

Encouragement Page is a weekly Bible reading material published by the Calvary Bible-Presbyterian Church (Singapore). It is freely downloadable from [www.calvaryjurong.com](http://www.calvaryjurong.com). If you have been blessed by this ministry, do let us know at [info@calvaryjurong.com](mailto:info@calvaryjurong.com).

-----

02 July 06

My thoughts after the bible camp

Eld Cheng Wei Nien

The Bible Camp is over. Thank God for a very pleasant and successful Bible Camp. We were well fed both physically and spiritually. Of course, everyone has his or her personal appreciation of the camp. However, some good thing must have come out of the camp. Now that we are back home, lives have returned to 'normal' and everybody is back to his or her own business. The messages in the camp had been challenging and encouraging but the more important thing is whether we have brought the messages back from the camp to meditate upon and to put into practice what we have learnt.

***"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps 119:11).*** It is a fearful thing to sin against our living God. Men of the world sin because they know not the word of God. Sadly, believers like us, also often sin against our God because we heed not the word of God. During the Bible camp we have heard the wonderful word of God preached to us and most of us enjoyed all the messages. The question is: "Have we heeded and hid those words in our hearts and meditate upon them?" The psalmist says: "*Blessed is the man...his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night*" (Ps 1:1-2). The blessing of the camp is not in its physical comfort nor the sumptuous food, but the precious word of God. Now that we are back from the camp, the question is: "Have those messages made any difference in our lives?"

***"Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works" (Ps 119:27).*** The main objective of the Bible camp is for us to understand the way of God's precepts. It is not easy to understand the precepts of God especially concerning our relationship with our families and church members. The speakers have made these precepts plain and clear to us. The Lord has done wondrous works in our families and our church and we need to talk about them and find ways to make them perfect in the sight of God. The messages by themselves are not important. It is how they affect our attitudes with one another and how we treat one another in the way God wants us to do — that is important.

***"Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction" (Ps 119:92).*** If not for the mercy of God, we would all have perished in our afflictions because it is not in our nature to delight in the law of the Lord. But God "*is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Pet 3:9). The messages in the Bible camp, hopefully, have renewed our appetites for the word of God so that we would delight in His laws and meditate upon them and do them even after the camp. Otherwise, our families and our church would perish in our afflictions because we do not delight in the laws of the Lord. The psalmist says: "*I will never forget thy precepts:*

*for with them thou hast quickened me'* (Ps 119:93). Hopefully, the Bible camp has quickened us and helped us to improve our relationship with one another and bring about revival to ourselves, our families and our church.

***"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"*** (Ps 119:105). A lamp is for us to hold in our hands so as to shine on the path on which we are walking. Without the lamp, we would be wandering in darkness. Apart from what we have heard in the camp, we must continue to search the scripture and hold the word of God in our hands as we continue to live for God, and not to stop at the end of the camp. In the camp, we had good relationship one with another and had a wonderful time getting up early in the morning for our early devotion and prayer. We must continue to do the same now that we are back from the camp. This will bring a revival to us, our families and our church. God bless everyone. Amen!

09 July 06  
Where Art Thou?  
Elder Foong Kon Yu

When we cannot get what we want, we would like to put the blame on anything but ourselves. We may even blame God, yes the very One who is able to provide all our needs. So the most often asked question would be "God, where were you when I needed you?" We are sometimes even influenced by those ungodly around us. Do you remember what the psalmist says about those who ridicule us and God? Psalm 115:2 "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?"

I wonder what your answer would be if God asks you one day in return, "Where art thou?". He asked Adam "Where art thou?" Where were you? Well, I was in church on Sunday for worship. Good. What is the next important day after that? We all know that prayer is the most important thing that God has privileged us. When we pray we communicate with God. It should become an instinct in our system to call upon God. The apostle Paul instructs us to pray without ceasing. We open our mouth to ask. God will reply us. He can only do so when we open our ears. We should be watchful to wait upon the Lord, to hear what He has to say to us. Prophet Habakkuk in 2:1 "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." Obviously, the prophet was not just staring blankly when he said he was watching. He was waiting upon God and the most likely thing he did was praying.

Since prayer is so important, the church organizes prayer meetings. Gathering to pray was practised by the disciples during Jesus' time. However, this gathering in the church was revived during the great depression in America. The economy has fallen apart. The rich have lost their millions overnight. The poor have become desolate. It was then that the mid-week prayer meeting became an 'in' thing. Churches were filled. When God lifted up the economy, when pockets and stomachs were filled, the church began to empty out. What an expression of gratitude!

