



FUNDAMENTALS OF
CHRISTIAN LIVING

JOHANNES MANTIRI

Fundamentals of Christian Living

By Johannes Mantiri

Introduction

This book attempts to cover some of the basic practices of Christians. There are really three main things I dedicate a chapter to, these are:

1. Prayer,
2. Reading the Bible and
3. Joining a Church community.

These things serve as some sort of checklist for every Christian to see if they might be lacking in any of the three. If you've read up to this part, you pretty much know what this short book is about now and whether you'd still want to continue reading it.

In the first chapter I write about the Christian message, the Gospel, which is the very basic foundation of Christian belief. The next three chapters are dedicated to the three main things, prayer, reading the Bible, and joining a church. I try to explain why they are important, and how to go about them, with an emphasis against strict formulas and methods. The fifth and final chapter wraps it up and also goes, only very briefly, into other Christian basics such as worship, baptism, fasting, etc.

Christianity is a religion, a movement, and most importantly, a mind set, or a world view. It is about 2,000 years old, but many of its principles were built on top of a foundation of ancient Judaism, which dates back perhaps around 3,500 years ago. Many cite the heavy influence of the Christian world view on the development and advancement of Western civilization. Christianity elevates the dignity of the individual person into a divine level, by stating man, and therefore every person, is created in the image of the same God who created the cosmos. This fundamental belief has led to the common law assumption of human 'rights', which did not exist in a widely popular form in past ages. Christianity has also had a significant and profound effect on me in a personal level, and so I wanted to see if I could communicate its principles in a clear way with words in this little book. Thank you for reading.

Chapter One

The Christian Gospel, The Good News

What is the Christian Gospel? Let's first take a look at the world origin. The word Gospel is an old English word that can be translated into 'Good News'. The old English spelling is 'Godspel', which comes from two words 'God' and 'spel'. The English word 'Good' has its roots from God; God of the Bible, being seen as good. The word 'Good', also means excellent, fine, valuable and desirable. These are seen as traits of God. The word 'spel' can mean story, or message, or revelation. So the word Gospel may be translated in different but ways, such as 'God story', 'Good message', 'A message of God', 'A message from God', 'The revelation of God' and even 'The revelation by God'. So the word Gospel encompasses a wide meaning. The most popular English translation of Gospel is simply 'Good news'.

Now, what is important about good news? This probably depends on the individual. Good news, for sure, is mostly desirable. People like good news. We, as people, like to hear good news, and we like to tell it to others. It make them happier to hear it, and makes us happy to convey it. We react well to good news. We rejoice and celebrate when we hear it, and join in rejoicing after we tell it. Imagine a young person that receives news from the mail that he or she is accepted in a prestigious university. Imagine a person that gets a phone call saying they were accepted for a job in a company they applied to and really wanted to work in. Imagine a person that receives a letter from a hospital with medical test results that show they are completely healthy and not sick at all. The Gospel, the good news from God, should (yes should) get us to rejoice, if it is presented to us clearly.

So what is this good news? The short answer is that you, and me, and anyone who is willing, can be in a right standing relationship with God, and that is because God's loves us dearly and wants to be united with us. Now is this really good news? I believe it is to some people. These are people that want it, people that, from the depths of their hearts, do not want to be apart from God.

Now looking at History, religion seems to be as old as human civilization itself. People have worshipped gods in order to gain their favor. To gain a right standing relationship with a transcendent higher authority, or in some religions, a transcendent higher plane. Many religions give conditions that humans must meet in order to gain or earn this right standing, to gain or earn this relationship. In Christianity, God grants this right standing relationship without demanding that we earn it first.

Again, is this truly good news? Well it appears to be for a certain segment of people. A segment of people that want to be in a right standing relationship with God, but do not see themselves as able or worthy to achieve it on their own strength. It may not be important news for people that are not interested in any sort of standing, or in any sort of relationship, with any sort of higher authority.

Right standing and relationship are connected here, but they describe two different things. In the Christian sense, right standing means you and God have accepted each other and are now close in relation. You and God are in good terms with each other. You stand close to God and he stands close to you. Indeed, Christianity makes a bolder claim, one that says you and God are spiritually joined, merged, as one. In the Bible, the word 'Righteousness' can be used to describe this right standing. Now relationship, means you and God have frequent two-way communication with each other. Yes that's right, Christians believe God communicates to them directl, and vice-versa.

Once again, the good news in Christianity, the Gospel, says that God offers this right standing relationship with you, and you do not have to earn it, to gain it. Christianity actually says no one can earn it by their own strength and ability, but only that God will grant it, to whoever is willing, and wants ask it from God directly.

Jesus the Christ and the issue of sin

So where does Jesus Christ play in this Christian good news? To answer this we have to go back to the beginning of the Bible, the book of Genesis, to see

what happened to our right standing relationship with God. The bible starts with God creating man, and that man is created already in a right standing relationship with God. But man chose to live without God, hoping there was another way to live without needing to depend on God. This man cut his relationship with God, not by disobedience, but by a desire to live apart from God, and it is demonstrated through disobedience. Again, man cuts himself from God, not by disobedience, but through disobedience. Here is what I mean, If man disobeyed God but did not want to live independently, his right standing relationship with God would probably remain intact. But what happened was man wanted to live and not have to depend on God,... and he disobeyed God on top of that, in order to get that. There was willing intent involved in man's part.

Man's right standing relationship with God was cut. Man cut it. In Christianity this means man sinned. But some men wanted to get back this right standing relationship with God, other men did not want it back. This situation is still the same right now in the world. Some people yearn to restore a right standing relationship with God, and some people prefer God not interfere with their lives. The good news, to people that want to get back to God (as I mentioned, good news to them only, probably), is that God loves them and wants to get back with them also, and that God has already prepared everything for this reunion. All God needs is man's approval to reunite and rejoin as one. How much does God want to get back with man? Christians believe God wants it so much he is willing to pay the highest price to get back with man. Some of you may know what this price was.

Now about sin. What does it mean when one says man sinned? Sin is taken from an English word meaning 'missing the target'. It was sports term, a word used in the sport of archery, that was popular in England during the middle ages. A person that 'sinned' was a person that did not manage to hit the target with the arrow. The Bible says everyone is a sinner, which just means everyone misses that target, which really means nobody is perfect. Christian tradition over the ages has turned the meaning of 'man has sinned' into 'man is a horrible and wicked creature', which isn't exactly wrong, but the more accurate translation is 'man is not perfect'. This includes all men.

