family is every Christian husband's God-given responsibility, as reminded by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:8, "But if any provide not for his own, and

specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"! When a healthy-bodied man stays home and does not work hard to earn his keep, is he not drastically failing to provide for his family's needs? Is he not failing to exercise faith in God's promise and obey His counsel? Every hardworking, godly man should put his confidence in God's promises, including Psalm 128:1, 2—"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." Let every Christian husband take heed that his conduct does not contradict his faith in God's Word.

Wife's God-Given Role

While the husband must work and provide for the household, the wife's God-given role in the family is to be a loving manager of the home. This is Scripturally highlighted when the aged women are exhorted to "teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:4–5). In the same vein, when the apostle Paul prescribed the biblical solution to the problem of idleness among the younger widows, which would lead to sin (cf. 1 Timothy 5:13), he did not recommend that they should go out and find jobs to occupy their time. Rather, Paul exhorted that they "marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (1 Timothy 5:14).

In God's design of family life, a mother's care for her children should never be absent or lacking in the home. A father is neither created nor expected to provide 'motherly' care for the children. Neither can a maid nor a professional child-caregiver be a replacement for a mother's loving presence. In Psalm 128:3, the divine expectation of a wife and mother is beautifully depicted—"Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table." Why would the Bible depict believing women as being "by the sides of thine house", or as one "to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children" (Psalm 113:9)? It is because the woman's primary, God-given work is in the home!

Every wife's calling is, first and foremost, to work in the home, and not outside of the home. She should not pursue anything that will cause her to neglect her responsibilities at home. Her primary role is to be a submissive "helpmeet" to her husband (cf. Genesis 2:18) and a joyful mother of her children (cf. Psalm 113:9).

Conclusion

The specific roles which God has given to husbands and wives are not merely suggestions that can be altered according to a change of culture in society, or to one's wish and whim. When a healthy, strong husband or father neglects to work and be the breadwinner for the family, is he not defying God's authoritative counsel? When a married woman leaves her home to pursue a career and fails to devote her attention to her husband

and children as Scripture demands, is she not failing to honour God's Word? Neglecting the God-given roles will give "occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (cf. 1 Timothy 5:14b), and will cause the Word of God to be blasphemed (cf. Titus 2:5b).

Let us not be victims of the secularisation of Christian families. Do not surrender our homes, but resist the vicious invasion of secularism and its corruption. If Christians do not stop their compromises with the worldly way of living, soon their homes will have nothing in the way of godliness. Biblical family life is under serious threat today! But we thank God that He has not left us without principles and guidelines, nor without great and precious promises, concerning our households if we abide by His unfailing blessed truths for family living. ■

OUR FAMILY OUGHT TO MATTER TO GOD

This exhortational article is for every Christian family, especially young Christian couples. If your family ought to matter to God, your family must focus on matters that are of significance to God. That's what really matters to be a blessed Christian family.

Why Do Our Families Matter to God?

It is God who has ordained family life. Families are God-ordained institutions. The family is meant to be a spiritual institution which ought to reflect Christ's loving leadership of the church, and the church's loving submission to Him. God's Word declares in no uncertain terms those divine intentions and plans concerning Christian families:

“²² Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. ²⁴ Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶ that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, ²⁷ that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish ... ³³ Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:22–27, 33).

As the above biblical exhortation insists, the goal of every Christian family is to promote the glory of Christ and His redemptive, sanctifying love and truth. God expects every Christian's domestic life to exist and function for His glorious purpose concerning His church—that is the theology of the Christian family.

What Shall Then Matter to Our Families?

Having known God's particular purpose for Christian families, nothing ought to matter to Christian couples more than being the servants of the Lord,

be it within their domestic life or without. Every Christian home ought to be covenanted to the Lord to be His servants, as reflected in the words of Joshua: “but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15b).

As such, every family must avow itself to be a biblical family, committed only to desires, pursuits and conduct that are in total conformity with God's Word. God expects Christians' families to be spiritually-minded in all aspects of life. The life and activities of the family members must be characterised by reverence and devotion to the Lord.

Covenantal Duty of Christian Husband

The “fear of the LORD” must characterise every Christian husband, the head of the household, as he labours and guides his wife and children (cf. Psalm 128). Nurturing a God-fearing family must be his primary goal. For this purpose, he himself must be a man of strong faith and abiding devotion to the Lord. Though there are situations when special grace is given to a lady (like a widowed mother, or the wife of a severely disabled man) to guide the family in the ways of God, it is the unalterable duty of the Christian man to nourish and nurture his family. Husbands who are negligent or complacent, and thereby fail to actively guide his family into godly living and service to the Lord, are guilty of dereliction of the most solemn duty that God has entrusted to them.

Every man must examine himself constantly to keep himself focused



and committed to his God-given task of nurturing his family. He must persistently ensure that the counsels of God's Word guide his thoughts and affections, so that he may carry out the solemn charge of building his family for the Lord's glory. It is indeed an accursed thing to encourage or allow the family to pursue an unscriptural, worldly manner of life. Every man who would not instruct his family to follow the Scriptures strictly is like Eli, the priest, who spurned his fatherly duty of rebuking and correcting his sons. Let none of us be vessels of God's wrath, like Eli whom God severely judged, "because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not" (1 Samuel 3:13).

Covenantal Duty of

Christian Wife

Christian wives must steadfastly support and encourage their husbands to build a thoroughly devout, God-fearing family. The wife must be submissive and meek, prayerfully fulfilling her duties at home. For this purpose, she must examine herself and see whether she adheres to God-given duties of young married women, who are taught by Scripture "to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed" (Titus 2:4-5).

For that matter, the apostle Paul reiterates this divine calling for every Christian wife, when he admonishes every young woman in the church to "marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary

to speak reproachfully" (1 Timothy 5:14). He minces no words for women who neglect their biblical duties to be homely and godly wives, by depicting them as "some (who) are already turned aside after Satan" (1 Timothy 5:15)!

