



READINGS

for the Week of Prayer

Friday, December 3 to
Sabbath, December 11, 2021

"... The Father of Our Lord

Jesus Christ
of Whom the Whole

Family

in Heaven and Earth Is Named"

Ephesians 3:14, 15

INTRODUCTION

"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, That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. 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."

This prayer of the apostle Paul references a unity through lineage and as members of the Lord's family of those who identify themselves and belong to Him as their Father, to Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and to the Holy Spirit as the Presence of God in them. The attributes, fullness, and magnificence of divine blessings poured upon humanity surpass all human description, understanding, and measure. Divine grace and unfathomable riches of glory are shared by and unite the "family in heaven," unfallen beings, and the "family on earth," fallen human beings. Faith and love make it possible to understand and receive those blessings, for God knows full well what He is dealing with in the weak, sinful human nature.

The exalted spiritual blessings contained in the apostle's amazing prayer are

for the purpose of bringing man up to God's level. The Creator wants man to fathom His great love in its breadth, length, depth, and height! Words we can use for the concepts the prayer includes are "powerful," "limitless," "transcendent," and "timeless"! All through the ages, the church, the body of Christ, whose purpose is to receive, amplify, and share that saving love, is purified and made able to give to the world the living hope of His glory, grace, and soon coming.

"Through faith in Christ we become members of the royal family, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. In Christ we are one. As we come in sight of Calvary, and view the royal Sufferer who in man's nature bore the curse of the law in his behalf, all national distinctions, all sectarian differences are obliterated; all honor of rank, all pride of caste is lost. The light shining from the throne of God upon the cross of Calvary forever puts an end to man-made separations between class and race. Men of every class become members of one family, children of the heavenly King, not through earthly power, but through the love of God who gave Jesus to a life of poverty, affliction, and humiliation, to a death of shame and agony, that He might bring many sons and daughters unto glory.

"It is not the position, not the finite wisdom, not the qualifications, not the endowments of any person that makes him rank high in the esteem of God. The intellect, the reason, the talents of men, are the gifts of God to be employed to His glory, for the upbuilding of His eternal kingdom. It is the spiritual and moral character that is of value in the sight of Heaven, and that will survive the grave and be made glorious with immortality for the endless ages of eternity....

"All who are found worthy to be counted as the members of the family of God in heaven, will recognize one another as sons and daughters of God.... They know that they are to wash their robes of character in His blood, to find acceptance with the Father in His name, if they would be in the bright assembly of the saints, clothed in the white robes of righteousness." —*Review and Herald*, December 22, 1891.

The Week of Prayer should be an occasion for the believers to meet in church, at home, or virtually. Let each reading be considered with reverence, a willingness to learn, and active participation through prayers and discussion of the subject. The last Sabbath will be devoted to fasting, prayer, and giving. The reading that day should be presented as a sermon for the service, after which the annual gathering of the offering will take place. Each giver should place his offering in an envelope on which he has written a Bible verse expressing his desires, experiences, gratitude, and praise. The gifts will be dedicated to the opening and sustaining of new fields under the responsibility of the General Conference. "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

—The brothers and sisters of the General Conference

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READINGS

for the Week of Prayer

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*"... THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS
CHRIST, OF WHOM THE WHOLE FAMILY
IN HEAVEN AND EARTH IS NAMED"*

Ephesians 3:14, 15

"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, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." Ephesians 3:14-16.

He [Christ] declares, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." This unlimited power it is our privilege to claim.

The glory of God is His character. While Moses was in the mount, earnestly interceding with God, he prayed, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." In answer God declared, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." ...

The glory of God—His character—was then revealed: "The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."

This character was revealed in the life of Christ. That He might by His own example condemn sin in the flesh, He took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh. Constantly He beheld the character of God; constantly He revealed this character to the world.

Christ desires His followers to reveal in their lives this same character.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Today it is still His purpose to sanctify and cleanse His church "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." ... No greater gift than the character that He revealed can Christ ask His Father to bestow upon those who believe on Him. What largeness there is in His request! What fullness of grace every follower of Christ has the privilege of receiving!

God works with those who properly represent His character. Through them His will is done on earth as it is done in heaven. Holiness leads its possessor to be fruitful, abounding in every good work. He who has the mind that was in Christ never becomes weary in well-doing. Instead of expecting promotion in this life, he looks forward to the time when the Majesty of heaven shall exalt the sanctified ones to His throne....

O that we might more fully appreciate the honor Christ confers upon us! By wearing His yoke and learning of Him, we become like Him in aspiration, in meekness and lowliness, in fragrance of character, and unite with Him in ascribing praise and honor and glory to God as supreme. —*The Signs of the Times*, September 3, 1902.

The spiritual strength here spoken of is something that we may each obtain; but how shall we get it? Perhaps we are in darkness, feeling weak and discouraged and that God does not love us. If so, we are not to give way to feelings; feeling has nothing whatever to do with the matter. We are to take the Word of God as it reads, the words of Christ as He has spoken them.

WALKED WITH GOD

Hear these words of our Saviour: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock." It is the privilege of every one of us to build upon the Eternal Rock; then we shall not dishonor God, nor by our words and actions scatter away from Christ....

When you have thrown yourself upon the mercy of God, and taken Him at His word, and yet the enemy comes, and suggests your faults and failings, and tells you that you are no better than before you sought the Lord, you can point to Jesus, and repeat His promises, and tell what He has done for you.

The apostle continues: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." While this divine fullness has been placed within our reach, how easily we are satisfied. We have accustomed ourselves to think that it is enough to have a knowledge of the truth without its sanctifying power. Just a little sip at the fountain of life quenches our thirst. We do not come again and again to drink. But this is not in accordance with the mind of God. Our souls should be continually athirst for the water of life. Our hearts should ever go out after Christ, longing for communion with Him. It is hungering and thirsting after righteousness that will bring us the full measure of His grace.

Enoch "walked with God"; but how did he gain this sweet intimacy? It was by having thoughts of God continually before him. As he went out and as he came in, his meditations were upon the goodness, the perfection, and the loveliness of the divine character. And as he was thus engaged, he became changed in the glorious image of his Lord; for it is by beholding that we become changed. —*The Signs of the Times*, August 18, 1887.

In the church, officers are appointed as co-workers with God for the edification of the body of Christ. Mothers and fathers who are doers of the Word of God are a part of the body of Christ. They nurture and admonish their children in accordance with God's Word, raising up a little army to stand under Christ's banner. They are God's witnesses, showing to the world that they are under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Christ is their pattern and they educate their children to know God.

In the prayer Christ offered in behalf of His disciples just before His betrayal and crucifixion, He said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Should not every family on earth be a symbol of the family in heaven? In each household should there not be heard songs of praise and thanksgiving?

THE HUMAN FAMILY

The family whose members love God and one another, who do not get provoked, who are longsuffering, forbearing, kind, is a symbol of the family above. The members realize that they are a part of the great firm of heaven. They are taught by the laws of mutual dependence to rely upon the great Head of the church. If one of the members of such a family suffer, all the rest suffer. The suffering of one entails suffering on the other. This should teach the youth to take care of their bodies, and to pray to be preserved in health, because when they suffer from disease, the whole family partakes of their suffering.

Those men and women who have determined to serve God will seek to govern their families so that they may correctly represent the religion of Christ. The children will be taught to be tidy and useful, to share the burdens of the home, not allowing the parents to bear any [burden] which they can carry. Thus the lot of mother and father is made much easier. The whole family shares the blessing of the helpfulness of its members.

Why do not parents come to Jesus just as they are, asking for His forgiving grace and healing power? Why do they not plead to be endowed with capabilities that will enable them to rule their households aright? ...

