

# The Vine

2002

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Greetings to all the saints in Christ Jesus. In case you have been wondering why the Editor of The Vine thinks like the Treasurer of the church, that is because we are of the same mind. Each time I share with you the concerns of the leadership, the directions and plans, I usually share from the point of view of the Treasurer. Indeed, next year, if I am still the Editor, I would not be writing from the viewpoint of the Treasurer anymore.

Next month is Christmas. Have you considered what this means?

*For God so  
loved the  
world,*

*that He gave  
His only  
begotten Son,*

*that whoever  
believes in Him*

*should not  
perish, but  
have eternal  
life.*

*John 3:16*

**The Greatest Love.** The Bible tells us that God is a loving God. He loves you. It is the greatest love the world has ever known!

**The Greatest Gift.** The Bible tells us that man is a sinner, and that our sins have separated us from God. Nonetheless, God sent His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins so that God can pardon and save us from hell.

**The Greatest Invitation.** God issues a universal invitation to ALL. No one is too bad or sinful for God to pardon and save. No race is rejected. No sinner is beyond God's forgiveness.

**The Greatest Promise.** God is true to His promise. You become a Christian by faith. Faith is simply believing that God will be true to His promise to grant us eternal life in heaven through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

**The Simplest Condition.** "believe in Him". Christianity is NOT a religion. In all religion, eternal bliss is based on the good works we do. Christianity is not "do" - but done! It is not "trying" - but trusting.\*

\* extracted from "Growing Deep in God" by Edmund Chan

*The Editor*

# THE NIGHT IS NOT YOUNG

by Charlotte Sam

Friday at 11:11pm.

I see my laptop. My laptop sees me. The laptop is brand new. Twice as fast as the previous one. Bigger hard disk too. Lighter, niftier. Perks on the job, you might say. Unfortunately all these do very little to the weary soul and heavy heart (and quite often so too). Another byline article to write and the deadline is drawing near. One thing remains: 70% of the subject matter is unknown to me.

I have what you call 'the writer's nightmare'

INSPIRATION DEFICIENCY!

Then I am reminded of ...

What does Matthew 11:29 mean when it says, *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."* (KJV)

Tonight, I learnt that the verse meant: *"On days when life is difficult and I feel overwhelmed, as I do fairly often, it helps to remember in my prayers that all God requires of me is to trust Him and be His friend. I find I can do that."*

-- Bruce Larson

"I find I can do that" – His yoke that He intended for us – is easy. We just have to

- trust Him
- befriend Him

Simply brilliant, don't you think?

## THE ANT AND THE CRICKET

One night we had a devotional based on Psalm 119:9-16, of which v.11 says, *"Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee."* (KJV)

The object for discussion that night was the saguaro cactus that soaks up as much as 200 gallons of water – enough to last it a whole year in the desert. The cactus roots lie about 3 feet below the earth and spread 100 feet in all directions. These hairy roots draw in every drop of moisture from rain and transport it up to the hidden storage area in the spiny arms and trunk of the cactus.

Like the saguaro cactus, we are to store up on God's Word in our heart. By doing so, we will grow into mature Christians who are pleasing in God's sight.

It was as if God had known (and of course!) my children loved stories before they sleep each time. I chose this a story entitled "The Ant and the Cricket" from "The Little Big Book for Dads" by Lena Tabori, et al. The following are excerpts from the story:

*"Once upon a hot summer, on the tip of a leafy branch, lounged a cricket. All day and all night, she sang cheerful songs while watching a long line of ants slave away on the ground below. 'Hey, down there!' she called between songs. 'How can you work in this heat?'"*

*"We're -- storing -- food -- for -- the -- winter," answered an ant, struggling under the weight of a piece of grain.*

<kind of like how some of us struggle to do our Quiet Time regularly. Just persevere, mate!>

*'But winter is months away!' shouted the cricket. 'You've got to learn to relax.'*

*'It takes us all summer to fill our winter pantry. And we'll only make it through the winter if our pantry is full.'*

...  
*Then it began to snow. Gathering all her strength, she made her way toward the light.*

*'Open the door!' she cried, as loudly as she could. 'I'm starving. I need food!'*

*'We worked hard all summer while you sang songs,' said the ant.*

*'Sorry, there is no free food here,' said another ant, munching on a corn kernel."*

So, will you be the cricket or the ant?