We experienced the same thing here too in our own church. During difficult times, such as poor economy, threats of war and disaster, our attendance shot up. How easily we forget God and His blessings! Did you reflect on the reason that we are "too busy?" Firstly, God bless us with jobs that are promising, so we are busy. They say business is a good sign of good returns. Who wants to be idle? Secondly, since we are able to do without God, we cannot finish what we set to do, so we are perpetually busy. Thirdly, God allows us to be busy in order that we may appreciate the quiet moments we set aside to pray. Did you pause to think that God let us choose if we step on the "too busy" side or to answer our prayers to allow us time to wait upon Him? Did you pray for time off to attend the prayer meeting? God will answer and honour our request to be allowed time off for Him. God has always been gracious to release us in order that we may be present for prayer meetings. It is both an encouragement to the chairman and the others as well by our presence. The chairman is likened to a cook who has prepared so that the many listeners can savour. This is spiritual food that nourishes our soul. At the same time we learn how others are blessed. We can benefit from their testimonies too.

Even Thomas, one of the apostles, missed the blessings for being absent in one of the prayer meetings when Jesus appeared. He had to hear second hand news and when he saw the Lord, he needed to check it out because he doubted if what he heard earlier was true.

Attending prayer meeting is a testimony to non-believers too. To them God is not real. If we are absent long enough in fellowship through prayers, we may also say what the heathens say. Psalm 10:4 " *The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.*" Psalm 115:2 " *Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?*" We need to walk the talk to show that we are at the correct place at the appropriate time. We talk about God being gracious and that we are followers of Him, but when it comes to prayer meetings other activities take priority. So, for those who do not believe, and for those overcrowded by their own doubts, their question would be: "Where is God?". To those who missed you at prayer meetings, we wonder: "Where art thou?"

16 July 06  
Are You Lonely?  
Elder Lawrence Sim

Six months have gone by for the year 2006. How many times have you felt lonely? You may wonder why time flies away so fast. The Bible tells us in James 4:14 *"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."* So, what are you waiting for?

Here are some pertinent questions that people often ask: Have you ever felt lonely? How often have you felt lonely? Why do you feel lonely?

Our God is a loving, merciful and gracious God, and He has given us many promises:

Hebrews 13:5 *"...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."*

Matthew 28:20 *"...I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."*

1 Samuel 12:22 *"For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people."*

Isaiah 41:10 *"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."*

John 14:18 *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

Psalms 147:3 *"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."*

Deuteronomy 31:6 *"Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."*

1 Peter 5:7 *"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."*

Psalms 46:1 *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."*

Doing good deeds alone is not good enough. Every true and faithful child of God is to go and tell the gospel to every lost soul to rescue them from spiritual darkness. You have been given your talents, and God knows your abilities and limitations. We must not give excuses that we can't do this or that. Our Lord Jesus has warned His disciples in Matthew 7:15 *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."* And signs of the Lord's coming are very near as recorded in Matthew 24:4-9. We are seeing the revelation of prophesy of wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes in divers places; and what will happen in Matthew 24:10-12, *"And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets*

*shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."*

The Lord has given to each one of us different talents. Let's use them to "occupy till He comes" which is His command to us. We pray that you will arise and come forward to serve Him wherever you are, as we move into the future.

Are you lonely? Remember, whenever you feel lonely, look to God and ask for His deliverance, and He will deliver you from your problems, worries, etc. If you are lonely, look to Him, call on Him and He will come to you. This is His promise to us. In Matthew 7:7-8 the Lord Jesus tells us to: *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."*

This is God's promise to His children. Believe in Him and He shall deliver you from loneliness. If you keep away from Him, you will be lonely. So let us always walk closer to Him each day as we journey on in this troubled world. Pray that the Lord will continue to shower His blessings upon us in the years to come. May the Lord be merciful and gracious to us all.  
Amen.

23 July 06

A Gracious and Merciful Life

Mr Yang De Gong

*"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Ps 23:5-6).*

God has blessed us till our "cup runneth over", so that we may be of blessings to others wherever we go. Think of others, be thoughtful, gracious and merciful towards them. This is a demonstration of a fruitful Christian life. Christ's disciples are called Christians, so we should live Christ-like lives. Barnabas was a gracious and merciful person in the early church. Let's learn a few lessons from him.

