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**3 April 2005**  
**Growing in joy**  
**John 15:1-11**

*By AP Dennis Kwok*

People everywhere attempt to find life outside of Christ. They try every means available in the hope to produce a quality of life which they think will bring them joy and fulfillment. But Jesus tells us that we can only find that kind of life in Him. Is Jesus your vine? Are you His branches? Please don't pretend if you are not. Jesus says, "*for without me ye can do nothing*" (v 5). What does it mean: without Him we can do nothing? It means that apart from Christ we cannot do those things that please God, things that glorify and promote Him. Is your life pleasing to God? Remember, without Christ we can do nothing.

Some people have made themselves the husbandman or the vine. They try to find joy and fulfillment of life according to their human wisdom and philosophy. Perhaps they are looking at their own success in studies, in career, in their material wealth and possessions. Some may even look at how good their health is. Really? My friends, we are only the branches. As children of God, we are neither the husbandman nor the true vine.

1) We must know our place. Our place in Christian living is to stay connected to the true vine and to allow Him to penetrate through us in order that we may bear fruit for Him. That's what we are as believers and we are completely and utterly dependent upon Him in everything. Without Him we can do nothing to please God. Our place is to be the branches. We are servants, not the master. We are slaves, not the lord. We are the creatures, not the Creator. God is the Master. He is the Lord. He is the Creator. He alone owns this right. And so if we know our place in Christian living, God will bless us because Jesus is our true vine. There is no greater sense of joy and fulfillment until we know our true position in life.

2) There is pruning work to be done in us. The word Jesus used is "*purgeth*." It means to purify, to remove impurities, to clear away those things that are harmful or useless. Sin is still very much active in our lives though we have been wonderfully saved once and for all by the grace of God. There is the work of purging to be done in our lives. As branches to the true vine, we must bear fruit. In order to bear fruit we must submit to the purging or the pruning work of God. This is crucial if we want joy and fulfillment of life. If there are still sins in our lives, we will not experience true joy. We must let God do the pruning work in our lives to remove whatever that prevents us from bearing fruit for Him. Sometimes purging from God can be painful. In order to bear a good testimony, many a time, you stand alone while others are having a good time in places of sin and temptation. But the pruning is worth it because there is joy waiting for you.

3) We must abide in Christ. To abide means to remain, to continue, to stay and to dwell. How to abide in Christ? Verse 7 tells us to *abide in His Words*. We must get into reading, studying and meditating on God's word daily if we say we abide in Him. We need to allow His word to get into our lives and influence everything we think, say and do. It is the perfect filter, clearing all the unclean thoughts, words and actions of our lives. In the same verse, abiding in Christ also means engaging in the only communicating line with God through Christ. That is the hotline. We need to keep that line hot all the time if we say we abide in Christ.

What happens to a believer if he chooses to ignore all of the above? He will not be bearing fruit. And because he is not bearing any fruit, he will be cut off and set aside. This is very unfortunate for anyone of us whose life is not abiding in Christ by remaining in God's word, by keeping that hotline of prayer busy, by loving God and one another based upon the truth of God's word. There is no joy left for us. His joy is taken away from us. We have no fruit to bring with us. There is no joy from growing and living.

March has just passed. We are now in the fourth month of the New Year. Before we know it, we will soon reach the end of the year. Do something now if you want to grow in your joy because that is God's desire for you. "*These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full*" (v 11). God has His word for us for a good purpose in order that His joy may remain in us and that our joy may reach to the highest point. May God help us. Amen.

**10 April 2005**  
**Peace be unto you**  
**John 20:19**

*By Elder Cheng Wei Nien*

In the same evening of our Lord's resurrection, the disciples shut themselves up in the room for fear of the Jews (Jn 20:19). They were most probably in the same room where our Lord had the last supper with them three days before. During this short period of three days, many events took place. They had finished their last supper, after which, our Lord was betrayed, arrested, judged, crucified, died and buried. Then some women among them said that He had risen, and that they had seen Him! What will happen to the disciples then? They were naturally worried and confused. There was no peace in their hearts and they needed this peace badly. Suddenly, the Lord stood in the midst of them and greeted them with these words: "*Peace be unto you*". What a comfort this was to them! These were the very first words our Lord spoke to them after His resurrection. Our Lord's very first words to the people at the beginning of His ministry on earth, were: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Mt 4:17). Now that He has finished His work of redemption, all that we sinners need to do is to repent and we will receive the same peace which He had given to the disciples. What kind of peace is this?

**Peace in our hearts.** Before we were saved, our lives were full of worries and fear. There was no peace in our hearts. In this world, we cannot have peace because of our sins. However, as believers, we have peace in the Lord who said: "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (Jn 14:27). If we have trusted in the Lord, not only were our sins forgiven, we also have peace to overcome this world of troubles, as He had said: "*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (Jn 16:33). Our Lord is the risen Saviour in whom we can have peace. The world cannot give us this kind of peace. Are you a believer? If yes, you too would have peace in your heart.