Jesus Christ was the only man that lived a perfect life in the sight of God. Using the archery metaphor, that means he hit the target, right in the bulls eye. He was the only man that lived in a right standing relationship with God. Jesus Christ was able to do this because he was the Son of God, and was God, according to the Bible. He was born of the virgin Mary and was also 'sent' by God to do one big thing on earth. This was to exchange his right standing relationship with God the Father, for man's wrong standing lack of relationship with God. On the cross, when Jesus died, Jesus became sin, and took on our imperfect status into himself. When Jesus rose again from the dead, when he resurrected, he gave us his right standing with God. The Bible says this in the second book of Corinthians.

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)

Men and women that wanted it, could gain a right standing relationship with God (again, this is described as righteousness), because Jesus took our status, and gave us his status. One way I've heard it described is, the great exchange.

This is how we gain a right standing relationship with God. Christianity says that only through Jesus can we gain this right standing relationship. We cannot earn this status, no matter how hard we try in our own effort. Our sins cannot be erased by our good works or by our religious compliance. Think of it this way, if our good deeds could erase our sins, then at best we might achieve a net 'score' of zero, if sin were to give us a negative number and good deeds were to give us a positive number. But God's standard is perfect, and so even the smallest sin would automatically remove our chance of getting a perfect 100% score. No one has lived a sinless life, because nobody is perfect, therefore nobody can earn a right standing relationship with God on their own merit and effort. It can also be seen as a debt that is too high in price that we cannot afford to pay it back. Only another person, a person far richer than us, can pay back this debt. In Christianity, this person was Jesus, and he paid back all our sin debts. He actually over paid them. This is why in Christianity, Jesus is called the Savior. He 'saved' us. He rescued us. He gave us 'salvation'. Jesus did this through death, because the only way to pay the

sin debt was death. The spiritual law that Christians believe is that only death can pay back for sin in any satisfactory way. Death, as in the story in Genesis, means we move away from God. So, Jesus paid out debts of sin. Jesus did this willingly. He sacrificed his life in exchange for us. The bible describes this as the highest form of love in the book of John.

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.”
John 15:13 (NIV)

Our part in salvation

Now one question is, what is our part in all of this? What is our part in salvation? Our part is simply to agree and allow ourselves to be rescued and saved. When we allow this in our hearts, we will want to express this automatically in some outward form. So we might acknowledge it vocally. We make it clear to other people that we willingly accept God's rescue plan. God has paid for the sin debt of every person that ever lived, that is living, and that will live in this world. But the choice to accept this salvation depends on us. God has a gentleman-like nature so he will not push us to accept his rescue plan.

Imagine now a situation where a friend invites you and a bunch of other people to eat in an all-you-can-eat buffet in a restaurant nearby, and says he has already paid for everyone's meal in advance. He asks everyone to follow him as he makes his way to the restaurant. It is free food, and everyone can eat as much as they want. But if some people may choose not follow him and eat there, they will miss out on the meal, even if it has already been paid for. In Christian salvation, we are still given the choice to accept or reject God's invitation.

A Christian is a person has made a decision to accept this invitation of salvation, thus entering into a right standing relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. So now what should a Christian do after this? Well, God still has things he would like to do on earth, and he would like to cooperate with and appoint Christians to do them. God has a plan for every Christian on earth but all Christians are encouraged to put their relationship with God first. The

personal relationship is more important than the mission from God (but they are also related, as I plan to explain later) and so the next few chapters will talk about things all Christians are encouraged to do to develop this relationship with God.

A goal of every Christian is to imitate Jesus Christ, to imitate God

One main goal of every Christian is to be like Jesus. Jesus is the perfect representation, image and picture of God, and so it is an incredible privilege for God to ask all his followers to be like him. As people we often try to emulate and imitate the people we most respect. God, in his great love, has given us the best example in Jesus, and asks us to imitate him. Remember, God never forces us to imitate him. A lot of the reasons for why it is important to practice the Christian basics is that Jesus practiced them, and we are called to imitate him and do what he did.

Now unless you see Jesus as a worthwhile and truly noble person, there is no real reason to imitate him. Christians that accept this as one of their goals, usually do so because they have met Jesus, and continue to meet him; also they have found Jesus, and continue to find Jesus to be awesome. They see Jesus as a noble person to imitate. Christianity is one of the few faiths where God asks more than just worship and obedience, He asks Christians to be perfect and imitate him. This is how Christians 'follow' God.

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. Matthew 5:48 (NIV)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Genesis 17:1 (NIV)

God gives Christians the ability to imitate him through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus was taken up into the sky, and into heaven, at the end of his physical ministry on earth and promised that his followers would receive what he described as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit being known as the Spirit of God, is also God. The Holy Spirit is said to be powerful, and lives inside every

Christian. The Holy Spirit empowers and enables Christians to live a life imitating God. If Christians tried to imitate God with their own ability, most likely it wouldn't work as well. God asks Christians to 'live by the spirit' (Galations 5:25). The Holy Spirit is not just a force, but a person. One of the persons of God. When the Holy Spirit lives inside a Christian, here is the union of man and God.

Chapter Two

Prayer

Most people would guess the way Christians develop a relationship with God is through prayer, and that is not wrong. In this Chapter I try to go through the basics of prayer, why prayer is important, and some different ways to pray.

Almost every religion practices prayer of some sort. But Christian prayer might, and should, be different from other religions. The personal Christian prayer should be more free-form, free of form. Christian can still pray structured prayers, as some Christian church denominations teach, but effective prayer is usually not always structured, as regular conversations are. Structured prayers are useful when groups of Christians gather together. The person that leads group prayer might find it easier to pray a prayer with structure, but even this should not be seen as a hard and fast rule. My contention for effective personal prayer is that it should have no strict formula. The best prayers sometimes come about almost spontaneously, a cry out to God for help. Very often this happens when a person is at their limit when facing a serious problem. Spontaneous prayer can also happen if a person is ecstatic and shouts out thanks and praise to God. Some church traditions seem to have taken away emphasis of the free-form characteristics of personal prayer, and this may have come about without the church's original intention.