## THE TEAM

What is a team? Of course this would bring to mind the famous 1 Corinthians 12 passage. One friend of mine spent the last 6 years in civil service and is contemplating on moving on to his own business. His love for photography may mean it is unlikely for him to readily find partners who share his passion and understanding of this domain. I mean, it is probably hundred times easier to find willing and knowledgeable partners to set up a business in IT or mobile communications. I advised him that if he is seriously thinking of converting his passion into a long-term business, he cannot be doing this alone. Problem is, what constitutes a true team? I found an initial answer for him.

John Stemmons, a renowned Dallas businessman said, "Find some people who are comers, who are going to be achievers in their own field ... and people you can trust. Then grow old together." He is referring to a group of capable and dedicated people, each one different and distinct, growing old together, yet still very much a solid team. In his book, "The Quest for Character", Charles R. Swindoll has the following to add: *"Instead of just going for big names or starting with a few hotshots, look for some comers, achievers in process, truly trustworthy folks ... love them to their full potential as you cultivate a long-haul friendship. Give your heart in unrestrained affection! Then watch God work. A team drawn together by love and held together by grace has staying power. I suppose we could call that growing old gracefully."*

My friend asked me what I would like to do. I have always wanted to write a book for children. One book in a lifetime is not too many, right? Well, what sort of team of would I need? Please write to me at [charlotte\\_sam@hotmail.com](mailto:charlotte_sam@hotmail.com) to tell me. ☺

## MORE THAN A BRIGHT SPARK

It is going to take more than that! This is an excerpt from a speech I wrote with "all my heart and soul" ☺ for a speaker whose buzz words were "innovate" and "wireless":

*"Some 125 years ago, Alexander Graham Bell invented the transmitters that are still being used in telephone systems today. This was not the result of a new revolutionary idea but it was in fact an adaptation of a failed undersea telegraph system that Thomas Edison was trying to develop in his days. The innovative adaptation of one's failed idea to create the success of another emphasizes the fact that a technology innovation does not happen in one big spike but is made up of successive attempts to learn from previous mistakes and make constant modifications."*

Here is another one:

*"In May 1919, Raymond Orteig of New York City offered a princely sum of US\$25,000 for the first non-stop airplane flight from New York to Paris. Suppose in the year 1922, you were asked by one of the 2 aviators, Cabral and Coutinho, to join him on board the single-engine British seaplane to fly from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro. You would certainly want to think twice. Besides a strong heart, you would need to be a strong swimmer if the plane does not make it across. The flight took place, but it did not meet Orteig prize's condition. Not only did it stop on the way, Cabral and Coutinho actually changed airplanes on a small Atlantic island.*

*In 1927, Lindbergh, a determined airmail pilot, who wanted to take up Orteig's challenge to make a non-stop trans-Atlantic flight, found a like-minded designer at the tiny Ryan Airplane Company. Ryan specially built the*

*spindly monoplane in just two months and named it Spirit of St. Louis. The word luck does not apply to the courageously focused intensity, Lindbergh and Ryan brought to the one flight we remember.*

*So what was so special about Lindbergh's flight? Well, it was the longest, non-stop, heavier-than-air, trans-Atlantic flight and it was the first solo crossing from Long Island to Paris. In aviation history, the flight was the last step that had to be taken before commercial trans-Atlantic flights began in the late 1930's – 20 years after the first trans-Atlantic crossing and 35 years after the Wright brothers'. The world of commuting would have been different if this historical flight had not taken place. The success of Lindbergh's flight has drastically changed the way we travel across continents. Without Lindbergh, we may still be globetrotting today for business or leisure on board the Orient Express or Titanic-class ships!*

