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Greetings to you in Christ's Lovely Name! Christians are by default, disciples of Christ. One cannot be a Christian without being a disciple.

The Marks of True Discipleship

In the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:4-15), Jesus said that different people would respond to the gospel in different ways. Many will initially hear and obey the truth, but not all of these will keep the faith with endurance. Some will become unfaithful and fall away. Those who "have no root," for example, may "believe for a while," but in time of temptation they will fall away (v.13). Still others are "choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life." Jesus said that these will "bring no fruit to maturity" (v.14).



The truth of the matter is, it takes a certain kind of *character* to seek God faithfully, and not everyone will choose to have that kind of character. The call of the gospel separates those who have a "root" in themselves from those who do not. Knowing this ought to stimulate some serious thought concerning our own selves. Do we personally have what it takes? Are we willing to be like those who have the strong inner character the gospel calls for? Seeking God requires "Three C's": courage, commitment, and confession. If we are not willing to pay the price in each of these areas, then we are not serious in being a disciple.

Courage. At the very least, it takes courage to follow the Lord. In Rev. 21:8, the fearful, or cowardly, head the list of those who will be lost. Courage is fortitude in the

face of danger, and we can be sure that the devil is going to make our discipleship to Christ as dangerous as he can. But whatever loss the devil may threaten us with, we can have the courage that comes from faith, which is the willingness to take real risks based upon our trust that God will save us. The person whose main objective is to protect himself and play it safe will never be a faithful follower of the Lord. The risks are real, the attack by terrorists at New York's World Trade Center is a sober reminder, the losses in this world may be great, and it is only the courageous people of faith who will fight and keep on fighting until the last battle is won.

Commitment. Without the making of a genuine commitment to God, we will not stand very long in the face of what the devil can throw at us. The faith necessary for our salvation in God involves far more than a whim or passing mood. Neither wishful thinking nor simply "giving it a try" will suffice. If we propose to follow Christ, we must have the character that is capable of making a genuine pledge to actually do what we've decided to do. James urges us to "purify" our hearts of double-mindedness: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8). There is no greater need in our day than for those who profess to be the Lord's disciples to make up their minds decisively and focus their hearts on God with a deep-down commitment. Of course commitment also involves sacrificial cost. We need to count the cost of discipleship and not turn back (Luke 9:26).

Confession. Secret commitments do not hold up nearly as well as public ones, and so it ought not to surprise us that the Lord requires that we publicly confess we believed in Him and committed ourselves to being His disciples (Rom 10:9,10; 1 Tim 6:12,13). Like Jesus Himself, the "Faithful and True Witness" (Rev 3:14) who never failed to acknowledge publicly what He knew to be true privately, we must be willing to die rather than cover up or hide our convictions and our commitment to Christ. So important is our confession that the Hebrew writer speaks of it as the very thing that must be "held fast" if we are to reach heaven. He wrote, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us *hold fast our confession*" (Heb 4:14) and "Let us *hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful*" (Heb 10:23).

So being the faithful disciple of Christ requires courage, commitment, and confession. But let us not misunderstand: the fact that we may not "have what it takes" does not mean that we are born one way or the other by God's predestination. Salvation is a free gift of God but character is a matter of *choice*, and the choice is our *own*. Our "heart" is determined by the many free-will decisions we make every day. Some of these are big

and others are little. But together they all add up to the sum total of that which is called our "character."

Because our choices make our character, we can change from one "heart" to another. In fact, this is precisely what is involved in being "converted" to Christ. Such a "conversion" is not optional. Jesus said that we *must* change: "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:3). Whatever we've been in the past, do we today have *courage*? Are we willing to make a genuine *commitment* to God? Will our lives be characterized by a faithful *confession* of our commitment as long as we live? If so, we have the makings of true discipleship!

Pastor Martin Yee



God is still in Control

by Rev Henry Kong

This past Tuesday night, I attended a leadership awareness meeting. When I returned home, my phone started to ring throughout the night with news of WTC, NYC tragedy. Since I was at the meeting, I was totally unaware of what took place although I have been alerted by email of plane crashes in USA. Immediately, I turned on the TV and tuned to CNN, then BBC and finally to Channel News Asia, where I got hold of a number to call and rang up the CK Lees whose son, Seng was staying in the Lower Manhattan area.