Christians pray because Jesus prayed often

In the New Testament records of Jesus, it says he often woke up early to pray to God in a place away from crowds. Jesus even tells people to lock their rooms and pray to God on their own. In Matthew 6:7 Jesus actually tells his followers not to pray the way other people pray, to avoid repetitions in prayer and avoid too much speaking. Effective prayer can sometimes sound like a normal conversation between people. God is a person, he created people, and the Bible says he created man in his image, so it might seem somewhat out of place to be communicating with God in a completely different way from the way we communicate with other people.

Arranging set prayer times with God

As we try to imitate Jesus' prayer life, it might seem natural for us to copy his prayer habits. This means we too might want to arrange private times to meet with God. Some Christians organize special set times in a day or week to simply talk with God. Now I don't believe there should be a set formula for prayer schedules and methods, but everybody practices methods and routines that work for them, and this scheduled prayer time seems to work for many people.

Pray to God while doing other activities.

Someone I know from a nearby church would often tell me that he has a day-long running conversation with God from when he wakes up to when he goes to sleep. This reminds me of the phrase "Ora Et Labora" from Catholic Saint Benedict, which translates to 'pray and work' or 'pray and labor'. The idea is that prayer is combined with activity. So a person might pray or meditate on God while performing a physical task. Now this does not have to be formal work, it could include activities like washing the dishes, or gardening; or maybe even praying while exercising. This method is popular among many Christians too, and probably favored by Christians that lead quite active and busy lives.

There is no reason to choose any one method over the other, to schedule set prayer times or to pray as you go along with your daily activities. Jesus seems to have done both. He spent time with God alone, and he was also able to listen to the Holy Spirit in the middle of doing his ministry. Both methods could be useful in different ways.

How to Pray

I have tried to avoid giving advice on specific methods of prayer. I don't really want to offer formulas to pray. I feel that, ... if you, the reader, are able to read this, this means you already know how to communicate with people, and prayer is not much different from that. I encourage you to find your own way

to pray. Imitating how other people pray can be helpful, but after a while I think it would be beneficial if we all found our own way to pray. We should first remember that the Bible also shows us how Jesus prayed, and so it would be worthwhile to imitate his ways. Jesus being the perfect man, in perfect union with God the Father.

What to Pray about

Jesus's disciples asked him to teach them how to pray in the Gospel books of Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2. The format here is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer. I was taught to memorize this prayer as a child in Catholic Catechism class. It is recited every Catholic mass. I now believe that this prayer was probably more of a guide to help us, rather than some sort of mantra to memorize and recite. The books of Matthew and Luke even use slightly different wordings for the prayer, which means the exact words are probably not as important as the what you mean behind them. I am not so sure if repeating and reciting prayers are that useful if your mind is not engaged with God. We don't normally repeat and recite words when we talk to people, so I assume this won't work as well when we pray to God. Also, as I mentioned before, Jesus tells his followers not to pray this way.

Prayer and positive conversation

We have all been in conversations with other people. We have all enjoyed conversations with friends. This is why we look forward to meet friends that are dear to us. Now meeting friends isn't very exciting if nobody says anything, this makes a boring meeting. We want to be with our friends because we want to hear what they have to say and we want to say something to them. By now most of us already know what positive and negative conversations sound like. Positive conversations build us up, delight us, and make us look forward to the next time we meet our friends to have another conversation. Negative conversation drags us down, can put us in a miserable mood, and makes us reluctant to meet that person, or those people, for another conversation.

If our prayer times with God are like positive conversation, we will look forward to having the next one. God is a delightful person, and if we feel he is not, then I submit to you that you are not having a conversation with him in your prayer times. If prayer feels like a chore all the time, then I suspect we are not spending time with God. I don't believe God is boring, or oppressive, or gives out negative vibes. I believe that engaging with God fully gives us strength, joy and peace; and we are refreshed and renewed after meeting God. So let this be a good indicator as you try different prayer methods. Ask yourself if that moment with God was worthwhile or not. If it was not very good, then the chances are you did not engage with God properly, maybe you only engaged with yourself. Don't forget to ask God for help even with how to conduct your prayer life. God obviously knows which method of prayer will suit you. Once again, people who are in love, or have good friends, look forward to their next meeting with them. Meeting with God should be this way.

I draw a strong link between prayer and conversation. I tie them very close to each other. This is because I believe the New Testament kind of prayer that Jesus seems to be instructing is one that assumes the Christian is very, very close to God. The Lord's Prayer is sometimes known as the 'Our Father' prayer because it establishes the Christian's relationship with God as son or daughter and their father. Many religions, even some Christian denominations, seem to establish God as distant and not very close. True Christianity presents just the opposite.

So what is good conversation, or at least, not terrible conversation, and how is it similar to prayer?

When good friends call on each other, ask them how they are doing. They want to know more about each other's activities. In prayer feel free to talk to God and express our cares to him.

Good friends ask each other for help, and they are also ready to help when asked. God is the same. We can ask him for help. We can also ask him what he would like us to do for him today.

Good friends share jokes. If we allow ourselves to listen to God, we find that God has a sense of humor and delights in making us laugh also.

Good friends listen to each other patiently. God listens to us patiently, We should do the same also.

Good friends sometimes don't need to have too many words between them (but not all the time of course). Sometimes it is worthwhile just to be silent and acknowledge God's presence as we do nothing, or even if we are doing something.

It feels good when a friend says something like "I've thought about what you said, You might be correct there.", or simply just "I've been thinking about what you said recently." I'm sure God loves it when we think about the things of God, when we fill our minds with what he likes, what he doesn't like, and as we meditate on them, in between, or even while we converse with him. Jeremiah 29:11 shows us God thinks about us often too.

Good friends express their gratefulness because they care for each other. They feel thankful and they will express thanks. God does a lot of good to us, so when we remember his goodness we naturally spend a lot of time thanking him. We may also hear God sometimes thanking us if we listen very carefully. I think we sometimes put too many stiff religious connotations on 'giving thanks' to God.

