

MANNA

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Grow in the
grace and knowledge
of our Lord

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Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

2 Peter 3:18

From infant to youth to adult: we mature as surely as time advances. Physically, our growth is inevitable; spiritually, this is not necessarily true. Peter exhorts us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord; yet, do we? Perhaps we may mature physically and psychologically but remain a spiritual infant. To paraphrase *Psalms 65:11*, to crown the year with our bounty of spiritual maturity will surely please our Lord.

Similarly, the church must also mature. Her maturity depends on the many contributions from her constituent members. These members serve the Lord and the church by performing many tasks, all according to their gifts. They are, in effect, holy workers - workers who voluntarily give up their time, money and energy to advance the church work. Implied within this definition is that anyone can be a holy worker, not just those who have been ordained or elected.

So how does one recognise their calling?

The Lord does not necessarily command forcefully; He may whisper instead, subtle but present. An assignment from the

board, or encouragement from others may be the signal that the Lord is calling.

Romans 12:1 exhorts us to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to serve and worship the Lord. Yet for many, the opportunity to serve is declined, perhaps out of a desire not to show off. This is misplaced modesty. After all, what would your reply be if Jesus Himself asked you to serve?

The church's road to maturity may not necessarily be smooth. Again, her development closely mirrors the spiritual maturity of her members: where they are on the road to maturity, so too will be the church. There will be times when insistence is required and times when compromise is the best solution. The ability to distinguish between these two is a clear milestone in the development of the church. For the truth and way to salvation, there is no compromise. However, with more willingness to come to a compromise, typically through a decision agreed upon by a majority of members, is the preferred route.

Recent history suggests that we have a tendency to emphasise the construction / purchase of the church building and the increase in church membership.

Both these are admirable goals. However, they cannot be pursued at the expense of the quality of the members' spirituality. If the spiritual maturation of the membership lags behind the growth in population, the church will face difficulties in sustaining her loyalty to the Lord, particularly in present times.

A healthy spiritual church is built upon a foundation of spiritually mature members. Each member is responsible and accountable for the spiritual maturity of the church. Hence, for the church to glorify the name of our Lord, her members must depart from basic teachings and strive towards perfection (*Heb 6:1,2*).

When we are young, milk and honey suits us best; but the mature Christian can maintain the faith in whatever circumstances, even those that taste bitter. This Christian is a disciple of Christ, capable of overcoming adversity to become a living sacrifice for Christ. But let us be clear: a believer is not necessarily a disciple of Christ. Christ has commanded us to "make disciples of all nations." (*Mt 28:19*). Not only must we preach His gospel and bring others to believe in Him, we must encourage these people to follow and imitate Christ; in short, to develop believers into disciples. The church is strengthened only when the number of disciples increases.

So, how is discipleship developed?

1 Ensuring our value system reflects our spirituality

By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the reward.

Hebrews 11:24

Moses, son of Pharaoh's daughter, a prince of Egypt, was in fact the son of a Hebrew slave. The inner struggle between acknowledging his heritage and continuing in royalty was enormous. Should he return to his roots? To slavery, bondage and struggle? To sacrifice his position, his comforts and his adoptive family? As we all know, Moses discarded his royal garments and assumed the yoke of the Hebrew people. Moses made a very difficult decision. Yet, it was clearly the right one. How much would we be willing to sacrifice?

Paul regarded the Lord as above all, and the rest as rubbish. (*Phil 3:8*) He unequivocally staked out the Christian value system: our values must reflect and respect the sacrifice of Jesus, upon whom our eternal hope lies. Paul also hinted at how we are to develop this value system. In *2 Cor 4:16-18*, he suggests that we fix our eyes on what is unseen, that which is eternal. As a result, while our bodies may decay, our spirit is renewed. When confronted with choices, our decisions must be examined under the light of our spiritual values. Unblemished decisions that reflect Christ's glory should be pursued, others discarded.

To the spiritually mature Moses, his values dictated he chose the less travelled, tougher path. He put his faith in God, and with his eyes fixed on the horizon, set off towards the unseen destination, sure that this decision would bring glory to God.

A healthy, spiritual church is built upon a foundation of spiritually mature members. Each member is responsible and accountable for the spiritual maturity of the church.

2 Service to the Lord

And the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.

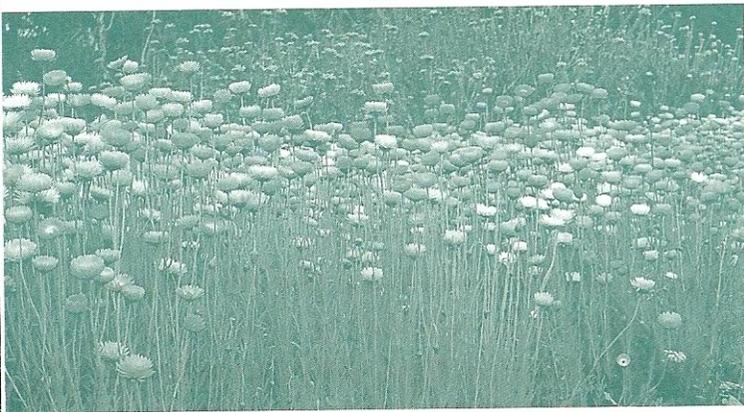
1 Samuel 2:21

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli.

1 Samuel 3:1

When Samuel was young, he began to minister to the Lord. As he grew, the Lord remained with him and the prophet's words did not fall to the ground (*1 Sam 3:19*). Samuel matured spiritually because he served the Lord. Through service, he developed an understanding of God's will and this in turn, was reflected in his words and deeds.

Our religious lives include prayer, bible study, attending service and fellowship with others. Yet, it is incomplete without service. To serve is to grow. The various skills with which the Lord has endowed us are wasted if they are not put into service.



Like maturation, service is a process; it develops gradually. There may be setbacks along the way, but with determination and fixing our eyes on the finish, we will succeed. Take Mark, for example.

In *Acts 12:12,25*, it is clear that Mark received good religious education from his mother and wanted to serve the Lord. He helped the apostles whenever possible, and in verse 12, provided lodging for Peter

when the apostle escaped from prison. Yet in *Acts 13:13*, Mark did not accompany the apostles.

Why? Paul decided in chapter 15:36 that Mark was not to accompany them because he was still immature and not ready to suffer for the Lord.

Through the training and co-working of Barnabas, he devoted himself to service to the Lord and, by this, grew up spiritually. By the end of Paul's life, we see that Mark has indeed matured: Paul

specifically asked Timothy to bring Mark along, for he is useful in Paul's ministry. (*2Tim4:11*).



Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord

3 The importance of wisdom

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

Luke 2:52

What is wisdom? And from whence does it come?

The familiar *Proverbs 9:10* states that to become wise, one must first fear God. A reverence towards God is a firm foundation, able to withstand the temptations that threaten us.

As we grow in stature, do we become wise? Not necessarily!

Our education may increase our knowledge of the world, but its importance pales when compared to spiritual wisdom. By the time he was 40 years old, Moses had substantial formal education and was powerful in speech. Yet, his spirituality had not matured at the same rate. When an Egyptian mistreated a Hebrew slave, Moses killed him. Only after another 40 years, were his powerful emotions tampered by spiritual wisdom and he was able to lead his people out of Goshen. In contrast, as the boy Jesus grew in stature, his wisdom grew also. This wisdom was not of the world.

Indeed, measured against any standards of formal education and status, Jesus was lowly. His wisdom was derived from His determination to follow the will of the Lord (*Jn 7:17*).

Heavy emphasis on formal education may obscure the wisdom of God. Indeed, Paul rebuked the Corinthians for neglecting divine wisdom in favour of worldly knowledge (*1 Cor 1:20,21; 2:6-8*). This is not to say that worldly knowledge is irrelevant. On the contrary, worldly education is important and should contribute to our pursuit of the word of God. Balancing the pursuit of such learning with the pursuit of divine wisdom is necessary to attain spiritual maturity.

The church must grow. This happens only when the spirituality of her members grows.

Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:15,16

K.C. Tsai,
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THE GROWTH OF THE CHURCH



At the farewell gathering of the 7th World Delegates Conference held at Telok Kurau Church, Singapore, in 1997, both delegates and local members enjoyed Christian fellowship as they presented hymns and worshipped the Lord together.

With the meetings over, everyone felt happy and relaxed. But I remember sitting through the service with mixed feelings. By the grace of God, the True Jesus Church has been in existence since 1917, and since then, the complete gospel of Salvation has reached many countries. She now claims to have over 83,000 members and also with an estimated of between 1 to 2 million members in Mainland China. Delegates from many of these countries were present that night. But is this the best we can do? Many have sowed and watered, many have been added to the Lord's fold. The number of church buildings has also increased. Yet again, is this the best we can do?

Grow in the knowledge of God

We may reply that we have already achieved much and, given our limited resources, have done our best. We have preached and taken care of our brothers whenever possible. But is this really the case? Can we think of a friend that we have yet to preach to? What about our family members? Our relatives? Examples from the early church have shown us that the salvation grace of God is not aimed only at individuals; rather, through these individuals, the blessing is to reach their families. Look at Cornelius (*Acts 10*) and the jailer (*Acts 16:29-33*). And what about Andrew who immediately rushed to share his wonderful discovery with his brother Peter (*Jn 1:40-41*)? Today, if we lack such eagerness to share our faith with others, we cannot claim that we have done our best. The early workers of the church were loyal and faithful servants of the Lord. They have laboured to pioneer the gospel and upheld the faith. It is now our turn to take up the baton. We need to grow but how do we do so?

**Our Christian journey begins
the day we accept Christ
and are baptised into His fold.**

In order for us to grow, first and foremost, we must establish a personal relationship with God. Like Paul, we need to know whom we have believed (*2Tim 1:12*). Only then can we successfully weather the storms of life which inevitably dog our Christian journey and reach the goal of our faith, eternal life.

From then on, we have to walk along the path we have chosen. We cannot just stand still. As each day passes, so must we progress on our Christian journey. We must grow up spiritually, out of the infancy of our faith. Initially we may only seek God's material blessings but gradually we must be determined to know God Himself. We may start with needing to receive the love and concern of our brethren but eventually want to give of ourselves to serve our brethren.

For us to know God, we have to understand the significance of Jesus' sacrifice for us. He has exchanged for us eternal condemnation with eternal life in His kingdom (*Eph 2*). Through Him, we have become fellow citizens in His kingdom. When death knocks on our door, we face it without fear, because we have the hope of eternal life. This is all familiar teaching from the pulpit, but many a time, we fail to reflect upon its significance. We have heard it so often, does it still touch a chord in our hearts?

At every funeral service that we attend, we should ask ourselves - where has the soul of the deceased gone? When it is my turn to lay in this coffin, where will my soul go? We are given only one chance to journey through this life of faith. It will be such a pity if we muddle through it, never growing in spiritual maturity, always receiving never giving.

We need to progress in our knowledge of God such that we truly believe that in all things, He works for those who love Him and call upon His name (*Rom 8:28*). Our faith has to reach the stage where even when we cannot feel God's presence, we know that He is watching over us. And when facing the trials and tribulations of life, we understand His higher will for us. Perhaps He wants us to reflect on our ways (*Ecc 7:14*); perhaps He's refining us (*Job 23:10*), building up our spiritual fortitude. Such assurance that Jesus is always with us can only come through a close personal relationship with Him.