For most of us, the tragedy was like something out of a James Bond movie. My family stayed at the WTC when we were in NYC. We even took a ride up to the top for a view of that great city. It is very strange now to look at NYC skyline without the famous twin towers. The thing that numb me most was not the graphic live videos but the recorded voices of the victims who were desperately calling their love ones with their final message.

Although what happened is very far away, the extent of the destruction and the scope of it is such, that none of us can go back to business as usual. How do you respond to humanity inhumanity to mankind? How do you reconcile the reaction of people dancing and rejoicing in

the streets of Palestine crying, "God is great!" at the grave evil that was done? When senseless tragedies happen what do we do? In this article, I want to refer to 3 of the senseless tragedies in the Bible and draw lessons that may serve as an anchor for our souls at times such as these. The 3 events that I will refer to are Uzziah's death, Christ's crucifixion and the persecution of early Christians. All these, in a way, are senseless tragedies and are either self-inflicted, inflicted by our fellowmen or by our enemies. In all of these events, like the WTC tragedy, they are humanity's inhumanity to mankind - senseless tragedies. When they happen, like the WTC tragedy this past Tuesday, what do we do?

The bond of brotherhood is strengthened

When "Senseless" Tragedies Happens... I believe that the bond of brotherhood is strengthened. As our eyes are glued to the TV on Tuesday night, I believe we all feel a common sense of outrage that what happened is no longer regarded in isolation, but against every civilised human being. The bible tells us that in the early church, Christians were persecuted severely. There was no way that they could defend themselves, so they had to leave their homes, like refugees and were scattered everywhere.

Acts 8:1-4 records "And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles... But Saul laid waste the church, entering into every house, and dragging men and women committed them to prison. They therefore that were scattered abroad, went about preaching the word."

The Bible tells us that there was a great persecution. One of the cause of this senseless tragedy was a man called Saul. Verse 3 says that he laid waste the church and carried out house-house searches. As many as he could uncover, every Christian were put into prison. But what was the result? Though they were scattered abroad, they were bond together by their faith, unity and determination to preach the word

So it is at times such as this, that we have never seen before America as united as this, NATO as united as this and countries of the world with the exception of a handful, as united as this. Our enemies may plan and plot all kinds of evil against us - senseless inhumanity against humanity, hoping to destroy our will power and wipe us from our every existence. But once the situation is accessed and we figure what odds we are against, and how we will respond to this tragic evil, we are all at one in resisting overooming and conquering it. Persecution has never hurt the church nor destroyed any cause; rather it has proven that it will strengthen the bond of brotherhood and like gold tried by fire, become stronger than ever.

We are driven to Prayer

When "Senseless" Tragedies Happens... we are driven to Prayer. It is extremely difficult for mere humans to respond to the senseless tragedies that are done against us. Our first reaction is to ensure that such an incident must not be allowed to repeat itself. Then we try to hit back and devise ways of meeting force with force. At the end of the day, we sink as low as these people - hitting out with hatred, revenge and every selfish motivation.

My first response after the horrific tragedy sank in my mind, in this order, is to first pray for the victims, then the helpers who are trying to rescue and heal and following, for those in authority that they might do the right thing.

The Bible tells us that Isaiah wrote in chapter 6:1 that "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple." Here is another senseless tragedy, but not in the scope or extend of Acts 8. It focuses on one person only but he was an important person, the king - the Hope of Israel.

These were bad times for the people of God. The kingdom of Israel was divided into two factions. 10 tribes have forsaken God and are now worshipping idols in Samaria. Only 2 tribes - Benjamin & Judea are faithful, but they had a series of bad and wicked kings. Uzziah became king when he was only 16 years old. For about 30 years, he ruled faithfully and returned Judea to much of her former glory. However, because of his pride in latter years, he was stricken with leprosy by God. And even though he was one of the greatest kings, he was not remembered for his accomplishments but his great fall - as the leper king.