Good friends apologize when they hurt each other. We don't always do what God would like us to do. If we cared about him we would apologize too. I think, in this also, we sometimes put too many stiff and negative religious connotations on 'repentance and confession' to God. Never let the religious concept of repentance and confession scare us away from drawing close to God. If you had a dear friend or family that you did something wrong to, and your felt sorry about it, usually you can't wait to meet them and apologize to them. This should be the same with God.

Good friends compliment each other. The word 'praise' is also sometimes given too many stiff religious connotations. Some people might even protest

when they are demanded to praise God. Praise and complements should flow out naturally, out of love and care. It should not come out by force.

Good friends are honest and also polite with each other. On one hand we must be polite with each other and choose our words carefully, on the other hand we must also be able to express ourselves freely to our friends, and not always have struggle to make sure we say the correct words. Our conversation prayer with God must be a balance of making sure we don't use words too inappropriately (because we care for him) but also making sure we are not too scared of using the wrong words either.

Good friends are gentle in their conversations. Part of selecting the right words when we talk to our friends comes out of our desire to be gentle to them, because we care for them and love them. God is gentle, and this comes across when he speaks to us.

Good friends can sometimes be firm with each other if necessary. If you care for your friends, you will be firm and stern toward them sometimes, especially if you feel they are doing something that could be harmful to them or you, or others. God can be stern and firm also, but it comes out of love, not out of some sort of tyrannical oppressive character.

Good friends are committed to each other, and this is yet again based on love. Commitment is not a frightening concept. A commitment that grows out of a foundation of love does not feel like a burden. It is a joy.

So in prayer, a lot of how we pray and relate to God is just like how we relate to loved ones and friends.

One way to start prayer is by going to a quiet place, perhaps your room, and start by saying 'thank you' to God for all the good things he has done. You can speak out a list of specific good things too. Following the Lord's Prayer as a guideline is probably the best way, coupled with your own words, and your own style, from your own heart.

One final thing here. When thanking God, we tend to think about his recent and current blessings, which is good I believe, but let us not also forget about the greatest gift he gave us, which was Jesus Christ his son, and his being, and what he did on the cross and the resurrection, when he took away our sins and brought us into a right standing relationship with God the Father.

Listening to God

A lot of what I've covered so far is mostly about what we say to God. Now since our relationship and communication with God is two-way, how should we listen to him? God communicates with us in different ways. Some of these I try to expand in the next chapter on the Bible, but I will also talk about other ways God communicates with us here.

A deep sense of what God wants

As Christians we may sometimes just 'sense' what God wants. It is some sort of 'knowing' that goes beyond feelings. We can sometimes feel this deep down in our heart. Some describe it as a 'still small voice'. How do we know this sense comes from God? One way of knowing that it is what God wants is that it might go contrary to what we actually want. A friend of mine once told me that she felt God wanted her to get one of her relatives a gift, but in her heart she did not really like her relative and preferred to avoid that person. The still small voice of compassion that went contrary to what she wanted convinced her that this was what God wanted, since it couldn't have come from her.

Desire

God can work through our desires. Now this does not mean all our desires come from God. When we sense strong desires, it is wise to check and pray (ask God) about them. Desires that go against what the Bible teaches, or cause harm to people, are most likely do not come from God. We are usually able to detect whether a desire comes from the selfish part of us, or if they are motivated by compassion and a will to please God. Knowing the Bible,

and discussing these things with trusted Christian friends and mentors can help us determine more clearly if the desire comes from God or not.

Repetition

When God wants to communicate something to us, he will not only place a sense or a desire in our hearts just once. Sometimes repetition is a way God makes his will clear. We may not know whether it is God that wants us to do any particular thing, but as the sense or desire repeats itself, or if it somehow gets stronger, it could reach a point where we cannot simply ignore it anymore and we become more and more convinced God really wants to communicate to us about that specific thing. Again, with prayer and discussion, God will make his will clearer to us.

The Word of God

I will stress again that if what we sense or desire does not line up with the words of God written in the Bible, it is very likely they did not come from God.

On discretion

God may not want us to ask him to choose every little thing in our life. He might want us to use our own discretion on what to wear, what colored clothes we should choose that day. God may not want to be specifically telling us exactly what meals to eat, leaving some of this to our discretion. Of course we should be prudent and wear appropriate attire, depending on the situation, and not eat food that is unhealthy all the time. All of this must be motivated by love and care for others, and for ourselves.

Chapter Three

The Bible

In the last chapter on prayer, I described it as a two-way form of communication, yet most people seem to understand prayer more as us talking to God, rather than God talking to us. This chapter will be about the Bible. Many see the Bible as a primary way God speaks to us. The chapter will start by talking about some of the history of the Bible.

A collection of texts

The Bible, as a book, is its modern and current form. It did not start as a book. The words in the Bible were written before the modern book design even existed. It is actually a selection of different texts written long ago, at different times, by different people. History says ancient people formed languages and designed letters or symbols for them. They would carve these letters in stone or record them on pieces of wood, later they would use ink and write them down on papyrus (made from plants) or parchment (made from animal skin). Ancient scrolls in some Eastern civilizations in China were made of bamboo. Different methods for writing and recording writings were used by different civilizations before paper became the most common material, and before the modern and familiar book design. The words in the Bible were written down in some of these old forms and the scrolls were kept well, preserved, then duplicated before older scrolls began to wear out. The Catholic church commissioned a single package containing a collection of the texts and documents recognized by that church as the words of God sometime around the end of the 4th Century. This was known as the Vulgate. Later versions of the texts were translated, compiled and duplicated again. After the development of mass printing technology in Europe, another translation of texts were collected and printed into one complete document package known as the Gutenberg Bible in 1455. It was one of the first printed books from Europe if not the very first one. The Catholic church did not commission the Gutenberg Bible.

The author, or authors, of the Bible

Christians maintain that the Bible was authored by God, but written through many different writers, over a time span of perhaps 3,500 years. The texts comprising the Bible, were not always written originally in the same language. Some of the text were written in Hebrew, others in Aramaic and the later ones in Greek. The styles of the texts are also different. While most of the texts are written as some sort of historic narrative or story, other texts comprise of songs, poems, sayings, and records of data. Christian traditions maintain that the different human writers wrote the texts under inspiration from God, and that despite different translations, each original word in the Bible can have deep meaning.