Prophet Hosea warned the people of his time that they had fallen away for lack of knowledge (*Hos 4:6*). This warning is very relevant to believers of the end time. Knowing that his time is short, Satan will strive very hard to lead the whole world astray (*Rev 12:9*) and to deceive even us, the Elect (*Matt 24:24, Rev 13:13-14*). We have to be very careful that we do not fall prey to his devious ploys. We cannot under-estimate his craftiness. Do not think that his tools are merely the typical vices of gambling, drinking and womanising. He may even deploy innocent activities like golf games, our academic or career pursuits and even our own families to occupy so much of our time that we are unable to spend time in daily prayers and Bible reading, let alone attend church services and participate in the ministry. Our spiritual life soon becomes stagnant, and unwittingly, we have allowed Satan to draw us away from God.

Grow in pastoral care

The second aspect of Christian growth is pastoral care - looking after the spiritual as well as physical welfare of our brethren. In this respect, we need to follow God's footsteps to "... seek the lost, ... bring the back the strayed, ... bind up the crippled, and ... strengthen the weak, and the fat and strong ... watch over" (*Eze 34:16*).

We may have heard it said, or even complained ourselves, that the church lacks love; that her members are uncaring. This is a sweeping statement. If we were a little more observant, we would realise that the church does have many members who actually go out of their way to care for their brethren. I know of those who took turns to cook "confinement food" for new mothers who were away from their own families. Some have stayed 24 hours with their bedridden brethren; others have extended their homes to overseas students during weekends and term holidays, offering these struggling students warmth and care sincerely and unreservedly. These are members who practise the axiom that it is more blessed to give than to receive and they do this quietly, unknown to many. Nevertheless, the church does need more of her members to live by this axiom.

**We are given only one chance to journey
through this life of faith.**

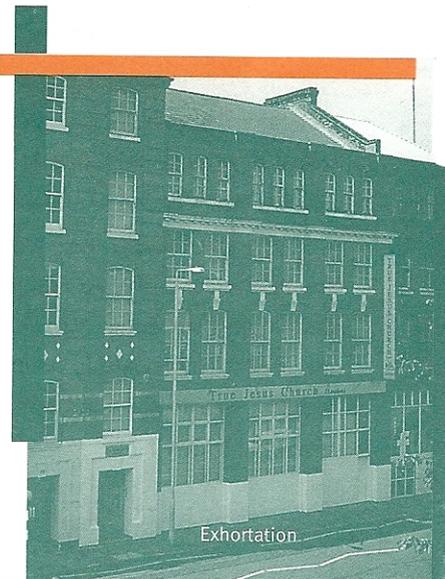
**It will be such a pity if we muddle through it,
never growing in spiritual maturity, always receiving
never giving.**

What does caring entails? Let's look at the parable of the good Samaritan. After stopping to help the injured man, the Samaritan spent time to bandage his wounds and took him to the inn. He even returned the next day to pay the inn-keeper. In helping the injured man, the Samaritan had to disrupt his journey and revise his original plan. This tells us that helping others often demands sacrifices on our part. We have to offer our time and effort; we may be greatly inconvenienced but this is usually part and parcel of helping others. As Apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, in everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we "must help the weak" (*Acts 20:35*) Helping the weak requires 'hard work'. It is not always easy, the person whom we help may not be appreciative; worse, he may even criticise us. But this doesn't mean that we give up. Rather, we remember the Lord's assurance that "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (*Matt 25:40*). Let us not write the person off as soon as we encounter difficulties.

As part of our Christian growth, we have to go beyond helping others out of a sense of duty. Helping others has to become part of our daily activities, something that we do as naturally as eating and sleeping.

For us to be able to persevere and continue to care, our motive in helping has to be correct. If we help others solely out of Christian duty, it would be difficult to sustain our zeal. Discouragement and giving up follow closely when we meet with problems. Instead, we ought to care for and look after our brethren because we understand the love of Christ for us, the great price He paid so that we now have this hope of eternal life. Our care for others has to be motivated by this love, expressed through our compassion for them. As Jesus said, when the good Samaritan saw the injured man, he "had compassion" (*Lk 10:33*). When we genuinely care for their welfare, we think little of the time and effort we have to put in. We would not be impatient when they fail to meet our expectations or heed our advice. We would not make them reluctant to turn to us for help. As part of our Christian growth, we have to go beyond helping others out of a sense of duty. Helping others has to become part of our daily activities, something that we do as naturally as eating and sleeping.

GROWTH



Grow in service or stewardship

When membership of the early church grew, the apostles anointed deacons to take charge of the needs of the congregation (*Acts 6:1-7*). Likewise, the True Jesus Church has set up administrative structure to ensure the smooth running of the church activities. But for the church to grow, we need to have the correct attitude in service. We need to return to the very principle established by Jesus Himself. He said that He came to the world to serve, not to be served (*Matt 20:28*). As workers participating in the church ministry today, our role is also one of service to the congregation. We need to fulfil the needs of the church, rather than wait for the church to fulfil our needs.

We cannot run the affairs of the church as if we were running a secular organisation. In the house of God, it is God who leads. In a sense, "leadership" at church is a misnomer. Every worker, be it elder, deacon, preacher, RE teacher, etc., is merely a steward charged with handling specific aspects of God's household, the church. Our role is to handle the matters under our charge faithfully, loyally and silently. When praise is received for a job well done, we simply acknowledge that we are merely unworthy servants discharging our duties (*Lk 17:10*). We do not expect any reward in return. The very fact that we can serve in God's household is reward in itself.



As the church approaches the new millennium, on the one hand, it is vital that her leaders uphold the spiritual and doctrinal assets received from God, and strive to preserve a purity of faith not influenced by external factors (*Jude 3-4*). At the same time, we cannot ignore the complexities of the world around us. In order to reach out to other Christians and the unbelieving world at large, the church needs leaders who regularly review the current status of the church, identify and admit to her shortcomings, and have the courage to break through the status quo. This is not easy. As time passes, there is the danger that the church may become entrenched in man-made traditions and self-imposed principles. Her leaders merely preserve the status quo, which is much easier, rather than take the harder route of proactive, visionary leadership. This lack of foresight will inevitably hinder the progress of the church.

**...for the church to grow, we need to have
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Conclusion

When we talk about church growth, it goes beyond establishing the infrastructure, or building more physical church buildings. Whilst these are necessary for members to congregate and worship, it is the spiritual growth of the membership that is imperative. So when we assess the growth of the True Jesus Church, the benchmark has to be the spiritual qualities of her members in terms of their knowledge of the truth, their daily conduct towards their brethren and their attitude towards the service of God. Individually, if we love the Lord, we must also seriously examine ourselves to see where we stand in our spiritual growth.



Lee Jin,
Singapore

If we study the workers of God from the Bible, we would notice that many successful workers ensured that they had successors. Look at Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Paul and Timothy. Today, every worker of the church has to ensure that the church has worthy successors to take over the baton of the church ministry. Every church leader has the responsibility to training capable youths. They have to build up these youths' biblical knowledge, as well as encourage, coach and guide them in their service. Positive reinforcement rather than negative criticism is important.

Apart from imparting the youths the church's biblical beliefs and modes of service, church leaders need to encourage them to cultivate their faith within their own lifestyles. For example, youths born and grown up in the States will be 'American' in their outlook, regardless of their ethnic origins. This is perfectly acceptable provided they do not go against the teachings of the Bible. If we belong to the 'older' generation, we may hold on to more traditional ideas and concepts. But we have no right to impose these on the youths indiscriminately. Oriental authoritative paternalism ought not exist in the church. This will only serve to alienate the youths. Instead, we need to have the heart of a parent, one who would lovingly nurture and cultivate his charge until the young one grows into adulthood. Only then we can be assured that when the Lord calls us home, we have left behind worthy successors.

Out of

midian

The name "Moses" triggers vivid images of the Exodus - the awesome plagues in Egypt, the incredible parting of the Red Sea, the victory over the Amalekites, Mount Sinai engulfed in smoke and cloud as one man ascended alone to meet with God to receive the Ten Commandments, miracles of bitter waters made sweet and water springing forth from the rock.



The story of Moses began with his untimely birth when the Israelites were being oppressed as slaves in Egypt, and when Pharaoh had ordered all newborn male Israelites to be killed. By God's arrangement, his life was preserved when he was adopted and raised in the palace by Pharaoh's daughter, with his natural mother becoming his nurse.ⁱ This was probably why he knew all along that he was an Israelite. When he was of age, he decided to visit his brethren. When he saw their burdens and witnessed an Egyptian abusing one of his Hebrew brethren, his indignation drove him to strike and kill the Egyptian.ⁱⁱ This was surely no mere act of rashness committed on the spur of the moment. Rather, it signified a critical decision of faith—the determination to deliver his oppressed brethren and to deny the fleeting pleasures of sin that life as the son of Pharaoh's daughter would bring. So he chose to forsake Egypt, to suffer affliction with the people of God, and to risk the wrath of the king.ⁱⁱⁱ



To Moses' surprise, his brethren failed to understand God's intention of delivering them by his hand. They did not appreciate his actions. In fact, they openly showed this lack of recognition when he attempted to reconcile two fighting brethren.^{iv} They challenged his authority! This was a great blow to Moses.

Was it not God who had preserved his life and let him realise his status as a Hebrew? Was it not God who had nurtured his faith and zeal, so that he could clearly recognise his calling to deliver the Israelites? Were his Hebrew brethren not eager to be delivered from oppression? How was it then that they did not understand the tough internal struggles he had undergone to forsake all he had to be with them, to take up the even tougher task of delivering them? And when these people did not understand, why did God who had appointed him to the task remain silent? Though God had His purpose, Moses simply found no answer. The setback was too heavy to bear. The rejection of the people was too painful. Utterly confused and disappointed, Moses faded into Midian.^v

From an aspiring deliverer of Israel, Moses became a contented dweller in Midian. He settled down, happily married with two sons. He built a stable career tending his father-in-law's flock. Years passed and his lifestyle took form. He had a loving wife, a blissful family and a stable career. For many years, his routine life remained peaceful and undisturbed by any significant event. His great aspirations of delivering his people, the knowledge and skills accumulated in Egypt which could have been devoted to significant achievements, his underlying great leadership potential, his once-strong faith and fervent zeal were eroded by time. His faith was no longer the integral part of his life. He had lapsed into a state of comfort. He was contented with his secular life.^{vi}

Does the above encounter of Moses not resemble our own experience? When we first believed or first acquired independent thought, were we not like him? Did we not make that critical decision of faith to forsake the world and embrace the faith? Back then, we had great zeal in learning the word of God. We had lofty aspirations for the Lord - to serve Him and to preach the Gospel to the end of the world. Our faith was genuinely an integral part of our lives. We may even have resolved to dedicate our lives to full-time ministry. But alas, the way ahead was not plain sailing. People just did not understand or appreciate us. God seemed to have withdrawn His arm of assistance and withheld His lips of justice. We sacrificed much of our time and energies in the service of the Lord only in exchange for cold and unkind remarks. Our sincere love and concern for our brethren were rewarded only with unappreciative rejection. Every new effort on our part was met with an even greater setback.