Conclusion

When Christian husbands and wives pay scant heed to biblical instructions and admonitions, and instead pursue their selfish, material and worldly glory, they are in great danger of reaping shame and sadness. Christian families, if any of you have failed in your God-given family duties, repent and plead for God's mercy, and amend your ways at once! Prayerfully and joyfully settle in your hearts that your family ought to matter to God. ■

God expects Christians' families to be spiritually-minded in all aspects of life.



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EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD THE HOUSE

“**E**xcept the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1a).

The truths of this verse must be the prayer and hope of every Christian husband and wife who desire to build a home blessed of the Lord. Understanding the spiritual truths imbedded in this

wonderful verse is like drawing the best help and provision for designing and building a house. Three very important truths are found in this verse concerning building our homes.

The Lord Promises to Build Our Homes

The verse first of all provides us with a divine promise. It gives us a strong indication that the Lord is willing and ready to build our homes. Inherent also in this verse is the Lord’s unhappiness with those who do not embrace His promise, and consequently exclude Him from the building of their homes. Scripture is unambiguous that the Lord is deeply interested to build the homes of His people. The Lord does not wish to stand by as an observer when we labour to build our house. He promises to be the Chief Architect and Builder of our homes—this we must believe. Our God is not inactive, but He is in the business of building the homes of those who trust in Him. What a loving and caring God He is!

The apostle Peter reminds us that God’s promises are “exceeding great and precious” (2 Peter 1:4). Christian couples should therefore not forget this precious promise that “the LORD build the house” (Psalm 127:1a). The assurance that the Lord is willing to build your house is a precious asset as you live your life together as husband and wife. Though you may be anxious about the future, trust in this promise and look forward with unwavering faith in the Lord who promises to build your home. When you face difficult circumstances in your life, do not give

up, but go to Him in prayer by trusting in His promise. Truly, if God works for us, why should we be pessimistic about life? If God works for us, why should we be anxious or fearful about tomorrow?

How does God build our homes? The Bible says in Proverbs 24:3 that “[t]hrough wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established”. In other words, God builds our homes by giving us His wisdom. God has revealed His wisdom in the Bible, that we may know and obey it. The Bible provides God’s supreme counsel for every man and woman pertaining to

The Bible provides God’s supreme counsel for every man and woman pertaining to his or her roles and responsibilities in family life.

his or her roles and responsibilities in family life. If we follow the counsel of God's Word in our daily lives, we shall have our homes built by God. Walk in the way the Lord wants you to walk, then you can be sure that He is moulding your lives for His glory and to your spiritual profitability. Obey His commandments, and He shall prove to you that His commandments are a blessing. "The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish" (Proverbs 14:11).

The Lord Says There is Labour in Building Our Homes

Just because God has promised to "build the house", it doesn't mean that we can become indifferent or lazy about the building of our homes. We must not forget that while the Lord builds the house, we are called to be **co-labourers** with Him.

Now, God expects us to work hard according to the opportunity, health and strength He has graciously provided for us. Surely, one of the things that God detests is laziness—"if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). In other words, if you don't bother to work hard, you deserve no food! Men must therefore be diligent in whatever business or service that the Lord gives to them, including building a home. Otherwise they cannot expect to prosper. They must faithfully labour, "not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). Then shall the Lord's promise to the diligent be

fulfilled in his life: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men" (Proverbs 22:29).

Women, likewise, are exhorted to diligently work at home to support the husband and to raise a godly family. Just like the virtuous woman, as described in Proverbs 31, who "girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms ... She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff ... She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet ... She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness" (Proverbs 31:17, 19, 21, 27). So much so that "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her" (Proverbs 31:28)!

When the Lord promises to build our homes, He expects us to work out all His will diligently. Without question, building a godly home entails much labour on our part.

The Lord Will Make Our Labour in Building Our Homes Fruitful

The Bible says that all who build the house without the Lord, labour in vain. In other words, without the Lord's help, our lives and labours are meaningless and fruitless.

It is an observable fact in real life that some work hard and make loads

of money, but they can't sleep well. They live in anxiety and fear. Scriptural insight makes us realise that earthly success in life, accomplished without God, is ultimately vain and empty, devoid of real blessings. An unbelieving man may be a millionaire without God, but what is the use of that high status if life is without true peace with God and with his inner conscience? He may reportedly be worth a million dollars, but he could take none of it with him to his grave. Even the silver plate on the coffin does not belong to him. If anyone had dug the grave, and attempted to take the precious metal away, the late millionaire would not be able to even say, "Leave that there, it is mine." The Bible reminds us, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7). No doubt about it, life is a failure if it is only spent in amassing material wealth. One whose life is lived without God finally ends up in hell to suffer the punishment of one's sins. But one who in his life trusts in the Lord Jesus for forgiveness of sins and for wisdom to live righteously, will have wonderful rewards not only in this world but also in heaven.

So, let every Christian couple have the right perspective of what constitutes a successful life. If they follow the Lord who has saved and called them to live for Him, then they will be rewarded with His mighty blessings in this world and in the world to come. Do all that you can as a family for the Lord's glory, then He will grant to your life meaning and blessings untold. Sincerely love one another because the Bible commands it, and the Lord will reward you with a happy home. Serve the Lord in His church because the Bible

instructs believers to do so, and then the Lord will build you a blessed home. Generously support God's work, then "shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine" (Proverbs 3:10).

Finally, God's bestowal of favour and rewards upon your labours in the building of your homes in accordance with His ways, is further corroborated by Psalm 128:1-4, "Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shalt be well with thee. Thy wife shalt be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD."

Conclusion

As you daily labour to build your home and nurture a biblical family life, remember the three wonderful truths found in Psalm 127:1a.

- God has a promise for you—that He will build the house.
- God has a precept for you—that you must labour with Him, being guided by His Word.
- God has a prospect for you—that He will make your labour meaningful and full of rewards.