The Biblical texts and other ancient texts

There have been many other ancient texts written throughout the centuries. Many of them are sayings, teachings and stories like the Biblical texts. But the Biblical texts appear to be written in a different way, with a different underlying assumption, and that is that the Biblical texts seem to proclaim and state that they come directly from God. Other ancient texts, and ancient stories, appear to be written in a way that indicates the reader and the writer probably knew they were only stories. The Biblical texts, especially the first five books of the Bible, begins with the origin of the world, then appears to transition, almost seamlessly in a single narrative flow, into actual laws, practices and ceremonies that the people of God, the Israelites, were expected to follow. Again, the underlying assumption is that Biblical texts claimed to have come from God, who makes bold claims that he is a god that plays an active role with a relationship with his people. In other words, the assumption is that the writer and the reader of the biblical texts understand that the words come from their God, and are not crafted stories or wise sayings from man. No other ancient text, written as old as the Bible, claims the assumption that they are the actual words of the God that created the universe, neither do they appear to ask for some sort of reverence for the words of the texts themselves. This tradition has been passed down over the ages, and so people that believe in these texts, and see the words themselves as Holy.

But are the written words from the Biblical texts really from the God that created the universe? Why do some people believe this is so?

This is the key question. It has to do with the validity of the words in the Bible. The simplest answer to this is that the words of God have had a significant transformative effect on a significant number of people in an individual sense. These people, called Christians, continue to claim the words in the Biblical texts are the words of God, and that these words are living. Many Christians begin their testimonies by claiming to have had a personal and profound encounter, or experience, with God that changed them in their inner core being. They heard the words of God, either from the Biblical texts or from other ways. Those words had a direct life-changing effect on their minds and their entire being. The Bible talks about a different kind of 'hearing', which is an experience where a person senses God communicating with them in a direct and personal level. The next issue is the consistency of the effects of the texts on people. The words in the Biblical texts continue to affect Christians in a significant and profound way. As mentioned before, the words somehow appear 'living'. The biblical texts are so full of some kind of richness that there are people that make a living, and pursue academic studies, purely from these texts. Christians thus feel they continually 'feed' on the Biblical texts, that the texts provide them some sort of constant spiritual nourishment.

In the history of the Church, as believers shared their personal experiences of how God seemingly communicated to them through the biblical texts, a consensus was formed where groups of believers in Christ felt the texts were special, that they are the very words of God. They then considered it vital to preserve the texts as accurately as they could. Jewish scholars understood how profound their texts were before Christians did, and were already preserving them before the time of the physical Jesus Christ.

The texts that Christians agreed on include in the modern biblical canon was formed through consensus, and this consensus did not involve a single meeting or a single council. Various groups of Christian believers in different regional churches. over a period of about 300-400 years came to an agreement on which texts were inspired by God and deemed proper to

include in the Bible canon. Jesus Christ himself said that every little mark in the texts of the old testament were important, thus establishing their validity to his followers. One of the ways the early Christians determined which texts that formed the New Testament were inspired fully by God was probably on how profound the texts had been to a significant number of individuals and churches over the generations.

Again, in conclusion, it was most likely the significant transformative effects of the texts, to a significant number of believers, that gave it greater weight to be included into modern Bible canon. This transformative effect was deemed more important than preserving information on exactly when these texts were written.

How do the texts transform people?

I believe one important transformation that engaging with the Biblical texts has on Christians is that it changes their desires, and this effect can take time to grow. The transformation is like a small seed that grows under the ground for a period of time, and after enough time passes we see the sprout, the plant, and then the fruits. There are two types of growth in a plant. The growth that is visible and above ground; and the growth that is not visible because it happens underground. Likewise I present that the Biblical texts have two parallel ways of operating on people. The more 'visible' side, the side that we are at least more aware of, comes as we engage the texts with our cognitive mind. But there is also an invisible way the Biblical texts affect us. We are not always aware of this effect, but over time, we understand that we are now somewhat different. Some things we used to like, we like no more, and other things we used to abhor, we are now quite fond of. I contend that this happens spiritually, in the spiritual realm. God is a spirit so he communicates with us through the spirit also.

Over time our desires change and become more in line with God's desires. Things that God likes, we find attractive too, and things that God does not like, we also find repulsive. The transformation occurs as we become more and more like God as he is our greatest example, and his nature and character is displayed across the Biblical texts. Jesus Christ, in the Gospel stories and in

other parts of the Bible, act some sort of barometer, benchmark, or yard stick, that we measure against. The Christian will begin to transform into a likeness of the God they follow, which is Jesus Christ. Indeed the origin of the word Christian means something like 'Little Christ'.

The transformative effect of the Biblical texts change individuals, then groups, and then even countries. No other collection of texts have had a profound effect both on individuals and society as seen in how the Biblical texts have transformed modern Western civilization.

How can I engage with the Biblical texts?

This is a better way of putting the question, instead of 'How should I read the Bible?'. Now we get on to what this chapter is really for, so I go on to describe some ways.

Just read it

It is useful to simply just read the Bible, and try to understand it as best you can. Even if there are parts that you do not get at first, have faith that God is also planting spiritual seeds inside you as you read the texts. I mention this method first because it is the most obvious way, but I understand that many people that just read the Bible will find many things they do not understand and this might cause them frustration and they might stop reading the Bible further. So there are other ways to engage the texts also.

Pray and ask God for wisdom

Even if it is perfectly viable to simply pick up the Bible and start reading, another way is to pray to God before you read the Bible, and ask God for help in understanding it. God is caring and wants us to understand his words, so he will give you wisdom liberally. Never underestimate God's ability to simply implant knowledge and understanding in our minds and hearts.

Study the Bible

The other important way to engage the texts is to change our initial approach of just 'reading' the Bible into 'studying' the Biblical texts. For this, we will need teachers and other people to help us. The Bible explains the importance of other people, which can be teachers or even just friends, to help us understand the texts better. Many teachers are appointed, enabled and anointed by God to help people understand biblical truths. In this modern age there are many resources available to us, even through the internet, to help us study the Biblical texts. If you prefer to study in an actual physical group, around people, perhaps pray to God to lead you to a good Bible study group or program. There are also many good internet resources on Bible studies, different people might find some of them more suitable than others. If you have the time, consider joining an actual Bible school or take a Bible course. I believe everyone should study the Bible even if they do not have plans to join an official Ministry. Making notes, and writing down what you have learned is very much recommended when studying the Biblical texts. I personally use spreadsheet files in my computer where I write notes next to some individual Bible verses.