These made us turn to the materialistic world for satisfaction and acceptance. Ironically, the more we strayed from our faith and zeal, the less trouble and worry we seemed to have. Leading secular lives with a stable career, loving spouse and blissful family was peaceful, joyful and distress-free. We continued to attend services to delude ourselves that we were fulfilling our basic Christian duty. We cast aside zeal, aspirations and devotion. In short, our initial faith and zeal did not withstand the test of time, the trial of setbacks and the lure of the world. Like Moses, we lapsed into a state of contentment and comfort as we faded into Midian.

Moses' return came only 40 years later, when God called him at Horeb. By then, he had become a mild shepherd with hardly any drive for great works. As such, when God made clear His intention to send him into Egypt to deliver the Israelites, it kicked off a series of refusals. Moses cited various excuses. Each time God gave him an answer to one excuse and reassured Moses of His presence, Moses would raise another excuse. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" "Suppose they will not listen?" "I am not eloquent." Indeed, these excuses bear close resemblance to those we mouth when God tries to lift us from the ebb of faith to serve Him. "Oh, I'm not good enough for the job, I've lost touch" resembles the "Who am I" excuse. And when this objection is resolved, we continue with an unending series of "What ifs", citing the one thousand and one adverse scenarios which may happen if we respond to the calling of God.

This closely resembles Moses' "suppose they will not listen" excuse. And when an answer is given on each occasion, we give the excuse that we are not gifted, not unlike Moses' "I am not eloquent" excuse. With so many worries, considerations and with such alacrity in devising excuses, the Moses in Midian was a stark contrast from the young Moses who had been blazing with zeal to deliver his people.

Forty years of blissful, comfortable living in Midian had numbed Moses to the suffering of his people and drained his zeal and aspirations to deliver them. If the deliverance of his people had been utmost in his heart during the 40 years in Midian, he would surely have grabbed the first opportunity and pounced at the call of God. But alas, it was not enthusiasm that greeted God's calling at Horeb but a series of lame excuses which concluded with the Moses' blatant request for God to send someone else.^{vii} This angered God. Only then did Moses relent, and realise that he could not oppose the will and calling of God. And as this great commission finally dawned on him, he arose with his wife and children. With the rod of God in his hand, he finally left Midian, the land where he had lapsed into the ebb of faith, where his zeal was drained, and where his love for his brethren was numbed.^{viii} From henceforth, Moses became the great hero, prophet, leader and man of God we are all so familiar with.

The great commission of our Lord to go into the world to preach the Gospel^{ix} mirrors the call of God at Horeb. Egypt symbolises the world, and as Moses had to deliver the Israelites out of Egypt into the promised land, we are, likewise, to deliver the people out of this sinful world into the heavenly kingdom.

Indeed, when we first believed, we were charged with zeal to share the goodness of the Gospel. We were full of lofty aspirations to serve the Lord, to preach to the ends of the world, to encourage and revive the faith of brethren who had fallen away. Each time we saw or heard of our brethren backsliding in faith or unbelievers hardened in their hearts, our hearts of love immediately triggered sense of pity and regret. But like Moses, with all his initial faith, zeal and love, who lapsed into Midian, the mundane pressures of modern life may lead us to slacken and fade into a superficial state of faith. Our initial zeal for God gradually becomes history.

However, Moses did not remain in Midian. He did not remain in the ebb of faith, zeal drained and love numbed. He responded to God's call, picked himself up and left Midian. Only then did Moses become the Moses we all know so well. For those of us who have lapsed into Midian, the similar call of God rings in our ears today. If we respond as Moses did, we will surely regain the faith, zeal and love we once had for God. What is more, we will have the rod of God in our hands to lead a victorious Christian life.

Shee Tse Koon,
Singapore

- i Ex 1: 8 - Ex 2:9
- ii Ex 2: 11 - 12 ; Acts 7: 20 - 24
- iii Heb 11: 24 - 27
- iv Acts 7: 24 - 28
- v Acts 7: 29
- vi Ex 2: 21 - 22 ; Acts 7: 29
- vii Ex 4: 13
- viii Ex 4: 14, 18-20
- ix Mk 16: 16 ; Mt 28: 19-20

DAVID TAKING CENSUS

This is a brief but interesting excerpt from David's colourful life (*2 Sam 24:1-17*).

It is a simple story.

Yet there are obvious questions not explicitly answered by the biblical account.

Why would David want to take a census of Israel and Judah? God had previously commanded the Israelites on two separate occasions to take a census of their able-bodied fighting men, but why was He angry this time?

Why was David punished for taking the census?

Let's play detective and get the whole story.

Why Was David Punished?

The scriptures are not clear as to why David was punished for taking a census of his army. However, from David's reaction in verse 10, it is obvious that he felt he had done something wrong. David is described as being conscience-stricken; he openly admitted that he had sinned. Since David felt that he had sinned, we no longer need to question whether his action was sinful. Further, if God had not considered David's actions sinful, He would not have punished him.

What Was The Sin?

Why did David want to take a census of his army?

From David's reaction in verse 10, we reckon that his motive must have been one known only to himself. We deduce from Joab's tone when he asked David why a census was needed (verse 3), that it was not deemed a very good idea. The reactions of Joab and David, before and after the fact, inform us that whatever David's motive, it must have included some measure of arrogance. That is, David wanted to show his success and power. He sought glory for himself.

BUT The Sin Of Pride

Being proud is a sin because it takes glory away from the One who actually deserves it - God. Even Satan knows that. We too should know this too because pride is a sin that is difficult to detect. A proud individual usually will not realise that he or she is proud.

But God loved David. Immediately after David had taken the census, he felt guilty and was conscience-stricken. He had subconsciously tried to glorify himself but ended up robbing God's glory. Could David have won all his battles without God? Could he have had even a chance against Goliath without God? It is thus increasingly obvious that David's act of taking census was indeed wrong.

A person as David who revered and honoured God would definitely have felt that taking glory away from God was a terrible sin. Exalting yourself is a terrible sin because that is exactly what Satan sought to do - exalt himself to be above God. In our modern age, children are taught to take pride in their accomplishments. It is alright to pat yourself on the back once in a while because it builds confidence and self-esteem.

This, however, is where the standards and values of this world do not measure to God's standard. True confidence comes from humility! If we adhere to the world's definitions, this statement is contradictory. Conversely, if we can transcend the secular values to uphold God's values, we will understand that true confidence develops from the understanding that strength comes from God. Hence all glory is due to Him.

DAVID TAKING
GOD'S CENSUS
DAVID TAKING
GOD'S CENSUS

REPENT...

David was respected by people of all ages not because he was perfect.

David's greatness lay in his ability to admit to his own transgressions and repent before God.

For example; after he had sinned with Bathsheba, prophet Nathan rebuked him.

David immediately admitted his sin to God and repented
by submitting to God's punishment.

The striking difference:

David honoured God enough to face his wrong-doings. Saul, on the other hand, could not humble himself despite knowing his wrong-doings. It is one thing to know about doing good, but it takes much more to admit one's faults.

David's secret for always being able to admit to and repent from his mistakes comes from his genuine reverence towards God. He never knowingly lost sight of his position with respect to God.

And David was a king.

Who are we?

It ought to be even easier for us to subject ourselves constantly to God.

It is easy to fall into the trap of pride especially after one has accomplished something significant.

However, we must keep everything in perspective.

In everything, it is God who gives us what we have, it is He who enables us to do what we do. He not only gives us life, He also sustains it. In all things, we ought to give due glory to Him. If we have erred, we ought to honour God by admitting and repenting from our wrong.

Ask Him for forgiveness.

If God is always in that exalted position, our lives would surely prove to be as successful as David's.

James Hwang,
Canada

CHRISTIAN SERVICE motivation

Some months ago, I stumbled on an old note book that I used to record some of the youth service activities way back in 1980. At that time, the youth services were attended by less than 40 youths. During discussion sessions, we would divide into smaller groups of about eight persons each. These notes of mine recorded some of the discussions as well as the names of those involved in the discussions. Going through the names I can still remember quite vividly these church members but unfortunately majority of them are no longer regular church attendees. This is indeed sad.

Is it so difficult for one to maintain his zeal and faith in the Lord? To me at least, the answer is obvious since history has shown consistently that it is difficult to maintain our zeal in the Lord. Biblically, we also know from Jesus' description of the narrow way of salvation that more will stray and less will stay. It is therefore important for us to understand our motivation behind our Christian service and get our basics right. Otherwise, we would be like trying to build a house without a proper foundation. We may stack beautiful things on top, e.g., our works may be abundant and glorious, but without the support of a proper foundation, these works will soon crumble and hurt someone in the process.

The Servant

In *Luke 12:42-43*, Christian service, as the word “service” suggests, is compared to the work a servant or slave does for his master. Why does a servant serve?

He serves because the master has paid him wages. Why does a slave serve? He serves because he is the property of his master. Perhaps, the slave owed someone a large debt and by paying that someone, the master had paid the slave his life wages. Or it could be that the slave was a war captive whose life had been spared in exchange for his lifetime labour.

For us, we know that we serve one master, the Lord Jesus. But what wages have we received from Him that demand our service? *Romans 6:23* says the wages of sin is death. For the sin of Adam and our own personal sins, we deserve our wages of death. *1 Pet 2:24* tells us that when we are baptised, we receive God’s love and through His blood shed on the cross, we receive the forgiveness of sins. In this case then, the wages we receive for our Christian service is the removal of the wages of sin! So like the slave who ought to have been killed, we now belong to Jesus who has paid for our lives. At the least then, our service towards God is an inescapable obligation.

A Better Motivation - Gratitude and Love

Yet there are some servants and even slaves (*see Deut 15:16,17*) who love their master and serve him beyond contractual obligation. Such is the service a true Christian will deliver. A true Christian will realise and remember that the blood of Jesus was not shed easily. The sin that we have is so great that it required God Himself to come into this human world and undergo immense pain at the cross so that His sacrifice can atone for our sins. Not only was the pain physical, He also underwent spiritual death by being cut off from the Heavenly Father. Despite these, we know that the Lord did not complain or murmur. He knew that the way to Calvary would be extremely painful. He knew that He had to face death in order to accomplish God’s will. In the Garden of Gethsemane, in His humanity, Jesus was fearful that He would not be able to complete God’s mission. *Luke 22:39-44* shows clearly how our Lord felt as He was about to pay for our sins.

Today, we may have heard many times about the great sufferings and love of Jesus. Yet how many of us really appreciate this love of our Saviour? How many of us have been so moved by this love that we are able to live no longer for ourselves but for Him who died on our behalf?

Christian service must begin with this motivation to repay God’s love. It is a natural response to love received and not just a desire to do something meaningful. It is service out of gratitude and love because He has saved us. We do not expect further payment either in terms of respect or praise or anything else because we truly understand the full implications of the phrase ‘Jesus paid it all’.

A Necessary Motivation

- A Sense of Sin

One important reason for our weak response towards God's love is our failure to understand the gravity of our sins. We examine ourselves and whilst we do not claim to be perfect (because we know the saying that no one is perfect), we also do not feel that we have grossly transgressed against God. In fact, we would grade ourselves as above average. Therefore, when we say or sing that Jesus forgives our sins, we are unable to feel greatly indebted to God for our forgiven sins nor do we feel the need to repay Him.