**Peace of comfort and assurance of salvation.** "*And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord*" (Jn 20:20). After the Lord's crucifixion, the disciples were very sad, especially Peter, who had denied the Lord three times. Now that they have seen Him and seen the scars in His hands and His side they were comforted because they knew that this was the Lord who had died for them and had risen from the dead. Their hearts were then at peace. Those scars were the marks of the passion of Christ, by which our peace was obtained, as the prophet Isaiah said: "*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed*" (Isa 53:5). Today, we have this assurance of salvation because He bore our sins on the cross. "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (Rom 3:23-24). He who believes shall not perish but shall have everlasting life. This is the real peace. Dear friends, do you have this peace? Come and put your trust in Jesus.

**Peace with God.** When we were yet carnal, we were alienated from God. But now, through the blood of Christ we are reconciled with God. "*And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself*" (Col 1:20). Our Lord offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins so that we can be reconciled and have peace with God. "*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*" (Heb 9:12). Therefore the resurrection of Christ gives us everlasting peace. The question is: "Have you reconciled with God through the blood of Jesus?" If not, why don't you come to Him today?

"*As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you*" (Jn 20:21). The peace from our Lord Jesus Christ is not for the disciples only. It is for everyone who believes in Him. Therefore, our Lord sent His disciples to "*go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mk 16:15) so that everyone who believes in Him shall be saved and shall have everlasting life. It is now our turn to preach the gospel to the people around us, so that they too can have the peace of God and everlasting life. "*How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*" (Rom 10:15).

17 April 2005

**"... dwell together in unity!"**

**(Psalm 133:1)**

*By Elder Foong Kon Yu*

Perhaps we have heard and told the story of the three little pigs many times over. We probably can mimic the actions of the wolf howling and blowing at the houses that the pigs built. Is there a lesson for us as adults out of this short story? Here are a few lessons we ought to learn.

**Pride.** Each of these little pigs tried their best to build the most comfortable house. Obviously each has a different idea of what a house should be like. The first pig wanted a quick fix while the last wanted a solid house with safety and good protection, albeit longer to build. You can almost hear their arguments. For the first, it would be a waste of time to build a strong house. It was after all just a house. For the last, it would be a waste of time to build a flimsy, useless house. It sounds like they were talking about time but their thoughts were different. They should have thought of the dangers they would be facing. Instead of taking time to discuss, they each went their own way to prove that their own way was the best. Pride was camouflaged in their ideas. To the proud, the solution in his own head is the only way and the best!

**Help each other.** Later, when the wolf destroyed both the straw and wooden houses, the solution was to flee for protection in the strong brick house. Instead of chiding and telling them he was right in building the brick house, the one with the strongest house just helped his brothers. They were busy working together to ward off the wolf rather than spend time debating on who built the best house. They were focused on dealing with a common enemy. We too have a common enemy "*for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*" (Eph 6:12). For this reason, we ought to help one another to walk closely with the Lord. Why waste time to justify our thoughts when there is so much to be done to help our brethren? "*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*" (Eph 4:32). "*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith*" (Gal 6:10).

**Learn from others.** Although it was not explicitly written, we can be quite certain that the houses in the future from what the pigs had built were made of bricks. A famous industrialist once said that everyday we ought to be humble to glean lessons from our surroundings and fellow human beings, whatever level they may be. Our Lord teaches us to learn even from the ants. "*Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise*" (Prov 6:6). We can only achieve this through humility and at the same time, acknowledge that our "know all" attitude is blinding us. God knows best, and if we are not humble to learn from others, how can we see the word of God manifesting through others? They, too, are the children of God with gifts that may be superior to ours.

**Unity is strength.** Even the brick house would soon give way to the constant attacks from the devious wolf. Besides the protection, the pigs have to get rid of the threats. They achieved this through working together and preparing according to their plan. They were later united to strive for one common goal: to safe guard themselves and to destroy the enemy. Our Lord Jesus makes sure we are well taken care of while we are here on earth even though we are just passing through. His final purpose is to take us to heaven and to destroy the enemy, Satan. As members of the Body of Christ, we need to stay united to ward off the enemy. *"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph 4:16). "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps 133:1).*

**24 April 2005**

**"Charity suffereth long . . . is not puffed up . . . seeketh not her own"  
(1 Corinthians 13:4-5)**

*By Dn Jeffrey Soh*

Preachers quit preaching because "they've had enough." Church leaders resign because of church problems. Deacons stop serving because of criticisms. Sunday school teachers give up their classes because they are taken for granted and not shown due appreciation. Members refuse to get involved in church programs because their feelings have been hurt at some time or another.