God is robbed when men and women do not connect with Him in such a way that mind, soul, and strength may be controlled by the Holy Spirit. The family of God here below should cooperate in the most perfect harmony with God's appointed agencies in the work of molding the human character after the divine similitude. —*Manuscript 1*, January 19, 1899.

The price paid for our redemption, the infinite sacrifice of our heavenly Father in giving His Son to die for us, should give us exalted conceptions of what we may become through Christ. As the inspired apostle John beheld the height, the depth, the breadth of the Father's love toward the perishing race, he was filled with adoration and reverence; and, failing to find suitable language in which to express the greatness and tenderness of this love, he called upon the world to behold it. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." 1 John 3:1. What a value this places upon man! Through transgression the sons of man become subjects of Satan. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ the sons of Adam may become the sons of God. By assuming human nature, Christ elevates humanity. Fallen men are placed where, through connection with Christ, they may indeed become worthy of the name "sons of God."

SONS OF GOD

Such love is without a parallel. Children of the heavenly King! Precious promise! Theme for the most profound meditation! The matchless love of God for a world that did not love Him! The thought has a subduing power upon the soul and brings the mind into captivity to the will of God. The more we study the divine character in the light of the cross, the more we see mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness blended with equity and justice, and the more clearly we discern innumerable evidences of a love that is infinite and a tender pity surpassing a mother's yearning sympathy for her wayward child. —*Steps to Christ*, p. 15.

The heart of God yearns over His earthly children with a love stronger than death. In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift. The Saviour's life and death and intercession, the ministry of angels, the pleading of the Spirit, the Father working above and through all, the unceasing interest of heavenly beings, all are enlisted in behalf of man's redemption.

Oh, let us contemplate the amazing sacrifice that has been made for us! Let us try to appreciate the labor and energy that Heaven is expending to reclaim the lost, and bring them back to the Father's house. ... Let us avail ourselves of the means provided for us that we may be transformed into His likeness. —*Steps to Christ*, pp. 21, 22.

Through Christ the hidden glory of the holy of holies was to stand revealed. He had suffered death for every man, and by this offering, the sons of men were to become the sons of God. With open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, believers in Christ were to be changed into the same image, from glory to glory. The mercy seat, upon which the glory of God rested in the holiest of all, is opened to all who accept Christ as the propitiation for sin, and through its medium, they are brought into fellowship with God. The veil is rent, the partition walls broken down, the handwriting of ordinances cancelled. By virtue of His blood the enmity is abolished. —*Letter 230*, 1907.

The simple story of the cross of Christ, His suffering and dying for the world, His resurrection and ascension, His mediation in the sinner's behalf before the Father, subdues and breaks the hard and sinful heart, and brings the sinner to repentance. The Holy Spirit sets the matter before him in a new light, and the sinner realizes that sin must be a tremendous evil to cost such a sacrifice to atone for it.... How grievous must sin be that no less a remedy than the death of the Son of God could save man from the consequences of his guilt. Why was this done in behalf of man?—It was because God loved him, and was not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, believe in Jesus as a personal Saviour, and have life eternal. —*The Youth's Instructor*, January 19, 1893.

Religion consists in doing the words of Christ; not doing to earn God's favor, but because, all undeserving, we have received the gift of His love. Christ places the salvation of man, not upon profession merely, but upon faith that is made manifest in works of righteousness. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). Not those whose hearts are touched by the Spirit, not those who now and then yield to its power, but they that are led by the Spirit, are the sons of God. To live by the word of God means the surrender to him of the whole life. —*The Review & Herald*, December 31, 1908.

We are to be sons and daughters of God, growing into a holy temple in the Lord. "No more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; ... built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:19, 20). This is our privilege.... —*The Review & Herald*, March 19, 1895. Amen. ■

"THE FAMILY IN HEAVEN"

Ephesians 3:15

ORIGIN IN PARADISE

The family's origin is in paradise, a realm of peace, harmony, and happiness. As such, the family is part of the divine creation and reflects the ideals of God's plan and work. All other creatures were created in pairs—male and female—so that they could co-exist and multiply. After the Lord brought them to Adam to name, "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'" Genesis 2:18, *English Standard Version*. God could have created this helper in the same way that He had created man from the dust of the ground. But His plan was different; man's companion must come from man himself. "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man." Genesis 2:21, 22.

The second human being thus had the same nature and dignity as the man. She was also perfect and

noble, reflecting the holy image and likeness of God. That is why, when he saw her, "Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Genesis 2:23, 24. This marvelous event took place in the earthly paradise, a place of great serenity and happiness, so the family came into existence in the ideal environment for enjoying communion and mutual service and to continue the creative work with the animals.

Unfortunately, the entrance of sin altered not only God's plan but also the very nature of people to the point where relations between husband and wife were not always characterized by support and solidarity but by division and adversity. Genesis 3:11-13. Over time, clashes and problems also emerged between children (Genesis 4) and also between children and parents. Genesis 26:34, 35. Then the atmosphere in many families was no longer that of paradise.

WHAT THE FAMILY REPRESENTS

History shows that the heavenly love in the hearts of men cooled and was replaced by separation, divorce, and even polygamy; but God's plan for the human family did not change. In His eyes and in the holy Scriptures, the husband, wife, and children were symbols of God and His people. There are places in His holy word where God presents Himself as the Betrothed, or the Bridegroom, who loves His bride. "For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." "And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord." Isaiah 62:5; Hosea 2:19, 20.

In other places, He promised, as the Father full of love for His son or sons, "I will be his Father, and he shall be My son: and I will not take My mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee." "And He said unto me, Solomon thy son, he shall build My house and My courts: for I have chosen him to be My son, and I will be his Father." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." 1 Chronicles 17:13; 28:6; Psalm 103:13.

These illustrations depict the divine love, harmony, and readiness to serve and sacrifice that must characterize the lives of our families. Is it like this in our families, dear brothers and sisters? Can we say that our lives as fathers are an expression of God's love and that they indeed represent God's love and sacrifice? And, dear sisters, can you say that your constant experience as wives and mothers reflect the love that God has for you? Let us not take weak, poor men and women as the example to follow in dealing with our family members, but rather our Father in heaven, whose love is eternal. "... I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Jeremiah 31:3.

The warm reflections of God's love do not appear only in the Old Testament; similar views of the Christian family are also found in the New Testament. The husband represents the Lord, and the wife is a type of the church.

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 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. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. 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. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. 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 5:22-33.

It is too sublime and beautiful to forget that the members of God's family are presented as betrothed to Him as a pure virgin: "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." 2 Corinthians 11:2. In the description of paradise, in the Old and New Testaments, and also in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, marriage and family continue to represent the relationship between Christ and His church. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for

the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Revelation 19:6-8.

Let us remember how highly the family and family ties are esteemed in God's eyes, and let us determine by His grace to value them that highly in our daily lives. If we do this, the Lord will protect our marriages and families from the snares of evil. We will not face disappointments and bitterness or unfaithfulness, betrayals, or separations; but we will rather be prepared to live together in the eternal kingdom of heaven.

"God designs that the families of earth shall be a symbol of the family in heaven. Christian homes, established and conducted in accordance with God's plan, are among His most effective agencies for the formation of Christian character and for the advancement of His work." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 430.

"The grace of Christ, and this alone, can make this institution what God designed it should be an agent for the blessing and uplifting of humanity. And thus the families of earth, in their unity and peace and love, may represent the family of heaven." —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 65.

FAMILY MEMBER WILL BE KNOWN

Sadly, sickness and death separate dear spouses and beloved family members; but these events are not the end. Death and the resurrection

will not change each person's identity; everyone will recognize each other and their family members. Concerning this, the Spirit of prophecy writes:

"The resurrection of Jesus was a type of the final resurrection of all who sleep in Him. The countenance of the risen Saviour, His manner, His speech, were all familiar to His disciples. As Jesus arose from the dead, so those who sleep in Him are to rise again. We shall know our friends, even as the disciples knew Jesus. They may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured, in this mortal life, and they rise in perfect health and symmetry; yet in the glorified body their identity will be perfectly preserved. Then shall we know even as also we are known. 1 Corinthians 13:12." –*The Desire of Ages*, p. 804.