The more we realise our sins, the more we would feel grateful towards God for forgiving us and the more we would want to serve Him. In *Luke 7:40-47*, Jesus remarked thus on the sinful woman, "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." But how are we to realise our sins? For a start, we need to have a better understanding of the word of God and be more sensitive to His righteousness. *Hebrews 4:12* describes the word of God as a two-edged sword that is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. We must believe in the word of God.

Once, a friend in a discussion commented rightly that the pace of our evangelistic work is really slow. Many of us do not have an evangelistic orientation despite our numerous evangelistic activities. Even youths who are the more evangelistic lot appear to be flagging in this fervour. Before we look at others, we must introspect and ask ourselves when we last preached to someone and how many we have preached to this year. Do you believe the words of God in *Ezekiel 3:18-19* that the wicked, e.g.,

sinners, including our loved ones who have not believed, shall surely die? Sometimes, we unconsciously doubt God's word. Maybe we think that since they are also quite nice people, God will not be so heartless as to put them to death. On the other hand, if we do believe that they shall surely die, why are we not motivated to preach to them? Again, we may not really believe that God shall require his blood of us. After all, we may have served God in other areas of work. Surely God is not so unreasonable as to punish us? The discounts we give to God's words and the use of our human concepts to rationalise them have made us insensitive to God's righteousness.

Do we not realise the number of times in which we have failed in the sight of God; our pride in believing we are good enough, our selfishness in continuing in our own comfortable lifestyles oblivious to the sufferings of the world, our unholiness by allowing ourselves to be exposed to sounds of impurity and images of immorality. Yet each time, when we kneel before God and ask Him to forgive us, the blood that He shed for us is used to forgive our sins. So many times we repeat our sins despite telling God that we will change. Yet each time we ask Him to forgive, He truly forgives. Do we not realise our repeated sins are manifestations of our lack of understanding of the Lord's love and the sufferings He underwent to shed His blood for us? We are like the sheep in Hymn 29 that asked, "Lord, whence are those blood drops all the way that mark out the mountain's track?" We do not realise that they are shed for one who has gone astray so the shepherd could bring him back. We asked, "Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?" without realising that they are pierced tonight by many a thorn.

The modern man does not like others to tell him of his wrongs. He says it assaults his dignity. If we find it difficult to accept the loving constructive criticism of others, we must learn to examine our ways before God. The great servants of God are those who understand the greatness of God's love in consideration of their grave sins. Paul said, "I am foremost of all sinners." He could not understand why God had decided to choose him. Today, we too must realise the greatness of God's love. If it wasn't for His love in choosing us, in using His blood to redeem us, we will perish in our sins. We will be in the world, arrogantly announcing that there is no God and pursuing our own way of life. We will continue to be in the hands of Satan enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sins. There is nothing in us that is worthy for God to suffer and die. The only worth in this sacrifice is His love. Try singing meaningfully Hymn 30 Stanzas 2 and 3.

Conclusion

Christian service needs to be motivated by God's love. When we serve out of gratitude and to repay God's grace, there is no murmuring in our work. As long as our work is beneficial to humankind, we serve even in the face of difficulties. We do not expect any returns for our labour because the Lord has already paid us with His life. In fact, we are so grateful that God has decided to use us despite our lowliness (*Luke 17:7-10*). On the other hand, if we do not serve Him nor strive to serve Him with our heart and soul, we have received God's love in vain (*Luke 12:47,48*).

Today, we have been entrusted with much and much are expected of us. Of the millions of people in the world, God has chosen us to be His children, to be in the true church and to have the hope of salvation. Many have spent their years searching but they have not found the truth. Many have spiritually nurtured themselves but works of righteousness cannot save a person. Today, for you and me who have been given this grace, much is expected of us. We must not be deceived into thinking that the abundant gifts we have and the many favourable factors and comforts we may enjoy are God's blessings for us to enjoy materially. They are the blessings of God, no doubt. But if we thank God with the intention of enjoying ourselves until our ripe old age, we have sadly missed the purpose of God for these blessings. God gives us the opportunities today to serve Him. We are given both time and ability. Having received these, we must understand and remember -

Both riches and honour come from Thee, and Thou rulest over all. In Thy hand are power and might; and in Thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

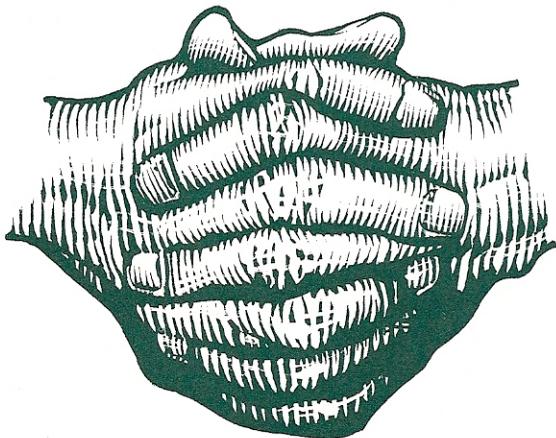
I Chronicles 29:12

Tay Teck Kiang,
Singapore

ONE DAY, ONE OF JESUS' DISCIPLES SAID TO HIM,
"LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY" AND
THE LORD TAUGHT THEM
THE LORD'S PRAYER. . . .

THE LORD'S
PRAYER
REVISITED

MY Father who art in heaven, once again I come before you to offer this prayer to you, in the same manner as you had taught your disciples to pray in the days when you were on earth. This prayer has become so much a part of our daily conversations that often you hear me rattling off the verses with great speed. Today, may this prayer be different. Teach me, as I pray, to contemplate on the things you were concerned with and had wanted your followers to pay attention to. Enable me to understand your many teachings embedded therein, teachings which I have neglected to observe.



LORD, as I acknowledge your presence in heaven, as I call out "Our Father" with my brothers and sisters in church, help me to remember that we share one common Father; we are all one in you. Hence, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female."² Regardless of skin colour, language or backgrounds by whatever definition, let me love to my utmost every brethren in your fold. I remember the new commandment you gave while you were on earth, that we love one another as you have loved us so that by our bond of love, others will know that we are your disciples.³ Remind me that you are not only watching and guiding, but very importantly, also preparing a place for us.⁴ You shall come in your glory and splendour to receive us to be with you forever. It won't be only you and me and saints of old whom I have not personally met. It will also be the brothers and sisters whom I see during worship services and with whom I labour in your holy work. With everyone whom I shall meet on that Day, will I rejoice at the assurance that we are to live as neighbours for eternity? Is there going to be a face that may not bring a wide smile to my face, perhaps because of certain grievances or differences which I have failed to resolve within myself? If I harbour any form of unholy sentiments towards any one of my brethren, how can I have a clear conscience before you when you come to receive us all into the heavenly home?

LORD, as I say "Hallowed be Your name," I am reminded that I cannot be counted true if I do not keep myself holy. For I am called by your holy name.⁵ Help me today, so that my whole being and my whole preoccupation will be striving after holiness. I want to fear you and keep your commandments, for that is my whole duty as a human being.⁶ "You shall be holy, for I am holy," you said.⁷ Grant me strength to simply obey, be it in my conduct, my speech, or my thoughts.

Lord, I pray that Your kingdom come. I know that I can't claim to be faithful to what I pray unless I actively obey your command to bring your kingdom into the lives of people who are spiritually starving for your mercy and grace. There are many out there who are still in the clutches of the devil, suffering as a captive in his kingdom. You have commanded us to bring them out of that darkness, into your glorious light. I must confess to you, Lord, that many a time, I fail to open my mouth to share the wonderful grace of salvation with people who need you. In fact, they are not far from me; they are around me and they walk beside me and talk with me. A few of them even have their lives intertwined with mine. Some tell me of their sorrow and pain, which perhaps is an opportunity from you for me to tell them about you, the almighty who can relieve all woes. Yet, I kept mum.

Sometimes, I excuse myself most conveniently by turning my eyes to the load of errands to run and the seemingly all-important task of pursuing a comfortable life for my loved ones and myself. But, what could be more important than transformed lives and saved souls? Had I but even tried . . . O Lord, empower me with the strength of your Holy Spirit. Help me out of my self-centredness and spiritual ennui, which will degenerate into paralysis, unless I awake.

WHEN I say "Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven," I must ask myself if I have put my all before your loving presence, like a baby sound asleep in the mother's bosom, wholly trusting in your promise to take care. In this boisterous sea of life, there are never-ending waves of toil and sorrow gushing towards me as I sail. Help me to accept calmly whatever befalls me, allowing your peace which surpasses all understanding to rule in my heart.⁸ Let me be convicted of your love even when things don't go my way. You willingly gave me your very life, so surely you will not withhold anything which is of benefit to me.⁹ Help me also to actively seek to know and fulfill your will so that it may truly be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

GIVE me this day my daily bread.

Each and every day as I repeat these words, let me realise how there is absolutely no need for me to worry about tomorrow. Lift me up to a higher level of spirituality where I can completely delight myself in you, trusting that you will grant me the things I need, for I seek first your kingdom and your righteousness.¹⁰

Remind me that today is what I have to live for. Yesterday, with all its glory or shame, is past and tomorrow is still unknown. So, help me to make the most of today. At the end of the day, I want to know that I have not wasted it on pursuits which are ultimately futile. I need to exercise good judgement to do the things which are really worth doing.

So, Lord, grant me the wisdom to tell the difference.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Forgive me my debts, I pray, but let me not forget that I have to first forgive my debtors. Search my heart, Lord, and reveal to me the bitter grudges hidden in the crevices of my imperfect heart

LORD, I also call to mind your words that "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of (your) the mouth of the Lord".¹¹ Each day, no matter how many tasks there are that I have to complete, I shall strive to devote time to learn more of your teachings and to savour the sweetness of your precious words. In the hurly-burly of daily living, let me not ignore your call to spend time alone with you, to listen to you and to talk with you. For it would be a lifeless existence without the nourishment of your living word of life.

FORGIVE me my debts, I pray, but let me not forget that I have to first forgive my debtors. Search my heart, Lord, and reveal to me the bitter grudges hidden in the crevices of my imperfect heart. Give me the magnanimity of your boundless forgiveness, that I may forgive another just as you have forgiven me.¹² Open my eyes to see my own transgressions, that I may be humbled and hence refrain from picking up the first stone to strike another who has transgressed.¹³ Often, I take offence against another because I assume for myself a primary position as I relate with others. "I" has become my central concern. When that happens, I cannot see how it is more blessed to give than to receive.¹⁴ Your very earthly life was a perfect demonstration of self-denial and sacrifice. Let me therefore seek to give rather than receive, and to love rather than be loved. When I can hold to that principle, I know I shall be closer to being one who forgives not just once, but like you have instructed, even seventy times seven!¹⁵

WHEN I ask "lead me not into temptation but to deliver me from evil," arouse in me a vigilance to not place myself in situations where I am most likely to be tempted. The devil, like a roaring lion, is walking about, seeking whomever he may devour.¹⁶ Looking back on my past, I cannot but concede that many a transgression could have been avoided had I fled from the devil's lure as soon as I felt his presence. Often I fool myself into thinking that a little relaxation of my Christian vigil is not going to hurt, only to find myself wandering farther and farther away from your precepts.

