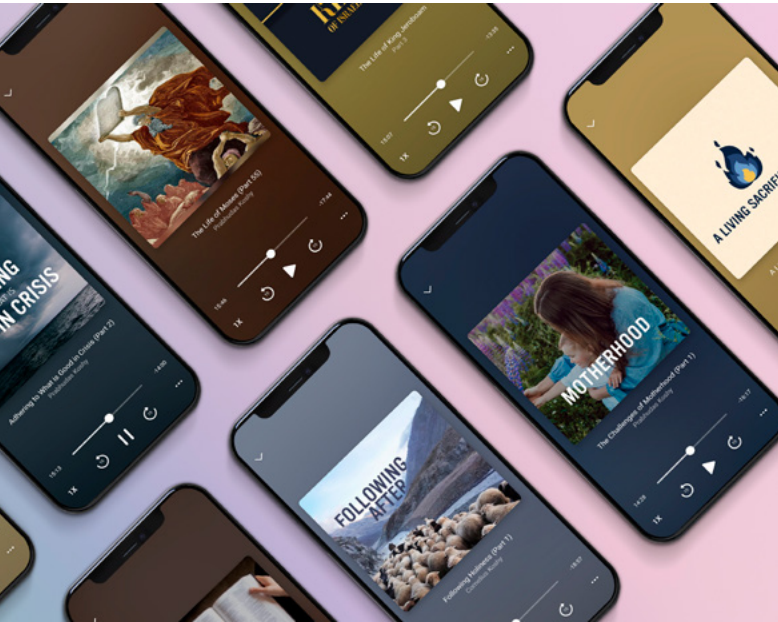


Bible Witness

MCI (P) 028/04/2024 | ISSN: 0219-5364 | VOLUME 24 ISSUE 3 (MAY-JUNE 2024)

**GIVE OURSELVES
CONTINUALLY
TO PRAYER
(PART 2)**





▲ Listen and Grow

In Romans 10:17, we read, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Here at Bible Witness Media Ministry, our mission is to declare God’s truths boldly and clearly. To this end, we provide helpful audio resources for you to listen to sound, faithful exposition anytime, anywhere.

We have on-demand resources that cater to men, ladies and youth. New resources are uploaded to our website and app every week.

Listen now at biblewitness.com/ondemand. Alternatively, listen on the go with Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church’s app. Just search for “Gethsemane BPC” in your app store to get started.

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** 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

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). This magazine is distributed free from 2006 onwards. Postage and handling charges still apply. 2 years (12 issues): **S\$10.00** Singapore/Malaysia surface mail delivery, **S\$14.00** international surface mail delivery, **S\$26.00** Asia air mail, **S\$34.00** for air mail to all other countries.

LOVE-GIFT Bible Witness Media Ministry welcomes love-gifts from readers to meet the cost of publishing and distribution. The Ministry also sends the magazine freely to churches in poorer countries. Hence your generous support is much needed and greatly appreciated. Love-gifts may be sent via bank transfer (DBS Bank a/c no. 025-011173-7; swift code: DBSSSGG), PayPal (an additional S\$2.00 charge will be incurred) or Singapore currency cheque made payable to “Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church”.

USE OF ARTICLES The articles may be freely used for non-commercial purposes, so long as they are quoted verbatim, and the writer as well as the source identified.



On the Cover ▲

The painter, Theodor Schüz, was inspired by Psalm 104:27–28 to paint this—“These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.”



Scan Me! ▲

Back issues of Bible Witness magazine are available online at biblewitness.com/magazine

GIVE OURSELVES CONTINUALLY TO PRAYER (PART 2)

Volume 24 Issue 3 | May–June 2024

IN THIS ISSUE

4
Prayer: Realisation of the Fullness of God’s Power

8
Praying Together as a Church

11
Christ’s Prayerfulness —Our Pattern

14
Prayer Pattern of the Early New Testament Church

17
When God Answers “No!”



All articles in this issue were written by the Rev. Dr Prabhudas Koshy, Pastor of Gethsemane B-P Church, Singapore, and Editor of the Bible Witness Magazine.