Should I continue or should I move on to something else? Is it time to leave or should I stay in the church where I now serve? Very likely, someone reading this is going through his or her own struggles and is presently contemplating "dropping out" of some service to God because of the way they've been treated. They may even think about moving on to something else or to another church. It needs to be said here that sometimes the decision to leave or not to leave is clear-cut and there is little or no doubt as to what one needs to do.

Who can understand the frustration of trying to serve God while being "disrespected" by your peers — even those claiming to be your brothers and sisters in Christ? How often do we let the fear of men and situations overcome us? The actions of others can bring discouragements and disappointments. This is a difficult thing to deal with because often we don't have control over what other people do and say, but we do have control over how we respond to the actions of other people.

In the book of Job, Satan asked God: "*Doth Job fear God for nought?*" (Job1:9). In response, God's confidence was that Job would serve Him even if all the external reasons to do so were taken away.

What about you? Will you serve God when you don't get patted on the back? Will you serve Him when you are opposed, criticized, evil-spoken of, and disrespected? Will you serve Him when you're hurt by harsh words and actions? Will you serve Him when people speak against you, even for your own good? Will you serve God when no one is noticing?

Our service to God shouldn't be contingent on anything that anyone says or does to us. How does it sound when we say that we'll serve God, but only when we're treated with proper respect and appreciation? We forget that it is not about us. It is about the Lord. It is about yielding to the Holy Spirit's guidance in doing all that God will us to do while we are here on earth, to be worthy of the kingdom of God. We have a duty to the Lord. A duty that must be done with joy and without complaint. "*Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you*" (1 Sam 12:24). When you do, God will surely be as pleased with you as He was with His servant, Job.

Remember that it does not matter who disagreed with you. It does not matter what you gained or lost. It does not matter if those who benefitted from your working behind the scene do not know it is your effort. What matters is that you glorified God.

*"What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil 1:18).*

Take heart! Your discouragement is evidence that God is in the process of helping you grow to the next level. Do not be angry. Do not be discouraged. Do not calculate. Do not worry about time. Do not complain. Do not be proud. Do not insist on your way. Do not be lazy. Do not commit sin. Do not give up. The Lord's work must be done. Even with our complaining and rebellion, the Lord will make sure that His work gets done. Even if he has to use a donkey to get us to listen and obey! The Lord's work does not wait for you. The time will come when you cannot participate in the Lord's work anymore, even if you are willing and wanting. Happiness comes slowly, but calamity comes suddenly and quicker than you think.

*"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb 6:10).*

**1 May 2005**  
**Growing in wisdom**  
**(2 Tim 3:15)**

*By A-P Dennis Kwok*

If God were to ask us the same question as He did King Solomon, what will we answer? What will you want God to give you? I believe many will ask for power, wealth, fame, knowledge, etc. Very few perhaps would want to fill in the blank with mere wisdom. "Oh, why waste it? Should have asked for more practical things like wealth and health, power and long life; what a waste!" But Solomon is one rare man who asked for wisdom. To him there was nothing more important than acquiring wisdom to rule the country in peace and prosperity. He did not ask for more wealth. He did not ask for more power though he was the king of Israel.

Now that we have received the light of salvation just as Solomon did, we are no longer slaves to the system of this world. We are free, we are made alive forevermore in Christ. So if there is anything we need to live for Jesus in our lives today, it is wisdom. Wisdom to live for God; wisdom to bear a good testimony for Him; wisdom to handle every situation of life; wisdom to make good decisions; wisdom to discern what is right and wrong, and to stand firmly upon God's truth.

How old was Solomon when he asked for wisdom? Was he an old man who had all the experiences of life that would qualify him to really know what he was asking, something that is really needful and **MUST HAVE** in life? No, he was but a little child. Such a young child who already has such wisdom to ask wisdom from God! Amazing! Surely this wisdom was given to him from young as he grew up in the grace and knowledge of Jehovah God. That is what happened to young Timothy of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul said, "*When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also*" (2 Timothy 1:5).

What is the one thing that is vital to make one wise? It is the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois must have personally taught Timothy from his suckling days to know the Holy Scriptures. What a privilege for Timothy to be born in a Christian family! Can we say that for our children? Are our children growing up in the grace and knowledge of our Risen Saviour, Jesus Christ? Are we teaching our own children the way of the Lord so that they may not depart from it as they grow older? I am sure every parent would desire that their own child will grow up to be a successful person in society, not one who will spend his life behind bars or a good-for-nothing who will waste his life idling, and bring nothing but grief and pain to the family. It may be true that we cannot control what our children will eventually become in the future, whether good or bad. But we can do something now as we raise them up. We can do our part by teaching them, educating them, and nurturing them in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. So that from a very young age, they will know the Holy Scriptures which are able to make them wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We ought to be fully convinced

that we have an important role to play toward our children for many have neglected this heavy responsibility, to their own pain and regret.