Lord, I want to rely on the power of your Holy Spirit, to detect temptations that are stealthily creeping close and be up in arms at the slightest signs of their intrusion in my life.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

OF course, Lord, I must not take confidence in my own will power and ability in my war against the devil. So many have fallen along the wayside that I dare not imagine I will never falter. Therefore, I pray for your preservation so that I may never fall. It is you who strengthens me and gives me hope to do anything because you are the author and finisher of my faith.¹⁷

Finally, I pray that the primary pursuit of my life, no matter where my station is in this world, will be to follow you and be wholly dedicated to you. May my life be a living attestation of your rule over my will and your pre-eminence in all my interests, for yours is the kingdom. Let me rely on your power and accomplish great works beyond what I can achieve on my own, for yours is the power. May all that I am be befitting my status as your child, for yours is the glory. May all praise be yours forever more. Amen.

1 Luke 11:1-4; Mt 6:9-13

2 Gal. 3:28

3 Jn 13:34, 35

4 Jn 14:3

5 James 2:7

6 Eccl. 12:13

7 1 Pet 1:16

8 Phil 4:7; Col 3:15

9 Rom 8:32

10 Mt 6:33

11 Deut 8:3; Mt 4:4

12 Col 3:13

13 Jn 8:1-9

14 Acts 20:35

15 Mt 18:22

16 1 Pet 5:8

17 Heb 12:2

Lim Siok Hong
Chicago, USA

ARE

YOU

READY

TO

DIE ?

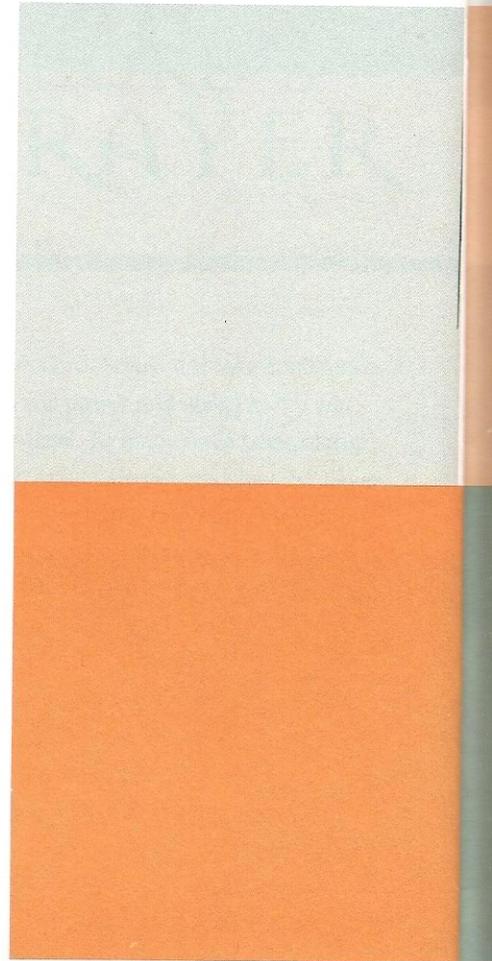
"...and he died instantly..."

These unforgettable words came over the phone one day last summer. A friend of mine was killed in a terrible accident. The question "Why?" was the first thing that came to mind after the initial shock wore off. He was only twenty something, he was my brother in Christ and my friend. He was full of life and energy. Recently graduated from university, he had just begun a new chapter in life, which he had barely just tasted. He had so many plans. Little did he know that he was going to die so soon. None of us expected it too. Through faith, I understand and accept that God grants us life and thus has the full right and authority to take it away. Nonetheless, I still found the shocking news difficult to accept and comprehend and the same question "Why?" continued to linger in my mind. I should and do, however, take great comfort in the fact that he is enjoying a new chapter in his life now - and a far more joyful, meaningful and tranquil life than one could ever imagine. Praise the Lord!

"Man's life is short." How many times have we heard that? These words only took effect on me when my friend's life ended so suddenly. Life is like the sound of a bell, whose resonance reaches its listeners for a moment and is heard no more. Despite the gradual increase in health awareness and the advancement of medical knowledge and technology, none can live forever. The law of nature determines that where there is life, there will also be death. Death is a certainty that no one can prevent from happening, although the actual time it happens is uncertain. Furthermore, death knows no barriers and is not prejudicial - it does not just visit the old and the sick as is the common perception.

Before the sudden death of my friend, the thought of dying never entered my mind. Even if it did, it was quickly dismissed. But thinking about it now, what would happen if God decided to take His breath back from me today or tomorrow. Am I confident enough to say that I am ready for Him and that I will be able to live eternally with Him? Have I lived a life worthy of a child of God? Have I done enough for God? Or more to the point, what have I done for God?

How many times have I put God to one side and left Him there until I had a use for Him or needed Him?



How many times have I been spiritually charged after attending church convocations, youth meetings and theological seminars but failed to maintain this high level of intensity in my faith after I leave each spiritual oasis? Does my renewed spiritual energy slowly deplete, unnoticed and unused?

How many times have I procrastinated about drawing nearer to God because I am too wrapped up with myself and my life and am not quite willing to cut off or even loosen the ties I have with this world?

How many times have I, moved by God's love and spirit, been determined to become a new person and to love God sincerely with all my heart, only to lose this motivation and drive when I encountered obstacles and succumbed to temptations?

How many times have I pondered over and found excuses when asked to attend bible studies and church services, but readily accepted invitations to the cinema or to dinner?

Embarrassingly, these times have been all too many. When we are enjoying life and everything is hunky-dory, we may develop a complacent attitude towards life, and more importantly towards the church and towards God. When this spiritual apathy becomes apparent to us, it is vital that we take the necessary steps to change for the better. Realisation is the first step. Taking action to resolve our spiritual inertia is the key.

Two skydivers, both wearing parachutes, jump from a plane at 15,000 feet in the air. One of the skydivers ignores the ripcord of his parachute and says to himself "I'm perfectly safe because of my parachute" and still with this ignorant thought in mind, he is killed as he hits the ground at 100 mph. The other skydiver knows that just wearing the parachute will not save him. He must physically do something to avoid the fate of the other skydiver, so he pulls the ripcord of the parachute and lands safely.

If we know we have to make a stronger commitment to God, we should take steps to do it while we still have the chance, whether it is to resolve to work more for God or to modify our priorities in life. If we are aware of our spiritual apathy, we should do something about it. We know too well; "time waits for no man". What if we gain the whole world, yet realise too late, that we have forfeited our soul? No compensation in this world is as valuable as our eternal life. Nothing could ever replace its loss.

Jesus once related a parable about a certain landowner (Luke 12:16-21). This man was very rich, astute and intelligent, but Jesus called him a fool. Why? The reason was that this rich man misunderstood the meaning of life and what it took to fulfil it. He had laid up much goods for himself for many years to come but then God told him that he was going to die that very night. What use are riches to the dead? He was a fool because he was so busy gathering his treasures in the material world that he did not think to lay up treasures in heaven. He failed to comprehend that his spiritual needs could not be satisfied through material means. The pursuit of money, prosperity and prestige had occupied his mind and time. How many of us today are just as foolish as him? It is necessary to work in order to take care of our physical needs, but the purpose of living itself calls us to go further than this - to fulfil our spiritual needs.

The fate of this rich fool should constantly remind us that what we perceive as being of great value may in fact be ultimately meaningless. The only riches that will retain its value and not depreciate with time are those that we invest in our eternal inheritance. These riches are only gained through fearing God, obeying His commandments and testifying for Him. But how many of us look that far ahead?

We are constantly reminded through the news how death does not give any warning. Consequently, "life should not be taken for granted" - how many times have we heard that adage? Unfortunately, many of us do take life for granted. Day after day we expect tomorrow to bring the start of another brand new day to be filled with work, rest, play and more memories. But what if tomorrow doesn't come to us? Have we ever seriously thought about it?

Sometimes certain events like the sudden death of a young friend serves as a sharp reminder of how adversity may strike at any time and how fragile life really is. We should devote our lives to what really matters and not waste time striving after worldly success, prosperity and pleasure. These are understandable pursuits for those who do not know God. Believers, however, have to pursue goals that are everlasting and pleasing to God.

King Solomon, the man with unprecedented wisdom and wealth, wrote Ecclesiastes not only to warn future generations (including us today) that the pursuit of wealth, power and excessive pleasure was a "striving after wind". He also wanted to spare them the pain of learning for themselves that without God life is meaningless. Solomon had everything a man could desire but when he concluded that every-thing was vanity because all men will eventually die (Ecc1.9:2-3), he had to search for true satisfaction elsewhere. The aged Solomon then took a reflective look at his life and ultimately concluded that the true meaning of life was simply to "fear God and keep His commandments" (Ecc1.12:13). Everything else was vanity and a "striving after wind". He advised that even if we were to lose everything in the world, we still have God who is all we really need.

No one knows for certain how many years God has granted to each one of us. What is certain is that one day we will pass away. Paul's philosophy of life was simple: "if we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord." Paul constantly wrote in his epistles how he did not fear death, how he considered his life and his possessions as refuse and how he longed to be with God. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). But he knew that God had a purpose for him in this world. As long as God's breath of life was in him, he had to preach and to fight the good fight. He endeavoured to imitate Jesus and urged others to follow his example (1 Cor 9:16-17). After his conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul understood the true meaning of his life. He was motivated to honour and glorify his Saviour through boldly preaching Him.

For the present, as we wait, we should live life judiciously and constantly examine and control the direction our life. We simply cannot afford to become complacent. If we find ourselves stuck in the doldrums, swift action needs to be taken. Thankfully, we are still living in a period of grace, but for how much longer? Bearing in mind that tomorrow is promised to no one, we should regard each new day as a gift from God and give thanks to Him.

We should consider the advice of King Solomon and Apostle Paul and resolve to live and devote each day for our Lord - to fear, to obey, to glorify and to serve Him until the day we die or the day our Lord returns. Only then will we be living a meaningful life both beneficial and satisfying to ourselves but most importantly, acceptable to God.

Many people shudder at the mention of the word death. In fact, many people fear death because they fear the unknown and what will happen

to them beyond life, as they know it. From a Christian's perspective, death should not be feared but embraced because the day has come when our Lord Jesus will gather us in His gentle arms and carry us into His heavenly kingdom. There is our final home, which our Lord has lovingly prepared for us, to live a new life free from toil and suffering (In 14:1-3). It is a world where tears are replaced with laughter, sorrow with joy, chaos with tranquillity, war with peace, and hate with unconditional love. Although death ends our physical life on this earth, it is also the beginning of our eternal life with God in heaven.

Everyone will eventually die, that is a fact. The question is 'ARE YOU READY'?

Moira Shek,
Elgin, UK



Thoughts on

Spiritual Growth

Of all the different issues facing Christian parents today, none is more important than that concerning the spiritual growth of their children. Recently, several parents were asked to share their thoughts on this subject. Three principles emerged.

1

Rely On God

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" so quotes a mother of two young sons. But helping children grow spiritually in the 90's is a difficult thing to do. So this mother relies on the power of prayer. Every day, she prays for herself so that God will give her the strength to do the right thing. She has also been praying for her sons since they were born. She says, "I ask God to keep them in His love." As the boys grew a little older, she taught them to pray and to rely on God. For example, when the boys face a challenge in school, she reminds them that God will help them all the way.