CHILDREN’S PAGE

20
Wang Ming-Dao (Part II)
Jenny Lok

27
Bible Trivia
Joshua 2
Sarah Yong

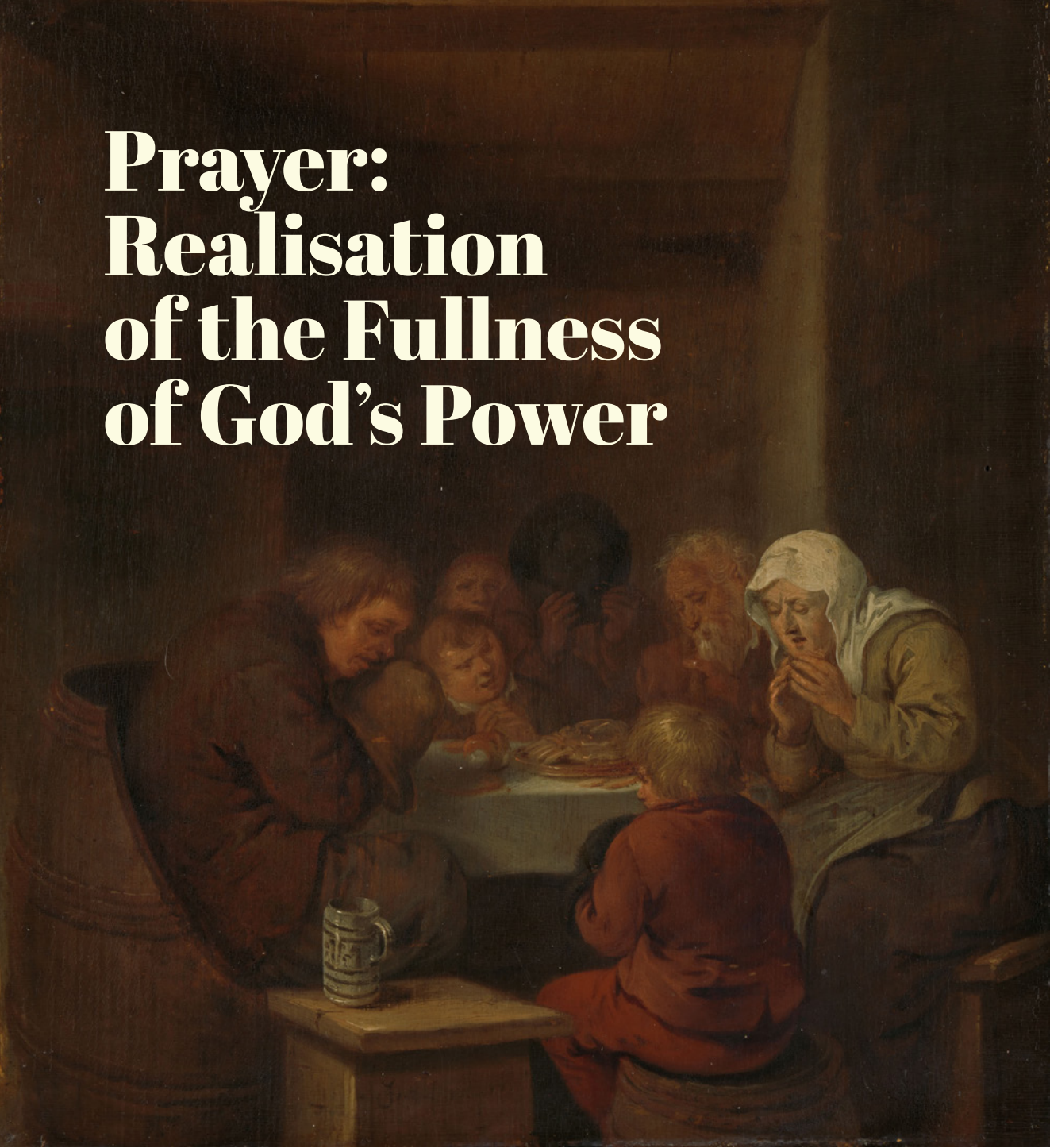
References for the Children’s Story:

- Wang, Ming-Dao. (1995). A Stone Made Smooth. (A. Reynolds, Trans.) Singapore: Berean Publishers
- <https://canonjohn.com/2022/10/15/heroes-of-the-faith-wang-mingdao/>
- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/wang-ming-dao-faithful-political-coercion/?amp>
- <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/stubborn-saint>
- <http://prayforchina.com/bios/eng/bio-26>
- <https://bdcconline.net/en/stories/wang-mingdao>

Cover Image Credits:

“Midday Prayer During the Harvest”, Theodor Christoph Schüz, Oil on Canvas, Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie.

Prayer: Realisation of the Fullness of God's Power



In Ephesians 3:14–21, we have, recorded for us, a prayer of Paul which is generally acknowledged to be the most sublime, the most far-reaching prayer that could be found anywhere in Paul's epistles. The Epistle to the Ephesians was written by Paul while he was in prison (cf. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). One would think that Paul, in his lonely imprisonment, had burdens enough of his own without thinking about the needs of people far removed from the place of his imprisonment. Some of these people he had never seen, but he gathered them up in his prayers and pleaded with God on their behalf.

Written under divine inspiration, it reveals not only the requests of Paul for the Ephesians, but also the desire and longing of God for all of His people. This passage affords us some precious insights into prayer as a means to the realisation of the fullness of God's power.

APPROACH TO PRAYER

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (vv. 14–15). “For this cause” indicates the reason for the prayer, and it points in particular to those aspects of divine purposes and privileges for God's people set forth in Ephesians 3:2–13. Paul's prayer, therefore, was offered because of his sincere desire that his Gentile readers may enter fully into their privileges in Christ.

Though the customary posture in prayer among the Jews was that of standing (cf. Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11–13); a kneeling position is alluded to here. A kneeling posture betokens special solemnity or unusual urgency (cf. Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60). Therefore, when Paul said, “I bow my knees”, the words are indicative of the intense earnestness and the unusual emotion he felt.

Furthermore, the prayer is addressed “unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named”. “Family” is used in the sense of clan, or tribe, or nation—any group that claims descent from a common father. The expression “whole family” should be taken as a reference to the company of the redeemed, both in

heaven and on earth. Just as children derive their name from their father and their relation to him is determined by it, so the apostle was saying that the whole family of God derive their name from Him, and are known and recognised as His children.

BOLDNESS OF PRAYER

“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory” (v. 16a). Paul's desire is that God may grant his requests “according to the riches of his glory”. He had in mind the limitless resources of God, and he was asking that his readers may receive the benefits they require in accordance with God's limitless ability to give.