But how can we teach our children well if we ourselves have not learnt well first? Have we known the Holy Scriptures ourselves that will make us wise unto salvation? The Scriptures tell us that "*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed*" (James 1:5-6). When we have spent much time in the Word, our faith will not waver and our increasing knowledge will grow into wisdom by the grace of God. Are you growing in wisdom? May God help us! Amen.

**8 May 2005**

## **A Christian Home and a Godly Mother**

*By Eld Cheng Wei Nien*

Today is Mother's Day. When we think of mother, we think of the beautiful home that she has created. A good and godly mother is indeed a joy and blessing of the home. "*Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies*" (Prov 31:10). God bless our home frequently through a virtuous woman, who is none other than our mother, who takes care of all our earthly needs as long as she lives. At the conclusion of our Sunday worship service, we often hear the pastor pronouncing the benediction, saying: "The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all till the Lord's return". This is not to be taken as a signal of the end of the service, but rather as a reminder of the beginning of a week through which we will enjoy the blessings of God in our homes.

**Grace** (the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ). One of the most wonderful blessings that God gives us and our home is His grace which brings salvation to our family and sustains us through not only another week, but till the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the ways God gives us His grace is by giving us a godly mother. Like Zacchaeus who welcomed Jesus to his home also claimed His grace through which salvation entered his home. A mother who welcomes Jesus to her home will similarly claim the grace of salvation to members of her family. "*And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work*" (2 Cor 9:8).

**Love** (the Love of God). The home that has the love of God is a home that enjoys peace and happiness. A godly mother is often the channel through which God's love comes to the home. It is therefore important that we have godly mothers in our homes. It is also important that we appreciate such a mother. She is far more precious than all the rubies in the world. "*Her children arise up, and call her blessed: her husband also, and he praiseth her*" (Prov 31:28). A godly mother loves not the rubies of the world but makes herself a ruby of the home whereby the whole family gathers around her and calls her blessed.

**Communion** (the communion of the Holy Ghost). The Holy Spirit does not dwell only in the church. He dwells also in our homes and the hearts of every believer. The Holy Spirit makes intercession for us when we do not know what to pray (Rom 8:26), and teaches and reminds us of Christ's teaching whenever needed (Jn 14:26). He is a constant Companion at our family worship. A godly mother does not only take care of our meals, our clothes and our studies, she also makes sure that we are in communion with God through our daily prayers and family worship. She takes time to pray for every member of the family as well. Thus the Lord will bless our home.

**Till the Lord's Return.** A godly mother's effort to bring the family together and close to God will never cease until the Lord's return. She is never tired of giving her best to God and

to her family. She will see the goodness of the Lord not only on her but her children and grandchildren. Thus she will be rewarded at the return of the Lord. May the Lord bless every one of us with a Christian home and a godly mother. Amen!

**15 May 2005**

**". . . prepare your hearts unto God"**

*By Eld Foong Kon Yu*

*"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Sam 7:3).*

When Samuel called upon the Israelites to return unto the Lord, they were first given a personal choice. The choice was to return unto the Lord with **all** their hearts. Similarly, we can choose either to do something to our spiritual lives or to remain at status quo, living in a humdrum manner which at best would lead us to fear and uncertainty. When we choose to return to the Lord, we are to be serious in doing so with **all** our hearts. This is the only way. Anything short of a hundred percent commitment is not acceptable. If we have this settled, the other conditions will fall in line. All our wrong doings in the past are not important any more. We should not cry over spilt milk. There is no way that we can undo them. What we can do is to forget about all the wrong doings, learn from the mistakes and move on. We can make amends by avoiding them and not to repeat past errors. The Lord is gracious to forgive and forget. Symbolically, the Israelites poured water on the ground. They treated their past sins like "spilt milk" (or "spilt water" in this case) which are not retrievable. Moreover, when we offend another brethren, we have to make right through apologies and seek forgiveness. It is in obedience to the teaching of our Lord Jesus. *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed"* (Jas 5:16a).

After returning to the Lord, the people were to put away the strange gods from among them. What were these strange gods? As much as they were during Samuel's time, these strange gods are real. The idols in our life may not necessarily be a carving, painting or a visible object. It could be something or thought that we have in our hearts. This would include pride. Anything that we put in greater importance to God is an idol. Now, when you honestly list them on a chart anything that we prioritize above God, are there not many? The scripture says: "Put them **away**, not aside!"