### **1. Be Merciful to Others**

When Paul first became a believer, the disciples were very wary of him, except for Barnabas who trusted and accepted him, led him to the apostles and even verified his belief in God. And so, Paul started to preach fearlessly in Jerusalem. If not for Barnabas who mercifully accepted Paul, his talents will be overlooked and buried. May God bless the churches of today with many more like Barnabas. Whenever there are people, there will be problems. This is because Christ has yet to come again, His bride (the church) is still being "fitly framed together" (Eph 2:21). Christians tend to look at the shortcomings of the church and like to wash its dirty linen in public; or when they see the failings of other Christians, they started criticizing, arguing that they have every right to point out others' mistakes. A merciful Christian is not blind to others' shortcomings, but rather, he takes the approach of using love and mercy to comfort and restore those who have fallen. At the same time, he is able to appreciate and encourage others, with the single objective of expanding God's Kingdom. Dear friends, our fallen brothers and sisters in church yearn for our encouragement and support!

### **2. Love One Another**

Barnabas and Paul brought Marcus on their evangelistic journeys. Marcus, born with a 'silver spoon' had already been used to a comfortable life in Jerusalem. When they reached Asia Minor, Marcus could not get used to the insects and bugs as well as the very different local culture and traditions, and so he returned home. The second time when Barnabas suggested bringing Marcus along for their missionary works, Paul was strongly against it and both of them had an argument, splitting up thereafter. Paul's focus was on the seriousness of the work of God while Barnabas focused more on the workers of God, wanting to forgive and encourage them along. However, Barnabas did not speak ill of Paul in front of Marcus, but rather, used Paul as an example to teach Marcus the principles of focusing on God's work and not be daunted by any difficulty that lies ahead. He would also have taught Marcus to respect a strong and faithful preacher such as Paul. Eventually, Marcus became a helper to Paul who recommended him to the churches (Col 4:10-11). And in 2 Timothy 4:11, the last

book written by Paul, he asked Timothy to bring Marcus along. The transformation of Marcus to someone who is humble, willing to serve God and of great help to the missionary works of Paul, is due to the love and assistance of Barnabas.

### **3. Forgive One Another**

The church of Antioch is not started by Barnabas. When he first reached the place, he was glad to see the grace of God among the believers. (Acts 11:23). This is another example of Barnabas' fruitful life. An ordinary Christian might be able to recite the Apostles' Creed, but he might only be interested in the revival of his own church. And when he sees the fruitful labours of other churches, he becomes jealous and critical.

Besides, in the relationship between Barnabas and Paul, the former is superior in age, experience and standing among the churches. Moreover, Paul comes after Barnabas and when the book of Acts started recording their missionary works, Barnabas' name is always mentioned before Paul. However, when Barnabas realized that Paul is much gifted in his preaching, he put him forward and willingly played second fiddle. In his willingness to be overtaken by someone stronger and better, and a magnanimous heart that is able to accept others, Barnabas has shown us clearly a life overflowing with grace and mercy. A church which "*...bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another*" (Gal 5:15), will be impeded in its growth. Didn't Barnabas' sole objective of reviving God's Kingdom and willingness to take second place make him not a belittled figure but rather one who commands our respect?

The churches of today need to protect the basic fundamentals of our Christian faith, focus on prayer and God's Word, and spread the gospel. As disciples of Christ, we also need to be gracious and merciful Christians, able to learn from others, accept their shortcomings, bear one another's burdens and remember the good of others. We need to be Christians who reflect the life of Christ, our Saviour and Master. Amen!

30 July 06  
Turn Back!  
Dn Jeffrey Soh

It was Passover — a time when Jews from all over Israel made their pilgrimage to Jerusalem to remember their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. This year Joseph and Mary took Jesus for this great event. After the Passover celebration was over, the people from Nazareth started for home. A day into this return trip Joseph and Mary discovered that Jesus was missing. They had assumed He was in the group of travellers with family or friends. What follows is a journey of emotions — anxiety and panic. After three terrifying days Jesus was found in Jerusalem in a temple. This is the reading in Luke 2:41-50.

Have you ever had such a journey? I believe many of us as parents had lost sight of our very young child at one time or another; "supposing" he or she is with us while we were engrossed with something, at a sales event perhaps. Or you may have witnessed a mother frantically calling for her lost child in a crowded street or shopping centre. What can frighten a parent more than a lost child? There is something about a missing child that no comfort can bring until the child is found.