"Then Jesus' silver trumpet sounded, as He descended on the cloud, wrapped in flames of fire. He gazed on the graves of the sleeping saints, then raised His eyes and hands to heaven, and cried, 'Awake! Awake! Awake! Ye that sleep in the dust, and arise.' Then there was a mighty earthquake. The graves opened, and the dead came up clothed with immortality. The 144,000 shouted, 'Alleluia!' as they recognized their friends who had been torn from them



by death, and in the same moment we were changed, and caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air." –*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 60.

"Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers' arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God." –*The Great Controversy*, p. 645.

DEATH DOES NOT DISSOLVE FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The resurrection will not alter the family relationships; it will not dissolve the wonderful bond that unites God's children in the family. The harmonious, united family here on earth will be united and happy in heaven.

In Israel, there was a belief in the resurrection and the reunification of marriage, but the Sadducees questioned the resurrection. They presented their objection to Jesus by referring to the case of a woman who had been married seven times, because her husbands died one after the other. "Therefore," they asked, "in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven?" Matthew 22:28. Jesus replied by correcting certain misconceptions, but He did not teach the dissolution of the family bond.

We read in the Spirit of prophecy: "We will pray for you and your precious little ones, that you may by patient continuance in well-doing, keep your face and steps always directed heavenward. We will pray that you may have influence and success in guiding your little ones, that you, with them, may gain the crown of life, and that in the home above, now being prepared for us, you and your wife and children may be a family joyously, happily reunited, nevermore to be separated." –*Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 262, 263.

"... The marriage ordinance ... is an ordinance ordained of God, to be looked upon with the greatest solemnity. As the family relation is formed here below, it is to give a demonstration of what they shall be, the family in heaven above. The glory of God is ever to be made first." –*The Adventist Home*, p. 101.

"I warn F. and the rest of the children to prepare to meet Jesus, and then they will meet their mother again, nevermore to be parted." –*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 263.

"When our friends go into the grave, they are beautiful to us. It may be our father or mother that we lay away: when they come forth, those wrinkles are all gone, but the figure is there, and we know them...." –*In Heavenly Places*, p. 353.

NO NEW MARRIAGE OR GENERATION OF CHILDREN

The fact that after the resurrection families will be reunited means that the previous family bond will not be dissolved but will continue

to exist. However, this should not lead one to think that redeemed will continue to celebrate new marriages and have other children. In His conversation with the Sadducees mentioned above, the Lord made this clear, for He said: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God heaven." Matthew 22:30. We read the same thing in the Testimonies. "There are men today who express their belief that there will be marriages and births in the new earth, but those who believe the Scriptures cannot accept such doctrines. The doctrine that children will be born in the new earth is not a part of the 'sure word of prophecy.' The words of Christ are too plain to be misunderstood. They should forever settle the question of marriages and births in the new earth. Neither those who shall be raised from the dead, nor those who shall be translated without seeing death, will marry or be given in marriage. They will be as the angels of God, members of the royal family." –*Medical Ministry*, pp. 99, 100.

THE FAMILY IN HEAVEN

"There the redeemed shall 'know, even as also they are known.' The loves and sympathies which God Himself has planted in the soul shall there find truest and sweetest exercise. The pure communion with holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels and with the faithful ones of all ages who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the sacred ties that bind together 'the whole family in heaven and earth'—these help to constitute the happiness of the redeemed." –*The Adventist Home*, p. 544.

What should we do if we wish to remain bonded with our loved ones forever? What mutual attentions and tenderness should we practice daily? What efforts should we make so that the family atmosphere is that of the heavenly family? "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children." "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord." Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4; Colossians 3:20.

"The presence of Christ alone can make men and women happy. All the common waters of life Christ can turn into the wine of heaven. The home then becomes as an Eden of bliss; the family, a beautiful symbol of the family in heaven....

"God would have our families symbols of the family in heaven. Let parents and children bear this in mind every day, relating themselves to one another as members of the family of God. Then their lives will be of such a character as to give to the world an object lesson of what families who love God and keep His commandments may be. Christ will be glorified; His peace and grace and love will pervade the family circle like a precious perfume.

"Much depends on the father and mother. They are to be firm and kind in their discipline, and they are to work most earnestly to have an orderly,

correct household, that the heavenly angels may be attracted to it to impart peace and a fragrant influence....

"Fathers and mothers who make God first in their households, who teach their children that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, glorify God before angels and before men by presenting to the world a well-ordered, well-disciplined family—a family that love and obey God instead of rebelling against Him. Christ is not a stranger in their homes; His name is a household name, revered and glorified. Angels delight in a home where God reigns supreme and the children are taught to reverence religion, the Bible, and their Creator. Such families can claim the promise, 'Them that honour Me I will honour.' As from such a home the father goes forth to his daily duties, it is with a spirit softened and subdued by converse with God." –*The Adventist Home*, pp. 28, 17, 27, 28.

**"We want to be prepared
to meet these dear friends
as they come forth in the
resurrection morning.... Shall
we lay hold upon the hope set
before us in the gospel that
we shall be like Him, for we
shall see Him as He is?"**

–*In Heavenly Places*, p. 353.

May the Lord grant us His special grace to do everything on our part to have families that are united, faithful to Him, and in complete harmony, so that the joy and happiness here below will not end but continue and be complete in heaven. May He give us His Spirit of love and tenderness so that our family on earth may be an image of the family in heaven. Amen. ■

"THE FAMILY ON EARTH"

Ephesians 3:15

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Genesis 12:1-3.

God's call to Abraham, while specific and historical, has resonated down through the millennia not only because of its importance, but especially for its spirituality and inspiration for every person and family on earth. It encompassed a command, a mental challenge, a blessing, prosperity, and a unique spiritual experience, all of which are of vital importance in purposeful human existence.

BELONGING

"The message of God came to Abraham, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee.' In order that God might qualify him for his great work as the keeper of the sacred oracles, Abraham must be separated from the associations of

his early life. The influence of kindred and friends would interfere with the training which the Lord purposed to give His servant. Now that Abraham was, in a special sense, connected with heaven, he must dwell among strangers. His character must be peculiar, differing from all the world. He could not even explain his course of action so as to be understood by his friends. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and his motives and actions were not comprehended by his idolatrous kindred. 'By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.' Hebrews 11:8." *—Daughters of God*, p. 24.

It is significant that Abraham had to separate and even uproot himself from everything and everyone that could affect and influence his loyalty and obedience to God. "And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac." Joshua 24:2, 3. Habits, influences, values, priorities, traditions, legacies, and ancestors impact our lives in an imperceptible and yet transformative way, so it is critically important to separate from everything that prevents faithful obedience to God. The variables that define an individual's unique identity must be redefined to make it possible for him to belong to God as his Father in accordance with His divine principles and plans. The apostle Paul expresses this necessity: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." Philippians 3:13. Titus 3:3 describes the life of sin from which there must be an uprooting: "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." However, after the divine belonging is brought about, it is declared: "But after that faith is come,... ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:25, 26. The sense of belonging to God fosters the certainty that one is part of God's great plan and gives the meaning

of life great importance and value, leading to happiness, service to others, and wonderful blessings. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22.

PURPOSE

A Chinese woman who had just learned to read prayed, "Lord, we are going to work among many people who cannot read. Please make our lives open Bibles, so that those who cannot read the Book can read it in us."