This spiritual reality is abundantly corroborated by other portions of Scripture. In the Scriptures, we are repeatedly told of God's unlimited blessings that are made available to us in Jesus Christ. The following are just a few examples:

- Ephesians 1:3—“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”.
- Ephesians 2:7—“That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.”
- Philippians 4:19—“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”
- Psalm 134:3—“The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.”

With spiritual access to such unlimited riches, shouldn't we be emboldened to come before God's throne of grace to seek help (cf. Hebrews 4:16)? Surely, the answer is in the affirmative!

CONTENT OF PRAYER

Three principal petitions are listed in this prayer of Paul, each being introduced by the same Greek conjunction (*hina*). This is the Greek grammatical construction of a purpose clause. Purpose clauses are introduced by "*hina*", which means "in order that". The three purposes expressed in the content of Paul's prayer are progressive, being built on what has gone before. Firstly, "that he would grant you ... to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (v. 16). Then, "that ye ... may be able to comprehend ... and to know the love of Christ" (vv. 17b-19a). The climax of the prayer is reached in the closing words of v. 19: "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (v. 19b).

A Request for Inner Power

The first request is contained in the words, "that he would grant you ... to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts". These words speak of a strengthening that is effected by the impartation of the power of the Spirit. Note that this strengthening takes place "in the inner man".

A Request for Comprehension

The second request is "that ye ... may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and

depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge". In a general sense, it is a prayer that believers, as a consequence of the divine strengthening and indwelling, may have spiritual capacity for understanding the love of Christ.

The thought of this petition revolves around two phrases: "to comprehend" (v. 18a) and "to know" (v. 19a). The first beckons a mental grasp and can be rendered "apprehend". The idea is of laying hold on something so as to make it one's own. The Greek word for "know" represents knowledge gained by experience. Thus, Paul's prayer is that Christians may with their minds lay hold on Christ's love, and in their personal experience come to have a true and expanding experience of it.

The reference to the fourfold dimensions of Christ's love—its breadth, length, depth and height (v. 18b)—is intended to bring out the all-encompassing character of that love. The cumulative string of words was meant simply to portray the surpassing magnitude of Christ's love for men. The phrase, "which passeth knowledge", has been called "the fifth dimension" of the love of Christ. The phrase means that His love for us is too great ever to be fully known.

A Request for the Fullness of God

The final petition, the climax of the entire prayer, is a request for believers to "be filled with (i.e. up to the measure) all the fulness of God." No prayer can possibly reach beyond this, for in this filling every other blessing is included. The full meaning of this is beyond our comprehension, but in a general

way it may be seen as a prayer that the Ephesian Christians may be filled with all spiritual excellence.

Unquestionably, this petition staggers the imagination, but we must not let its magnitude cause us to set it aside as an impossibility. Indeed, every believer already knows something of this experience, for "of his (Christ's) fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). In another part of this epistle, Paul also exhorted the believers to grow "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). In the light of this overwhelming exhortation, we should take Paul's prayer not only as an expression of God's desire and purpose, but also as a promise that this spiritual blessing will one day come to pass.

DEDICATION OF PRAYER

Paul closed the prayer with a doxology: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (vv. 20-21). It is not only the conclusion to the prayer, but also the climax to all that has been said in chapter three.

Verse 20 speaks of Paul's confidence in the inconceivable greatness of God's power. In this verse, Paul laboured to express the boundless reach of God's power. It exceeds all our requests; it exceeds even our highest thoughts! For God, who is infinite, eternal, unchangeable in His being, wisdom and power, is able to do "exceeding abundantly above" all of our requests or thoughts. How wonderful it is that we

who cannot begin even to comprehend God's power, are privileged to be the earthly instruments through whom His power operates.

Finally, v. 21 is an ascription of glory to God. Glory belongs inherently to Him; it is His exclusive prerogative. It is our responsibility to acknowledge it, reflect it, and make it known. As the answer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism question 1 puts it, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." Amen. ■



Praying Together

AS A CHURCH

A PEOPLE GATHERED IN PRAYER

Acts 1:14 sets the tone and pattern for the church prayer gathering—“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication...” True Christians within the church have always been fond of coming together to pray. The church recorded in the Scriptures has always been characterised by prayer gatherings of her members. The early church’s legacy in the New Testament portrays it as wholly given to prayer

in giving thanks to God and pleading for the Gospel work, the preachers, and for fellow believers. Though faced with many treacherous circumstances, the church thrived everywhere by the continuous engagement of her people in prayer.

However, when the COVID pandemic broke out, and safe distancing measures hindered our gathering, the result was that many churches met online for their church

prayer meeting. Our church is one of such. Though our online meetings were held efficiently and orderly, they lacked the joy of us coming together as a congregation to have fellowship with our God and with one another. Truly, it is of the Lord’s mercy that the COVID pandemic has been brought under control worldwide, and thus the enforced lockdown (of almost two years) has been lifted. Through this pandemic episode, genuine Christians all the more appreciate the Scriptural injunction and pattern for church members to get together to pray (cf. Hebrews 10:25). The proper practice is that believers ought to come together in one place for prayer meetings.

BENEFITS OF CHURCH PRAYER MEETING

Certainly, there are unique practical benefits when church members pray together. Though more can be listed as benefits of praying together, a few are listed below:

1. Coming together to pray helps brethren to encourage one another to seek the LORD and His blessings (cf. Acts 2:46–47; Hebrews 10:24–25). We also will be encouraged by others’ exhortations and examples.
2. Coming together to pray unites the congregation. Praying together creates a deep feeling of belonging, resulting in strengthened fellowship and solidarity of the church. The brotherhood within a church that prays together will be healthy and vibrant.
3. Coming together to pray enables the church to receive the Spirit’s

guidance to identify and ordain godly leaders (cf. Acts 1:24; 6:6).