Is Jesus with us in our journey through life? Like Joseph and Mary, we assume that He is. We are quite certain that He is. However when we begin to look closer we may be shocked to see that we have been making the journey without Him. What contributed to Mary and Joseph losing Jesus can happen to us, causing us to lose His presence in our lives. Having just attended church camp spiritually "charged", we then set out on the road back to normal. We expect Jesus to be with us. We assume He is near. Then something seems to be quite different — our service seems to lack power, pleasure and peace. We soon discover Jesus is not as near as we thought. How could we have lost Jesus? Some of us lost Him as soon as we returned to work. Others lost Him already at home. But had Jesus gone anywhere? Did Joseph and Mary lose Jesus or did they leave Him behind in Jerusalem? No one intends to leave the Lord behind but too often we do. We find ourselves so busy that we forget why we are doing whatever we are doing. We were led by people and not by prayer. Our attention was focused on self rather than on Jesus.

Sunday Worship, Lord's Supper, Prayer Meeting, Fellowship Meeting, Good Friday, Easter, Christmas — all these have become routine to us. We realize that Jesus just might not be where we thought we could place Him. We get so used to Jesus that we forgot who He is and left Him behind. We "are supposing Him to have been" in our company. We suppose that the Lord is in agreement with our actions.

Do you see a real danger here? What we do routinely, what we do regularly, what we do out of habit — these things become common place and are taken for granted! Week after week we show up on Sunday, is there a danger that we will come and sleep through the service? Could we lose our alertness to God and His presence in our lives?

Jesus is here this morning. Have you seen Him? Did you see Him in the songs we've sung? Does He speak to us in the message from the pulpit? Is it possible to lose Jesus right here in the Church?

What are our assumptions about where we are likely to find Jesus? The last place we would think to look is in one another! We are too busy criticizing...judging one another; certainly never thought of looking for Jesus in one another. The distraught Joseph and Mary had to retrace their steps to Jerusalem in search of Jesus. We must return to the voice of God speaking in the scriptures. We should immediately seek to secure Him again. We must begin our search for Him all over. We need to go back to the place where we left Him. That is where we will find Him, right there waiting for us.

Do we want to find Jesus? Do we want to be about the Father's business? Then start caring, really caring, about His people, His creations, His church, that which He came and died for.

The old familiar Indian folk melody, "I Have Decided To Follow Jesus", the song writer had resolved "No turning back, No turning back". In the context of today's writing, we better turn back!

13 Aug 06  
Fear Not, Go Forward  
Elder Foong Kon Yu

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. This is your captain speaking. If we can take off and land successfully, we should reach our destination in six hours. However, I like you to know that taking off and landing are the most dangerous parts of the flight. For this reason, you have to put on your seat belts, just in case we do not lift off. If you are on board this plane, you probably will not fly again, well at least, not with this particular pilot, who would most likely be flying for his last time. All that the pilot said are true. He is just being honest. What did he do wrong? He induced fear to the passengers. Well, we all like to hear only the good part. We all know that flying is never 100% safe but we like to think only of the best to rid the fear in us.

To be human is to know fear, to be scared. Fear causes havoc in our lives. It leads us to fault finding and false condemnation. It binds us to another perspective that makes us very unreasonable. We cannot perform with a logical mind under the influence of fear. Within a short span of time, a fearful person would succumb to panic. Panic would disrupt the function of the body and trigger the mind to think of the worst scenario. A person in panic perceives that all his imagination is true. It is very difficult to calm a person in panic. His mind is already in another dimension of his own. He has "make believe" assumptions. Fear is the unseen enemy that caused many deaths, either directly or through irrational acts which result in deaths.

**Fear not.** When the Israelites came to the end of the road — the Red Sea was in front, the Egyptian army was at the back — fear gripped them. They forgot that there is God who performed the plagues in Egypt. They forgot that God delivered their firstborn. While they witnessed with their own eyes, they could not believe. God provided a cloud to protect them from the sun and to give light in the night. Exodus 13:22 "*He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.*" Seeing is believing? Thank God, that He knows us thoroughly. He calmed the Israelites by asking them not to be fearful. Repeatedly, God records in the scripture that we "*fear not*". Exodus 14:13 "*And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.*" We need to be reminded constantly to stay calm under any circumstance and not be overwhelmed by fear.