When a person's identity is changed to being "born of God" (John 1:13), a new purpose and a promise become part of his being: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing." Genesis 12:2. Growth, expansion, and benevolence characterize this second pillar in the solid existence of the one who is adopted into God's family on earth, along with divinity and infinity.

"Abraham's unquestioning obedience was one of the most striking instances of faith and reliance upon God to be found in the Sacred Record. With only the naked promise that his descendants should possess Canaan, without the least outward evidence, he followed on where God should lead, fully and sincerely complying with the conditions on his part, and confident that the Lord would faithfully perform His word. The patriarch went wherever God indicated his duty; he passed through wildernesses without terror; he went among idolatrous nations, with the one thought: 'God has spoken; I am obeying His voice; He will guide, He will protect me.'" —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 523, 524.

When one by faith obeys the divine call to divine discipleship, his life takes on a whole new perspective and reality. He becomes part of a whole that is much greater than himself, encompassing God's will in his life. He has real joy and satisfaction in desiring goodness and salvation, not only for himself but also in service, dedication, and brotherly love for others. "'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.' Ephesians 3:14, 15. The perception of God's love works the renunciation of selfishness. In calling God our Father, we recognize all His children as our brethren. We are all a part of the great web of humanity, all members of one family." —*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 105.

Understanding the meaning of life and its purpose motivates a person to do or to stop doing something so as to achieve a supreme state of well being that has the highest excellence. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him." Colossians 3:17.

TRANSCENDENCE

The third part of God's call to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 led him beyond time, space, and circumstances. "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." In fact, "transcendence" is a word that designates everything that goes beyond the human comprehension of the three dimensions—space, time, and matter. Thus, a person's being able to overcome sin through the power and grace of Christ transcends human understanding—is far above and beyond it. The plan of salvation, the messianic promises, the incarnation of God's Son, the eradication of evil, and the victory of good are all understood by faith. By faith that works by love, the human being is made able to think beyond his natural ancestry or past and even his existence in the present and cling to real hope.

"From the beginning there have been some whose faith has reached out beyond the shadows of the present to the realities of the future. Adam, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—through these and other worthies the Lord has preserved the precious revealings of His will. And it was thus that to the children of Israel, the chosen people through whom was to be given to the world the promised Messiah, God imparted a knowledge of the requirements of His law, and of the salvation to be accomplished through the atoning sacrifice of His beloved Son.

"The hope of Israel was embodied in the promise made at the time of the call of Abraham, and afterward repeated again and again to his posterity, 'In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.' Genesis 12:3. As the purpose of God for the redemption of the race was unfolded to Abraham, the Sun of Righteousness shone upon

his heart, and his darkness was scattered. And when, at last, the Saviour Himself walked and talked among the sons of men, He bore witness to the Jews of the patriarch's bright hope of deliverance through the coming of a Redeemer." —*Prophets and Kings*, pp. 682, 683.

Felix Carey and his companions, the first Baptist missionaries to Indochina, had to work very hard for seven years before the first convert was baptized. When the churches that were supporting these missionaries saw that after so many years of work there was little of the desired fruit, they became discouraged and tried to withdraw their financial aid. But Adoniram Judson sent the following message to these churches: "I beg the churches that support me, to have a little patience." This mission began in 1814, and in 1870 there were more than one hundred thousand converts.

NARRATIVE

Abram was 75 years old (Genesis 12:4) when he left Haran. After that, important events occurred in different places during his pilgrimage in Canaan. He sojourned in Shechem, Bethel, Ai, and Negev. And then he went to Egypt because of the famine. In addition, he experienced the separation from Lot, the battle against the four kings of Sodom, the meeting with Melchizedek, and then the covenant made between God and him, as well as a time prophecy.

"After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir. And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not

be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness. And He said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it." Genesis 15:1-7.

After almost ten years, because, according to Genesis 16:3, Abram was approximately 85 years old, he spoke to God about his prospects for having offspring. He believed that his servant would be his heir, for although he recalled the divine promises, it required greater faith to believe them. So, God patiently clarified and explained to him how things would be in the future; He even illustrated His words by giving the patriarch a transcendent view of the heavens and telling him to count the stars. Sublime, humanly impossible concepts challenged Abram's spiritual vision concerning his coming descendants. It is very important in our religious experience to recall and reconfirm the promises, experiences, memories, and direction of our walk with God and thus to strengthen and engrave in our hearts and minds those religious principles that raise our experiences above any tribulations, regrets, or common events.

"Temptations will assail, cares and darkness will oppress. When heart and flesh are ready to fail, who throws around us His everlasting arms? Who applies the precious promise? Who brings to our remembrance words of assurance and hope? Whose grace is given in rich measure to those who ask it in sincerity and truth? Who is it that imputes to us His righteousness and saves us from sin? Whose light rolls back the fog and mist and brings us into the sunshine of His presence? O who but Jesus? Then love Him, then praise Him." —*Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 245.

Recalling and setting memorials of experiences with God strengthen our sense of belonging to Jesus. They also pinpoint the time when God gained our attention and highlight the experiences that revealed the progress in our Christian lives, intensify the purpose of our existence, and strengthen the bonds with our fellow believers. Furthermore, gratitude, brotherhood, and spiritual experiences are wonderful results of the shared, increasing religious maturity of God's family on earth.

It is said that the King of Prussia once visited a rural school, where the children had presented an explanation that everything belongs to one of the three kingdoms—mineral, vegetable, and animal. The king then asked, "And I? To which kingdom do I belong?" How should that question be answered? A gracious girl solved the difficulty by answering, "You belong to the kingdom of God." The king was very pleased with the girl's quick response and was deeply moved by the truth she expressed.

"'Glory to God in the highest,' they sang, 'and on earth peace, good will toward men.' Luke 2:14. O that today the human family could recognize this song! The declaration then made, the note then struck, the tune then started, will swell and extend to the end of time, and resound to the ends of the earth. It is glory to God, it is peace on earth, good will to men. When the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings, the song then started in the hills of Bethlehem will be reechoed by the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, saying, 'Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.' Revelation 19:6." —*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 250. Amen. ■

"THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE"

Ephesians 3:16

All of the wealth that we possess comes from God, and Paul in his letter to the Ephesians presents us with two of the greatest riches—grace and glory.

To what does the word “riches,” which Paul used constantly, apply? To abundance, so that all human beings will hear and understand that God’s grace is inexhaustible.

There are people on this planet who are so wealthy that they cannot calculate the enormity of their fortunes; and they could eradicate hunger on the planet, clothe everyone in the world, buy entire countries, and change politics everywhere. But Paul addresses only one class of people—those who kneel and pray to God. According to the richness of His glory, He is the Creator of everything—of all of the planets, galaxies, and everything that exists. That is God’s wealth. Ephesians 3:16.

We have a God who is Lord of lords, King of kings, Creator, and Owner of everything! “But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19.

Therefore, beloved, we will not let the enemy rob us of this certainty of knowing that we have a God who has compassion on His children in this world, who, through this wealth of glory, supplies all our needs. And what are these needs in one’s life and in the life of his family? It may be wisdom, favor, health, finances, love, forgiveness, unity, etc.; and we are rewarded according to God’s benefits, such as goodness, patience, and longsuffering. Many of the needs that He supplies in our lives are not even acknowledged in our prayers, even though He grants them to us every day in His goodness and mercy. We are surprised by God’s providences in our behalf—things that often we do not even imagine. Are we paying attention and recognizing these riches?

GOD’S TWO GREATEST RICHES

We are privileged to receive two of God’s great riches, as I already mentioned—grace and glory. God thus grants us much more than any wealth in this world, even though we do not deserve it.

First is the wealth of grace, “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” “That in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 1:7; 2:7. Nothing can be compared to God’s grace and unconditional love. It is our greatest wealth.