Isaiah, the prophet of God at these times was related to king Uzziah. So in the year that the king died, he was mourning not only the loss of his king and his relative, but also the hope of Judea. I can guess what he must be thinking - "Uzziah had accomplished so much, brought us all back to God. He could have done more but because of his sin, God inflicted him with leprosy. It was such a senseless tragedy..."

In the midst of his grief, sense of loss and sorrow, the Bible introduces one of its great worship scenes. I put it to you, that faced with such a tragedy as the WTC event, we dare not take it upon ourselves to decide the next step, but wholly lean on the Lord for his perspective and direction.

We gain new Insights

When "Senseless" Tragedies Happens... We gain new Insights. Every time I think of the crucifixion of Jesus, I wondered how things could get so out of hand, for a crowd consisting of His fellowmen, who has seen Him done nothing but good... then hail Him King in His triumphant entry to Jerusalem... could be so fickle that they can be manipulated by evil men, disguised as religious leaders to cry for the release of 'Barabas', a wrong doer and then turn against Him, crying 'crucify Him, crucify Him'. What a senseless tragedy this is, the day we murdered God's only Son! Yet out of the grave, rose the resurrected Christ and it is out of senseless tragedies like this we gain new insights.

In Luke 24:13-31, we read "And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was threescore furlongs from Jerusalem. And they communed with each other of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, while they communed and questioned together, that Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. " Here we have 2 guys like us, numbed by the horrific event and still unable to come to terms that they actually crucified our Saviour.

"17 And he said unto them, What communications are these that ye have one with another, as ye walk? And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said unto him, Dost thou alone sojourn in Jerusalem and not know the things which are come to pass there in these days? " What? You are in NYC and did not even noticed that the twin towers are no longer there? Don't you have CNN on your TV?

"19 And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel. Yea and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass." These people were hoping against hope...

"Moreover certain women of our company amazed us, having been early at the tomb; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. And certain of them that were with us went to the tomb, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not."

"25' And he said unto them, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

"28 And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they were going: and he made as though he would go further. And they constrained him, saying, Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent. And he went in to abide with them. And it came to pass, when he had sat down with them to meat, he took the bread and blessed; and breaking it he gave to them. 31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight."

Often, it is in times like these, that our eyes are open, when the important things in life stands out in stark contrast to the routine, so that it can no longer be ignored or side-stepped. What are some insights we can glean from the WTC tragedy?

1. The vulnerability of human life. In one swift blow after another, at the heart of the greatest city in the modern world, an estimated 10,000 lives were lost.
2. The frailty of human endeavours. Who amongst us would believe if I told you on Monday, last week that the WTC twin towers will no longer stand? You would probably laugh me to scorn, and try as I may, at that time, I could not figure out how it would be possible either.
3. Most of all, we reaffirm that God is in charge at all times, for without Him nothing make sense. With Him, there is hope purpose and meaning

NEW YORK WTC ATTACK - An INTERNET Survey

It is true that Iraq is the place of ancient Babylon. But what is modern Babylon? Consider these words:

*"For you have trusted in your wickedness;
You have said, 'No one sees me';
Your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you;
And you have said in your heart,
'I am, and there is no one else besides me.'
Therefore evil shall fall upon you;
You will not be able to put it off.
And desolation shall come upon you suddenly,
Which you shall not know."* (Isaiah 47:10-11)

Previous to the above quote we read:

*"Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures,
Who dwell securely,
Who say in your heart,
'I am, and there is no one else besides me;
I shall not sit as a widow,
Nor shall I know the loss of children';
But these two things shall come to you
In a moment, in one day:
The loss of children, and widowhood. . ."*
(Isaiah 47:8-9)

Did you know that during the Afghan War in the '80s, it was America's CIA that trained and armed Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect of the New York city terror attack? That Sept 11 was the anniversary of George W Bush's speech to Congress in 1990 that heralded the war against Iraq? It was also the anniversary of the Camp David accords, which signaled the US "buy-out of Egypt as any countervailing force for Palestinian rights in the Middle East."