**Stand still.** Unless we stand still we cannot hear what the Lord says to us. He always speaks to us in a still small voice. Too often we rush into saying or doing something, to our regret later. Impulse can get us into trouble. For this reason, we need to pray (stand still) and wait upon the Lord before we take any action. Under any circumstance — in joy or in sorrow, pray. *Pray without ceasing.*

**The LORD shall fight for you.** Exodus 14:14 "*The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.*" There is no need to fret or to be in deep worries. As the Lord fought for the Israelites (and is still doing that today), He has promised to fight for us too. We are to

trust God and let Him take over things that are beyond our control. Psalm 55:22 "*Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.*" Is there anything too hard for God to take care? None! Be assured that God is always near. His pillar of cloud and pillar of fire, though invisible to us, are always present and near us. We should have peace in our minds. There is no need to lose sleep for it makes no difference to what we are facing. Can we change things by not sleeping? No, never! On the other hand, can we just go to sleep and hope to find peace? Only God gives us peace.

**Go Forward.** Exodus 14:15 "*And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.*" There are many things to be done for the Lord. Those who truly and fully trust the Lord can pick up and move on. So when we next face a problem, even though a humongous one, "Fear not, stand still, let the Lord fight for you and then go forward." Moving forward is important else our whole life would be bogged down by worries. Worry is no solution. Do not let the problem turn into worry and fear that will overcome us. Trusting the Lord and obeying His word is the only solution. This is the most assuring verse. Jeremiah 32:27 "*Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?*"

20 Aug 06  
The Mighty Hand of God  
Elder Su Ching Chun

During the Bible Camp in June, brethren from the Mandarin congregation studied the book of Nehemiah. The topic of the messages centered on the theme of rebuilding one's spiritual life. Indeed, Nehemiah was a great spiritual leader who consecrated himself to do what God set him to achieve. He had vision, vigour and single-mindedness in his service, and we can all learn much from Nehemiah so that we can serve the Lord better.

Nehemiah lived in the comforts of the palace in Persia but he was alert and very aware of the state of things back in Jerusalem. He was anxious over the broken walls and gates of Jerusalem and wanted to do something about it. Nehemiah fasted and prayed as he sought God's will. God gave Nehemiah the wisdom and vision to plan and execute a project that seemed impossible to man.

### **Nehemiah's Prayer**

Nehemiah prayed for four months, looking only to God as he waited for an answer. Prayers are indeed the best solution when faced with problems. Nehemiah knew that very well and God answered his prayers. God moved the king to shower Nehemiah with kindness and grace, providing help on financial and material needs.

The Lord is our help at all times. A believer will run into difficult moments in life where difficult decisions have to be made. We may not know whether to turn left or right, to go forward or backward. Pray like Nehemiah did and trust in the Lord for the "*good hand of my God was upon me*" (Neh 2:8).

### **Nehemiah's Leadership**

Nehemiah organized a precise mission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He had the blessing and "passport" of the king, the needed materials and the manpower. Once in Jerusalem, he surveyed the land and planned the best way to proceed. The plan was revealed only when he was ready. The tasks were delegated and Nehemiah led by example, exhorting the people to "*rise up and build*" (Neh 2:18).

A great leader must have leadership. The Church is the body of Christ, the branches of the vine. We shall bear fruits if we are in Christ. The Lord has given us gifts and talents to serve Him under the leadership of our pastor. The Church needs you. Have you prepared yourself to serve?

### **Nehemiah Overcame Problems**

Nehemiah faced many problems and threats during the project. There were sneers and threats from outsiders who wanted to dent Nehemiah's faith and strength. They wanted to see Nehemiah fail. Internally, he had to encourage his co-workers as they were intimidated

by the threats. However, Nehemiah stood firm in the face of adversity and continued with strength granted upon him by God.

Once again, Nehemiah overcame problems with prayer. There will be problems in our lives that we need to overcome too. They may be criticisms, difficulties at work, different opinions or obstacles to overcome. Pray and ask God for wisdom and patience, trust in the Lord and have courage to persevere.

### **Repentance and Revival**

Nehemiah completed the rebuilding of the walls in 52 days. The outer wall was completed and it protected its occupants within. But what was the state of the spiritual lives of the people? Nehemiah knew that the people needed to repent as they sinned against God. They needed a revival of their spiritual lives. Thus, Nehemiah gathered the people and let Ezra teach the people the Word of God.