We are redeemed by Him, according to the richness of His grace. He provided the blood of Jesus to free us from the power of sin and to transport us by Christ’s representation into the kingdom of His dear Son.

Following is a list of several aspects of God’s grace: Salvation is by His grace; inheritance in heaven is by the grace of God; the fact that we are children of the kingdom is grace; God’s protecting care that we receive every day is grace; having a home is grace; the work of Christ in us and for us is His grace; and reigning with Christ in glory is grace. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Ephesians 2:8. Thus we can categorically state that Christ is the grace of God to a world of sin and sinners.

Look at these inspired words: "As your soul yearns after God, you will find more and still more of the unsearchable riches of His grace. As you contemplate these riches, you will come into possession of them and will reveal the merits of the Saviour's sacrifice, the protection of His righteousness, the fullness of His wisdom, and His power to present you before the Father 'without spot, and blameless.' 2 Peter 3:14." –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 567.

Second is the wealth of God's glory. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints," "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." Ephesians 1:18; 3:16. Through the power of God, we see the glory of Him who sustains us and works miracles in our lives. There is no greater wealth than to contemplate this glory.

When we speak of God's glory, we are speaking of God Himself. He is not visible to human eyes, so His presence is recognized as the manifestation of His glory. Habakkuk describes His splendor and majesty as His glory, holiness, and uniqueness. "God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise. And His brightness was as the light; He had horns coming out of His hand: and there was the hiding of His power. Before Him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at His feet." Habakkuk 3:3-5.

The prophet Isaiah describes the holiness and glory of God that he saw in vision: "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood

the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." Isaiah 6:1-3.

God also manifested Himself in the midst of the people of Israel in the shekinah, which means "the habitation or presence of God." It was the visible manifestation of God's presence and glory among His people. What a joy for Moses! "And he said, I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory. And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. And He said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by: And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen." Exodus 33:18-23.

In the very beginning, God created man to be a participant in His glory and thus to become like Him; but He also left man free to choose whether or not he wished to participate in that glory.

JUSTICE AND MERCY

He separated himself from God by disobeying the divine command. Adam used his freedom to yield to sin by transgressing God's law! The inspired word explains that God cannot collude with sin.

"The righteousness of Christ will not cover one cherished sin. A man may be a law breaker in heart; yet if he commits no outward act of transgression, he may be regarded by the world as possessing great integrity. But God's law looks into the secrets of the heart. Every act is judged by the motives that prompt it. Only that which is in accord with the principles of God's law will stand in the judgment." –*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 316.

It is impossible for a sinful person to endure the presence of the holy God. He is righteous, and man's sinful condition made it impossible for him to participate in the divine glory, for he sold himself to sin and became the servant of Satan.

Why is it not possible for a slave to save himself? Because he sold himself and would have to be purchased. How possible would it be for a slave to purchase his freedom when everything that he has belongs to his master? What right does he have? None. The person who is begotten of Adam receives sin as his master. Moreover, sin as a master rewards its slaves with death; this is the reality.

And that is not all. Man committed more than one unrighteous act against God. God is righteous, and He cannot live with unrighteousness. In fact, it was not enough for Him to buy the man; he had to repair the unrighteousness. This illustration shows that it always was and still is impossible for man to save himself.

It was Jesus who accomplished this. He put aside His glory, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the virgin Mary, became man, and was tested

as all human beings are. As man, He also had to believe in the Father and obey Him, because unbelief was the sin that Adam committed; he did not believe, and he did not obey God. Finally, when the time came, Jesus died for sinful man; He shed His blood, and He laid down His own life, as the ransom for humanity. "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Ephesians 1:7.

"To His church, Christ has given ample facilities, that He may receive a large revenue of glory from His redeemed, purchased possession. The church, being endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depository, in which the wealth of His mercy, His love, His grace, is to appear in full and final display. The declaration in His intercessory prayer, that the Father's love is as great toward us as toward Himself, the only-begotten Son, and that we shall be with Him where He is, forever one with Christ and the Father, is a marvel to the heavenly host, and it is their great joy. The gift of His Holy Spirit, rich, full, and abundant, is to be to His church as an encompassing wall of fire, which the powers of hell shall not prevail against. In their untainted purity and spotless perfection, Christ looks upon His people as the reward of all His suffering, His humiliation, and His love, and the supplement of His glory—Christ, the great center from which radiates all glory. 'Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 18.

ABUNDANT GRACE

If one lays down his life for a righteous man, it is grace; but Christ gave His life for sinful men and women, thus demonstrating the infinite riches of His grace. The apostle Paul speaks of the riches of divine grace in the plural.

If Jesus had left His throne of glory and come to this world to be treated like a king, that would already have been amazing grace; but no, He did much more than that! He came to this world as a servant. He came to serve those who had voluntarily sold themselves as slaves. He came

to serve, and not only those who were imprisoned. Jesus came to rescue the slaves of sin!

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." 2 Corinthians 8:9.

"The progressive Christian has grace and love which passes knowledge, for divine insight into the character of Christ takes a deep hold upon his affections. The glory of God revealed above the ladder can only be appreciated by the progressive climber, who is ever attracted higher, to nobler aims which Christ reveals." —*Manuscript 13*, 1884.

Thank God for sending His Son and fulfilling His mission. Grace is in Him, and it came through Him. He is all grace. May God help us to accept and rejoice in this grace!

We conclude with the inspiring words of Romans 11:33, 36: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." ■



READING 5

By D. Francis

8

WEDNESDAY

DECEMBER

"STRENGTHENED WITH THE POWER OF HIS SPIRIT"

Ephesians 3:16

MYSTERIES

The New Testament presents various concepts about "mysteries," and the book of Ephesians is no exception to this. According to Biblical analysts, the Greek word *mysterion* appears twenty-eight times in the New Testament, six of them in Ephesians. One mystery deals with the connection between heaven and earth, which was bridged by Christ. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him...." Ephesians 1:9, 10.

With the original mindset and education of a radical Jewish Pharisee, the apostle Paul demonstrated the great mystery of an extreme change in himself in seeking to bring the Gentiles and the Jews into fellowship with Christ. The central theme of his preaching in Ephesus was how, through the atonement of Christ, the Gentiles are adopted as children of

God and united as one body along with the Jews in the church. Here is the power of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesus, this mysterious concept became a cultural revolution.

THE POWER OF HIS SPIRIT IN THE GOSPEL

"On his arrival at Ephesus, Paul found twelve brethren, who, like Apollos, had been disciples of John the Baptist, and like him had gained an imperfect knowledge of the life and mission of Christ....

"These disciples [in Ephesus] were ignorant of the mission of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to His believing people to be the life and power of the church. When asked by Paul if they had received the Holy Ghost, they answered, 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.' Paul inquired, 'Unto what then were ye baptized?' and they said, 'Unto John's baptism.' The apostle then proceeded to set before them the great truths which are the foundation of the Christian's hope." *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, p. 129.

What would be our answer to the apostle Paul's question—"if they had received the Holy Ghost"—if it were asked today? The experience of the converts and the apostle's mission have great lessons for us today, for we, too, are placed in the world to minister to the Gentiles.

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." We are baptized into the body of Christ, the church. There are no more separations or divisions among us. We are united with each other as well as with Christ. Caste, creed, tribe, language, race, traditions, and customs will not separate us any longer. The apostle Paul's experience in the ministry is an encouragement to us today as we seek to reach people who were mostly Gentiles.

THE SPIRIT QUALIFIES CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS

"With deep interest, and grateful, wondering joy, the disciples listened to the words of Paul. By faith they grasped the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and acknowledged Him as their Redeemer. They were then baptized 'in the name of Jesus;' and as Paul laid his hands upon them, they received also the baptism of the Holy Spirit, by which they were enabled to speak the languages of other nations and to prophesy. Thus these men were qualified to act as missionaries in the important field of Ephesus and its vicinity, and also from this center to spread the gospel of Christ in Asia Minor." –*Sketches from the Life of Paul*, p. 130.