We are then to prepare our hearts unto the Lord. This means having fellowship with Him through daily prayer and reading of the Bible. God does not want us to have head knowledge only. We have to believe, commit and abide by God's commandments. Again we need a self assessment on how our actions tally with that of what we have been instructed to do. Humanly speaking, it is very difficult. Even Paul has this problem. He was a spiritual giant in comparison, yet he said: *"For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do"* (Rom 7:19). Thanks be unto God, His laws go after our inner man. We ought to decide for ourselves to be determined with a strong will, wanting to observe His words and to demonstrate so in our deeds. *"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man"* (Rom 7:22). By God's grace He will see us through. If God can use Paul and all the other saints to the fullest, why can't He use you and I? The question is whether we have a willing heart. *"I*

*thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Rom 7:25).*

With both idolatry put away and our hearts prepared towards God, serving our Lord comes naturally. Our renewed desire is to be faithful servants as the motivation comes from God through our inner man. Our objective is to serve Him with our best ability. We will find our service enjoyable and effective, and learn to take comments constructively. Someone has to do the job, so why not say: "Let it be me"? Nothing is too small or demeaning. Our primary purpose is to please God. Amen!

**22 May 2005**

**Salvation of our loved ones**

*By Dn Thomas Goh*

The RPG writing for 29.4.2005 was on Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman recorded in the gospel of John. The notes explained that "No sinner is beyond the reach of Christ the Saviour. He reaches out to all, respected men like Nicodemus, social outcasts like the Samaritan woman." My instant reaction was to wish that our Saviour has also reached out to my dad.

While doing my QT that morning, dad was warded in Singapore General Hospital for heart problem. He was admitted a few days earlier for breathlessness. Doctors concluded that he had a heart attack and internal bleeding. It was not his first hospitalization but this time it was more serious. He was frail and tubes had to be inserted into his nose to help him breathe.

Thank God for preserving him. He was discharged on 2.5.2005. Would he capitalize on the extension of time to confess his sin and receive Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour?

I rejoice whenever members bring their parents to church. To me it is a very special blessing for a family to be saved, and a privilege to be able to serve God actively as a family. For those of us who have unsaved loved ones, I am sure it is also your desire for them to be part of God's family. But, will they be saved?

It is certain that the family unit is established by God. Didn't He create Adam and Eve as a family? It is of great comfort to know that God desires to save the household. This was demonstrated by His instructions to Noah to build the ark. It was not to save Noah alone but his whole family (Heb 11:7). The angels who went to get Lot out of Sodom, hastened Lot to take his wife and two daughters with him after his sons-in-law mocked at his plea (Gen 19:14-15). In another example, Joseph consoled his brethren that it was God who had sent him before them to save their lives (Gen 45:7). In the New Testament, there was the salvation of Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15) and the Philippian jailor and his family (Acts 16:31-32).

Our longsuffering God wants our family to be saved. However, they must make their own decisions (Rom 10:9-10) and be responsible to God. Although it is their personal decision and responsibility, He has given us an important part to play in their salvation. Our lives must be exemplary. We must expose them to the gospel as often as we can. We must also pray that their spiritual eyes may be opened and their hearts receptive to the gospel.

If God should bless us with the salvation of our loved ones, our appropriate response is to serve Him as a family. In his sermon on household salvation, CH Spurgeon pointed out that

after the Philippian jailor and his household were saved, they were actively serving God. Even though it was midnight, they took Paul and Silas from the cell into their home and washed them and provided them with food (Acts 16:32-34). According to Spurgeon, "it is a great mercy when you have a family saved and baptised, if the whole household sets to work to serve God, for there is something for all to do." How true!

It is heartening to observe that in our church quite a few households are already serving God actively. Each one of them is an example and encouragement to us. Recently, I was immensely uplifted by the testimonies of one of our elders and his wife. The elder shared that in spite of his physical health, it is his desire to serve God wherever He leads. His wife added that her call is to serve God behind the scene by supporting her husband wholeheartedly. She does so by praying for God's strength to sustain him and to do her best to help him focus on his service for God. As for their children, they are serving God actively in their respective ministries.

It is God's desire that our loved ones "*should come to repentance*" (2 Pet 3:9). May that encourage and help us in our efforts in reaching out to them with the gospel. He has also given us the example of the Philippian jailor and his household (and others) to follow. May we together with our household do our best to serve Him actively. Amen!

**29 May 2005**

**How is your heart?**

*By Dn Winston Chew*

"*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*" (Jer 17:9). Even though we may be Christians for many years the vestiges of sin remain in us, and resurface every now and then to influence us, even when we are participating in spiritual activities. In the areas of public worship, service for the Lord and private devotions, we may well find that they are tainted with iniquities.

"The iniquities of our public worship, its hypocrisy, formality, lukewarmness, irreverence, wandering of the heart and forgetfulness of God, what a full measure have we there! Our work for the Lord, its emulation, selfishness, carelessness, slackness, unbelief, what a mass of defilement is there! Our private devotions, their laxity, coldness, neglect, sleepiness, and vanity, what a mountain of dead earth is there!" (Spurgeon, in "Morning and Evening").