Meditate on the Biblical texts

There are two ways I believe you can meditate on the Biblical texts. First is to use your imagination as you think about what you read in the texts, or let your mind wander a bit as you ponder on the texts and their meaning. This can be done alongside praying to God also. Another way is to mutter the texts with your mouth as you think on them. Indeed there are two Hebrew words describing meditation, one of them *hāgâ* (הגה) means to murmur and the other, *sîhâ* (שיח), means to reflect or rehearse in the mind. It may even be possible to do both at the same time.

Joining a Christian community or a Church that engages with the Bible is very useful. Like running a marathon, sometimes we do it better when we do it with other people around us, running the same race. The internet enables us to join online Bible study communities and social media communities, as well as chat groups on the Bible with friends.

Chapter Four

Joining a Church / Christian Community

I will stress this again. One of the most important things in a Christian person's life is that he or she simply experiences a relationship with God. This relationship continues on for eternity, but it starts here in this world. Prayer and reading the biblical texts cover the main ways Christians communicate with God, and the ways God communicates with them in this world. Now how about the way Christians relate with each other? This chapter will talk about the importance of believers joined in a community. I'll say right away that God wants all believers to love each other. As God is the father, all his children should love each other as siblings do. Some parents love to see their children together. These parents sometimes don't even want to disturb their children if they are playing together. I have seen this first hand.

Humans are designed to be a part of a community

People have chosen to live in groups and communities since the beginning of human history. At first, the benefits of coming together and forming village communities helped people deal with the hardships of living in the world. A village provided food, water, shelter and protection against the many dangers from the hostile environment outside the village. It was not easy for every person to hunt and look for food individually. Having different people focus on different tasks, hunting, farming, food preparation, making clothes and shelter, made the community operate better overall. People became specialists in their community. Even among villagers that focused on one task, hunters found it easier to hunt in groups, and farmers worked better if they did things together. Some village communities grew larger and larger until they formed towns and cities. Ancient cities usually had walls to protect them from invaders.

In modern times, more people that live in large cities tend to keep to themselves. They sometimes withdraw away from communities and they enter into some sort of individualism. Modern cities provide many

convenient services that allow people to live there without having to rely too much on social interaction with other people. The drawback is that this mindset can sneak its way even into Christians, and this is something I feel I understand very deeply. As a result some Christians may feel there is no need to interact with other people all that much, or be an active part of large groups, such as a church, or any other form of Christian community. I don't believe this is the right way to do things, and God, as if he knew what would happen, has given express orders to believers to love one another, which cannot be done if we avoid each other.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35 (NIV)

In the letter to the Hebrews, the writer, commonly thought to be the Apostle Paul, encouraged Christians to continue to gather and meet.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

Jesus did things together with people

Reading the Gospel books, we see that Jesus was a very community-oriented person. He had good friends. He considered his own disciples friends. One of his disciples, John, was so comfortable with him he could rest his head on his master's chest as depicted during the last supper. Jesus was close friends to a household of siblings, Lazarus, Martha and Mary. When Jesus was in another town, Lazarus fell ill and died. Jesus came back, wept for his friend, then proceeded to raise him from the dead. He had many other followers aside from his twelve disciples, and some of those followers, some women the Biblical texts say, supported Jesus' ministry with their finances. When Jesus died, his followers numbered about a hundred and twenty and they stuck close together, also partly because they were afraid of what might happen to them next. Many of his followers saw

him being taken up to Heaven and they continued to stay together in Jerusalem until the day of Pentecost. Now it is fair to say Jesus' followers stayed together before Pentecost because of fear, but after Pentecost, the fear disappeared and they continued to gather. The first church was formed here.

As Christians, we aim to be like Jesus, so this must naturally mean we must also be a part of a community of believers, as he was, and as he instructed us to be. In the Acts of the Apostles, we see that other disciples of Jesus, such as the Apostles Peter and Paul, would operate with the church community and not always on their own. The church would meet together often, serve together, and come into council to share what God had done. The church would also come together and discuss rules to help streamline its mission. (I must add that rules that help streamline organizational processes and help the group mission are fine, as long as they do not add to requirements for any individual's personal salvation. Salvation comes only from Christ, by grace through faith.)

So now we understand Jesus loved community and wanted believers to continue to meet, commune and cooperate with each other in love as they worshipped God, It is only proper that the Christian obeys this command willingly. How should Christians go about meeting and forming church?

I don't believe there should be a formula on how Christians should gather and pray, but church organizations have crafted methods and rituals on this issue. The word 'Church' was translated from the Greek word 'Ecclesia' which means an assembly, congregation or convocation. The church has evolved into a more formal religious organization over time, but this was not how it started. Every organization appoints specific people to oversee various responsibilities and activities, all of this is done in order to give benefit to the organization at large. This is fine thing to do, even recommended. Over the centuries, however, some of the hierarchical structures that the church formed were given some sort of authoritarian weight, and it only led to the Church becoming too large and inflexible with its purpose, as well as led to corruption, misuse of authority, and even authority turning tyrannical, by people that were considered high in the

Church's ranks. The Roman Catholic Church (my denomination) is the main church that this accusation is leveled against, and with good reason, although it has changed in modern times and does not exercise as much power and authority towards its congregation now.

My definition of church is simply a group of believers, however small, that desire to follow Jesus Christ and his ways. Many churches have devised various rituals for their worship meetings over the years, and some of these rituals have had positive and negative effects on the congregation overall. Some of the negative effects of rituals is a tendency of them replacing a vibrant and dynamic personal relationship with God. Some churches have gone to depend too much on the rules and systems they created. Over time these rules turned into accepted culture, doctrine and tradition, and they replaced the church relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God. Churches are often considered falling behind modern trends, but the fact is, the Holy Spirit is not just trying to be relevant, it is a trend-setter. The Church's calling is that it must lead with trends, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the world is to follow what the church does. The church should be unmoving with its core principles, but lead from the front with style. This is the way Jesus Christ operated and it is the way I feel we, as the church, should operate as well.