The Spirit of prophecy reiterates that one of the primary qualifications to be a missionary is to receive the baptism or the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit was evident in the early apostolic church.

UNDERSTANDING THE GREAT MYSTERY, THE HOLY SPIRIT

"It is not essential for us to be able to define just what the Holy Spirit is. Christ tells us that the Spirit is the Comforter, 'the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father.' It is plainly declared regarding the Holy Spirit that, in His work of guiding men into all truth, 'He shall not speak of Himself.' John 15:26; 16:13." –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 52.

As the apostle Paul presented various mysteries in his epistles, especially in his Epistle to the Ephesians, the Holy Spirit is shown to be a mystery. We do not necessarily need to try to present arguments to define the nature of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, we still need to understand the importance of His presence and work.

HIS NATURE AND PERFECT WORK

"The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. Men having fanciful views may bring together passages of Scripture and put a human construction on them, but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.

"The office of the Holy Spirit is distinctly specified in the words of Christ: 'When He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.' John 16:8. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts of sin. If the sinner responds to the quickening influence of the Spirit, he will be brought to repentance and aroused to the importance of obeying the divine requirements." –*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 52.

HIS SPIRIT EMPOWERS AND CHANGES THE INNER MAN

Jesus explained how God the Father would bless those who ask for the Holy Spirit. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" Luke 11:13. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God to those who believe in Him to provide them with the extra power they need to obey His will, to make changes in the inner man, and to unite them with Heaven.

When the sinner repents, believes in Christ, and is baptized, he is led to the fullest truth by the Holy Spirit. He will do God's will—obey His commandments as part of the heavenly family. In fact, this is how unity is established with the heavenly family, thanks to the Saviour's atonement.

Through the Holy Spirit's power, the repentant sinner unites with the Son and subsequently unites with the Father. This unity with Christ empowers him to perform the divine will to be witnesses on earth, transforming one's inherent evil character into the character of Christ and sharing the gospel through the power of His Spirit. In Acts 1:8 we read: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." Acts 4:33. The presence of the Holy Spirit gave unity, obedience, and empowerment to the

disciples, which led to a considerable transformation of their characters.

THE HOLY SPIRIT FUELS CHARACTER BUILDING

The Holy Spirit is compared to the oil in the candlestick in the Holy Place of the sanctuary. He is the source of light for every person. In the Scriptures, He is also compared to and symbolized by a dove, rain, fire, and wind. He is the substance and essence of power; He loves, reasons, helps, guides, teaches, regenerates, and reproves.

"The promise of the Holy Spirit is not limited to any age or to any race. Christ declared that the divine influence of His Spirit was to be with His followers unto the end." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 49. He will empower the believers of today if we will just ask Him. When we plead for the indwelling of the Spirit, we will experience the mystery of God dwelling in us and taking control of our lives.

"Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." John 14:17.

As many people know, today every airport has moving walkways, which make walking easier and save time. Similarly, the Holy Spirit's presence moves us along smoothly and faster in our spiritual journey, just like a moving walkway.

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things

that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Galatians 5:16, 18.

We human beings tend to gravitate toward sin and sinful ways. This is the sinful human nature, or the evil desire of humans. But the Holy Spirit develops the Christian's character so he may overcome these carnal desires that are so contrary to God's will and character. The definition of sin is the transgression of God's law. 1 John 3:4. Some sins may be categorized as sensual, superstitious, or social. Some of our actions may keep us from feeling that we are transgressing God's law, because we love those sins, and our carnal desires are tuned to worldly culture, habits, environment, and circumstances. However, they are not valid excuses. The Holy Spirit gives us a clear understanding of such situations.

The Holy Spirit also warns us and gives us alerts. If we listen to Him, it is possible for us to take a detour in our spiritual journey and bypass those sinful desires. In this journey, the Holy Spirit also helps us to develop the "fruit of the Spirit," which is found in the book of Galatians.

IF WE LOVE CHRIST, WE WILL INVITE HIS SPIRIT

We may compare our spiritual condition today to that of the disciple Peter, shown in Luke 22. Christ identified the need for change in Peter's heart so that he could be a help to his fellow brethren. Considering the concept of conversion, an unconverted person is of no use to God's church. It is critically important to understand this and be converted. We know that the disciple Peter was with Christ and accompanied Him wherever He went. He learned from Christ and had a willing heart to serve Him. However, Peter's inner life had to change, and this is what Jesus desired. He knew that an unconverted leader would make no progress in His church, so He said to Peter, "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: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Luke 22:31, 32.

However, Peter said to Him in verse 33: "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison and to death." Was Peter ready? No, not at all. He sincerely desired to be a follower of Christ, but he did not know himself and responded according to his innate understanding.

We may be baptized and think that we are converted. We believe that we are with Christ, and we participate in all of the church meetings. The question is, Do we have the conversion that Christ wants of us? Do we understand what it means to be a genuine follower of Christ, to be truly converted and obedient? If we are blessed by His Spirit, there will be no pharisaic legalism or liberalism in our obedience. It will not be based on fear or just a little thought about being saved; rather, we will always yearn to be blessed, which comes from the bottom of our hearts with a genuine desire to please God.

When he was with Christ, Peter was quite ignorant of the Saviour's mission and message, even after spending close to three years with Him. But then, that very same Peter received the Holy Spirit after Christ's ascension, as promised, and the Comforter made the change in Peter. The disciple's misunderstanding about the gospel, transformation of character, and the true meaning of being a follower of Christ disappeared. He was transformed from the disciple Peter to the apostle Peter. It was a significant change! We read in his epistle, 1 Peter 1:21-23: "Who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."

This is the same conversion that we need to have, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ prayed for him, and after that the apostle Peter strengthened many of Christ's followers. His writings in the New Testament are still strengthening the believers today.

Furthermore, Jesus said to His disciples: "If ye shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it. If ye love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever." John 14:14-16.

"Self" must die in us if we are to identify with the life that God desires for us. If we seek for His indwelling power, choose with all our hearts to obey His commandments, and

are willing to change our lives according to His will, we will be blessed abundantly. Obedient disciples are led and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Our priorities definitely matter.

MOODY'S BIOGRAPHY

Dwight L. Moody accepted Christ and was converted in Chicago as a youth. He belonged to the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) for a long time. Eventually, he became an excellent businessman and made a considerable amount of money. During his first visit to Britain and Ireland, Moody heard the words that set him hungering and thirsting for a deeper Christian experience and marked a new era in his life. He happened to speak with Henry Varley, the well-known evangelist of the 1800s, in Dublin, Ireland. His struggle became whether or not to give everything to the Lord. Biographers quoted Moody as follows: "The world has yet to see what God will do with, and for, and through, and in, and by, the man who is fully consecrated to Him." —<http://kenwytsma.com/moody-biography/>. He thought for a moment and then pledged: "By the grace of God, I will be that man." —<https://siena.org>. That decision changed the direction of his life, including a reordering of his priorities. After that, Moody became the most successful American evangelist of the nineteenth century. What will our decision be?

CONCLUSION

Jesus set aside His divine nature and came as a human being to this world. He performed miracles and overcame temptation through the Holy Spirit. He never used His divine power for His own benefit. This shows what happens to human nature when it depends wholly on the Holy Spirit. We, too, need to rely totally on the Holy Spirit. We need to fulfill Jesus' commission through the Holy Spirit's power by choosing to be an instrument in His hands with total commitment. Let us change direction today. Let us pray without ceasing, asking for the Spirit of God more and more. In this way, we will abide in Christ, in the Spirit, as did Enoch. Then our lives will be strengthened with the power of His Spirit, we will succeed in our missions, and we will build our characters in the perfect design of Jesus' character. We need the anointing of His Spirit, the baptism of fire, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Let us make this our priority during this Week of Prayer and in the days to come.