Indeed, sometimes we fall into complacency when we think that it is alright to be less vigilant as we already have our place in heaven "booked". We neglect Sunday worship, do not pay attention during messages and slacken in our daily Quiet Time with God. If we are like this, we need to repent! We need a revival of our spiritual lives.

For Nehemiah, it was through God that the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt successfully. God took compassion on His people and worked through His mighty hands to ensure that His will is done. Indeed, it was God's hands that led the Israelites out of Egypt. His hands led them across the river Jordan into the Promised Land. His hands led those who sought after Him (David, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, etc.). In Christ, those who believe in His salvation also receive the guidance of His mighty hands. Therefore, may God "*prosper us...and we his servants will arise and build*" and give us "*portion, right and memorial*" (Neh 2:20).

27 Aug 06  
Trust and Obey  
Elder Yang De Gong

*"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass" (Psalm 37:7).*

Jesus said, *"...every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit"* (Jn 15:2). A branch on the vine "trusts and obeys" its master completely, resisting not while he goes about purging it to bring forth a bountiful harvest of fruits. Jesus himself is our best Example to emulate. How are we going to trust and obey in our daily lives?

### **How to Trust and Obey**

God is almighty and full of wisdom. He knows the past, the present and certainly the future. He measures by eternity and never errs nor waivers. *"Is any thing too hard for the LORD?"* (Gen 18:14). Indeed, when the Israelites were in the wilderness, they learnt much about trusting in God. Out of nowhere, quails and manna arrived to feed everyone. *"The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy"* (Psa 103:8). *"O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever"* (Psa 136:1). *"...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matt 5:45). *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom 5:8). All these verses tell us one thing: God's love, power and wisdom encompass us. This is the base on which we build our trust and obedience.

### **When to Trust and Obey**

We ought to give thanks during difficult times. *"...the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"* (Job 1:21). *"...What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"* (Job 2:10). This was Job's wonderful testimony during his trials when he suffered much. Job trusted and obeyed. Likewise, we should trust that the Lord has a plan for us. *"... and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them"* (Psa 139:16). Our heavenly Father even counted each strand of hair on our heads. Thus, even during trials, we should give thanks unto the Lord for we trust that it is the best for us.

We also ought to hold our peace when criticisms or sometimes misunderstandings arise. *"Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously"* (1 Pet 2:23). We read about how Mary held her peace when Martha "complained" to Jesus about her not helping out with the chores. She did likewise when criticized for anointing Jesus. However, Jesus commended what Mary had done, saying that it was *"a good work"*. In our daily living, service and work, criticisms and misunderstandings are bound to happen. We should learn to hold our peace and show our trust and obedience in the Lord.

Let me end with an illustration. A famous surgeon had to operate on his wife. He felt unable to do it himself so he wanted to seek help from a fellow surgeon friend. His wife refused, saying gently to her husband, "I only trust you. I have no fear, why should you?" Indeed, when we trust our Lord, He is our help and we have no fears. Amen!

03 Sep 06

Teaching them to observe all things

Elder Cheng Wei Nien

Last Sunday we celebrated Teacher's Day. The importance of the teaching ministry cannot be over emphasized. Our government is investing heavily in education for our nation. What about our church? Are we putting enough efforts to teach ourselves and our children things of eternal values? What we learn from schools are only temporal which can only last us our life time but what we learn from God's word will remain in us from now till eternity. "*For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever*" (1 Pet 1:24-25). Before our Lord's ascension, He gave us three commandments (Matt 28:18-20):

1. "All power is given unto Me" — we must worship Him.
2. "Go ye therefore and teach all nations" — we must go and preach the gospel.
3. "Teaching them to observe all things" — we must continue to teach those under our care.

Here we see that teaching is one of the three important commissions given to us by our Lord. Teacher's Day is not just a day for celebration. It is also to remind us of the importance of teaching and for us to appreciate those who are labouring among us as teachers.

**The call to teach God's people was given as early as Moses' time.** "*And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them*" (Deut 5:1). Not only did Moses teach the people, the people in turn taught their children and their children's children. "*And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up*" (Deut 6:7). We see that the teaching of God's word is a must in all Christian homes and a must to all members of our congregation; and it must be an on-going program without stopping. Unless God's people are continuously being taught, and they in turn teach others, generations after generations, God's people will very soon depart from the faith and will fall easy prey to Satan. This is even more so in this perilous generation.