*The Lindbergh flight across the Atlantic Ocean shows that courage and determination is needed to bring ideas and innovation to reality. This flight was just one of the many cycles of innovation that occurred over 35 years before we arrived at the commercial planes we have today."*

*In the business context, we were promoting and encouraging the industry to innovate. However, has it ever occurred to you that many a times we stop moving forward not because many had said "No" but rather, only a handful had said, "Go".*

What is stopping you to:

- Live differently?
- Show that you live differently because you are a child of God?
- Acknowledge and give glory to God while in conversation with non-believers?
- Give a pat on someone's shoulder to admit someone's existence in God's creation?
- Lift someone's spirits up?
- Make a genuine compliment?
- Show you are sensitive to someone's needs when you show your care and concern? Never mind if the person turns out to be needy or not.
- Write for the Vine?

You can add to the list.

More often than not, it is not the objections we face, but the lack of impetus for change, to do things differently. In many instances, each of us *has* that impetus.

Here is a lovely story shared by Jeannie, one of the sisters in the care group I attend.

*Every morning the Church bell ringer would pull the chord at the same time, 7 days a week, every day of the year. Rain or shine – every one in the village would hear the chime coming from the Church.*

*40 years on, a new pastor to the Church approached him. The pastor has been known to win many souls for the Kingdom of God.*

*"Many years ago," the pastor began, "I was a busy businessman." "One morning, there was a thunderstorm and I was looking for a shelter.*

*Then, the bell rang. I ran towards the Church and stayed there. When the rain stopped, I headed for my workshop. It was completely engulfed in flames. Fortunately, there were no casualties."*

If you had been the bell ringer, would you have thought of the impact your role might have created on someone else? The Lord works in simple yet marvelous ways. No trickery, no imagery. Just allow God to work. In the interim, pray like crazy! 😊



MOSES REFUSES TO SERVE IN PHARAOH'S COURT

### CLOSING

7 Sep 2002 at 1:31 a.m.

Goodness, was I not supposed to be writing that dreaded article? Well, looks like I had better get down to some serious work from now on ... Talk about getting distracted.

Hope you have had a good read!

What about doing what I do – write!

# Reflections on 1 Samuel

by Tan Swee Leong

This paper is a personal reflection on the main protagonists in the Book of Samuel

Samuel comes on the scene in the worst of times, spiritually in the history of Israel. The Shiloh priesthood was in a state of decline under the weak-kneed leadership of Eli and his wayward sons. Politically Israel was under oppression by the Philistines for twenty years since being defeated at Ebenezer where they lost the Ark. Samuel as prophet called the people to put their priorities right between themselves and God and to serve only the Covenant God. Samuel as priest offered both intercessions and sacrifice and as judge sought God in the affairs of the nations. God honoured him with victories and deliverance from the Philistines. Samuel honoured God by erecting a memorial stone proclaiming "Ebenezer" meaning "hitherto the Lord has helped them". It is at Ebenezer that Israel lost the Ark fighting the battle their own way, Ebenezer now proclaims God's faithfulness in helping the nation when they seek him, what an apt reminder.

When Samuel was getting old, a successor was not in sight as Samuel's sons were not qualified to take his place as they were corrupt. The people clamoured for a king just like the nations. Samuel disapproved

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and warned the people of the dire consequences of seeking a king. The people insisted and God acceded to their demand but with a foreboding warning, "Israel has not rejected Samuel but has rejected God."

What lessons are there for us

in our times? The moral and spiritual climate of our times is in a state of declension. The life and words of Samuel standing steadfastly for God in such condition are indeed relevant. We need the right perspective of serving the only Covenant God and not other "gods". The Covenant God is faithful and when his children repent He is there for them. Ebenezer, God is there to help us with his unconditional love and mercy as we turn to him in repentance and obedience of His word. This is the bedrock upon which we can stand against the tides of our tumultuous times, a steadfast unchanging God, who is true to his word, faithful, loving and merciful.