All over the tiny island, people with handphones were messaging each other that the 16th century seer Nostradamus had somehow predicted the World Trade Center disaster. Here was the popular message:

"It has been foreseen that exactly three hundred and fifty years into the future, silver phoenixes shall strike down the twin brothers of oppression that carried the king's nation, which shall bring upon the apocalypse" - Nostradamus (Sept 11, 1651)

They then added 1651 + 350 to get Sept 11, 2001.

Unfortunately, Nostradamus died in 1566.

Jerry, Jenny, Jedidiah and Jeswyn LAM
24 Cloud Estate, Off Jalan Green
93150 Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia
Tel : 082-425295, 234426, 019-8261024
Fax : 082-421827 Email : jerrylam@tm.net.my



Dear partners in ministry,

Months have passed before we realize that it was several months ago that we last updated you.

Thank you for praying and supporting us over the past months. It's been an encouragement to hear from some of you. Your communication is an added bonus.

OUR CO-WORKERS

Since our last update, the possibility of another couple joining us has been confirmed. Benny & Jade joined our team in Sarawak since March this year. They are based in Sibu, having most ministries with the Chinese-speaking churches. Jade is fluent in Mandarin and Foochow (main dialect there) and Benny is re-activating his Mandarin. Our other co-workers, Pagag & Saran have settled well in Miri but are adjusting to life with a new baby. They have been great in making more inroads with the BM & Lun Bawang churches, which abounds in & around Miri.

OUR MINISTRY AND TRIPS

We continue to network with the churches in and around Kuching. God



Jeswyn is learning Mandarin well in her kindy and JD has picked up a fair bit of BM in Primary 1. They continue to enjoy playing together. "And sometimes we fight," says JD.

has also opened more doors for ministry in the past few months. In this year's missions weekend, Jenny took the kids for a morning of interactive missions programme. She was hoarse after 3 hours with them but the kids showed they had a positive input - many shared excited what they learnt with their parents.

During the 11-days school holidays in May-June, we went to West Malaysia where we attended a church camp in Cameron Highlands, visited Jerry's sister in Penang, shared in a church in Taiping and spends some days in KL. It was really good to see Jerry's sister & family going on with the Lord after

coming to HIM last year. They arranged for us to share in their cell group.

In July we drove to Miri for a weekend. We really felt the Lord ordained it when we saw His hand in providing a gift specifically for the fuel and enabling us ministering to the people. We were also able to spend time with Pagag & Saran and see their new addition. JD & Jeswyn was excited with the little baby!

At the end of July, Jerry went to Kota Kinabalu to help our Sabah co-worker to set up and run the OM booth and book-table at the 4-days Asian Pacific Consultation on Discipleship.

In mid-August we had the OM Malaysia Board and staff meeting here in Kuching. It was a good time of get-together and discussions. OM Malaysia staff & a board member shared in services of 5 churches in Kuching that Sunday.

With the decentralizing of the Sarawak office, we are exploring the possibility of moving the office back to the house. But that involves some extension & we are cracking our heads how to best do it.. Pray for wisdom.



LOOKING AHEAD:

Annie from Lawas is expected to join the Doulos for 2 years this September. We expect to be in Sibu in September. Doulos is tentatively planned to be in Kuching for a week in November. Another ministry trip in December?

FAMILY NEWS:

Jenny's asthma has improved tremendously the past few months with only one minor attack. Thank you, Lord for your healing. Jerry says, "Life is great! God is doing great things and I'm expecting God to do greater things in our ministry."

We are thankful to you for standing behind us in our ministry. You are our vital support. "Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work." 2 Cor 9:8

UPDATE 2 /01 : Aug 2001

Straits Times, 29th August 2001
BUSINESS PROSPECTS

"Remember, it wasn't raining when Noah build the ark."

Howard Ruff

Some commentators believe that Noah lived in a part of the land where they hardly experience rain. So he must have had great faith to build an ark in the middle of the land, when the sea is nowhere in sight.

If he had waited until the first clouds appeared in the sky, it would have been too late to complete the ark.