Let us unite ourselves as His representative family on earth with the family in heaven. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." Revelation 22:20, 21. ■

"THAT CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS BY FAITH"

Ephesians 3:17

Dear brothers and sisters around the world, it is a great joy for me to share this message from God's word with you during this Week of Prayer. I pray that the Lord will establish your hearts at the end of this year 2021, a year that brought astounding events showing that the coming of Christ will be soon. I pray that we will all be prepared for eternity.

Ephesians 3:17 is the basis of our reading for today: "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;..." This is a very interesting phrase, especially as related to spiritual life; let's go a little back in history and consider the great mercy that God has had for His people throughout all time.

When the majestic temple that Solomon built in Jerusalem was completed, on the dedication day he knelt in front of Jehovah's altar and prayed before the entire congregation with his hands lifted to heaven. He asked the Lord a question: "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built!" 2 Chronicles 6:18.

The Biblical account (2 Chronicles 7:1, 3) tells that, in response to Solomon's question, God's glory and presence were manifested and filled the

whole house. "And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped and praised the Lord,..." Such power and manifestation were a matter of pride for the people of Israel, because God kept His promise in the temple, above the ark of the covenant.

However, the Scriptures record that, in the second temple, the Lord's presence was face to face and complete in that place when the great Desire of all ages came and taught in person, teaching, performing miracles, and preaching.

Christ entered not only the temple at that time, but also various houses, where He was well received; and from that moment on, nothing was ever the same again, because everything changed radically in His presence. As an example, we can list some of the miraculous events that marked His life on earth: When He entered Zacchaeus' home, salvation was declared for him and his family; there was life in Jairus' home when his daughter was restored to life; and the same thing happened when Jesus was at the home of Martha and Mary after the resurrection of their brother Lazarus brought joy and comfort to his family and friends. These simple examples show that wherever Christ dwells there is salvation, life, restoration, and transformation.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us go back to the theme text, where it says that Christ wants to dwell in our hearts. In his prayer, the apostle makes four specific requests on behalf of the Ephesian believers. He prayed, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." This implies knowing the Lord's thoughts. It also implies a relationship of companionship, fellowship, acquaintance, and God's will for His people's lives. That is why the apostle could say, in Galatians 2:20, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:..."

VISITOR OR FAMILY MEMBER

Throughout all time, and especially today, Christ has not come for just a brief visit. He said to His own in John 15:4: "Abide in Me, and I in you."

He has come to live with us permanently through the Holy Spirit in our lives. And in John 15:5, He stated: "I am the vine, ye are the branches; He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing."

"When the heart is cleansed from sin, Christ is placed on the throne that self-indulgence and love of earthly treasure once occupied. The image of Christ is seen in the expression of the countenance. The work of sanctification is carried forward in the soul. Self-righteousness is banished. There is seen the putting on of the new man, which after Christ is created in righteousness and true holiness." —*Review and Herald*, September 11, 1900.

The word "enthroned" means that Christ is not an occasional visitor; He dwells in the heart of the Christian always to be an inexhaustible source of power that enlightens and purifies the soul. He promised: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him." John 14:23.

How beautiful! The words say, "We will come unto Him, and make Our abode with him;" not, We will pass by and visit him. No! It talks about Their staying in the person and making Their home there!

WHO WILL ABIDE

"As a Christian submits to the solemn rite of baptism, the three highest powers in the universe—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—place Their approval on his act, pledging Themselves to exert Their power in his behalf as he strives to honor God. He is buried in the likeness of Christ's death, and is raised in the likeness of His resurrection....

"The three great powers of heaven pledge Themselves to furnish the Christian with all the assistance he requires. The Spirit changes the heart of stone to the heart of flesh. And by partaking of the Word of God, Christians obtain an experience that is after the divine similitude. When Christ abides in the heart by faith, the Christian is the temple of God. Christ does not abide in the heart of the sinner, but in the heart of him who is susceptible to the influences of heaven." —*Signs of the Times*, August 16, 1905.

The word "abide" does not mean just to be inside of a house, which for the subject we are studying is the heart of the believer, but to be there as at home, totally embraced as a permanent member of the family, not as a stranger or usurper. Furthermore, Christ cannot dwell in a heart that does not joyfully submit to the conditions of heaven. It is necessary for the Holy Spirit to control the entire life of the believer for Christ be at home.

WHAT DOES THEIR PRESENCE DO FOR US?

"If we have Christ abiding with us, we shall be Christians at home as well as abroad. He who is a Christian will have kind words for his relatives and associates. He will be kind, courteous, loving, sympathetic, and will be educating himself for an abode with the family above. If he is a member

of the royal family, he will represent the kingdom to which he is going. He will speak with gentleness to his children, for he will realize that they, too, are heirs of God, members of the heavenly court. Among the children of God no spirit of harshness dwells;..." —*Review and Herald*, September 20, 1892.

"Young man embraces the murderer of his brother in an extraordinary gesture of forgiveness." This was the headline in a newspaper in the U.S.A. in October 2019. The trial of a Texas policewoman who was accused of murder had an extraordinary ending when the victim's brother hugged her in court as a gesture of forgiveness. "If you are really sorry,... I forgive you," said Botham Jean's brother to Amber Guyger. "And I know that if you ask God, He will forgive you."

This moving scene took place at the end of the trial of Amber Guyger, a 31-year-old white policewoman who in 2018 shot her black neighbor in Dallas after entering the wrong apartment, believing it to be her own.

It is very rare today to find a person with a heart that is willing to forgive someone who has caused him pain, because the world we live in has a different way of seeing things. The world says: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth;... love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Matthew 5:38, 43, 44.

However, we do not naturally live or love this way. It is generally very difficult for us to talk about loving our enemies as Christ commanded us, while in fact we sometimes cannot even love our friends and church members in such a way. That is why today, more than ever, we need Christ to dwell by faith in our hearts. It is urgent that the Holy Spirit dwell in us, so that we can show the

world, by testimony, that we belong to the family of heaven. Only when the Spirit is invited into our lives can He do more in our lives than we ever dreamed possible, as did Botham Jean's brother.

Now let me tell you another story, about the life of a man named Luke. He was a Bible worker for a Protestant church in a difficult region of the world, where evangelism is not always easy and many Christians are persecuted for their faith.

According to the story, Luke and his wife had a motorcycle accident while they were on a trip. It happened when they stopped on the side of the road; a drunk motorcyclist came and ran them over. Fortunately, no one was seriously injured, but both motorcycles were seriously damaged.

The man who caused the accident turned out to be the chief of a nearby town. And, even though Luke had very little money, instead of getting angry about this accident, he asked the man: "How are we going to solve this problem?" Very rudely, the perpetrator replied, "You have to fix my motorcycle!" And although it seems incredible, without saying a word, Luke paid for the motorcycle repairs. But the matter did not stop there. Later he went to the village to visit this chief and began to come up with different ways to help him and his family, including offering to go out and plow his field.

Luke did so many things for the chief and his family that the people of the village could not help but notice what was going on. "Our chief is a very tough man," someone said to Luke one day. "Why are you being so kind to him? No one has been able to befriend him!" Luke replied to this surprising statement by saying, "Because I love Jesus, and I want to make His love known to others."

A short time later, some of the villagers asked Luke to teach them more about Jesus. It was not long before Luke began to have Bible studies with several of the villagers, and some of them were baptized.