**Our Lord spent much of His time on earth teaching people.** "*And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying*" (Matt 5:2). He not only taught them on the sermon on the mount. He also taught them as He walked by the sea of Galilee and even daily in the temples. He commanded the disciples to continue "*teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Matt 28:20). So, the teaching of God's word must be a continuous process until our Lord's return. Too often, we think that only our children need to be taught and forget that we adults are also in need of God's word just as badly as our children. Believers must not be contented with simply attending the worship service once a week. They must study God's word daily and diligently and seek to "*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" (2 Pet 3:18) if they want to receive blessings from above.

*"These things command and teach"* (1Tim 4:11). Paul commanded Timothy not to neglect his teaching ministry. The church will grow and be healthy only when there are godly men and women who are prepared to study seriously the word of God and come out to teach others, not only to the children but to the adults as well. Of course, there must be adults who are willing to be taught. We need faithful men and women who are committed to teaching. *"And the things that thou hast heard of me [Paul] among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also"* (2 Tim 2:2). This is why it is so nice to see that those who are committed to teaching are being remembered on Teacher's Day.

10 Sep 06

"...the Lord heard it"

Elder Foong Kon Yu

When my brother and sisters gather, we would talk among other things the times we shared our lives together under one roof. We recall the enjoyment we had dividing whatever little goodies in our possession. Candies and biscuits were a rare treat in our younger days. We also laughed at ourselves for quarrels and fights. Many of these quarrels in the past have resulted in us not talking to each other. Now that we have grown into our fifties and sixties we realized that we learned to understand each other through frictions as we grew up. We are likened to a flock of sheep. The shepherd has a hard time with the quivering of his sheep. Though the grass patch may be large and enough for all the sheep to graze, they would still be unhappy because few of them would like to have a particular little patch of turf.

Abraham and Lot lived together and though they did not quarrel, their servants did. With a very gracious heart, Abraham gave his nephew the first choice. Indeed the fields were big and aplenty. Physical limitation and disadvantage in human sight cannot restrict the blessings of God. In the end, we all know that the greater blessing went to Abraham. Rightfully, Abraham should have the first choice. I recall reading a story in my primary school about two goats crossing a bridge from the opposite direction. It was a narrow bridge that had space only for one goat to cross. Refusing to give way to each other when they reached the middle, they fought and both goats fell into the river. There was no gain for either one of them.

When Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses' wife (Numbers 12), Moses did not retaliate or quarrel with both his brother and sister but the Lord heard the conversation. "**...And the LORD heard it**" (Num 12:2). "*Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth*" (Num 12:3). Although Moses was prepared to submit to this unprovoked and hurtful attack without protest or defending himself, God was not prepared to let it pass. John Calvin comments, "This passage teaches us that although the good and gentle refrain from reproaches and accusations, God nevertheless keeps watch for them and, whilst they are silent, the wickedness of the ungodly cries out to, and is heard by God". The Lord was the Judge for Moses and He caused the cloud to depart from the tabernacle to show His displeasure. Aaron noticed it and repented of his sin. Miriam was struck with leprosy. Instead of telling his sister off, Moses prayed for her recovery. "*And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee*" (Num 12:13).

Even during Jesus' sojourn on earth, His disciples were eying to be the greatest. The mother of James and John pleaded to have her sons seated on the right and on the left of Jesus. It is only natural that the mother wants the best for her children. Thank God that His perspective is entirely different from that of man's. What did Jesus say? "*But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*" (Matt 20:26-28). To be a servant is to be meek, forgiving and submissive. Humanly speaking, to be

submissive is equated to losing. However, In God's teaching, to be submissive is humility and letting God take over. He certainly knows our hearts and He is in control of every situation. We have read that vengeance belongs to God. We have heard it. This principle is being taught in church in our Sunday school lessons. We understand it, yet we violate this principle all the time. We want to have our last say. We insist that we are right. Jesus, while being accused and persecuted, chose not to have the last say. He was and is right. He has shown us that it's possible to be meek and let God take control. Very often, we refuse to give in. Defiantly, we say that if we are ever to be submissive, it is to the Lord only. God's word teaches us that we are to submit one to another too. The leaders of the church are not to lord over the people and the people are to submit to their leaders. *"Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet 5:5-7).*

For those whose conversation evolves magnifying the faults of others and the lies that go along, please refrain. The Lord hears every word we speak. Let us learn to obey God's word. *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph 4:32).*

17 Sep 06

"Maturity and Growth"

Elder Su Ching Chun

The growth and maturity of a Christian's spiritual life is like the growing up process of a baby. A baby drinks milk, then takes solid food slowly before reaching maturity to function as an independent adult. Therefore, for all of us who proclaim to be believers of Christ, we should strive towards spiritual maturity to become instruments of our Lord's work. As such, we shall study Nehemiah 13 and Ephesians 4 to see what constitutes the growth and maturity of a Christian's spiritual life.