Even our desire to keep our hearts like a beautiful garden may be tainted with iniquity. "I may look at the weeds which overspread my garden, and breathe out an earnest wish that they were eradicated. But why? What prompts the wish? It may be that I may walk out and say to myself, 'In what fine order is my garden kept!' This is *pride*. Or, it may be that my neighbours may look over the wall and say, 'How finely your garden flourishes!' This is *vanity*. Or I may wish for the destruction of weeds, because I am weary of pulling them up. This is *indolence* (laziness). So that even our desires after holiness may be polluted by ill motives." (Spurgeon, in "Morning and Evening").

On the surface, we may seem to be obedient Christians, doing the work of the Lord. But how is our heart? Are we obeying God because it is expected of us, or convenient for us, or our duty to do so? Or is it because of a genuine love for God. God does not want "vain oblations". Let us examine our motives in our private devotions, our worship, our service and giving for God. They should not be for self or others, but for God alone.

**5 June 2005**  
**Growing in Meditation**  
**(Joshua 1:8)**

*By A-P Dennis Kwok*

Think about the last Quiet Time you had. Do you still remember? Was it meaningful? Do you remember what you have prayed? Do you remember the Bible verse or passage you have read and the lessons learnt? If you can't remember, is it because you are distracted during your Quiet Time? Just as we need to keep our eyes on the road and our minds on the wheel at all times while driving, have we kept our eyes and minds upon God and spiritual things? Or are we easily distracted? Dear friends, if we have this problem of being easily distracted and unable to remember a single thing in our last Quiet Time, it is time for us to do something about it. One of the few things we could do is biblical meditation.

Meditation in the Bible means reflective thinking on biblical truth so that God is able to speak to us through Scripture and through the thoughts that come to the mind as we are reflecting on the Word. While the New Age ideas attempt to empty the mind, biblical meditation, however, is an attempt to empty the mind of the wrong things in order to fill it with what is right and true according to the forever inspired Word of God.

Our Christian life is not to be lived out based on our thinking and our ways. It must be all God's thinking and all His ways (1sa 55:8-9). This is exactly the goal of biblical meditation: to fill our minds with God, His Works and Words to transform our lives in order to live for Him successfully and victoriously.

God revealed this secret to Joshua in the Old Testament. He said, "*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success*" (Josh 1:8).

God promised Joshua good success as part of the fruit of his meditation on the Word. This has nothing to do with prosperity mentality of positive thinking or the New Age meditation that claimed one is able to control his or her destiny. Rather, according to the Bible, this is the success of obedient and godly living which experiences God's provision and deliverance from the spiritual darkness of the world.

What biblical meditation does is not to help us shy away from trials and difficulties. What biblical meditation does is to help us go through each trial, each challenge and difficulty by the way of the Lord. Each trial, each challenge and each difficulty happened for a purpose and it is the design of the Lord to make us stronger spiritually, and to be more dependent upon Him.

But how should we meditate? 3 Rs to remember: 1. Reading 2. Reflecting and 3. Responding.

1. **Reading.** Careful reading is necessary if we want to understand God's Word. We have to be mindful that God's Word is not an ordinary book. It is not a novel or a history book. It is God's book, a long letter written for us from heaven.

2. **Reflecting.** Reflection is the mind and heart at work, thinking over and concentrating on what the eyes have seen in the Word. The Psalmist says, "*Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee*". Reflection is more than just remembrance and memory. Reflection is that expectancy upon God to teach us and show us again His perfect will.

3. **Responding.** The purpose of reading and reflecting upon the Scripture is responding. It is to apply the Scripture to our own lives. Through biblical meditation, we personalize the truth with the help of the Holy Spirit to apply in our lives. The Bible tells us, "*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*" It is absolutely true that we cannot do without hearing first. But after hearing, we must need do, otherwise all that hearing would be meaningless. There is always application for us from every truth of God's Word.

May God help us to grow in biblical meditation today. Amen.

## 12 June 2005 Bible Camp

*By Eld Cheng Wei Nien*

Tomorrow, we will be on our way to our Bible camp. What is the purpose of holding a Bible camp every year? Different people have different views about Bible camp. Some regard it as an outing or a short vacation. Once a year, it is good to take the family for an overseas trip, have a vacation and, at the same time, hear some good messages. Others might regard it as a time to have a break from work or study, and have a time of relaxation in a luxurious hotel. The children will enjoy this, especially when there are singing, games, Bible stories and other activities such as swimming, etc. However, the main purpose of the Bible camp must be for us to have a break from our daily routine and have a time of retreat and meditation on God's word and to enhance our spiritual lives. The early Christians had this frequently and were greatly blessed. *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"* (Acts 2:42). They did not have the privilege that we have to hold Bible camps in luxurious hotels but they were able to hold this kind of retreat and fellowship frequently in their homes. Today, what do we do in our Bible camp?