Small groups and large gatherings

A friend of mine from a small group I attend occasionally said that he considers the small group meeting church, more than the large service gathering on Sunday, and I understand his point of view. I too feel that Jesus also disciplined a small group of people, and set an effective example for his disciples to follow as they went on to disciple others. There are benefits with teaching a large group of listeners, and teaching a small group of disciples. Jesus did both, and so churches would do well to do likewise. Some of my favorite churches and Christian communities are the ones that organize weekly small group meetings in addition to the main large service on Sunday. Small groups allow members to bond closer in love, and to enjoy fellowship as well as help make them accountable to each other. Taking an illustration from animals, some creatures find security with their herd

against predators. This is the same for Christians, Any Christian that tries to walk alone, may find him or herself vulnerable to temptations from Satan, who Christians believe is an ever-present threat.

Being an active part of a church or Christian community

My personal recommendation to every Christian is to find a church or a Christian community and be an active part of it. Pray and ask God to lead you to the community he wants you to be in. In this community the Christian should aim to serve and not just be served. Jesus said he came to serve, serving is in his heart, and so Christians that spend a lot of time developing their relationship with God will find this desire to serve others growing inside them too. They will begin to lose the selfish part of their individual importance. Now I must mention the danger of falling into the trap of getting the church, or the Christian community, to replace the role of God himself, for this could lead to a lot of disappointment and frustration. It is important to remember that a Christian must elevate his or her personal relationship and communion with God to the highest place, and that no church community should ever replace this.

Serving and joining a ministry

I believe every Christian is called by God to serve, but I don't believe every Christian is called by God to serve as a leader in an official ministry from a church organization. As I mentioned earlier, Jesus Christ said he came to serve and so we should also desire to do what he did. Since every Christian should have a direct line of communication with God, God himself will make it clear to every believer where they must serve. If a Christian thinks he or she is called to serve in the ministry in some official capacity or office, then after sufficient confirmation from God through prayer and counsel, that Christian should follow that path. But if God has not called a person to serve in a ministry officially, then I believe it will be harmful for that person to join the ministry; harmful to that person and to the body of Christ, the church. God is gentle and clear, so I am confident he will make his will known, if the Christian waits and asks humbly.

Disciples and mentors

There is a part of the New Testament, where Jesus Christ calls his disciples to go and make disciples.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28: 19-20

This part is known to Christians as The Great Commission. It is often understood, I believe misunderstood, to mean ‘go and get as many people to join the Christian religion’. But the call is to make disciples, students, followers, that constantly want to learn more about Jesus Christ. It is not just a call to get people to attend church. The mentality of the Christian is that of an active student of God, not just a recipient of whatever benefits church or community may give. The Christian has a teachable heart and constantly learns, constantly develops, transforming into the very image of Christ as he or she gains more knowledge of God. This will mean that the Christian would do well to search for mentors, other disciples, and perhaps later in the future, people that they will mentor. I say it this way because many times I have looked for a church with the wrong mindset, with the mentality of a ‘consumer’, waiting to see which church can provide the best service for me. Living in a large city sometimes I feel we are used to looking at which ‘company’ or organization can provide us the best service and more convenience. We look for churches and Christian communities in this very same way. But God looks at this issue differently I believe. Churches with small group programs tend to be good places for Christians to look for other disciples and even mentors. The common purpose behind small group systems is that the people that attend them want to learn more about God and want to change and develop themselves for the better. I admit when I was looking for a church or Christian community in Jakarta, Indonesia the main consideration I had was whether they had weekly small group meetings. I had seen how effective the small group system had worked in an Anglican/Baptist church called St. Thomas in Sheffield, England. The people

that attended churches with small groups appeared deeper in the faith, and kinder, more like Jesus Christ.

Accountability partners

This is an area I feel is very important for Christian development, but I admit it is an area that I am not very well versed in, as well as an area given less emphasis in most modern churches. The benefit of an accountability partner, or partners, is that the Christian will be able to express themselves freely, especially their weaknesses, sins, or addictions, in an environment where there is no harsh judgment, only encouragement and love. The Christian accountability partner I feel should be a person of the same gender. The Biblical principal here is that sharing our weaknesses and being transparent about our sins to accountability partners will expose them to the light, kill them, and set us free. This liberation is invaluable and most joyful.

Conclusion on community

I hope I've been able to write about the benefits of being an active part of a Christian community. It isn't always easy to be part of such a community because it will always be filled with imperfect people. Some people in the community may not even be good people with good intentions, they could be predators looking around for victims. Victims being people that are at their most vulnerable. I have seen this happen. But the overall benefits of community outweigh the drawbacks, and I believe it is probably more dangerous to live the Christian life, and any life really, on our own, in the long term. We are designed by God to operate in community, in family. God himself is three persons. God is a council, and yet God is also one, joined in community, bonded in love, therefore so should we be.

Final Chapter

This short book is coming to a close. I will try to summarize what the last four chapters have basically said in four brief points.

1. Christians have a right standing relationship with God, and a personal ongoing relationship with God. It is their greatest desire and they are overjoyed to have met and continue to meet God personally. They do not deserve this relationship, but God grants it to them, and paid the price himself. Christians maintain their relationship through,
2. Prayer to God and listening to him,
3. Reading the Bible and learning about him,
4. Joining a Christian community or church and bonding with each other in love.

Now there are other topics about Christianity that I have not yet mentioned in this short book. But I wish to dedicate a few sentences on each of them. I believe it is important to write about them, albeit very briefly. Many notable writers have written large books specifically on these topics. The hope here is to cover all the fundamental basics of Christianity and that you, the reader, might find some of them interesting and seek out further information on some of these truths.

The mission of the church and the Christian.

In the fourth chapter I wrote about the Great Commission. This was Jesus' command to his followers, that they go and make disciples of all the nations on earth. The Christian, and therefore the church as a community of Christians, must now go out into the world and spread the news about Jesus Christ and his salvation to everyone. Some people will receive this news and realize it is good news (The Gospel), and it is what they are looking for. After hearing it they will want to join the fellowship of Christians and the church. Others people might reject this news as foolishness and go on their way. The church's mission is simply to be prepared to receive anyone that is interested in a relationship with Jesus Christ, whom Christians believe is God, and disciple them in the way Jesus taught his followers. There will

always be people that want to hear the Christian message, known as the good news or the Gospel. The church must be prepared to receive them and deliver the Gospel message as clear and as accurate as it can. Again I stress that the aim is not to get greater numbers of church members or form passive church goers, but to make disciples. Disciples are active learners, ever seeking to know God more and more.