May the Lord bless every godly Christian couple with a God-honouring home for His own glory. ■

MAN'S ROLE IN KEEPING THE HOME HAPPY



Psalm 128—“¹ Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. ² For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. ³ Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. ⁴ Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD. ⁵ The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. ⁶ Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel.”

The above is a biblical picture of a happy and holy home. It is addressed to the man (who is the head of the house). Three aspects of the man’s roles and responsibilities (in keeping his home happy and God-honouring) can be gleaned from this psalm. The man should:

- Fear the LORD (v. 1).
- Maintain a loving and joyful atmosphere in the home (v. 3—which portrays harmonious relationships with wife and children).
- Rule his house well with children in subjection (vv. 5, 6—which speaks of seeing “good ... all the days of [one’s] life and seeing “[one’s] children’s children, and peace ...”).

Fear the LORD

A godly man (that is, “one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways”) has the promise of a happy and holy

home-life. The “fear of the LORD” is that reverent and loving regard for the LORD which will make a man shrink from transgression (cf. Job 28:28). This fear of the LORD is the essential foundation of the truly happy home. A man’s genuine piety guarantees his family’s blessedness, which all the wealth and fame in the world cannot secure. Godliness is the best assurance of a blessed family life. It will make his home the scene of purest joy, strongest comfort, and highest domestic happiness and family welfare.

When a man’s heart is full of love for God and the Holy Scriptures, all his motives and aims will be sublime and pure. Such a man will walk in the ways of God. In his house, he becomes an unhindered channel of supreme moral as well as spiritual sentiments and emotions. Truth, honesty, purity and holy love will be his pursuits. True piety is not dormant but vibrant. A pious soul will bloom and spread the sweet “aroma” of divine virtues and purposes through his leadership in the home.

**Godliness is the
best assurance
of a blessed
family life.**

A man who fears the LORD will seek after divine pleasure. He endlessly pursues the joy that is in the LORD. His house will have an abundance of wholesome laughter and lyrical expressions of Christian joy. As highlighted by the famous hymn of Ackley, “Jesus is the Joy of Living, He's the King of Life to me; Unto Him my all I'm giving, His forevermore to be. I will do what He commands me, Anywhere He leads I'll go; Jesus is the Joy of Living, He's the dearest Friend I know.”

Maintain Loving and Joyful Atmosphere

A man who fears and loves the LORD is like a happy, singing bird on the hedge. He makes all else sing along with him. He guides his wife, instructs his children, and assures them of divine blessings. Home-life is not always easy. Like the bird on the hedge that is wary of thorns and briars around it, the pious man with divine grace in his heart leads his family safely through many temptations and trials of life.

As the saying goes, “It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest”; so is an ungodly man who makes his own home wretched. Our homes must be full of love, holiness, prayer, joy and mutual care. True conjugal affection (between husband and wife) is a source of lasting and uplifting gladness in the home. Husband and wife ought to maintain throughout life the sweetness and excellency of their relationship through mutual courtesy, self-sacrifice, concession, tender ministry in health and in sickness, and united effort on behalf of others. If at any time they fail

to show mutual love and respect, they should quickly repent of their errors, and make every effort to live together in godly affection for each other.

Together they must provide children with a biblical, godly, loving environment to grow up in. By cultivating a warm relationship based on love and care, happy parents help their children to be happy and well-adjusted. Keeping a sense of humour (and thereby promoting healthy laughter with your children) will also go a long way to nurturing a happy, vibrant home environment. Proverbs 15:13 tells us, “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken” (cf. Proverbs 17:22). A wise mixture of love and firmness should go into nurturing the children.

Rule Well with Children in Subjection

Godly nurture of children demands respect and obedience towards parents; indeed, children should rejoice to love and respect their parents. Such a happy state of affairs does not just happen. Fathers have a critical role to play here. They are exhorted by the apostle Paul to “bring [their children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Sad to say, fathers are increasingly distracted by their jobs and businesses from the affectionate nurture of their children. Many of them seem to be unaware of the spiritual damages such negligence can inflict upon their

families, especially their children. Even some men, who are spiritual, appear to have forgotten that they have a fatherly role to fulfil. It is not uncommon to hear of spiritual leaders—like pastors and elders—neglecting their own children's nurture in their enthusiasm to care for the church. But the Bible unequivocally expects that their children will be nurtured to be faithful. After all, one key requirement of an elder is that he be “one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Likewise for the deacons (cf. 1 Timothy 3:12). The spiritual nurturing of our children is of grave importance. May none of us take this matter lightly. Otherwise we will receive a rebuke from the Lord, as did Eli, the high priest, did—“For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (1 Samuel 3:13)!

None of our homes should be like that of Eli the priest, who spoiled his children. The wisdom of God's Word says, “Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul” (Proverbs 29:17). Not to chasten our children betimes (promptly, early) is disastrous, and it would result in ourselves being “chastened” by the LORD for our neglect of duty! However, this does not mean that we fill our home with “fire and fury” all day long. Parents who hurt their children in their rage at their slightest mistakes, will surely bring about greater trouble to themselves. The principle of biblical discipline is concisely stated in Proverbs 3:12—“For

whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.” The clear implication is that a loving father takes the trouble and effort to reprove and correct his child, in order to turn him back onto the right path and restore him to a submissive, harmonious relationship with the father. The objective is never to destroy or condemn the child, but that the child may be restored to a blessed state before the Lord. In short, love, not rage, ought to be the motivation for the parental discipline of children.

Conclusion

Man's role is vital and instrumental in keeping the home happy and godly. Godliness, not worldliness or materialism, is the source of all divine blessings, including domestic and societal happiness and peace. A home led by a man who fears the LORD shall be a blessing to society. Through their godly and loving actions, exemplary conduct and many prayers for the people and the society in which they live, such a home will be a blessing to those around them. There should be no greater goal and prayer cherished by a Christian man than his pious living and labouring in the home, which in turn will bring about blessings to the church and country, to the glory of God! ■



MAN'S ROLE IN LEADING THE FAMILY SPIRITUALLY

God holds the head of the household responsible for the conduct of his family. It is instructive to note that despite the fact that it was Eve who was first deceived and sinned, the Bible says, “For as in Adam all die...” (1 Corinthians 15:22a). In Romans 5:19, we are told that it was “by one man’s disobedience many were

made sinners”. Adam, being the head of Eve, was held accountable by God for the entrance of sin. Similarly, the high priest Eli was held accountable by God for the immorality of his sons. It was not sufficient for him merely to warn them. As the LORD said, “For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because

his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (1 Samuel 3:13).