2

Set A Good Example

This is from a mother with two adolescent children. When she notices how big and tall her daughter and son are growing, she is reassured that they will also grow just as well spiritually if they are encouraged in an equally healthy environment. This mother explains that if she wants her children to grow in the ways of the Lord, she must "set a good example". This is a lesson she learnt from her mother. For example, she believes that there is no better way for her to teach her children about obedience than for her to be a submissive wife. This mother learnt to make sacrifices by remembering the many sacrifices the Lord has made for her.

3

Develop and Maintain A Good Relationship

A mother, whose son is in his early twenties, shares over two decades of parenting experience. She is thankful for the close relationship she has with her son. Through the years, she learnt how to talk to him and she also learnt how to listen to him. In this way, she has been able to help him develop a personal relationship with the Lord. Even when her son was studying at a university far away from home, mother and son regularly kept in touch with each other over the telephone. Thus she continued to impress upon the young man the importance of upholding spiritual values like praying and attending Sabbath services. At a separate interview, this young man confided, "My mom grows with me. I respect her a lot."

As we can see, the challenge of helping our children grow spiritually begins at the time of their birth and continues for at least twenty years. This calls for long-term commitment and single-minded devotion. Some years will be easier than others. There will also be very trying times. Whatever the case may be, we must persevere. Since the Lord has entrusted daughters and sons into our care, we certainly ought to do all we can to help them grow in the ways of the Lord.

Susan Estrata,
Pittsburg, USA

Diary of a Voluntary Worker

03 July

Arrived in Cebu. Met at the airport by Pr Thomas Kam, who had flown in earlier from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah and Sis Jessica. The latter's family had moved to Cebu from Sabah because of her husband's work commitments at a resort hotel. Will be staying with her family tonight.

04 July

Morning comes early to Cebu. Woke up at 5 a.m. to catch the 6:55 a.m. flight. Learnt later that the check-in counter close early; once closed, you have to "pay" money to check in. Managed to catch the Fokker 50. Landed at Pagadian at 7:35 a.m. Met by some brothers who took us to church, nicely built, simple with minimum facilities. A small house at the front is home to a worker and his family, and for the time being, us. Land is purchased and buildings constructed through love and offerings from our members all over the world.

Quite noisy in the room as it is near the main road where there is a slope. Tricycles and lorries have to accelerate, causing a din and emitting smoke. It is also warm and dusty. Tricycles are not the type with pedals. Rather, they are sidecars with seats mounted at an angle of 45 degrees to a motorcycle. These tricycles are a common form of public transport here; a few of our brothers ride them as means of a livelihood to support a family of five or six.

Houses in this area are either ramshackle wooden sheds or roadside stalls, though the very few well-to-do have brick and mortar homes. The members tell us it is still safe as we are near the town. Anywhere else in the outskirts exposes one to the risk of kidnapping by Muslim rebels and other ransom-demanding ruffians. Just last week, a church pastor and two of his young people were kidnapped. All feel uneasy. We pray that we will be kept safe for our entire stay here.

05 July

Prepared a sermon for the morning service - "What does the Sabbath mean to you?" Pr Kam spoke on "The Book of Life" in the afternoon. There were about 40 adults in the services and an almost equal number of children.

Hymns are sung to the accompaniment of the guitar, a versatile musical instrument. Being musically-illiterate does not deter the members from singing gustily; they have good voices and are able to pick up the tunes very fast. Back home in Singapore, some of our members have forgotten this form of worship, to "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God".

06 July

Classes begun for the Short Term Theological Course today.

Today is Sunday, and every Sunday evening, the church does a gospel programme on the AM radio to reach out to its listeners. It also goes a long way in reaching out to the remote areas, especially when there is an urgent announcement for the churches and prayer houses (there are about 20 places of worship in this area). For 15 minutes, from 6:45pm to 7pm, the brother will try to cram as much as possible on the live broadcast. Today, he speaks about the apostles keeping the Sabbath.

The broadcast can reach an area where about 8 million people live, though at any one time it is estimated about 2 million people could be tuning in. In a country where many cannot afford the television, the evenings are spent with the radio. Many members have come to believe through this method of evangelism and more have written in requesting for gospel tracts. But maintaining this broadcast may soon be a burden for the church as the station has increased the price of each broadcast to 1000 pesos. It is a princely sum, considering the living allowance of our full-time worker is only 1600 pesos a month.

07 July

Things here are relatively expensive, with some items of the same price back home. So we get two dishes at each meal, of which one will be common with the members, and another specially prepared for us.

The believers here are generally very hospitable, at times to an extreme. Heard that some will borrow money and go into debt so as to provide food and accommodation for a visitor in the house. It's a bit difficult to swallow the food when one hears this; a lump forms in the throat. Such love and generosity despite their poverty are indeed admirable.

Yet poverty for most young people back home is just an abstract concept. Hunger, squalor, filth and diseases; it is almost unimaginable for us who never experienced them.

08 July

Was hanging out clothes in the sun to dry, when the children, some as young as six or seven, rushed past, carrying pieces of firewood for the kitchen. The kids here lead a simple life, playing and splashing around when it rains, tending to the family's chickens, helping mummy with the cooking, washing and looking after the younger siblings, and finding fulfilment in playing with old makeshift toys. The similarity with kids back home ends with playing with toys. What a pity, if only kids back home can come and see the disparity, perhaps the clamouring to go to the amusement centre, and to ask for the latest gizmo toy will end too.

There is an urgent need for these children to be brought up on a proper religious education foundation, as they shall be useful vessels for the local gospel work in the future.

10 July

Noticed the students' keenness to learn the Word of God, and the church hymns. Have been teaching them hymns whenever we can, e.g., before the class or a service, or on *evenings when there is no service. It is more a sing-a-long* as we cannot read the notes, and sometimes we go off pitch. So we'll repeat and practise the hymns several times, but it is always a joy watching them finally singing the hymn without our help.

11 July

Electricity was cut off last evening, and so dinner was by candlelight. We were hoping it would be restored so that we could have a hymn session, but it didn't so we slept on our wooden beds and exchanged stories. Actually we use electricity only for the lights and fans, so its absence didn't bother us. Water is an important commodity here; each night, one of the brothers will have to fill up the water tank and whatever available pots and pails with the water tap from the government source. We nicknamed it "picking manna", as he has to do it every evening, as sometimes no water will be available for the rest of the day. **Often at home we take such conveniences for granted, not realising the blessings of God. Yet are we more fervent in our service to the Lord, despite the luxury of comfortable church buildings to worship Him? And are we offering more time, despite possessing modern tools to help us in our work?**

13 July

Evening evangelistic service, there were not enough hymnbooks to go around, so most members have to share.

15 July

Just a few more days before the course ends.

Thank the providence of God, except for a few cases of headaches, coughs and stomach discomfort, the three of us have been in the pink of health. The rains have also been pouring during the afternoons, keeping the weather cool and the dust from blowing. Constantly rejoice when reminded by the fact that the churches back home have been very concerned and are praying for our safety and health.

18 July

No more lessons today, most of the outstation members are returning home. Two full-time workers left at 3am this morning to board the bus to the harbour for a 12-hour ferry journey to visit a few families of believers, before returning home. Another worker will embark on a 30-hour journey through a series of packed buses and ferry.

Most of them had left home and family for almost 3 weeks to learn more of the Word of God. Some had brought their families along. Their faith is simple, and though poverty and illiteracy is a hindrance, they have great zeal in reaching out to remote areas to make disciples and establish churches for the Lord.

20 July

Took an opportunity to go to the town market. The land here is full of contrasts, you see the road dividers and walls here filled with pickets and banners proclaiming Bible verses, yet crime is rampant. Being a predominantly Catholic country doesn't help either. Yet again, we believe there are still many sincere 'Corneliuses', devout people awaiting the Truth to reach them.

The other hindrance to the gospel work here is the lack of workers to prepare the gospel tracts in the local dialects. May God help them soon. Will leave for Cebu tomorrow and continue onto Bacolod on Thursday to visit the church at Mansilingan.

25 July

Arrived safely in Bacolod yesterday. The truth arrived in the Philippines with this first church in Mansilingan when in June 1983, the International Assembly sent two missionaries there in response to their 'Macedonian call'. Henceforth, this church has undergone much spiritual tribulations and many have left the church as a result.

Despite these and other financial hardships, the members gather to pray together at 5:30 in the mornings and evenings for the church's progress.

27 July

The congregation gathered for additional services in the morning. After that we walked through the muddy tracks and in the rain with two workers to evangelise to a few families of truth-seekers. It's rainy season in the Philippines!

Will leave Bacolod for Manila tomorrow.

28 July

Did not stay on in Manila with Pr Kam as had to return home.

Heard that Manila church still has not a place of worship, as land prices here are exorbitantly high. She is also prone to flooding, and because of the traffic situation in this city, it can take 2 - 3 hours to cover a short distance to attend service.

Pr Kam writes later, "At Manila, we only had four services and less than twenty souls turned up due to the rain."

Yes, let's continue to pray and show our concern for the newly evangelised areas around the world. In the Philippines alone, there is still much to do. May the Lord continue to bless and give guidance to the work here.

Editor's Note

Brother John Chua accompanied Preacher Thomas Kam (of the Sabah General Assembly) as a voluntary worker to the Philippines from 03 to 28 July 1997. Together with another voluntary worker from Taiwan, they visited churches at Pagadian and Mansilingan. During this period, John kept a diary of his experience and reflections, and Manna is now publishing excerpts from this diary, to encourage more brethren to participate in this aspect of the holy work. It is only when we join in the work that we can realise the urgency in the Lord's comment that "the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers few".

John Chua,
Singapore

GROWTH

Tay Eng Guan,
Singapore

"When I am four years old," Joseph said,
"I can eat ice-cream and chocolates and sweets!"
Yes but now you're still coughing I'm afraid
So please hand over that sweet and that chocolate
And that is just what he did obediently
Of course not without some thought
As longingly he looked at the confectionery
But somewhere in that innocent mind
The past of racking coughs and the future of
Better treats told him, "Papa's right
And I'll have so much more when I'm four."

"Tell me a story Papa," Joseph asked
"I want Three Little Pigs and The Rabbit and The Tortoise."
Were you a good boy today? Did you pray?
To which he would always say yes
Even though Grandma would smilingly report
An altercation in the morning with him
And then with some prompting he would say Sorry
Could we get on with the Story?
Once upon a time, a rabbit laughed at a tortoise

"That's no good, right?" Joseph quizzed.