We may clamour for what we see as right in our own eyes to to be "just like the nations". The problem with asking for a king was perhaps not wrong, but what displeased God was that the people did not listen to God or His prophet and wanted a king right away. God is sovereign and is never at a loss in spite of plan not living according to his will and plan. He will ultimately bring things to pass according to His divine will and plan.

Israel saw a change of leadership from theocracy to monarchy. Saul the first king was by worldly standard appealing. He was from a wealthy and notable family and was of outstanding physique and stature. He was overwhelmingly accepted by the people and was a popular leader initially. However, Saul began to show his true character, which also saw the beginning of the end of his rule. He rejected the counsel of Samuel, the prophet who was the spokesman for God. Saul soon deteriorated from the sin of pride, to unbelief and impatience. He gave himself credit for victories by his own son Jonathan, he usurped the priestly office by offering sacrifices in clear violation of God's

instructions and disobeyed God in failing to kill King Agag and destroying the spoils of his war with the Amalekites. God rejected Saul as King but he obstinately refused to relent and sought ways to kill God's anointed who would take his place.

Saul's life has lessons for us aplenty by way of a negative example. Saul failed to acknowledge God's ultimate kingship and his subordination to Yahweh through his prophet. Today God speaks to us directly through his Word, He calls for our obedience to his word and to acknowledge Him as King of our lives.

David emerges as the chief protagonist as Saul came to an ignominious end by suicide. David stands in stark contrast to Saul in his zeal for the reputation of the Lord and in God's mercy and ability to save him. God was with David as His Spirit came upon Him, conversely God's Spirit left Saul and an evil spirit controlled him. God give David success and recognition which incensed Saul who sought to kill David. David, the man after God's heart was not flawless. He was a fugitive for ten years running way from Saul. David's fugitive years were reflected in several of his Psalms. His life was in turmoil and he resorted to devious scheming and manipulation. David suffered sever consequences for his actions. In all these situations God's grace and mercy was evident in restoring David who was used mightily by God.

David, a man after God's own heart submitted to God and obeyed his prophets and found acceptance and forgiveness. Saul in contrast, obstinately clung on to his right as king even after he was told clearly that God has rejected him. He sought his own way and sunk deeply into the mire of irrationality, letting his emotions get the better of him. Strong unbridled emotions can get the better of us and cause us to

stray from God. God disciplines but he is a God of love who forgives and restores, David experiences speaks volume of this. However we should not take God's grace for granted. David's exemplary trust in God in times of troubles where he sought he Lord fervently through prayer asking for God's will in specific situations. David a man after God's heart, knows God's heart as well, a reminder for us to know the living God and the wisdom of his Word for right and fruitful living.

Malachi 3:3

**"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."**

This verse puzzled some women in a Bible study and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible Study.

That week, the woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver.

As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities.

The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot then she thought again about the verse that says: "He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver." She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined.

The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed.

The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy - when I see my image in it."

If today you are feeling the heat of the fire, remember that God has His eye on you and will keep watching you until He sees His image in you.

# Do not judge a book by its cover.

Mr Edward Reid was a reclusive bachelor. He lived in a ramshackle farmhouse with no central heating. He had three cousins who hardly knew him, having seen him only twice in 25 years. Nothing unusual about Mr Reid's case as another common example of a struggling poor? Wrong!

When Mr Reid passed away this year at the ripe old age of 85, he left behind £17 million (\$47 million) for his cousins. STREATS (Nov 5<sup>th</sup>) reported this story. The man's frugal lifestyle fooled not only his neighbours about his financial situation, but also his housekeeper of over 20 years.

Have you heard the story of a beggar who was a familiar face begging for alms in dirty and tattered clothes, but upon his death was found to have savings of more than a hundred thousand dollars stashed away?