Clearly, man—being the head of the family—is given the crucial and indispensable role of leading the family spiritually. The Lord has commanded the husbands, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25–27). It is the husbands’ prerogative and duty to lead their wives! Furthermore, fathers are exhorted: “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Tips for Leading Your Wife

The biblical imperative is that husbands ought to love their wives as Christ has loved the church. Realise that to love the wife is to lead her aright, with the end objective that she may be led in the way of righteousness and be established in blameless conduct in God’s sight. Husbands who love their wives as Christ loves the church must desire their spiritual purity, that they may be set apart for God’s glory and honour. Christian husbands must do everything needful—rebuke, instruct, encourage and lead—in order that their wives may pursue their sanctification. They should at all costs avoid provoking or leading their wives to sin. Husbands’

highest duty of love to their wives is to help them grow in purity and holiness before God, and to increase in the service of the Lord. The following are needful ways in which husbands ought to lead their wives.

Daily read the Scriptures

to her.

Ephesians 5:25–27 clearly teach Christian husbands that as Jesus sanctifies the church through the Word, so they too must lovingly cultivate spiritual sanctity and maturity in their wives—through the reading and application of God’s Word. Christ loves the church with the intention of presenting her sanctified—“That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27). Through Scriptural instruction and example, husbands must help their wives to put sin to death so that they can come alive to righteousness. It is also the task of the husbands to help their wives flourish in the exercising of their spiritual gifts to serve and glorify God. Their wives must be encouraged to bring glory to God by doing good to others. Husbands ought to love their wives with a sanctifying love.

Daily pray with her.

The apostle Peter expected the husbands to pray with their wives. To enhance their prayer life together, he advised men to “dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as

being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (1 Peter 3:7). To pray regularly with one’s wife, one must know the wife’s needs, struggles, fears, and deal with her in an honourable manner. Dealing with her in an honourable manner means that the Christian husband should be careful not to make fun of her weaknesses, but gently and firmly advise her, and then pray with her. It is important that the husband take time to pray with his wife to strengthen her through prayer.

Encourage her to seek and serve the Lord.

Admittedly, some wives are too entangled in the household chores of cooking, cleaning, grooming and feeding. Husbands who are overly demanding and critical of their wives’ roles in the household affairs will hinder their spiritual pursuit. Husbands must take a leaf from Jesus, who encouraged Martha not to be cumbered with too many things concerning duties in the house (cf. Luke 10:40-42). Husbands must encourage their wives to study God’s Word and serve Him in the church in an increasing manner. He must be an encouragement as well as an example in serving the Lord. He must also lend a helping hand in the household chores, so that she can find time to offer her service to the Lord.

Exhort her to be a biblical woman.

There is so much pressure on modern Christian women to be secular-minded

rather than biblically minded. Sadly, in many contemporary churches (even sound, biblical ones, unfortunately), we see a growing number of mothers (with young children) becoming career-minded and neglecting the clear biblical command to be homemakers (Titus 2:4-5; 1 Timothy 5:14). In some other cases, the husbands expect their wives to take on full-time jobs, so they can live in greater comfort. This leaves many a Christian woman struggling, having very little time for children and for their own spiritual nurture and service to the Lord. Many Christian homes will be in a better condition, with their children under better care and discipline, if the mothers are not out of their homes, spending the best hours of their day doing the things of the world.

Let every husband work hard and earn a living, and then learn to live within his means. This is God’s expectation (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 1 Timothy 6:6-12). Let every husband make sure that he helps his wife to be a biblical woman, who has sufficient time to watch over the children, household matters and also her own spiritual growth. Husbands must take great care to help their wives not to be entangled in the secular world, so that they have time and energy to excel at home and before the Lord.

Commend her good spirit and good works.

Husbands must commend their wives for their efforts at home and church. There must be plenty of appreciation (cf. Proverbs 31:28b—“her husband also, and he praiseth her”).

Normally when it comes to criticising, disagreeing, rebuking, men have a lot to say to their wives. How about praising her generously whenever she labours hard and performs well for family, friends and church? Dear Christian husband, make it a point to look at the things that she has been doing daily, and commend her regularly. Husbands must not fail to reciprocate their wives’ efforts with words of commendation and encouragement. It is not good that familiarity breeds contempt.

Show that your love for her has not diminished with time.

To love their wives as Jesus loved the church, husbands must not allow bitterness to stay in their hearts. “Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them” (Colossians 3:19). On the other hand, true love endures all difficulties and provocations patiently, and ministers with grace and goodness (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Even when the family encounters difficult and tough issues, if the husbands are willing and ready to love, there will be real hope for the family to stay together and rejoice in the Lord. Love is not just an emotional feeling. Love gets into action even though feelings seem to vanish. Love endures, and it just won’t give up. Love is a commitment. It does not fade, but glows brighter with time.

That said, the husband does well to remember, from time to time, to do something special that will express his love in new and meaningful ways to his wife. The biblical injunction, “let

us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18), should take on greater meaning for the Christian husband when applied to marital leadership.

Tips for Leading Your Children

It goes without saying that to lead their children aright, fathers must live in obedience to God. “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them” (Psalm 103:17-18). God offers His special promise of mercy to the children of those who fear Him and keep His covenant. The following are indispensable spiritual responsibilities which fathers ought to shoulder in the leading of their children.

Husbands must not fail to reciprocate their wives’ efforts with words of commendation and encouragement.

Fathers must teach the Word.