### **1. Do we have a separated life?**

Nehemiah wanted the separation of those Israelites who returned to rebuild the wall, to be separated from the local *Gentiles*. This was to prevent the infusion of their pagan practices. Paul also said the same thing in 2 Corinthians 6:17 "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*" Such emphasis on being separate from the world serves to warn and guide believers to draw closer to God and further away from the sinful world which is filled with many traps and attractions which may distract us, and cause us to sin.

### **2. Keeping the sanctity of God's house**

God's house is a place where believers worship and listen to the Word of God. We must maintain its sanctity. It was also one of Nehemiah's main tasks to sanctify the temple before moving in the priests and equipment. In a similar fashion, Jesus sanctified the temple twice by throwing the businessmen, money-changers and traders out of God's house. "*My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.*" (Matt 21:13). The Church is not a club and never a place where we do business. We must keep it pure.

### **3. Serving the Lord**

Serving in the temple was a privilege for the Levites in the Old Testament. Nehemiah found out that the Levites were not properly provided, thus causing them to be unable to serve effectively. Therefore, Nehemiah acted swiftly to correct the situation and brought the Levites back to serve.

Similarly, Church leaders hope that serving the Lord will also be part of a spiritually matured believer's life. We do our part, using our talents to serve the Lord in every way. Sadly, there are instances where people do not want to serve but love to criticize. Is this the correct attitude? Let us all be doers in the Church so that we can edify one another through our zeal and service.

### **4. Keeping the Lord's Day**

Nehemiah saw that the people were not keeping the Sabbath. Instead, they were busy trading and doing business. This was against God's instructions and God was certainly not pleased. Nehemiah corrected the situation by rebuking the people and putting the right practices back into place (Neh 13:15-18).

*"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb 10:25).* Indeed, we should never stop worship unless under special circumstances. There is no reason for the children of God not to worship our heavenly Father. Therefore, never let excuses or laziness overcome us. Let us be zealous in keeping the Lord's Day to worship and to serve, so that we all grow in the Spirit to become a people well pleasing unto the Lord.

24 Sep 06

"A Spiritually Matured Life"

Yang Degang

*"...of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13)*

The life of a believer is one that strives towards spiritual maturity. *"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph 4:13-14).* Spiritual maturity can be manifested in the following ways:

### **1. Be unaffected by the attractions of worldly things**

Jesus was led to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit and fasted for 40 days and nights. The devil came along to tempt Him. Jesus was hungry and the devil asked Jesus to turn the stones into bread to satisfy His physical needs. Jesus said *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).* Of course, the Bible does not teach us to lead a life of self torture. Jesus also attended dinners, ate and drank while He was in the world. The point here is that worldly things can sometimes weaken our spiritual lives. Paul said, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim 6:6-8).* He added: *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil 4:11-13).*

### **2. Be unaffected by destructive criticisms**

The little flower that grows in the wilderness is very beautiful. It will not blossom better even if you heap praises on it. Neither does it lose any of its radiance when you criticize it. Such is the spirit to have when we serve. Serve the Lord with one heart and mind, and do not take to heart the lack of praises or the destructive criticisms that may come along. This way, the fragrance of a God-pleasing service can be preserved. Let us learn from the example of Paul. *"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor 4:2-5).*

### **3. Be unaffected by circumstances**

Jesus said, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*" (Matt 16:24). Indeed, a spiritually matured life is one that sacrifices time, money, talent and even one's life for the Lord, if needed. There are too many examples of missionaries who went into dangerous and unknown lands for the sake of the Gospel, and many suffered for the Lord. Of course, not everyone needs to be like those missionaries. The point is: "Are we willing to forsake the world for the Lord?" It may be as simple as a little of our time, energy, money and talents. Our Lord Jesus went to the cross for us. Are we prepared to reciprocate by doing only a miniscule of what the Lord did for us?

Pray that we can be encouraged once more, to wait for our Lord's glorious return. Let us be spiritually matured like Paul. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14).

---The End---