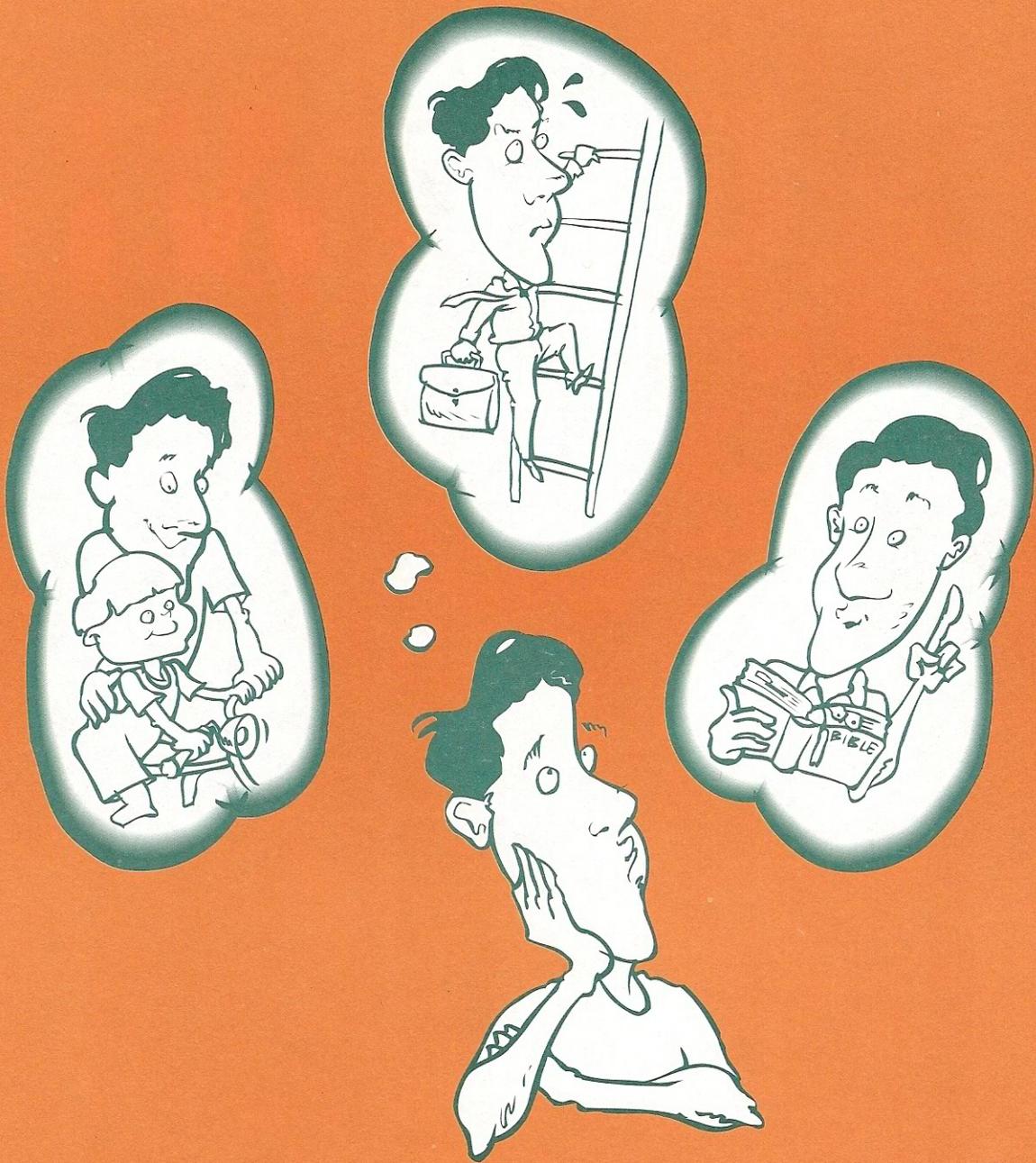
"Today is tomorrow Papa," Joseph said
"It's time to take me to the playground,"
And that is just what I did obediently
For promises made to a child must be kept
The exquisite occasion when mortal man
Shines in the image of God and we are reminded
That the Father always keeps His promises
And as I take his little hand in mine
And then watch him merrily go down a monster slide
I realise that he had grown
And through the years ahead
Both of us must continue to grow
Until the fullness of Christ in us may show.

Bible passages to ponder:

Hebrews 11:25 - on forgoing the
fleeting pleasures for something better.

Hebrews 5:13-14 - on
distinguishing between good and evil.

Ephesians 4:13 - on growing to
mature manhood, to the measure of
the stature of the fullness of Christ.



Making ^{Life's} Choices

One day, while walking in Wonderland, Alice came upon a cross-road. She did not know which road to take. So she asked one of the characters in Wonderland, "Sir, could you tell me which road I should choose?" The character answered her, "My dear, do you know where you are going?" As Alice stood silently and pondered over that question, he continued, "My dear, if you do not know where you are going, then it does not matter which way you choose."

In life, we constantly find ourselves in situations where we have to make choices. Which path should I take? What course should I study? In which company should I work? Many people describe the beginning of life as a boat that has just left the sheltered harbour. We are the coxswain who has to steer this ship in a vast boisterous sea.

The Wisest Choice...

Today, as Christians who have been purchased by the precious blood of our Lord, we have actually allowed our Lord Jesus to become the master of our lives. We have made the choice to believe in Him, follow Him, and allow Him to lead us into His heavenly kingdom. This is the wisest and best decision that a person can ever make in his entire life. Why? Elder James once declared, "What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." (as 4:14) Yet if we choose to believe in Him, after this short earthly life, we shall become partakers of the eternal heavenly kingdom. Consequently, it is only logical that all the other choices in our lives - our studies, career, etc. - should be in line with this great choice that we have made.

Sadly, when confronted with the demands of society, expectations of the people around us and the pressures in life, we find ourselves in a constant struggle to keep up with our Christian principles. We find it difficult at times to make choices in our lives that are in concert with our decision to become a Christian. In addition, we find that the commitment to our initial choice to become a Christian is often weak and difficult to sustain.

We are all familiar with the account of Moses leading the nation of Israel out of Egypt. Through the hand of Moses, God performed ten great miracles in the land of Egypt so that the nation of Israel could be freed from bondage and slavery. The Israelites were spectators and witnesses of these signs. They then made the choice to submit themselves to the leadership of Moses; so that through Moses, God would lead them into the land of promise.

Arriving at the Red Sea, a seemingly insurmountable obstacle confronted the entire nation. Right behind were the pursuing and ferocious armies of the Pharaoh. Immediately, the people of Israel started murmuring against Moses (Ex 14:10-12). At that crucial moment, they have forgotten the ten plaques sent by God. They had lost faith in God's salvation and failed to believe in His deliverance. The Israelites were uncommitted to the choice they had made earlier to let God lead them into the land of promise.

As they journeyed through the wilderness, God guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. When they met with adversaries, God fought for them. When they were hungry or thirsty, God provided for their physiological needs. God cared for them as a father would do for his children. Finally when they were about to enter the land of promise, 12 spies were sent to check out the land. Because of the reports of ten faithless spies, the Israelites started to murmur against God again. They were even planning to choose a leader to lead them back to Egypt, to a life of bondage (Num 14:1-4). In perspective, they feared death at the hands of the Canaanites more than a life of continuous bondage under the Egyptians. More importantly, they have forgotten how God had guided them in their wilderness journey. They have also forgotten the mighty works of God that they had witnessed with their own eyes. Where was their commitment to their choice to leave Egypt and enter the promised land? It had all gone! Their commitment was situational, largely influenced by their circumstances. As a result, for most of them, their lives ended tragically. Except for Joshua and Caleb, those above the age of 20 could not enter the promised land (Num 14:20-23, 27-30).

It is heart-wrenching to read of the tragedy of the Israelites. It would be worse to find ourselves repeating this history. Today, we have decided to become a Christian. This is good. But do we have faith in God's promises? Are we constantly relying on Him to guide us and trusting His deliverance in all our times of need? Let the tragedy of the Israelites be a lesson to us. We have to constantly ponder over the mighty works of God in our own lives and, based on these, build up a life of trust in God. Let us not merely be Christians by name, uncommitted to our faith. If we are, we may find ourselves barred from the land of promise one day. Let us hold fast to our faith and be totally committed to it right to the end (Heb 3:14).

An Even Better Life?

Growing materialism and affluence constantly lure us in search of a more comfortable life. Are God's material blessings insufficient? Are we caught up in the vicious circle of material pursuit and upgrading? Some have chosen a more comfortable life at the expense of their faith. Some have chosen to store up treasures on earth, thereby compromising their fervour and dedication towards God. Some have invested more time in pursuing things in this world because they are afraid of losing out to their relatives and close friends in the quantity and quality of their material possessions. Are all these necessary? Didn't God say that if we seek His kingdom and His righteousness, then He would provide all our basic needs (Mt 6:33)?

The Bible portrays Christianity as a relationship between God and humanity. Our Lord Jesus Christ had gone all the way to provide a new and living way for us. He remains committed to His mission to make that sacrifice for us (Phil 2:8). Today, He understands our weaknesses and continues to help us in our times of need. He remains faithful to this relationship today and forever. The question we have to ask ourselves is whether we have fulfilled our part of this God-Human relationship. Are we faithful towards Him, or are we building for ourselves a "better life" of comfort at the expense of our faith? Perhaps we may succeed in achieving a more comfortable life but will it be a truly blissful life? Or have we just completed a magnificent sandcastle? Has physical comfort blinded us to the threat of the rising tide? Luxury or poverty, abundance or lack, all will pass away. The important thing is to live a life pleasing to God; always honouring the God-Human relationship and be contented with the things God has given us.



During the period of the Judges, there lived a person named Elimelech who took his entire family to the land of Moab because there was a famine in the land of Judah. Though he was not starving in Judah, he sought refuge in a foreign land because he wanted a better life. He had abundance (*Ruth 1:21*) but went to the land of gentiles to search for more abundance. In the land of Moab, his family did indeed enjoy greater abundance but just for a few years. Tragedy soon struck. Elimelech passed away. His two sons who had married Moabite women also died later (*Ruth 1:1-5*).

This is the end result of one who constantly sought a better life of greater abundance, not contented with the things God gave. Elimelech left Judah, God's promised land, for the land of Moab that the Bible describes as the land God hated. His search for a life of greater abundance ended in tragedy. We must learn from the example of Elimelech. In whatever circumstances we find ourselves, let us never depart from the promises and presence of God. Let us keep ourselves in the grace of God all the days of our life, and lead a life truly pleasing to Him. Only then are we fulfilling our part in the God-Human relationship.

Choices, Choices, Choices.... Which One?

The decision to become a Christian and to remain faithful and committed to God is not the only decision one makes in his entire life. However, it is this decision that will constitute the principle in all the other choices that he should make.

The Moabite woman Ruth was given a choice to either return to her people or follow her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Judah. She chose to believe in the God of Israel and to be an Israelite. She elected to go to Judah to look after Naomi (*Ruth 1:16*). This turned out to be the wisest decision

★ She yielded herself to the customs and practices of the Israelites in the matter of redeeming back the land (*Ruth 3:9-10*).

★ She was willing to humble herself and to swallow her pride to glean in the fields so that she could support her mother-in-law and herself.

★ She led a life of virtue (*Ruth 3:11*) and sacrifice because of her commitment to her initial decision to live in the land of Judah with Naomi. Her decision to make the God of Israel her God and the people as her people was the principle for subsequent decisions through out her life.

Finally, God blessed Ruth abundantly. She became an ancestress of King David (*Ruth 4:21-22*) and our Lord Jesus (*Mt 1:5*). Such is the blessing awaiting one who is truly committed to her choice of faith. We must emulate Ruth in her commitment and her spirit of sacrifice. We must allow our decision of becoming a Christian form the guiding principle in other choices we make in our life. If we understand why we became Christians and the Christian goals that we should pursue, it is easy to make choices in our career, studies and marriage that are consistent and pleasing in the eyes of God.

★ Last Words...