The chief responsibility of a father is that he should instruct his children with God's Word. Christian fathers, you must not think that the teaching of the Bible to your children is the duty of the Sunday School teacher or the church pastor. It is, first of all, the fathers' duty to teach the children God's Word, as exhorted by Scripture—"Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons" (Deuteronomy 4:9). Abraham of old is a fine example of a father who was dedicated to teaching his children God's Word. The LORD said about him, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment" (Genesis 18:19).

Fathers ought to be diligent in teaching God's Word to their children. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; cf. 11:19-20). It is important to remember that the purpose of teaching is not just to raise up "well-behaved kids", but rather that they may be regenerated by the Word (1 Peter 1:23), and then they may be enabled to live holy lives. The Bible is sufficient to make them "perfect" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

May therefore our prayer concerning the teaching of God's Word (to our children) be: "Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (Psalm 78:3-7).

Fathers must pray for their children.

Every father who is responsible to God in raising up his children must pray specially for them. Consider the example of Job, a godly, responsible father, who would rise up in the morning to pray for his children. "And it was so ... that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually" (Job 1:5). Commitment to set times of regular praying for the children was the hallmark of Job's fatherhood. Dear Christian fathers, how about you? How often do you take time to pray for your children's salvation and sanctification? Without question, a father's unceasing prayer for his children will have a significant bearing on their spiritual well-being.

Fathers must bring their children to worship, fellowship, and other church gatherings.

The Bible highlights (not just for our knowledge, but also for our example) not a few instances of parents bringing their children to congregational gatherings of God's people for public worship, Scripture learning, fellowship, etc. Consider the following Scriptural instances:

- "There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the **little ones**, and the strangers that were conversant among them" (Joshua 8:35).
- "And all Judah stood before the LORD, with **their little ones**, their wives, and **their children**" (2 Chronicles 20:13).
- "Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and **the children** rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off" (Nehemiah 12:43).

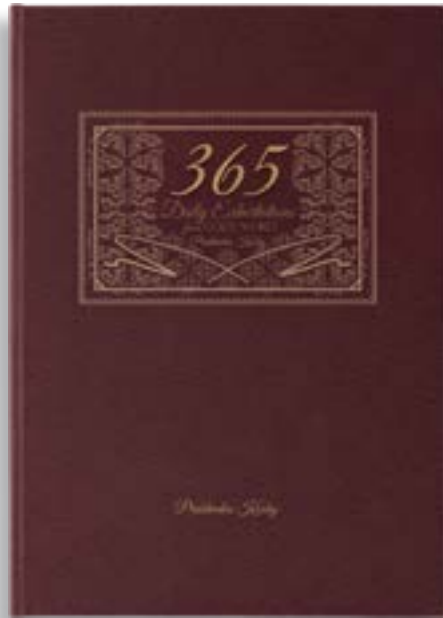
It also behoves us to remember Jesus' words to His disciples and the parents of the children who came to Him: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). Now, interestingly

when children enthusiastically joined the crowd that sang "Hosanna" to the Lord during His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, "the chief priests and scribes ... were sore displeased" (Matthew 21:15), and complained to Jesus about the children. To which Jesus replied, "Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou (God) hast perfected praise?" (Matthew 21:16). The clear implication is that the Lord values highly our children's worship and praise. Fathers, encourage your children to go for church activities, that they may be nurtured in spiritual matters from the earliest age. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Conclusion

Without question, the man's role in the family as husband and father is one of utmost consecrated leadership. May every Christian husband bear a good witness concerning his Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ in this ungodly world by loving (and leading) his wife as Christ loves the church. Equally important, may every Christian father bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, that they may in turn bear good testimony for Christ, being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom [they] shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15). ■

RESOURCES FOR THE FAMILY



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MY SOUL'S DELIGHT (VOLUME 1)

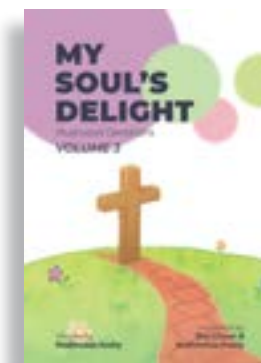
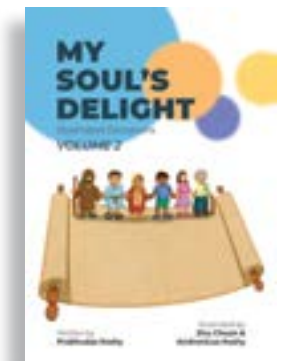
BY PRABHUDAS KOSHY, ILLUSTRATED BY MELISSA NEO

My Soul's Delight (Volume 1) was published in 2011. It contains 25 devotions for children, with each devotion accompanied by a colourful illustration. Each devotion expounds one Bible verse, with practical applications for the young reader.