4. Coming together to pray enables the church to seek, find and send Gospel workers for the soul harvest locally and abroad (cf. Matthew 9:38; Acts 13:2–3).
5. Coming together to pray opens our hearts to the struggles, fears and needs of other brethren and reminds us of our duty to intercede for them, as expected by God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:25; Galatians 6:1–2).
6. Coming together to pray provides an opportunity to listen to others pray and improve our attitude, manner and presentation of prayers to God.
7. Coming together to pray increases our faith, knowledge, wisdom and discernment as we hear and understand how the will of God is discerned by the pastors, elders, preachers and deacons who pray for various needs, difficulties, problems, etc.
8. Coming together to pray comforts and strengthens us in our painful situations as others pray for our nourishment, healing, guidance and steadfastness.
9. Coming together to pray grants us an increasing sense of responsibility towards one another, the ministries of the church, and all other matters presented in prayer. Thus, each member grows as a part of God’s glorious purposes worked out in and through the church. Besides, the Lord may then show

us how we can be the answer to someone's need and prayer.

10. Coming together to pray offers us a unique opportunity to witness the answers to our prayers together. It is like the experience of the Jerusalem church (praying together for Peter who was earlier arrested by Herod the king) that was suddenly taken by surprise when Peter, being miraculously released by God's angel, went to them while they were still praying (Acts 12:12–17)!

CHURCH PRAYER GATHERINGS OBLIGATORY

The early New Testament church relied on God through prayer for all their spiritual and physical needs. Through constant collective prayers, the church overcame persecution, apostasy, temptation, and made significant progress in preaching the Gospel and advancing the church's work. What a far cry from the contemporary church! Sadly, in churches of our day and age, prayer meetings attract only the faithful few. May it not be so of our church! We must take care not to be drawn away from the church prayer meeting by laziness, pleasure, business, etc., or even thinking it's an optional activity.

It is downright disobedience and a dishonourable attitude to consider church prayer meetings as not obligatory. Church members and leaders must put off the tendency to think of prayer gatherings as an optional "extra-curricular activity" in the church's life and ministry. Truly, when church members come together to pray, they honour God, who Himself

has sovereignly ordained the corporate praying of the church. God, down through the ages, has been pleased to work out His mighty purposes through the churches that have prayed together. May this same God also grant us the grace to increase our commitment to pray together, and thus be channels of His blessings. ■



Christ's Prayerfulness— Our Pattern

As Christians, we ought to be a prayerful people. The Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments, teach us the importance of prayer—both by exhortation and example (cf. Deuteronomy 4:29; Psalms 50:15; 91:15; Isaiah 55:6; Jeremiah 33:3; Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Philippians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:8; James 5:13–16; 1 John 5:16).

Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, taught His disciples about the necessity

of prayer (cf. Luke 18:1), the manner of prayer (Matthew 6:16–18; 7:7; Mark 11:24–26; 13:33; John 15:7), and the benefits of prayer (Matthew 7:8–11; 21:22; 26:41; Luke 21:36; John 15:16). He also gave an illustration of how we ought to pray (Matthew 6:9–15). Moreover, Jesus assured us of His presence when fellow believers meet to discuss and pray (according to His counsels) concerning matters or problems that would arise in the church (Matthew 18:18–20).

Jesus is our supreme Example. He was in the habit of praying alone, with His disciples, with others, and also before a large gathering whenever it was necessary or deemed fit to Him. Though He was full of grace and glory, truth and might, He humbly prayed. He prayed to praise the Father (Luke 10:21; John 11:41), to yield to the Father's will (Luke 22:42), and to seek the Father's aid for Himself and the people around Him (John 12:27; Luke 22:32; 23:34; John 17:9, 15).

We must follow Christ's example in our Christian lives and ministries, that we may effectively fulfil the Father's will concerning us. We do well to highlight some examples of Christ's prayer patterns for our learning and emulation.

CHRIST PRAYED ALONE

- “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35).
- “And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed” (Luke 5:16).
- “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).
- “And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not...” (Luke 22:31–32).
- Gospel account of Jesus praying in Gethsemane prior to His arrest and crucifixion (Matthew 26:39–44; cf. Mark 14:32–42).

CHRIST PRAYED WITH OTHERS

The following verses show us that Christ prayed while others were with Him:

- “And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him...” (Luke 9:18).
- “And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1).
- “...he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening” (Luke 9:28–29).
- Record of Christ's pastoral prayer for His disciples, who were with Him (John 17:1–26).

CHRIST PRAYED BEFORE A GATHERING OF PEOPLE

- Jesus prayed before John the baptizer and others at His baptism—“Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened” (Luke 3:21).
- Immediately after His upbraiding of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, Jesus prayed to His Father, which was meant to be heard by prospective believers—“I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed

them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Matthew 11:25–26).