The most amazing thing about this miracle is that this little town was in an area that Luke had previously tried to enter to spread the gospel, but his efforts had never been successful. Now, through his kindness to the chief, he was able to have an open door there. Think about this for a moment. If Luke had reacted to the accident in the way that most of us would have, he would never have been able to reach the villagers with the gospel of Christ. Can you imagine how different things would be in our world, our families, and even our church if we went the extra mile and served one another with that same selfless humility, even when we had been hurt? For this to happen, Christ must abide in our hearts by faith; it is necessary that He be the One who carries out that work in us for the salvation of many souls.

"We cannot afford to let our spirits chafe over any real or supposed wrong done to ourselves. Self is the enemy we most need to fear. No form of vice has a more baleful effect upon the character than has human passion not under the control of the Holy Spirit. No other victory we can gain will be so precious as the victory gained over self. We should not allow our feelings to be easily wounded. We are to live, not to guard our feelings or our reputation, but to save souls." —*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 486.

MORE NECESSARY THAN EVER BEFORE

Brothers and sisters, we can conclude that when the apostle Paul said that Christ should dwell in the believers, He was referring to the experience of sanctification. The strength of Christians lies in enjoying the presence of Christ in such a way that all areas of their lives are filled with His fragrance to the depths of their souls.

Do not put off this decision, but let Christ dwell in you by faith. It is time to have a clean house so that He can dwell in your heart and feel welcome. Remember, it is not you, but He who lives in you and, most importantly, governs your life. As a result of such an experience, you can serve Him out of love.

"The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 415.

Dear brothers and sisters around the world, today more than ever before, we need to live this experience personally every day. We need to ask Jesus sincerely to come and dwell in our hearts, so that we can show by our testimony that we represent the family of heaven on this earth.

The time we have left is short. What we are living through now tells us that Jesus is coming soon. Ask Him to dwell in your hearts by faith. Life is blessed when God's presence and glory are manifested and fill the home. I sincerely pray that this is our experience before we begin the new year.

Christ is coming soon! Maranatha! Amen. ■

"ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE"

Ephesians 3:17, 18

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, several times He used the phrase "rooted and grounded" as an illustration. Roots are the underground part of plants that provide the stability, nutrition, and water needed by the plant to survive and grow. "... That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;..." Ephesians 3:17, 18.

In this Bible verse, being rooted is presented as the condition for comprehending the truth in its three dimensions. The implication is that otherwise one's comprehension will be limited, incomplete, or partial.

"Faith and prayer are necessary in order that we may behold the deep things of God. Our minds are so bound about with narrow ideas, that we catch but limited views of the experience it is our privilege to have." —*Review and Herald*, November 17, 1891.

THE DECEPTION

According to the famous psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), religion is merely a figment of the human mind and imagination. Is religion really just a theory or imagination? Where is the end of imagination and the beginning of the real experience? The apostle Paul writes: "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." 1 Corinthians 15:13, 14.

The prophet Isaiah also observed this religious phenomenon. He wrote God's command: "Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." Acts 28:26, 27.

How does one move from the abstract to reality, from knowledge to understanding, from theory to action?

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Hebrews 11:3. Faith is a wonderful, mysterious gift that God gives through the presence of His Holy Spirit. However, in our perception of faith, we find a difference between living faith and dead faith. The illusion of the mind may be so convincing that many imagine that they have faith when, in reality, they are far from its real nature. Jesus told His disciples: "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;..." "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen." Matthew 7:21; 20:16. God's definition of faith and religious experience is different from that of man. The apostle James warned the followers of Christ that "If any man among you seem to be religious, and brideth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." James 1:26.

Oh, how sad the end will be for people living in an illusion of faith! We read about the Jewish nation, "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not be-

ing mixed with faith in them that heard it." Hebrews 4:2.

ROOTED BY PRACTICING GOD'S WILL

Thinking about roots, Christ's parable about the seeds falling into different types of soil is rich with meaning. "And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away." Mark 4:5, 6. Jesus explained the meaning of this to His disciples. "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." Matthew 13:20, 21.

The Spirit may be working gradually in the life of the believer. We need to begin cooperating with Him in our small daily endeavors. Faithfulness in the little duties helps us to hear the voice of God and be ready for greater tests. "His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Matthew 25:21.

One marvelous example in the Bible is the experience of faithful Job. He was rooted in the truth by practicing every part of it. "Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees." Job 4:3, 4. The suffering inflicted by Satan shook Job's confidence and faith. He did not understand why so much evil was happening to him. Why did God allow it? In such difficult times, his previous

experience of daily practicing the truth helped him to be grounded in it. He held on to the promises of God and endured. "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." Job 19:25.

This faith is the real one that helps us to grow spiritually and finally enables us to comprehend the "length, and depth, and height" of that which is divine. Job's practical, living faith helped him not only to obtain victory in the time of trouble but also to obtain a deeper knowledge of God. "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee." Job 42:5. Job advanced from an abstract understanding based on hearing to a three-dimensional comprehension of the truth.

ROOTED IN EXPERIENCE

Sometimes God permits us to make miraculous experiences that help us to move from theory to reality and be grounded in the truth. "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." Matthew 9:6.

The God of the Bible really exists. He speaks, hears, answers, and is omnipresent. We do not see Him, but we may see His presence in the movement of the elements. Like the wind, we do not see it, but we see the trees moving under its influence.

An impressive story from Mexico serves as a fitting illustration to these thoughts. A family that was interested in the truth had been studying the Bible for some time with Elder Martin Lagunas, but they hesitated to make the decision to be baptized.

One Sunday afternoon, they packed up their pickup truck to go to the city from their hometown. They saw dark clouds and were worried about a possible rainstorm; but, having no other option, they prepared for their journey. Their prayers were intense, because the truck bed in the back was full of luggage and people. The husband was driving in the cab, but the rest of the family—his wife and children—were sitting in the open truck bed in the back. In Mexico, this is allowed by the traffic regulations.

Sometime later, as they were traveling on the freeway, it began to rain and turned into a storm. Heavy rain was pouring down, and the driver had the windshield wipers set at the highest speed possible. However, not a single drop of water fell in the truck bed in the back! The sister



and her children observed the miracle with fear and joy, for their prayers were being answered. They explained that it was like an invisible barrier surrounding the truck bed. The sister believed she was dreaming, and several times she asked her children if they saw the same thing. Then, she reached her hand outside the truck bed, and her hand got wet and she felt the rain and wind. It was not a dream but reality.

The rain continued for the entire trip—for several hours. On the freeway, a bus with passengers passed next to the pickup. The passengers noticed the phenomenon and began to shout and call to each other to come and see. Arriving in the evening, the family called all the church members to come and witness the miracle, because the car was wet all over except for the truck bed, where everything was dry. Shortly thereafter, the family was baptized, and they are faithful members to this day.

Have you had an experience with God? If so, remember it. If not, then pray for an experience!

ROOTED IN LOVE

The apostle Paul advised the believers to be rooted and grounded in love. According to him, "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." 1 Corinthians 13:8.

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to 'the principalities and powers in heavenly plac-

es,' the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10." —*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

The spirit of service, obedience, and love is the Spirit of Christ. He demonstrated divine love by leaving His heavenly privileges behind and coming to earth to serve humanity. He expects His followers to represent Him on earth as He will represent them in the heavenly courts.

"For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels." "But if any man love God, the same is known of Him." Luke 9:26; 1 Corinthians 8:3.

By practicing love, we "may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; ..." Ephesians 3:18. Amen! ■

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"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, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. 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."

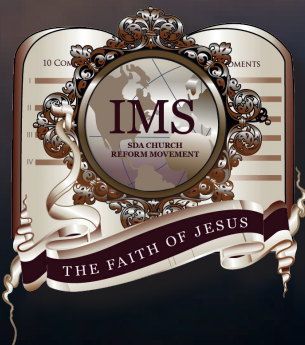
Ephesians 3:14-21.



READINGS

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General Conference