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ILLUSTRATED BY ZHU CHUAN & ANDRONICUS KOSHY

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BIBLE TRIVIA

NUMBERS 35

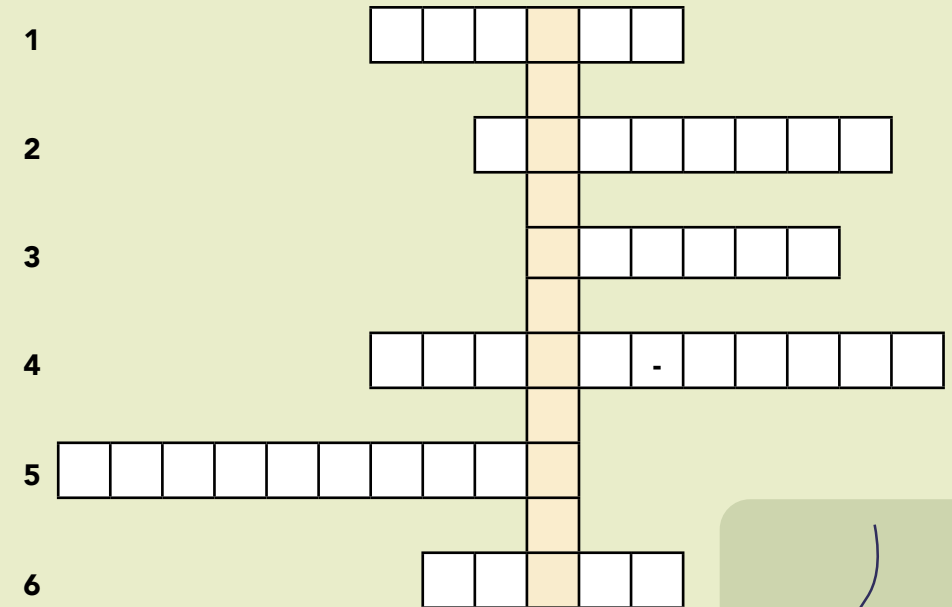
SARAH YONG

In the previous chapter, Numbers 34, the LORD had specified the boundaries of the entire Promised Land which the twelve tribes of Israel would inherit. The tribe of Levi, however, was not allocated any land—instead, the children of Israel were to give unto the Levites from their inheritance.

Part A: Complete the given sentences below, by filling each blank with a suitable answer taken from the respective verse(s) indicated.

1. The children of Israel were to give unto the Levites _____ to dwell in, including the surrounding areas for their cattle, and for their goods, and for all their beasts. (vv. 2-3)
2. The suburbs of the cities that were to be given unto the Levites shall extend to a _____ cubits round about, from the wall of the city and outward. (v. 4)
3. Among the cities that were to be given unto the Levites, there shall be six cities for _____, to which shall be added forty and two cities. (v. 6)
4. So, the total number of cities which shall be given unto the Levites shall be _____ - _____ cities, together with their suburbs. (v. 7)
5. These cities to be given unto the Levites shall be of the _____ of the children of Israel, whereby every one shall give of his cities unto the Levites according to his inheritance which he inheriteth. (v. 8)
6. The children of Israel were commanded not to pollute or defile the land which they shall inhabit, for the LORD is to _____ among them. (v. 34)

Part B: Use your answers in Part (A) to fill in the specially arranged crossword below, in their corresponding order.

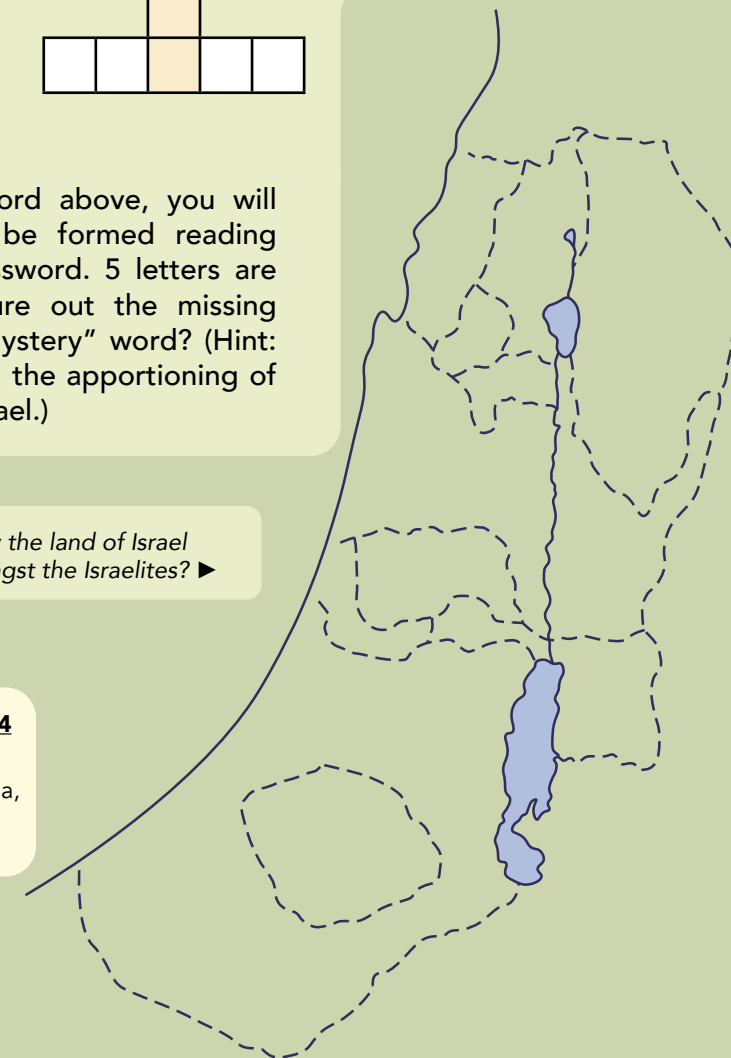


After filling in the crossword above, you will notice that a word may be formed reading vertically down in this crossword. 5 letters are still missing—can you figure out the missing letters to complete this “mystery” word? (Hint: this word is associated with the apportioning of land unto the children of Israel.)

Do you know how the land of Israel was divided amongst the Israelites? ►

**Answers to Bible Trivia—Numbers 34
(Vol. 22, Iss. 2, pp. 28–29)**

- a) Zin, b) River of Egypt, c) the Great Sea,
d) Mount Hor, e) Sea of Chinnereth,
f) Jordan River, g) Salt Sea



HUDSON TAYLOR (1832-1905) PART XIII

Retold by Jenny Lok
Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

Retold from:

- "To China With Love" by Hudson Taylor, published by Dimension Books, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, the United States
- "Hudson Taylor—God's Man in China" by Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor, published by Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, the United States
- "Hudson Taylor and Maria, Pioneers in China" by J. C. Pollock, published by Kingsway Publications Ltd, the United Kingdom
- "God's Adventurer" by Phyllis Thompson, published by Overseas Missionary Fellowship (IHQ) Ltd, Singapore

Having entrusted his life to God, Hudson threw himself heart and soul into the work in Ningpo, whether it be preaching at services or evangelising along the street, helping the poor or tending to the sick. There was much camaraderie among the missionaries, which added to Hudson's joy in serving the Lord. He would also look forward to their weekly dinner gathering at the school run by Miss Aldersey, a nearly 60-year-old missionary. She was, in fact, the first woman missionary in China and the founder of this first all-girls Protestant school. Though rather eccentric in nature, Miss Aldersey was hardworking and efficient, thus earning her the respect of both the Chinese and Westerners.