- Before the seventy who returned to Him, Christ expressed His joy in the form of a prayer of praise and adoration: “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him” (Luke 10:21–22).
- Jesus “gave thanks” to God (Mark 8:6; cf. John 6:11) and “blessed” the food (Mark 8:7; cf. Luke 9:16) before thousands of people, as He was about to provide food for them.
- At the grave of Lazarus, before all who had gathered there, “Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 11:41–42).
- Before the Jews and Greeks who were gathered around, Jesus prayed as His heart was troubled—“Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name” (John 12:27–28a).
- From the cross, Jesus prayed for those who crucified Him, saying,

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

CHRIST'S WARNING AGAINST HYPOCRISY IN PRAYER

A note of clarification here. Public display of piety with a deliberate intent to impress, along with long and ritualistic prayers, is frowned upon by Jesus. In fact, Jesus did especially warn against hypocrisy in prayer: “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward” (Matthew 6:5). Unfortunately, some overly-reactive believers have used this warning of Jesus as a reason to renounce all public prayer. However, neither the Lord nor the Scriptures ever taught against praying in public. As has been abundantly shown above, Christ often prayed in the presence of His disciples and in public. The Old and New Testament records are also replete with instances of godly men praying in public.

Thus, what we all should rather avoid is praying hypocritically, whether it be in public or in private. It is not an outward display of piety that God desires, but our hearts' humility, repentance and faith. May we continually look unto Jesus, who is not only the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2a), but is also our supreme Example, whose prayerfulness ought to set the pattern for our prayer life. ■



Prayer Pattern OF THE EARLY NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The New Testament records how the Holy Spirit guided the early church to thrive in prayer. From the beginning of the New Testament church, prayer was offered continuously—individually and collectively by the believers. Public prayers were common in the church of the apostolic era. In the Book of Acts itself, there are recorded about 50 instances of prayer—both public and private prayers.

Persistent prayers of the apostles and early believers played a major role in advancing the Gospel work and establishing churches in Israel, Asia Minor, Europe, and even to the ends of the earth. Through prayer, Christians persevered and progressed in their spiritual growth, and established churches amid great opposition and persecution arising in most places.

COMMUNAL PRAYER GATHERINGS

Right from the inception of the church, believers had gathered to pray. Such gatherings of believers were regular and frequent. The following records in the Book of Acts give evidence to the believers' commitment to collective prayer in the early churches. Some of those instances of communal prayers were pre-arranged, while others were spontaneous:

- “These (the apostles and early disciples) all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:14).
- “And they (the first church in Jerusalem) continued stedfastly

in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

- “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour” (Acts 3:1).
- “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).
- “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).
- “Peter ... was kept (by Herod the king) in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5).
- “And ... he (Peter) came to the house of Mary the mother of John, ... where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12).
- “As they (the church at Antioch) ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul ... And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2–3).
- “And when they (Paul and Barnabas) had ordained them elders in every church (which they had established in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch in Pisidia), and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23).

- “And when he (Paul) had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all (the Ephesian elders who came down to meet Paul at Miletus)” (Acts 20:36).
- “And when we (Paul's missionary team) had accomplished those days, we departed ... and we kneeled down on the shore (at Tyre, on way back from third missionary journey), and prayed” (Acts 21:5).

The early believers met together to pray whenever and wherever they found it necessary. Having no church building, they met in homes which were large enough to accommodate their gatherings. They also met to pray in the temple and in synagogues until they were forbidden from those places by the Jewish authorities. On occasion, they would meet in public places, like riverbanks and the seashore, to pray. When in trouble, those who were together would pray, like Paul and Silas who prayed in their prison cell!

In all those instances of communal prayers, believers met with one accord to pray (cf. Acts 1:14; 2:42, 46–47; 4:24). They were all in harmony about what had been uttered to God in prayer. The ones who prayed articulated the thoughts of all who had gathered to pray. In their prayers, they praised God (cf. Acts 2:47), submitted their petitions in conformity to the Scriptures (cf. Acts 4:24–28), prayed for the preachers of the Word (cf. Acts 4:29), asked for healing and strength for their persecuted and afflicted brethren (cf. Acts 4:30), as well as pleaded for the spiritual progress and protection of the believers and their works (cf. Acts 14:23; 15:40).

PERSONAL TIMES OF PRAYER

The apostles and the early Christians also spent time in personal prayer to God. They prayed at various times—morning, afternoon, evening, night. Some even fasted and prayed for several days. In their prayers, they worshipped God and made requests for themselves, for others, and for the Lord’s work. The following are a few instances of the many personal prayer times mentioned in the New Testament:

- At the time of his extreme physical pain, trauma and death, Stephen, who was stoned, called “upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he knelt down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:59–60).
- “But Peter put them all forth, and knelt down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up” (Acts 9:40).
- “On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour” (Acts 10:9).
- “And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God” (Acts 10:30–31).

- “Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy” (Philippians 1:4).

IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER

Whether it be communal or personal prayer, the believers in the early New Testament church were engaged in prayer happily and confidently—“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14–15). They prayed on many subjects, but always submitting to God’s will as revealed in His Word.

Let it also be our joy to pray for one another in our communal and private prayers, for it is a privilege and duty which God’s Word teaches us for the edification of the body of Christ. God has given Christ to be the Head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22), and will supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Christ (Philippians 4:19). Indeed, God has given us His best—His own Son. How much more shall He give good things to them that ask Him? (Matthew 7:11). No wonder Paul confidently declared: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20–21). ■



When God Answers “No!”

Down through the ages, there have been Christians who have suffered from painful sicknesses and other tragedies in life. It goes without saying that some have probably struggled with the fact that God did not grant them their request for deliverance. Some may have their hearts occasionally filled with a sense of bitterness when God’s answer to their prayers for healing had been an emphatic “No!” Some others may feel the disappointment that their persistent prayers had not been granted. Yet others

may wonder whether the negative responses from God mean that their faith is not genuine.