**"Stedfast in the apostle's doctrine"**. The early Christians did not have the Bible with them but they had the presence of the apostles to teach them personally what Jesus had taught them before. Today, we have with us the inspired Word of God written by the prophets and apostles in a book which we know as the Bible. The main purpose of the Bible camp is for us to hear the doctrine from the inspired Word of God explained and expounded to us by our camp speakers who are the messengers of God. The messages are based on the Holy Scripture which is *"given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Tim 3:16, 17). Usually, we can hear the Word of God preached to us only once a week on Sundays. During the Bible camp, we can put away our worldly worries and concentrate our minds on the teaching of the Word of God three times daily for the short period of a few days in the camp. We must therefore treasure this time and focus our minds on these messages. We must come with prepared hearts so that our time in the camp will not be spent in vain.

**"Fellowship"**. Warm fellowship with believers is also important for our spiritual growth. One day, in heaven, we will have a lot of saints around us. While on earth, a lot of time we are among non-believers due to the nature of our work and studies and the places we live in. We see our brethren only on Sundays and Tuesdays if we come to prayer meetings. Even during this time, we are often in a hurry to go home and have no time to really interact and get to know each other well. Bible camp is a wonderful time for us to meet and spend time to know one another. *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* (Ps 133:1). Let us therefore get to know as many fellow believers as possible during the Bible camp.

**“Breaking of Bread”.** The early Christians gathered frequently for meals and received the Lord’s supper at the same time, in remembrance of our Lord’s suffering for them. Today, we receive the Lord’s supper only once a month and only during our Sunday worship services. Therefore we do not administer the Lord’s supper in the Bible camp. This does not mean that we do not gather together for fellowship and have meals together. We must always give thanks to God not only for our food but also for our salvation and good health, etc. Fellowship round the dining tables provides good opportunity for inter-action and mutual understanding. It is also important for us not to gossip but to share with one another what salvation has done for us and our families. Let us therefore make good use of our time round the dining tables during all our meals.

**“Prayer”.** Morning and night devotions are an important part of our camp life. The early Christians were fervent in prayers. They *“continued with one accord in prayer and supplication”* (Acts 1:14). Such spiritual life is sadly very lacking in believers’ lives nowadays. Even in Bible camps many tend to avoid the morning and night devotions. This is no good for our spiritual growth. At home, some of us may have our own personal prayer time but it is not easy to gather brethren together for prayer and to intercede for one another in our secular lives. We should therefore seize such opportunities in the Bible camp to spend time together for prayer. For those who do not know how to pray, Bible camp is the best time to learn to pray. Try and make an effort to get up early in the morning to join the morning devotion and pray together. Let us make full use of our precious time during this short period of a few days in the camp.

**19 June 2005**

**"...my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him..."  
(Ps 89:33)**

*By Eld Foong Kon Yu*

Once there were two men competing with each other on tree planting. One watered his saplings daily and the growth of the trees was much faster and greener than the other man who would only water when he noticed that the leaves were withering. Many years later, both plots of land had beautiful fully grown trees. One day, a very strong wind blew across the land. Many trees from the plot that was watered daily when young fell while that of the other plot stood tall. What happened? When the trees were dug out for investigation it was found that the trees that had less water when young had very deep strong roots. The planter explained that he intentionally watered the saplings sparsely as he wanted the roots to grow deep down in search of water. These roots eventually became the main support for the trees. If the saplings were watered daily there was no necessity for them to search deeper so their roots massed at the surface of the ground and not deep down which will eventually serve as a strong anchor for support.

When eagles make their nests, they lay the foundation with very thick rough branches which are overlaid with finer twigs followed by a final top layer of soft dried grass. When the eaglets are growing their parents will remove the nest layer by layer until the young birds feel the rough branches hurting their young tender skin. They would have no choice but to fly off. The sound of the flipping wings is delightful, assuring music to their parents. They have become strong enough to be independent.

What lessons can we learn from the tree planters and the eagles? Both were taking care of the young and that in order to produce stronger adulthood, there need be some discomfort and struggles. This will build up the determination and encourage sturdy growth. Take note that the planter would observe to water his plants when he saw that their leaves were withering. The parent eagles would be near by when their young first stretched their wings. In similar fashion, the Lord also taught us to raise children. We have read these verses so many times that we take them for granted. What are these? *"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes"* (Prov 13:24). *"Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying"* (Prov 19:18). *"A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again"* (Prov 19:19). Read also Proverbs 22:15, 23:15. While we teach our earthly children God also teaches us for we are His children. Be thankful unto God for He gives us the honour to be called His children. *"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him"* (Psalm 103:13).