Working alongside Miss Aldersey were 2 sisters—Burella and Maria Dyer. Both were from a missionary family but became orphans at a young age. Miss Aldersey took them under her wings and they, with a little training as teachers, became good helpers in her school. Maria, the younger of the two, was tender-hearted and completely devoted to God. Life at Miss Aldersey's school could be difficult and demanding, but she had dedicated her whole life to serve God. The joy and peace she experienced through her loving service to God were all that mattered.

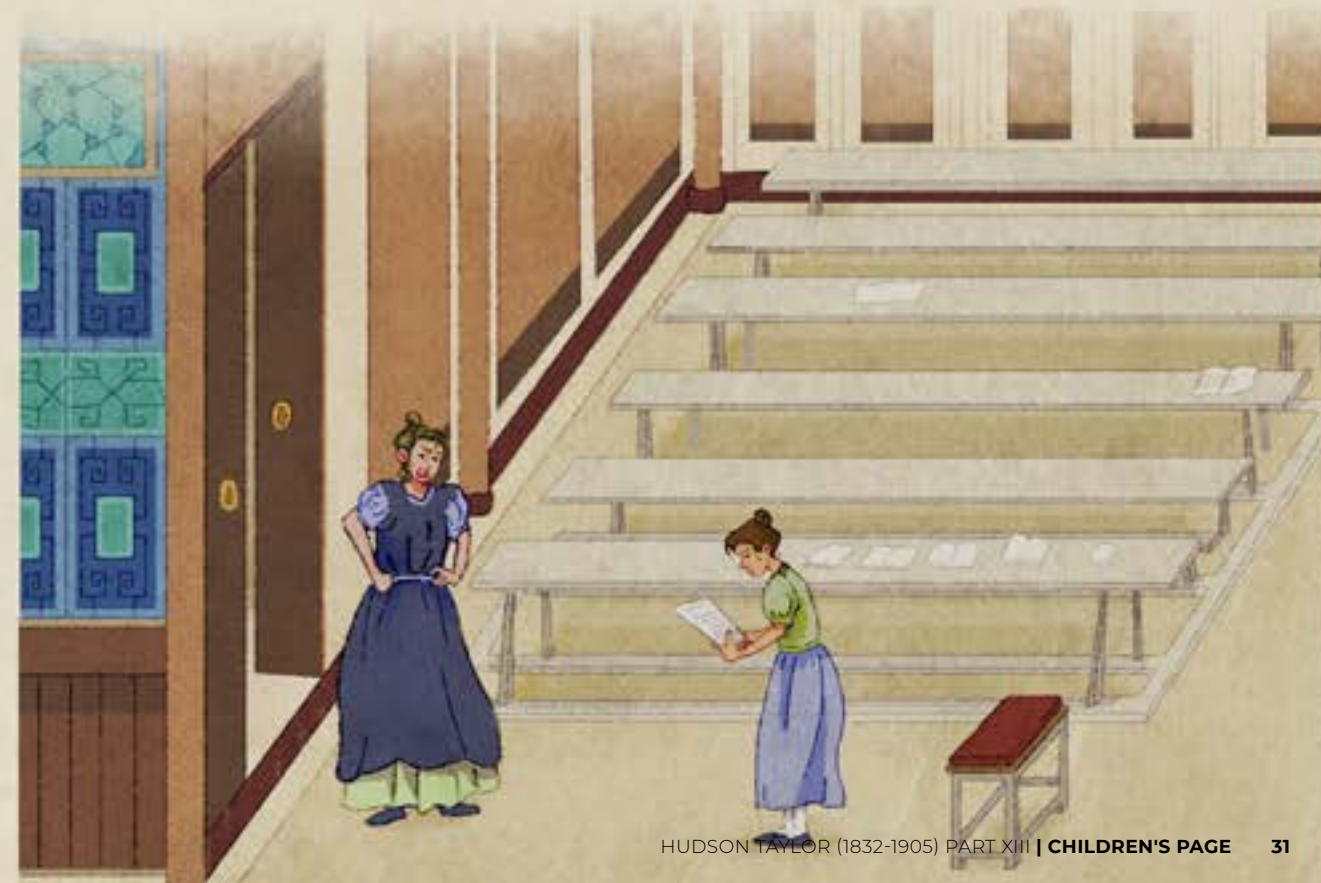
Hudson could not help but notice Maria Dyer. She was indeed pretty despite being born with a squint (where the eyes look in different directions). However, it was not her physical beauty alone that attracted his attention. In reality, he was much impressed by her focus on spiritual

matters, her compassionate heart, as well as her ability to speak Chinese like a native. On numerous occasions, he had opportunities to meet Maria, but he knew that he needed to pray for God's direction in his desire to have Maria as a wife and co-worker in the Lord's work.

At the same time, Maria had certainly found a kindred spirit in Hudson. She could see that he had "the same longings after holiness, usefulness [and] nearness to God". She went before the Lord in prayer, and was deeply convicted that God had sent Hudson into her life.

After months of prayer, Hudson took the bold step of proposing to Maria in a letter, which she received in the month of April 1857. She was truly on cloud nine and could not wait to break the good news to her sister and Miss Aldersey! Instead of being happy for her, Miss Aldersey lashed out in anger at Hudson's proposal of marriage to Maria.

"Mr Taylor? That young, poor, unconnected Nobody! The one who has made a spectacle of himself in his Chinese clothes! How dare he presume to think of such a thing?" Miss Aldersey's shrill voice pierced the air.