Some true believers may actually experience such bitterness, disappointment, and doubts from time to time. But these are not necessarily a sign of lack of faith in the Saviour. Rather, those feelings are a manifestation of their souls’ struggles for an answer to the questions that emerge out of their sufferings. Their sufferings are like a daily “companion”

that reminds them of God's refusal to grant them their requests. Some of us will sooner or later encounter painful and devastating sufferings, or experience serious reverses due to a sudden turn of events for the worse. It is therefore important for us to affirm in our hearts the promises and principles of the Scriptures, that we may learn to endure our trials, even when God sometimes answers "no" to our prayers.

This article seeks to highlight some pertinent biblical truths that are of great encouragement to brethren who are in the midst of their gruelling trials.

FIRSTLY, THEY ARE NOT GUILTY OF LACK OF FAITH

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus told His disciples that if they had faith as small as a mustard seed, they could move mountains. So, many affected people wonder whether it is because of their lack of faith that no miraculous deliverance occurs. Consider the following scenario, which is quite common among modern Christians:

A Christian who is afflicted with some sort of physical ailment asks a friend, "Do you think God would heal me if I ask Him?" "Of course He will", the friend assured him. "But you mustn't doubt. The slightest trace of doubt may prevent you from being healed." So the ill person spends hours reading the Bible—especially about God's mighty power and wonderful promises—in order to strengthen his faith. Finally, he feels "ready" to pray. He prays by himself, with the members and pastor of his church, and even attends a "healing service". But he doesn't get healed. "What happened? What went

wrong?" he asked. He was then told, "The problem isn't with God. He's ready and waiting. The blame must be yours. You probably didn't really have enough faith and trust in God all the way."

This writer had witnessed the anguish of a handicapped man when he was told by a group of "prayer warriors" in a huge "faith-healing" session that it was his lack of faith that prevented him from being healed during the session. He appeared fervent in prayer—but only to be told at the end that he did not have good faith! That man left the meeting with a flood of guilt, questioning his faith.

In contrast, Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12 about a painful experience in his life. He called it "a thorn in the flesh" (v. 7). As we would expect, Paul pleaded with the Lord to take it away: "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me" (v. 8). Three times he prayed that it would be removed from him. God said "no" to Paul's request on each occasion. Now, certainly Paul had faith. In fact, in the accounts of his missionary journeys recorded in the Book of Acts, he had prayed in faith and others had been healed. He even wrote, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). So, we must understand that sometimes God may not grant us our requests, though they are made in faith.

SECONDLY, PRAYER OF FAITH IS SUBMISSIVE AND NOT EXACTING

Without doubt, Paul possessed a rich, full and dynamic faith. Though he prayed for "the thorn" to be removed, yet God allowed it to remain. This

tells us that faith is more than the appropriation of God's power for our wishes. In His infinite wisdom, and for the ultimate good of His people, God will sometimes say "no" to the prayer of faith. In so doing, His people are usually called to experience and manifest an even greater faith.

Suffering Christians need stronger faith to live with persistent problems than to be healed. Thus, we must understand the prayer of faith as not merely submitting our needs to God, but as submitting ourselves to Him.

THIRDLY, THEY ARE STILL LOVED BY GOD

We do well to also note that when God said "no" to his request, Paul did not say, "God doesn't love me. If He did, He would heal me. I can't believe a loving God wants me to live with this unpleasant condition."

It is not uncommon for a parent caring for her terminally ill child to say in frustration: "I have prayed repeatedly for God to heal my child. If God loves him, He would have healed him. If He had any regard for me, He would have healed him. I no longer know if He is really there, or if He really loves me or my son." If one day we come to a similar heart-wrenching situation, where God did not answer according to our requests, let us recall our Lord Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane (cf. Matthew 26:38–42). Though Jesus prayed three times for the removal of the bitter "cup" of His impending death, the Father did not say "yes" to that request. However, we know that the Father loves His Son very much. Yet, Jesus was not delivered

from His agonising misery. Could Jesus have doubted the love of the Father? Certainly not! Neither could we doubt the love of the Father who gave His own Son to die for us.


Paul understood this one unalterable truth that can never be questioned: God who "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). That is why he refused to complain when God said "no" to his request. In fact, drawing from his deep faith and victorious experiences through the Spirit, Paul wrote: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35–39).

Notice Paul did not stop with the words, "...we are more than conquerors". He added, "through him that loved us". Truly, it is God's love that gives us the power to conquer, even amid those miserable circumstances from which we have asked to be delivered. So dear Christian, when sometimes the answer to your prayer is "No!", realise that you're not guilty of lack of faith, and remain submissive to God's will, and remember that you're still loved by God. ■