He may allow us to dwell in difficult times for a season. Sometimes our burdens seem unbearable. Immediately we question "Why me?", "Why at this time?", "Can I make it?" Does God really know how much we suffer? Yes, He does and would intervene just at the right time (remember, He is there all the time). It is always for a purpose which may be oblivious to us till we get through the crisis. We may never even know as to why certain things

happened till we get to heaven. One thing for sure is that for whatever the reason, God will not forsake us. *"...Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail"* (Psalm 89:33). He is observing near us and would not neglect us. How assuring are these words.

We are different from animals as we are created with a mind for reasoning and learning. Humans progress because we are able to leverage on lessons learnt through history. While others learn from us, we can also observe and learn from others as well as from our own past experiences. Such is the beauty of God's creation. So, the next time, before you ask God all these questions, remember that for every phase of our lives, God has a plan for us. Pray that we will accept and learn from all situations and predicaments. *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"* (Rom 8:28). Knowing this, with humility we echo *"Teach me thy way, O LORD"*.

**26 June 2005**  
**"The Power of the Tongue"**

*By Eld Sim Siang Kok*

(reproduced from Calvary Pandan Weekly dated 22.2.04)

Prov 18:21 pronounces "*Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.*"

An unknown author wrote the following poem to illustrate the power of the tongue:

"A careless word may kindle strife, A cruel word may wreck a life,  
A bitter word may hate instill, A brutal word may smite and kill,  
A gracious word may smooth the way, A joyous word may light the day,  
A timely word may lessen stress, A loving word may heal and bless."

James describes the tongue as "*a fire, a world of iniquity;... that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*" (Jas 3:6). Not only does the tongue have the power to destroy, it is also beyond the power of man to tame it; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison (Jas 3:8).

By divine inspiration, James pronounced the deadly disease (poison) of the tongue. By divine inspiration, Solomon and other writers prescribed powerful antidotes through proverbs of wisdom in Holy Scripture.

Prov 16:21, 23 "*The wise in heart shall be called prudent: and the sweetness of the lips increaseth learning. The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.*"

Hence, these proverbs are to be digested (learned) spiritually through the heart, the proper seat of wisdom. The truth in these two proverbs is that the heart ought to control (teach) the mouth what to say. This truth is reaffirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ (the One greater than Solomon) when he pronounced in Matt 12:33-35 "*Either make the tree good and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*"

As believers, how can we refrain from sinning with our tongues? The psalmist says: "*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*" (Ps 119:11).

The word of God is replete with godly instructions in how we ought to speak. The table below exemplifies some of the contrasting responses between unwholesome words that may destroy and wholesome words that exhort and edify.

Unwholesome – Normal font  
Good, Wholesome – *Italic*

“ Prov 15:1b – but grievous words stir up anger.

© *Prov 15:1a – A soft answer turneth away wrath:*

*Prov 16:24 – Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones.*

“ **Prov 12:15a – The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: (i.e. know it all)**

© *Prov 12:15b – but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise (a humble spirit that is ready to listen to counsel)*

“ **Prov 16:27 – An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire (i.e. accusatory speech)**

© *Prov 10:11 – The mouth of the righteous man is a well of life: (forbearing, protective speech)*

“ **Prov 18:13 – He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is a folly and shame unto him (i.e. being impatient and presumptuous)**

© *Prov 18:15 – The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge (i.e. speech based on facts and knowledge).*

“ **Prov 10:32b – but the mouth of the wicked speaketh frowardness (i.e. speaketh perversity)**

© *Prov 10:32a – The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable: (i.e. appropriate words)*

“ **Prov 28:13a – He that covereth his sins shall not prosper (i.e. defensive, justification)**

© *Prov 28:13b – but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy (i.e. confessing words like the prodigal son in Luke 15:17-21)*

“ **Phil 2:14 – Do all things without murmurings and disputings (i.e. grumbling, discontented)**

© *Eph 5:20 – Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (i.e. be thankful)*

**“ Eph 4:29a, 31 – Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth,  
“ Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put  
away from you, with all malice**

*© Eph 4: 29b – but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace  
unto the hearers.*

*© Eph 4:32 – And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even  
as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.*

**“ 1 Pet 3:9a – Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing;**

*© 1 Pet 3:9b - but contrariwise blessings; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye  
should inherit a blessing.*

The ungodly, the fool and the wicked are characterized by unwholesome speech. But the wise, the prudent, the righteous are characterized by soft answers and pleasant words, words that edify and encourage. Which group do you belong to? By the power of our tongue, do we promote life or do we kill? Are we fools or are we wise?

May the meditation on these verses change our hearts so that wholesome and God-honouring words always flow from our mouths. *“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” (Jas 3:2).*

---The End---