Are the clouds at the horizon already?

Martin Cheah

Let's talk about:

CHURCH HOPPING & CHURCH GROWTH

There are job-hoppers, country hoppers (migrants) and church-hoppers.

Among the hoppers, some have landed on greener pastures or settled on lands that reward them with better produce for their labour (or flowing with sweeter milk and honey); others have just been rolling stones gathering no moss.

Just talking about church hoppers, there are all kinds of reasons for people to grow springs on their feet, but I do not always understand their logic. It is not that they certainly do not have any logic, just that my frail mind can neither grasp it nor find the wisdom to follow it for my own gain against the sole alternative of a 'spiritually stagnant' (if not 'retrogressive', as some might want me to contemplate) existence here in JCC with its 'stifling' atmosphere and a physically old-fashioned and 'uninspiring' building that quakes every time a heavy truck rumbles by.

My pastors and Council leaders may feel sad, very sad indeed, to read what I have just commented about the spiritual and physical environment of JCC, save with a little consolation from the softening effect of the inverted-comma enclosures I have put in place for a few key adjectives.

A little more seriously speaking, our leaders may be very concerned that sheep are not growing but are being tempted by other crowd-puller

churches housed in grand buildings with the latest state of the art architecture and facilities, and powered by highly charismatic pulpit speakers who are blessed with a commanding spiritual aura around them whenever their tongues are loosened.

Personally, I am absolutely not bothered if our sheep find better grazing fields and thereby grow in spirit and truth where they feel comfortable, exemplified by their developing servanthood in the Lord's service. Ultimately, there is no loss to God's Kingdom since wherever these spiritually emergent sheep are, they are still within the Church Universal, the Church proclaiming our Lord and Saviour Jesus, the Christ. This is all good, so why should we lose sleep over them if we know that they are under capable shepherds who are ever so ready to help us out in our deficient areas and thus enabling us to spare more energy on our areas of strength? It would be a shame and most undisciparian-like for local churches to compete with one another for members just to have numbers to wield for encouragement or boasting!



However, when sheep move from one grazing field to another and begin to grow in boldness moving back and forth between fields braying loudly about their new wonderful discoveries but with no new and better wool as evidence of improved productivity to show for their supposedly better feeding elsewhere than here, it is not only our

leaders here in JCC who have to be very concerned, but also the shepherds at the alternative pasture who are drawing these sheep that would not produce enhanced wool despite the excellent nourishment that they keep braying praises about.

If a Christian feels that in one local church, nine out of ten things are not right and he is deprived of spiritual exultation and thereby he is compromised in his Christian service, he should do either of two things. Firstly, this local church badly needs him to contribute his talents with Christian humility to improve the state of affairs. He should accept this challenge because he is part of the body of Christ that is this church. In other words, the state of affairs of this church reflects on the body of Christ of which he is a part. Alternatively, it may be that the existing problems are too big for him and he cannot be faulted for wanting to breathe fresh air elsewhere so that he can be more energised to discharge his Christian duty. Well, if this were the case, he should go where the air is indeed fresh enough to enable him to be more energised as he wishes. If instead, he goes somewhere claiming the air is much fresher there and the spiritual food much more nourishing, yet over there as here he still finds himself without spiritual unction to play a meaningful part in Christian duty, what good do the fresh air and the excellent food do to him? For all the fresh air and good food he enjoys, does he not feel any urging to volunteer a service out of gratitude by helping out his host in some way? Or does he feel the sufficiency of a monetary gift as a return for some vague

In the final day of accounting before the Lord, what counts is our individual performance and neither shepherds nor sheep will have any excuse to point a finger at each other.

blessing received? Or does he think that going to a church is just for entertainment with a display of thrilling and impressive spiritual sparklers, and with heart-warming homilies to take home as keepsakes, but with minimal or no personal participation in the whole scheme of Christian worship and service?

Basically, we are in Church not to be served, but to serve. Consider this: If everyone

waits to be served, there will be no one serving and everybody ends up without being served. On the contrary, if everyone is raring to serve everyone else, he will find that he is always surrounded by servants. So if anyone wishes to be served, let him be the first to serve.