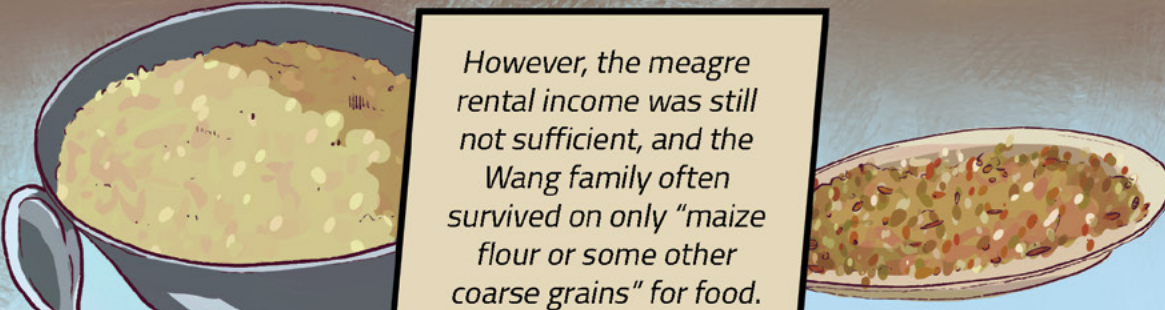
Wang Ming Dao

(1900-1991) - Part II

Retold by Jenny Lok
Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

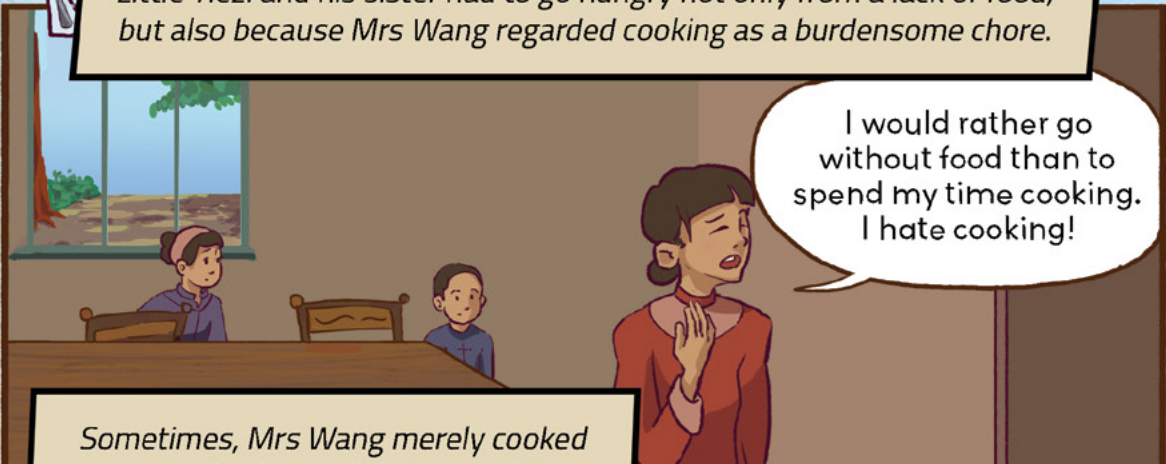


Mrs Wang eventually found a few tenants who would rent the spare rooms in her house.



However, the meagre rental income was still not sufficient, and the Wang family often survived on only "maize flour or some other coarse grains" for food.

Little Tiezi and his sister had to go hungry not only from a lack of food, but also because Mrs Wang regarded cooking as a burdensome chore.



I would rather go without food than to spend my time cooking. I hate cooking!

Sometimes, Mrs Wang merely cooked one meal a day, and that was all the food the two children had for that day!

In order to quell their hunger, the poor kids were forced to venture out into the street to buy several baked cakes to fill their growling stomachs.




It was no wonder that Tiezi frequently suffered from many physical ailments!

In truth, the Wang family had lost three kids (born after their eldest daughter but before Tiezi) to poor nutrition and ill health.



Despite the fact that Mrs Wang never loved cooking, she was very diligent when it came to household chores like laundry, needlework or sweeping the living quarters and the courtyard. For such work, she could go on for almost the whole day, even without a short break.



Fortunately, for Tiezi and his older sister, their grandmother tried to cook most of their meals and that kept them from further illness.

Mrs Wang realised, a few years later, that she needed even more income to sustain her family.

To do that, she converted an outbuilding into another room suitable for renting out.

With time, she also put up more rooms to increase her funds, so as to feed her growing children.

Nevertheless, having additional income means more trouble and inconvenience for the Wang family.



A very distressed Mrs Wang would often complain to her family,

I wonder what I have brought upon myself!

These neighbours of ours, about thirty of them from eight families, are giving me the biggest headache of my life!

Ma, we have no male adult person here to defend us.

See the way they bully us – being unreasonable, rowdy, rude, and sometimes failing to pay their rent, as well as engaging in gambling and shady activities.

I hate to listen to their frequent cursing and swearing!

I am indeed losing my patience with these hooligans. I feel like scolding them but it may lead to more quarrels and loss of temper, which I am prone to.

Maybe I should just give up renting out the rooms. At least we have some peace!

But we need the income!

Precisely! We do need money to survive. Well, though our neighbours' behaviour is most undesirable, we just have to grin and bear it!

Young Tiezi (Iron Son)
[also called 'Deh-Shung' (Virtue-Victory), a second name given by his mother before he started formal education] realised that the family needed to save money.

He started a daily routine of collecting rubbish for fuel from outside his rich neighbours' houses. Oftentimes, he was clad in clothing so thin that he suffered from frostbite during winter.

His dry and cracked hands made writing extra painful. However, Tiezi's extreme poverty did not stop him from learning to read and enquire about things around him.

He loved to tag along with his mother as she moved around the house, asking her for the pronunciation and meaning of Chinese characters he came across, and also posing endless questions about many things.

Interestingly, even at the tender age of between six and nine, little Tiezi's mind frequently dwelled on life and death issues. He would ask himself the following questions:

"What really is the meaning of human life?"
"Where do people go in the future?"
"Is there anything beyond death?"

Some of the replies he received went like these:

Dead, dead, dead, and that's the end.