Are you at the cross-roads today, wondering which path you should take? Brace up! Think about the ultimate goals that we should be pursuing. Think about where you want to steer your life and where you want to end up at the close. Then make the choice that is consistent with these goals. Finally let us remain committed to our Lord. Let us not waver from our wisest choice of becoming a Christian. Instead, we ought to rely on Him constantly in whatever circumstances, always trusting in His deliverance all the days of our life.

Derek Lim,
Singapore

The past couple of months will remain deeply imprinted on my mind as it allowed me to experience the love of brothers and sisters and the wonderful grace and mercy of God.

As part of my university degree, I had to spend four months in St. Petersburg, Russia. Those four months seemed the longest and hardest months of my life. Looking back, I am glad that I had that experience, although I hated it at the time. Before I left for Russia, I knew that I would have a long and difficult time ahead, with a different language and culture. Most importantly, the absence of church members meant that it would be a test of my faith. The thought scared me - I didn't know whether I could sustain four months without spiritual support. But thank God for assuring me in my prayers, confirming that He would not leave me alone.

God will find a Way

My first glimpse of God's assurance was through a Russian lady. This lady had been in Edinburgh (Scotland) for a couple of days and was supposed to return to London. Somehow she missed the last train to London. Not knowing what to do, with nowhere to stay, she wandered in the streets of Edinburgh. Amazingly she ended up at a church brother's take-away shop and asked him for help. The brother called my aunt, and later that evening, my cousins took the Russian lady to their home. They gave her food and offered her a room for the night. The next morning before this lady left for London, she exchanged addresses with my cousins. She told them that I should contact her once I went over to St. Petersburg. When I learnt of this incident, I knew that it was God's providence.

Why did this lady from St. Petersburg appear in Edinburgh? Why did she miss the last train to London? And why, of all the take-away shops on that busy street, did she enter the one belonging to our church brother?

I was deeply moved because I realised that God had answered my prayers. He was reassuring me that He would be with me to

hold my hand and lead the way. He would not leave me alone. I was much comforted by this incident. Later I managed to meet with this lady in Russia and enjoyed her hospitality. We have become good friends and I hope that one day, she too will be able to experience the love of God. Truly, God had opened a way.

The second incident that I would like to share demonstrates the importance of prayer. After some time in Russia, I felt alone and depressed. The weather was not improving; I was not getting anywhere with the language. My faith was dwindling. I felt so weak that prayer was an arduous task. On many occasions I did not feel like praying even though my heart reminded me that I had to. Once, when my cousin called, I told her how difficult it was to get myself to pray and how lonely I felt. She reminded me that I should always pray no matter how weak I felt. If we do not even take that first step to pray, how will God help us? For Him to draw near to us, we have to first reach out to Him. After that call, I prayed for God's forgiveness and help - I could not do it alone. I desperately needed God, the only one who could help me. I realised then the importance of prayer. If I stopped, I would lose all contact with God.

This would then inevitably lead to the death of my spiritual life. I did not want that to happen - I could not let it. Not after all that God had done for me. I owed Him that much at least.

Another incident that helped me in my struggling faith was a card I received from a sister. On hearing of my unhappiness and loneliness she wrote: "I just wanted to cheer you up and let you know that a lot of people are thinking about you and praying for you." As I read this, tears welled up in my eyes, I was very touched,

yet deeply ashamed. Brothers and sisters out there were praying for me!

But I couldn't even find the strength to pray. It was so comforting to learn that members still remember me. They have left an indelible impression in my heart and have enabled me to understand the importance of intercessory prayers.

Finally, an incident proved that God was guiding me to the very end. On 25th June - the day I was leaving for home - my director checks my passport to see that my visa was in order. We were travelling on the coach to the airport when he looked at me gravely and asked, "Where is your visa?" I looked at him and replied, "Is that not it?" pointing to a stamp in my passport. He shook his head and said, "No, the visa is on a piece of paper. It's all over now. I can't believe this is happening. You can't leave today. There's no way." I stared at him and started to cry. I was horrified. It was like a nightmare come true. "Is there no way that I can leave the country today?"

I sobbed. "No chance". Apparently what had happened was that when I first arrived, the police had taken my passport and visa but had not returned the visa to me. For the next forty-five minutes, I cried all the way to the airport while my director and two classmates tried in vain to find a solution. The only way was to postpone my journey home. The thoughts of having to stay in Russia alone without my classmates for another day or two sent shivers up my spine. I could not stay a minute longer.



Once at the airport, my director told me not to take my luggage, as it was pointless. I felt as if I was breaking down and that the whole world was against me. The director contacted the immigration officer at the airport to see what could be done. Initially, the officer was not hopeful, but after some discussion, he agreed to see if there was anything he could do. Meanwhile, my director was shoving me through customs because I was late already. However, I could not check in yet because the officer had taken away my passport. By this time, the check-in counter was closing. The staff asked me why I wasn't checking in so I explained that the officer had taken away my

passport to process my visa. They started to question me: What officer? What did he look like? Why did he take your passport?

All kinds of scenarios flashed through my mind. I thought, "Oh great! I've given my passport to a hoaxer. Now I'm well and truly stuck here." However, the staff reassured me that I would get my passport back. Another ten minutes later the officer came back with my passport and my visa. I hurriedly checked in and successfully went through passport control. I was going home!

They say that it is only with hindsight that we understand God's will. Yes, I did not enjoy my time in Russia but looking back on it now, I am glad I had that experience as it enabled me to strengthen my faith with God. I now truly understand that wherever I go, God will always be my Guide and at my side. He will never leave me alone, guiding my every step to the heavenly kingdom. I know that I am always indebted to Him for showing me such great love and proving to me that He is with me all the way. May all glory be unto God.

Elaine Shek,
Edinburgh UK

God will

see us through

None today is stranger to wars and rumours of wars. Yet when the riots in Indonesia hit the headlines on 14-15 May 1998, the world was aghast. In part, it was because of the suddenness with which everything happened. One moment, Indonesia was a prosperous, peaceful nation, and the next, chaos and conflict reigned. But more disturbing was the news of the burning and petrol bombing, the looting, and worst of all, the assaults on the female Chinese.

**“When one member suffers, all the members share the suffering.
When a member is honoured, they all share the joy.”**

If the world was horrified, how much more so all of us in the True Jesus Church. We might not have been to the church in Jakarta but each member there was bound to us by God’s love and Jesus’ blood. And thus prayers were offered in almost all the churches for these beloved brothers and sisters. We asked God to help them through this painful period, preserving their faith and enabling them to emerge stronger than before. God heard.

Sis Huang from Jakarta recounts some incidents that showed her how God was with them throughout:

INCIDENT 1

My husband drove off to work as usual. At about 10 a.m., the telephone calls started flooding in. Friends, relatives and church members were anxiously keeping each other abreast of the latest developments. The riots were now more than just demonstrations. There were cases where petrol bombs would be thrown at cars driven by Chinese. When these bottles exploded both driver and car would instantly go up in flames, the driver dying a painful and gruesome death.

I could not contact my husband. Sick with worry, I told my daughter to kneel down and pray with me. Thank the Lord Jesus for His guidance and protection, my husband managed to reach home safely. Things got steadily worse towards the afternoon. There were burning, killing, looting and raping. The air was thick with fumes from the fires. But we managed to pass the day through prayers.

At dawn, police sirens were heard. Five hundred rioters descended on our estate. While we had our vigilante corps (each estate had formed its own), the atmosphere was thick with danger, anxiety and fear. We felt really helpless. We could only rely on the Lord Jesus. My husband went off with the vigilantes. My daughter and I remained at home to pray continually, "Lord you are our only support. We rely on You, thank and praise You. We entrust everything to You." We believed that only the Lord Jesus could save us.

The rioters were only about 100 steps away from the rear entry point to our estate. They had looted every single Chinese-owned store along the way. But thank the Lord, our estate was preserved and saved by the Lord. I truly believe that in our times of tribulation, the Lord will protect us and deliver us from the wicked. Great indeed is the grace and love of our Lord.

INCIDENT 2

It was the afternoon of the riots. Sister A's shop assistants had all gone home. She was waiting for the family car to pick her up. Suddenly, a group of rioters swarmed into her shop. They looted everything. He then grabbed her handbag and jewellery. Sister A was almost strangled by the rioter tugging her necklace. So she shouted loudly, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" This shocked the rioter and caused him to release his stranglehold on her chain. She was free from this danger.

She could not run out so the only thing for her to do was to hide in the toilet upstairs and pray. She begged the Lord for deliverance. Not much later, an old native Indonesian lady came to her. She took off her sarong (wrap-around skirt-like garment) and used it to cover Sister A's face and body. This old lady told Sister A, "I am here to save you. Just follow me and walk straight ahead." It was indeed God's miraculous work - there were so many rioters about but none noticed her (otherwise they would have taken turns to assault her). She managed to leave the shop safely. It was indeed the great love of the Lord Jesus.

INCIDENT 3

Sister B was at home, ignorant of the fact that violent riots had broken out. She told her 17-year-old daughter to walk down to the end of their road to get some documents photocopied. Coming to the junction, the daughter saw many rioters behaving lawlessly. She wanted to turn back immediately but it was too late. So as this young girl walked along, she kept praying, "Hallelujah, Lord, please deliver me." The Lord Jesus heard her cry. The rioters did not disturb her at all and she was not harmed in any way.

When she reached home, she told Sister B, "Mummy, Lord Jesus heard my prayer. He rescued me and brought me home safely."

Coincidence? Lucky break? This is what people in the world would probably think but as for Sis Huang:

These testimonies truly helped me know that the Lord Jesus is our refuge. Though strong enemies would harm us, the Lord Jesus protects and delivers us. His loving and abundant salvation grace is ours. May the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit always be with us.

INCIDENT 4

Brother C owned a leather goods shop. The entire row of shops where his shop was located was set on fire. But just as it seemed that his shop would also meet the same fate as the others, the fire stopped at the adjacent wall. Just like that. By God's grace.

Doubtlessly, some had to undergo more difficult tests:

- * One sister had to jump off the second floor. She injured her spinal cord, but she made a quick recovery.
- * Four glass panels in the Jakarta church were broken.
- * 17 houses and shops belonging to members were looted. Of these, three were burnt.

But God does not put us through tests that harm us. He always works for good for those who love Him. The troubles in Indonesia should prompt us to self-examine, whether we, who belong to the more affluent Chinese community, have cared enough for our poorer native neighbours. We can also learn from the kindness of the old native Indonesian lady who probably had risked her life to save our sister. On top of these, one thing was clear: the church had emerged stronger from these riots...

...in faith the brethren in Jakarta saw how God really took care of them in their time of need. His guidance was always felt. Members held on to their faith and have even drawn closer to God.

...in hope the church as a whole learnt how to pray and rely on God for deliverance. Some who had been dozing off in their life of faith received a wake-up call.

...in love local members were really concerned for each other. If they were not phoning to encourage each other, they spent the rest of their time praying at home. The whole church has grown closer. The church's Welfare Department offered financial assistance to members whose shops, the source of their livelihood, had been burnt. Individual members also assisted in private. TJC members and churches all over the world called to show their concern.

Truly we are one family in Jesus Christ. We are children of a Father who loves us dearly, who will see all of us through all our trials and tribulations.

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