The extent of our service and capability is not as important as whether we put in our best effort according to our individual callings to whatever ministry, regardless of whether it is clerical or lay. Luke 21:1-6 is a lesson to us on how God values the heart more than mere human measures of worthiness apropos of our offerings (money and service) or the physical elements we crave for and boast about.

People always like to talk about what is realistic and what is practical, in the midst of commonplace struggles with the rat survival race in career or children's education. There is nothing wrong with such talk because it is only telling the truth about life as it is. Talking can make us aware that we are all in similar circumstances, which means that we should be more thoughtful in contributing effort to help one another in sharing the burden of

church growth so that we can avoid the situation of a few workers burning themselves out while a pedestrian crowd watch with arms akimbo. The more people there are to lend their shoulders, the lighter will the yoke be. If every one of 200 church members does a bit, how much do the bits add up? However, if the majority of members complain but do nothing at all in service (even in simple bit parts), and some of these even go to the extent of singing praises about other churches while hibernating in their own, how realistic and practical is it to expect the minority of workers to accomplish what the majority wishes to see?

When people share with me their viewpoints, I listen and try to pick whatever gems I can that may be put to good use in JCC service. When they share both their viewpoints and weight-bearing shoulders (no matter the size of their shoulders), I am very much encouraged.

If we call ourselves mature Christians, we ought to know that becoming actively involved in the church vision as it relates to the Word of God is the only sure sign that we are no longer spiritual babes still clamouring for milk and shunning solid food.

Church hopping (moving from church to church without a focussed spiritual direction) demonstrates the contrary.

An age-old chicken-and-egg question can be asked this way: Do members expect growth first before they would find the impetus to serve, or do they carry out the hard work of service first in order to expect the growth they wish to see?

Worse than expecting the church to grow before they serve, there are churchgoers who simply treat offering service as an alien idea. They are not interested at all in the question of serving, but most interested in whether the church has the finest facilities, their ideal hymns and sermons, the greatest range of agreeable programs, etc. when they consider to stay or move. Their focus is not really on Christ and worship, but on self – personal convenience, comfort and profit. Those who have experienced moving house will tell you that no house offers the perfect fit to one's expectations at any moment or all the time. Similarly, moving from church to church does not guarantee perfect fulfilment. Besides, in any move, there is always a sacrifice involved in terms of relationships put aside for building up new ones, adjustments to a new environment with benefits that may turn out to be over-estimated in the first place, adaptations by family members one tows along (children in Sunday School, spouse or teenaged children displaced from existing fellowship), opportunity costs, etc.

Talking about what is realistic and practical in another sense, one may ask about how reasonable it is to expect all the "right things" to reside in a single local church or be available to all local churches. Within the Church Universal framework, it is obvious that labourers are few to tend to the harvest of souls. This was what Jesus said to his disciples in Matt. 9:37. Among these labourers, the fine ones form just a small subset; so how sensible is it for everybody to expect all the best of preachers, Bible teachers, Cell leaders, etc. to be in his church? Maybe the excellently gifted who can draw crowds are found in

one or two of the local churches in a large geographical area. How then is it rational for all and sundry Christians to flock to these one or two churches and leave all the others empty? Would you even expect the crème de la crème of human servants to be blessed with unlimited means to hold an indefinite increase of sheep without setting off diminishing returns to good spiritual work or having to draw manpower from the limited common pool of predominantly modest talents in the Church Universal to fill service gaps? Evidently, it just does not sound realistic and practical for one to think that it is God's will to allow this to happen – i.e., with the worldwide sheep in Church Universal congregating or concentrating themselves for excellent spiritual feeding in a few local churches. A small number of sheep wanting to migrate to a lush pasture is fine. However, if the crowd mentality sets in and all sheep start to move in the same direction, the excellent pasture will become bare in no time and some neglected sheep deprived of food will die off while the wiser ones among them will rush back to their old pastures before they face the same doom.