Or have you come across a well heeled who often appeared in your mind as walking with a swagger, but actually shunned publicity for charity work and willed his wealth to social organizations as a philanthropist?

Do not be surprised if you discover that a beggar despised is really an angel in disguise. Neither should you be astounded on learning that a person bedecked in jewels is merely a debt-ridden pauper who does what the Chinese would say: 打肿脸皮充胖子。

Whenever we see a person of a certain characteristic, it is natural for us to subconsciously form stereotypical images of the person according to the superficial traits we observe, the very images that we abhor others attaching to ourselves no matter how we see ourselves compared to them. Whenever we judge others as unworthy of our patronage and act accordingly, we have no reason to complain when others do the same to us. Whenever we judge others as more worthy of our adulation than they deserve, then we are actually betraying our own prejudice against self, a kind of self-contempt regarding our imagined pitiful stations in life relative to others when in fact we are better off in some ways without the negative encumbrances our 'rivals' endure. Of course, they likewise enjoy some things better than us that we do not deserve. In the final analysis, they and we square off our advantages and disadvantages so that we are ultimately equal on balance. Instead of sapping our energy on needless struggles making comparisons (God unwilling that we



should do so), we can do better to count our blessings and be thankful for whatever we can enjoy (God willing).

**The unhealthy superficiality that individuals employ in the estimation of other individuals also bedevils Christians who like to compare churches based on outward appearances instead of innate beauty.**

I have had mission exposure trips to Northern Thailand and Sengoi (Malaysia), and I try to imagine myself growing up in an 'ulu' village attending church meetings in wooden huts. Under such primitive living conditions and elemental worship environment, will I grow up to be a more resilient person in facing up to the common menace in life that city folks struggle with relentlessly and be more pleasing to God with my simple trust in Him compared to the sophisticated mind-work of my superiorly educated urban brothers and sisters? In a modern clean city with first class sanitation, I may not withstand a humble housefly on my food toppling me over with a potentially murderous attack on my tummy. In a rural farming community, houseflies in the hundreds live in harmony with humble humans and pose no easy threat. Certainly, I have a so-called higher standard of living in the city that those in the countryside may look upon with envy, and I have a place called Jurong Christian Church where I can worship God in air-conditioned comfort well protected from the elements. Wow, I imagine the glowing eyes of my rural brothers and sisters as they look at the photos and PowerPoint presentations of JCC and begin to dream about replicating our luxurious sanctuary along one of their dirt tracks! Would you encourage them to do so? I do not know whether this will make them better Christians and more eager worshippers on the assumption that there is a difference in God's presence in different physical environments. ♥

In truth, God's presence is the same everywhere and God is fair to both country folks and their city counterparts, giving to each their dues in blessings to suit their different practical living terms according to His divine purpose. It is therefore simply vain of anyone to make comparisons and seek beyond the will of God. Every faithful church has its particular believers with particular gifts in a particular setting. For each, there is a particular divine dispensation so that all the churches seen together as efficaciously diverse are

bound together as one universal Church of Christ. It is not the calling of churches to indulge in extravagant spending to outdo one another just to feel a sense of worth, and it is not the **spiritual business** of individual Christians or church leaders to engage in competition like commercial enterprises with all kinds of **pop frills** and **secondary activities** thrown in to add to the boast of greater attractiveness and stronger financial bottom-lines. In the end days, the true measure of a church acceptable to God is solely based on how it conducts itself faithfully in carrying out the singular mission of reaching out to the lost for Christ with the Gospel message. The approbations, reproofs, assurances and warnings as given to the Seven Churches (Revelation II & III), representing the entire church of God, should be the spiritual eye-opener for all Christians. You can read about church persecuted and church defiled. You can read about the commendable endurance and perseverance of God's people in the face of difficulties leading to triumph. You can also read about the spiritual declension of those who have lost their first love, like a Bride whose love for the Bridegroom has waned, no longer keeping the passion and commitment of the past, and no longer giving the same satisfaction She once did. If even a whole church, like that in Ephesus, could be repudiated by God, leaving behind not a single vestige, it is plain for every individual Christian who has lost his/her love for the Church to see how secure his/her spiritual destiny is. To those who are neither cold nor hot, like the church in Laodicea, the Lord says:

*"I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth.*

*"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

*"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.*

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

*(Read Rev. 3:14-22)*

I have in fact been led to the above Revelation passage by our Bishop's exhortation on facing the unknown by faith. On the occasion of last month's Reformation Day celebration, he wrote these words: **"To the Church as a body, a leisurely and comfortable existence is not necessarily a blessing. Many churches in the land are well endowed with material riches, lacking in nothing, yet spiritually lukewarm, wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. This is indeed a portrayal of the church in Laodicea. (Rev. 3:17-19)"**

You will agree with me about the foolishness of people who decide what book to buy based on its cover (to regret after spending the money) and choose a life partner according to looks (to rue over their choice for a lifetime.) Well, how different is it for Christians who bank on exterior manifestations of polished walls and jostling crowds to settle down at a place of worship and fellowship they call their enduring spiritual home? To be sure, there is nothing wrong with polished walls and jostling crowds *per se*. However, in the ultimate analysis, it is not what we choose, but where God chooses to place us for our own spiritual good, and we would be remiss to be always complaining with nary a place to settle our feet peacefully.



I thank God for placing me in Jurong Christian Church where I have learnt a lot from a significant number of my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ (especially my seniors) who have been able to hold fast to their laudable service without shaking their faith in the very place where some others have found reasons for their tetchiness. If they (the faithful) can be resourceful in finding spiritual sustenance and grow in faith here in JCC, why can't I? The honest answer is either "YES, I CAN" or "NO, I CAN'T", depending on whether I place a premium on the rough and tumble of real spiritual training or I emphasize comfort of the senses as the decisive factor defining the worth of a spiritual home. God again reminds me to refer to what our Bishop has written:

*"The individual Christian should not descend into an environment that is too cosy, lest he loses his fighting spirit and vision. As what Dr Ed Pousson said at the missions seminar on 24<sup>th</sup> August, Joshua and Caleb had the faith to capture the fortified city wall and subdue the giants, but those Israelites with hearts like grasshoppers all perished in the desert. (Num. 13:25-33, 14:26-35)"*

I challenge anyone to desist from looking at the physical appearances of the building and of the assembly at Jurong Christian Church, but sink the eyes deeper into the subterranean and ordinarily less visible layers of work and ministry where spiritual manna flows. A WARNING (lest you feel cheated by your own false assumptions): Some effort on your part is needed because JCC is particularly inept at spoon-feeding.

If the above warning frightens you, please be assured that there is an easier route for a start: Walk a few steps to the rejuvenated Cell Group nearest your home. Now, don't tell me that you are not told about happenings in Jurong Christian Church that your eyes do not see on Sundays at No. 2 Tah Ching Road! By the way, I am eagerly looking forward to the outing that my Cell Group is planning for this December. Wanna join your Cell Group in equally exciting activities?

John Lee

## CREATIONWISE

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Many people think of the Bible as just a book, or even a 'good book'.

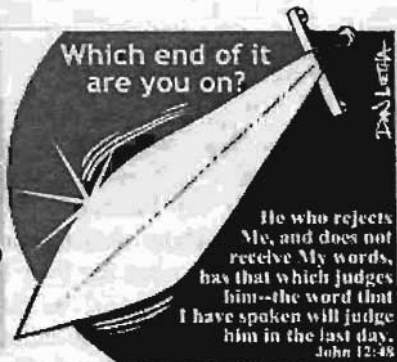


Yet it's God's Word. It's POWERFUL! Ephesians calls it a sword. Ephesians 6:17



And when it comes to swords, there's one really important thing to know.

Which end of it are you on?



He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. John 12:48