Maria was totally crushed by Miss Aldersey's harsh criticism of Hudson. Not heeding Maria's misery and distress, Miss Aldersey demanded that she write a letter of rejection to Hudson. Maria's tears fell rapidly as she composed the dreaded letter in words that were not her own. Upon receiving Maria's letter, Hudson's heart was also in anguish.

"Will I ever see her again? Is it God's plan for me to marry her?" Hudson wondered in sorrow. Within him, there was also a strange feeling that Miss Aldersey was possibly behind the letter! In such times of uncertainty, Hudson turned to his Saviour, and gradually peace and hope filled his heart.

In mid-July, about 3 months after the unfavourable reply to his letter of proposal to Maria, Hudson managed to arrange a meeting with Miss Aldersey. From his interview with her, Hudson realised that Miss Aldersey was deeply offended by his failure to consult her before his proposal to Maria. On top of that, Maria was 20 years old, just one year shy of her 21st birthday (the legal age for marriage). Hudson felt that he had indeed been careless and was quick to admit it to Miss Aldersey, saying, "I do apologise, Miss Aldersey, for my oversight. Truly, I have much to learn from this big blunder. Please be gracious to reconsider your objection to our marriage."

"Well, Mr Taylor, truth be told, I cannot give you the permission to marry Maria, for I am not her legal guardian. She has actually an uncle, Mr William Tarn, who resides in England. If you so desire, you may write to him. But first, I'll correspond with him." Miss Aldersey addressed Hudson civilly, with her nose in the air.

Hudson was overjoyed as thoughts raced through his mind: "This is truly a great discovery! Now I can write to Mr Tarn to ask for Maria's hand in marriage. But, wait a minute! For a start, I must speak with Maria to get her consent. But how am I going to do that? Miss Aldersey has given strict instructions that I should neither talk to Maria nor visit her! May the Lord help me!" Hudson's initial excitement turned into anxiety and, for a moment, he was speechless before Miss Aldersey.

God certainly had His way of working things out for Hudson. The opportunity to meet Maria came a couple of days later. It happened at the Joneses' home, where the Ladies' Prayer Meeting was held. Mr Jones and Hudson (who was then staying at the Joneses' place) were away preaching to the opium addicts. After prayer, the ladies had just settled down for tea when news of a waterspout (a whirling column of air and water mist) breaking over the city of Ningpo came suddenly. Apparently, the waterspout had moved forcefully up the river and flooded the entire city! To make matters worse, torrents of rain soon

followed and everywhere, the water was knee-high. By God's mercy, both Mr Jones and Hudson managed to make their way home safely. Upon arrival, Hudson was told to go directly to the study room while Mr Jones would proceed upstairs to greet the ladies. By then, only Maria and another lady, Mrs Bausum, were left waiting for their sedan chairs. Mrs Jones was sitting nearby, praying for the safety of her guests and her husband. Everyone looked up when Mr Jones appeared at the doorway.

"My dear, I'm so glad you're back! I presume that Hudson is back with you?" inquired Mrs Jones, her expression a mixture of relief and concern.

"Thank God for His protection! We are safe and sound. Mr Hudson is now waiting in the study room. I will send him up and see if the two young people can have a short meeting," Mr Jones replied with a slight smile on his face. Maria blushed at the mention of Hudson's name, and said softly, "I shall be glad to meet with him."



Hudson appeared in no time and the meeting confirmed God's will in an amazing way! Both pledged their love for one another and Maria consented to Hudson's request to write to her uncle, Mr Tarn, for permission to marry her. Many happy faces surrounded them that day, and what tremendous joy they felt in the midst of such loving friends! As planned, the letter to Mr Tarn was speedily dispatched, and the couple waited upon the Lord with much prayer and patience as the returned mail would take about 4 months (due to the slow mail in those days).

In the meantime, Hudson enjoyed untold blessings from the Lord since the day he and fellow missionary, Mr Jones, had resigned from the Chinese Evangelisation Society (CES). They were constantly reminded of God's faithfulness and provision by 2 scrolls written in the Chinese characters. The words were as follows:

Ebenezer, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us"; and
Jehovah-Jireh, "The Lord will provide".

Truly, God did not fail them, for in early November, a timely remittance (payment) of \$214 arrived in time to enable them to continue their daily (except Sunday) supply of breakfast for the destitute. This was but one of the many occasions when God supplied their needs in the nick of time.

God's blessings did not stop at satisfying the hunger and thirst of His needy people. Towards the end of 1857, amid disturbing news of an attack on Canton (trading city of Guangzhou) by the British and French forces, Hudson was most delighted to receive a precious soul—Mr Nyi—into the kingdom of God. On that occasion, Hudson was preaching the Good News of salvation through the finished work of Christ on the cross, based on John 3:14–17,

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."

During that Gospel meeting, Mr Nyi, a businessman and also one of the respected leaders of a reformed Buddhist sect in Ningpo, stood up and confessed his faith in the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:

"I have long sought for the truth, as did my father before me, but I have never found it. I have travelled far and near, but without obtaining it. I

have found no rest in Confucianism, Buddhism, or Taoism, but I do find rest in what I heard here tonight. Henceforth I am a believer in Jesus."

Everyone present was astounded at the mighty working of the Holy Spirit. Mr Nyi further surprised Hudson—and previous members of his religious society—by not only giving up his membership, but also making time to share with them his new-found faith in Christ.

Mr Nyi rejoiced in being a child of God, but lamented over the fact that his father had died without discovering the truth of the Gospel. So he inquired of Hudson, "How long have you had the Glad Tidings in England?"

"Several hundred years, I suppose," Hudson replied with some hesitation, his face suddenly turning crimson.

"What, several hundred years! Is it possible that you have known about Jesus for so long, and only now had come to tell us? Oh, why did you not come sooner?"

Hudson felt a stab of pain in his heart at Mr Nyi's words. Didn't Jesus say in Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"? Hudson resolved to work harder in reaching out to the lost in China...

(To be continued)





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