It is plainly realistic and practical that since the majority of church members are unexceptional people in the spiritual domain, the majority of churches are managed and sustained by unexceptional servants. It is a testimony of God's grace and guidance at work when unremarkable people can manage and sustain most of the local churches with a fair geographical spread. Let these regular servants be humble (for they just do not

have anything to brag about) and give all praise and glory to God! (Though just a below-average servant, I am glad that God is providing me the necessary support as and when He sees that I need it. Despite a personal sense of dissatisfaction with my own level of performance, I try to push myself to remain at least a plain and simple servant depending on God's grace instead of being an idle worshipper. It would be very much tougher for me if I were an above-average servant who tries to depend on my own strength for anything.)

When talks about Church growth are thick in the air, it is easy to forget that truly meaningful discussions are focussed not on numbers but on quality. If we want only numbers, then it is not difficult at all to devise crowd-pulling plans, but when people file in easily by the front door, they leave as easily by the back door. The difficult part is to mould a community (regardless of size) of faithful Christians

who will grit their teeth and bond with one another through thick and thin rather than being mere fair weather comrades in the Lord's Army. When the basics are done right, and we have a strong community to lay bare a wholesome Christian testimony, the

numbers will grow naturally with a quality foundation.

In life, there are many things good and desirable – good health, stable family, happy and well-educated children, etc. However, we know for a fact that the wind is not always at our back, the sky is not always blue and the pathway not always

flower-strewn. We may puzzle over why God allows the 'bad' or 'undesirable' things instead of blessing us with all our worthy aspirations, the reason being that "there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God." (Rom. 3:11 NIV) Our limited human vision cannot fully fathom God's blueprint for things on earth. Often what is against our perception turns out to be good on hindsight whereas what we rejoice in may have a short-lived purpose within the divine plan. A great superpower, the Soviet Union, broke up overnight when President Gorbachev resigned. A closed communist nation, China, opens up quite dramatically only recently, especially with her fervour towards reaching out to the world via the Olympics, bringing in its wake vast opportunities of all sorts. We also see a developed nation, New Zealand, tending towards a developing state; and 'poor' Philippines reportedly registering a higher growth rate than Singapore. Rise and falls are common in the lives of nations, communities, families and individuals. The local churches as congregations of distinctive Christians are not immune to the flow and ebb of events.

This is not to say that we expect our church to rise, to fall and then to rise and fall again like a roller coaster. The truth is that our human vision in seeing things is often very myopic. Yet, if we look hard enough, we can still make out the blessing of humble lessons in hard times and the blessing of solemn lessons about not resting on our laurels in pleasant times. Know the hymn "Count Your Blessings"? Think of this advice:

*"When you are discouraged,
thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings;
name them one by one,*

*And it will surprise you what
the Lord hath done."*

Instead of drowning ourselves in despondency by looking only at the inferior side of any situation, what is our situation as a church and what are the blessings we can count?

John Lee

Look out for the conclusion and maybe the final article in the next issue of The Vine. Bro. John Lee has decided to take a break from The Vine for a season.

Pray for Rodney



Bro Rodney Ratnam has been warded at the Woodbridge Hospital for almost a month due to deep depression. At times, he hallucinates and imagines all kinds of things, which frightens him.

Please remember him in your prayers that God will heal him and also reconcile him to his family. That he will be able to recall the goodness of God in his life.

• **"Our Father,"**: The world surrounding you often moves at a frenetic pace, and bonds of family, friendship and community between people often aren't as deep as they were in previous eras. Still, you are God's child, and can enjoy an intimate relationship with Him. God loves you deeply and wants the best for you. He's always present with you and is willing to become involved in all aspects of your life. Others who share a bond with Him through the Holy Spirit are connected to you as part of God's universal family.

• **"who art in heaven,"**: The Internet has expanded our notion of communication, enabling us to easily share messages with people all over the globe. Space exploration has given us glimpses into the universe's vast size. Whenever you pray, God hears you. He exists both with you on earth - wherever you are - and in that other dimension of our universe called heaven. When you're connected to God through His Son, Jesus Christ, you'll never experience technical difficulties trying to reach Him.