After death a person is reborn according to his past conduct. He may be a rich man or a poor man, but he may be changed into an animal or a bird, or an insect or a fish.

All must die.

The good go to heaven but the bad are bound in iron chains by small demons to receive all kinds of punishment in hell.

When people die, it's like extinguishing a lamp.

Tiezi pondered over the answers to his questions and thought to himself,

Dead – gone!

What a hopeless future!
I cannot accept this! There has to be a road to life!"

He was troubled and sought an opportunity to find out more.

He approached his uncle for a possible solution to his agony.

Uncle, can one actually avoid death?

Yes!

How can you do that?

Go into the mountains.

Leave all worldly cares; deny yourself all that you enjoy;

engage in some meditation;

drink only the dew on the grass and on the leaves.

For food, dig up the fungus from the floor of your cave.

Gradually, you'll become immortal; you will not die!

Uncle, please bring me to the mountains to cultivate virtue!

But you've to give up all pleasure as well as fame and wealth of this world.

Won't it be very difficult for you to do that?

Yes, I'm willing to give up everything! I must escape death!

Oh, wait a minute. I'm rather busy at the moment.

Maybe the next time.

Well, when I grow up and become an adult, I want to find my way to the mountains and seek the path to immortality!

Tiezi comforted himself with this thought.

At the age of nine, Tiezi started attending the Tsui-Wun Lower Primary School run by the London Mission (London Missionary Society). This time, Mrs Wang gave Tiezi a third name, 'Yong-Shung' (Eternal Abundance). His teacher was Mr Yu, a very strict disciplinarian of between fifty and sixty years old. Mr Yu's son, a medical student, also helped in the teaching.

Yong-Shung (Tiezi) adjusted readily to his new school, where he studied subjects like "Arithmetic, History, Geography, Ethics and Chinese Literature".

Reading the writings of Confucius, a well-known Chinese philosopher and teacher in ancient China, was a must upon entering the school.



Mr Yu had high hopes that Yong-Shung would become an outstanding student as he often topped the class. Yong-Shung was truly on cloud nine as Mr Yu regularly showered him with much attention and praise. Slowly, Yong-Shung became more and more confident in his ability to do well in his studies.

He began to spend more time playing than doing his school work.

As the saying goes, "Pride comes before a fall", and Yong-Shung soon found himself unable to make the grade.

One afternoon, Yong-Shung told his mother

Ma, Mr Yu wants to see you.

Has something happened? You have been doing well in your studies, I suppose he shouldn't be finding fault with you?

Don't worry.

Surely Mr Yu has kind words to say about you!

(To be continued)

BIBLE TRIVIA—JOSHUA 2

SARAH YONG

As the new leader of the children of Israel, Joshua sent out two men to secretly spy out the land of Canaan.

A. Read the passage from Joshua 2:1-24, and then fill in each blank with a helping word from the box given, to complete the biblical story.

children	dried	fainted	forth	house	land
Rahab	stalks	scarlet	time	wall	

Joshua sent out of Shittim two men to view the 1) _ _ _ , even Jericho. They came into the house of an harlot, named 2) _ _ _ _ , and lodged there. It was reported to the king of Jericho that men of the 3) _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ of Israel had come to search out the country. So, he sent his guards unto Rahab's house to bring 4) _ _ _ _ _ the men who had entered into her house. She replied that the men had already left at about the 5) _ _ _ _ of shutting of the gate, but actually she had hidden them under 6) _ _ _ _ _ of flax in the roof of her house.

According to Rahab, all the inhabitants of the land had 7) _ _ _ _ _ because they heard how the LORD God of heaven had 8) _ _ _ _ up the water of the Red Sea, and helped them destroy the two kings of the Amorites. She then pleaded with them to show kindness unto her father's 9) _ _ _ _ _ , that her family be saved alive when the LORD hath given them the land. The spies agreed and were let down by a cord through the window, for Rahab's house was upon the town 10) _ _ _ _ . Before they escaped, they instructed her to bind the 11) _ _ _ _ _ _ _ cord in the window and to bring all her father's household into her home, that they be not destroyed.

B. Fill in the blanks below, using the bold letters from the respective answers above (according to their corresponding question numbers). This will reveal a reminder from God's Holy Word.

Thou shalt not _ _ _ _ _ .
 2 3 1 8 4 1 6 9 3 10 5 11 7 3 9 9

Answers to Bible Trivia—Joshua 1 (Vol. 24, Iss. 2, p. 29)

Joshua: "Son of Nun"; "Strong and very courageous"; "Moses' Minister"

God's Law: "Meditate therein day and night"; "Turn not from it to the right or to the left"; "Shall not depart out of thy mouth"; "That thou mayest observe to do accordingly"; "In obeying it, thou shalt have good success"

Promised Land: "An inheritance which I swear unto their fathers"; "Unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun"; "All the land of the Hittites"; "From Lebanon even unto the great river, Euphrates"

25th Bible Witness Retreat

The God of Covenant

Speaker: Pastor Prabhudas Koshy

Dates: 4th–6th September 2024 (Wed–Fri)

Timings: 10.00am–4.00pm

Venue: Gethsemane Media Centre

33 Ubi Crescent, Singapore 408584

The 25th Bible Witness Retreat will be held during the September 2024 school holidays in Gethsemane Media Centre (GMC). Please register for the retreat at **biblewitness.com/covenant**

A concurrent programme for children aged 4 to 12 will also be held in GMC.