Water baptism

Jesus Christ began his main ministry after he was baptized in water by the prophet John the Baptist. He went on to baptize other people and asked his followers to do the same. Water baptism is therefore a command from Jesus Christ and not a suggestion. A Christian aims to follow the example of Jesus, and so knowing his Lord was baptized, will naturally make him want to experience the same also. Baptism represents a new birth, the leaving of the old, and the acceptance, and the putting on, of a new identity in Christ. Baptism does not grant salvation to the believer, but it represents a sign of the believer's commitment to transformation into the holiness of Jesus Christ. Different church denominations conduct baptisms differently. I won't go into too many specifics here, but I will say that when I finally knew about the truth of Jesus Christ and the Gospel message, I asked to be baptized in a way where I was immersed in water. Baptism comes from a Greek word "Baptizo" which means to 'immerse' or 'dip into' a liquid. Naturally I wanted to experience this as I believe my Lord did.

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is another experience, and different from water Baptism. Both can occur at the same time though. The roots of this baptism began in Pentecost when God's Holy Spirit came upon followers of Jesus Christ. It involves a mighty move of God's Spirit flowing through the Christian. God's Spirit will come and dwell inside a Christian that believes in and confesses Jesus Christ as their Lord. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a different act where the Holy Spirit is now able to flow out of the person and God's power will manifest in the real world. Some of the signs following the Baptism of the Holy Spirit include miracles, healing, raising from the dead,

prophesying, and speaking in Tongues (uttering words in a different language, even a heavenly language).

Miracles and Healing

God loves people and desires them to be healthy and well. When God was on earth, in the form of Jesus Christ, he proved his that desire through miracles, healing, and driving away demons from people. The Apostle Paul, in one of his letters, made it clear that the church should continue to use the gifts of the Holy Spirit for healings and miracles, to help express God's love and will to people, and to bless the world. This topic isn't commonly talked about even among many Christians, and I believe we are somewhat lacking in practice. But healings and miracles are God's will, and we need to ask for wisdom on how we can obey him in this ministry.

Marriage

The meaning of marriage is first and foremost the marriage of God and his bride. His bride is his people, the church. God wants us to partake and join in this great marriage. He also wants to help his people experience it in a personal level, so he has created a similar mini version for people. This version is what the world understands as marriage. Marriage is a great and joyous thing from God. I'm going to take some liberties here. Instead of calling human marriage, 'marriage', and the marriage of God and his church, a 'great marriage'; I will call the marriage of God and his church 'marriage', and the marriage we see commonly here in this world, 'a miniature imperfect but still wonderful little copy of marriage'. Hope that hasn't confused anyone.

Family

Most of the principles of family, I have covered in the fourth chapter. A church or Christian community must operate as a family operates, with love, forgiveness and wisdom. Wisdom includes when to discipline and when to be gentle and show grace. God is the head of the family. We as Christians are brothers and sisters. God has also granted us the opportunity to form our

own personal families to help us experience this individually. Families can help us understand the kind of unconditional love God has for us.

Holy Communion

Jesus Christ taught his disciples to practice the breaking and eating of bread, and the drinking of wine, in Holy Communion. He also asked his followers to continue to meet and do this. It benefits the church to copy from Jesus' example here and teach other believers to do this also. In Holy Communion, we fix our minds and hearts on Jesus Christ and what he did for us. Holy Communion should be a joyous celebration, yet done with a form of solemn reverence too.

Fasting

Fasting, in its purest meaning, means to deny our carnal and fleshly desires. To say no to them. These desires can be food, or can be other things that we consume to satisfy our senses. The aim of fasting is that when we do not feed our fleshly desires, we become more sensitive to God. The Spirit of God sometimes goes against what our body craves. Fasting can be done anytime by any believer who believes that he or she has been spending too much time satisfying their own desires, and may find themselves less sensitive to the Spirit of God. The believer wants to fast so that they can sense what God wants more clearly. This is a part of developing a relationship with God. Fasting requires a small sacrifice on the part of the believer, a sacrifice that is well worth the pay off.

Worship

Worship can take many forms. This is a big topic and one that I feel should not be mired under strict formulas and methods. The word worship means to show honor, and to lift up something and give it worth. Worship is an attitude of the heart. We can honor God in many ways. The common way we are taught to honor and worship God is by bowing or kneeling down to him in prayer, also by singing songs of praise and worship to him. I believe that simply giving an object your time and attention is an act of worship. Worship

therefore becomes more free form. A person can worship God in many different ways. When we hold someone in high esteem, spend time with them, and expend effort for them, this means we love them, and is a form of worship as well. In many ways Worship and prayer are intertwined. Below I try to give an incomplete list of different ways to worship God, all of them involve giving God our time, effort, and expression.

Worship is..

Talking to God

Meditating on God and the things of God.

Singing to God

Praising God,

Using body language to express our reverence to God, (kneeling, bowing, lifting hands, clapping etc)

Doing some sort of creative endeavor, (drawing, writing, etc) to honor God

Honoring God with our physical senses, eating the right foods, hearing the right things, looking at the right things, touching the right things. (Perhaps smelling the right things too?)

Honoring God with our bodies by taking care of them.

Working hard on a given task.

Telling truth and not telling lies.

Helping a ministry.

Helping people in need with the right motivation.

Encouraging people.

Studying God's words in the biblical texts.

Learning God's desires and commands, and following them.

Making time to attend meetings with believers.

Visiting people, even people in need, the sick, those in prison, and spending time with them.

Blessing and taking care of our friends and family.

Praying for people, in their presence or even when we are alone.

So worship has a very broad meaning that does not simply mean the religious act of worship. It encompasses much more. We worship God during the day by our choices, and our actions, and how we spend our time.

Final words

One final time I stress that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which leads to a union with him, is the most important part of Christianity. For anyone that has read to the end, I thank you. I have no real final parting words, so I will use some of Jesus Christ's words instead.

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." John 16:33 (KJIV)