• **"hallowed be thy name,"**: In a world that currently finds relativism more fashionable than universal truth, it's popular to refer to simply a "higher power" or "divine being." But an all-powerful, all-knowing God exists. He is unique, and infinitely worthy of your respect.

• **"Thy kingdom come,"**: Technology is constantly advancing, enabling people to accomplish many important things. But it's only when people access God's power and guidance that those efforts can be ultimately successful. You can become a channel through which God's power can operate in the world every time you humble yourself and trust in Him rather than just your own efforts.

• **"thy will be done,"**: We're faced with a vast array of options in every situation, and the prevalent relativistic attitudes suggest that any choice can work well. But God knows what's best, and if you seek His will, all things will work together for good to accomplish His purposes in your life.

• **"on earth as it is in heaven,"**: Many scientists are concluding from recent discoveries that earth seems to have been designed for humans. Each element of our planet's design is precisely right to support our lives here. Evidence also shows that the entire universe has been calculated in just the right ways to sustain life. As in ages past, God is in control of all of His creation.

• **"Give us this day our daily bread,"**:

Today's world offers unprecedented opportunities for many people to enjoy a high standard of living. Take time to thank God for the many blessings He has made available to you.

There are 594 chapters before Psalms 118
There are 594 chapters after Psalms 118
Add those numbers up and you get 1188
What is the center verse in the Bible?
Answer - Psalms 118:5

Does this verse say something significant about God's perfect will for our lives?

The next time someone says they would like to find God's perfect will for their lives and that they want to be in the center of His will, just send them to the center of His Word!

Psalms 118:5 (NKJV) "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man."

Now isn't that odd how this worked out (or was God in the center of it)?

• **"And forgive us our trespasses,"**: Sin is a very unpopular concept in our postmodern world, but people continue to make wrong decisions and the consequences. Having the courage to confess your sins will enable you to embrace God's forgiveness and grace so you can grow.

• **"as we forgive those who trespass against us,"**: Just as we now know that the electrical charges of protons and electrons inside atoms suffer counterbalance each other, our willingness to forgive others motivates God to forgive us. Since we are all God's children, connected to each other in His universal family, He wants His love to flow between us. There is a spiritual balance that is created when that occurs.

• **"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,"**: No matter how high technology raises your standard of living, you will never be immune to trials on earth. Be aware of the evil side of the spiritual world, and pray for the Holy Spirit's mercy and help when you encounter trials.

• **"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,"**: The universe still holds many mysteries we haven't yet uncovered through science, but when we experience God's work in our lives, His glory shines through clearly and radiantly.

• **"forever and ever. Amen,"**: Many recent studies on the nature of time have indicated that eternity is a reality, not just a hope. Energy can't be destroyed, and neither can our salvation if we have a relationship with God through Jesus. So be it!

IDMC 2001



The pastors together with a team of councilmen and leaders attended a 3-day conference on Intentional Disciple Making Church conducted by the Covenant Evangelical Free Church. What we found out was that *"disciplemaking is all about a certain kind of person, radically committed to a certain kind of purpose, who through a certain kind of process,*

reproduces a certain kind of product."



Rev Edmund Chan was the keynote speaker who shared the vision of Covenant EFC in the area of disciplemaking. *Disciplemaking is the deliberate process of bringing people into right relationship with God; and developing them to full maturity in Christ through intentional growth strategies, that they would reproduce that entire process in others also.* His six proteges shared in other related topics in the various workshops over the 3-day period.

The church has 7 pastors leading a flock of about 1200 members. They started off with only 40 members worshipping at various locations. When they reached 400 members, they found that there was no place big enough for them to worship so God gave them a vision to build a church. They had made bids for three different locations. The first they lost out to another church, the second bid went to Living Sanctuary Church (the people who came to share about Community Penetration) and finally they secured the plot at Bukit Panjang for over \$7million. How they raise the funds to pay for the land and building (another \$7 million) is a story I may like to recount to you some day.



The pastors and leaders are now working on how we can implement what we have learnt to JCC's context. Continue to pray for us that God will give the pastors a direction for JCC.

Martin Cheah