

The Vine



The Vine Committee

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Editor's Ramblings

without proper running water and dust over everything. Is there is lesson for me to learn in this experience? Are we being prepared for the end times which many people are suspecting is now upon us? Some people are claiming that the four horsemen of the Apocalypse have been let loose. The rider on the White Horse has come, the rider on the Red Horse has come and now they are suggesting that the rider on the Black Horse is galloping across Wall Street causing the financial chaos which will lead eventually to famine.

The partial renovation of my house is completed after more than a month of living in something like a disaster zone



Is your money safe in the banks?

Nowadays, placing your money in the banks is like gambling. The banks use your money to invest (gamble in more polite terms) and if they earn, you get your share in interest. However, if they loose, you stand to loose your capital. If you go for capital guaranteed deposits, then you get back your capital but little else. Yet, they call people who put money in the bank greedy. Indeed the times have changed where people who put their money in the banks are called greedy and the bankers are the good hardworking guys who try to earn interest for you. Can you imagine where \$500 million dollars from 10,000

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depositors could have disappeared to?

Wouldn't it be better to put your money some place else where moths, rust and thieves (Matthew 6:19) cannot take it away? If you are going to put your money down for 5 years and not get any interest for it, why not consider giving JCC an interest-free loan for rebuilding the church? I am sure your interest will be given to you overflowing in Heaven (Luke 6:38).

I have heard some people worry that during the time it takes JCC to rebuild, the people would have left JCC and not come back. The Bible says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21) Those who have put their money to rebuild JCC would certainly come back because that is where their treasure is. After spending a tidy sum of money to renovate my house, I am not likely to sell the house and move to a condo. I will come back to enjoy its newly renovated features.



Others have told me how lucky that I did not invest in minibonds. Anyway, I have heard of Mini Me but not Mini Bond. **007** But what has luck got to do with it? Isn't it God who gives and bless us for a purpose? If you are blessed with wealth, have you wondered why? Is it to build bigger barns as in Luke 12:18, or to be a blessing to others as in Genesis 12:2?

The year 2008 is almost over and 2009 is just round the corner. The world may be ending soon as some are claiming and a financial crisis seems to be just ahead. What would your grandfather have done with all the Japanese "Banana" notes that he had just before the Japanese surrendered? Now with foresight, you may have a better idea of what he should have done with the currency. To my mind, he should have bought land, built houses or settled all his debts because once the Japanese surrendered, that currency became of no value. You too have a decision to make today. What will it be? Will you be rich toward God?



Martin Cheah

PS.

If you are a collector and find that volume 09/08 of The Vine is not in your collection, look no further. There is no volume 09/08 because I was too busy to do one.

eMail from **Shanghai**



Hi everyone,

I just want to share a little about my 'Sabbath day' yesterday...

When I was about to leave for church service, my landlady asked me where I was going. For a moment, I hesitated, not knowing what to say. However, I still managed to squeeze out the words "I'm going to church."

Landlady: "Why are you going to church?"

Me: "Because I'm a Christian and we Christians attend worship services on Sundays."

Landlady: "I want to go to church too! Next time, I'll come with you."

Me: "Alright! Next Sunday we'll go together."

She's not a Christian, but she got quite excited when she heard that I'm going to church. Currently, I'm attending the English service, which is only for foreign passport holders. However, there's a morning Chinese service which is open to local Chinese. I'm going with her for that service next Sunday. ***Please pray together with me that my landlady, Mia, will be open to the Word and that God will prepare her heart to receive Him.***

During the service, the sermon touched on the topic of the Holy Trinity. Many people can't grasp the fact that we worship only one God, who exists in 3 persons: Father, Son and Spirit. However, is it really true that we only worship one God and not 3 gods? If so, then how can there be 3 different persons and still one God? Simply put, "there are not 3 Gods because all 3 persons share the same essence in complete unity". This "same essence" encompasses the notions of unchangeability, holiness and eternity. Why many can't grasp the fact about the Trinity is because there's no perfect natural example. However, some vague examples may include: (1) Husband, father & son, (2) Body, conscience & spirit, (3) $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$

When we worship God, we worship God the Father, God the Son & God the Holy Spirit. Worship is what characterizes heaven, where God the Father, Son & Spirit live in perfect unity. Heaven is where the plan was birthed to make sure we get there. Heaven is our home.

We always characterize our Christian life as a journey. But as all other journeys we make, there must be final destination in mind. Otherwise, we'll be wandering aimlessly. Heaven is our final destination. Being back home with God in perfect unity should always be in our minds.

I remember Rev Chang once saying that he constantly reminded his children, while they were in Australia, that their stay there was only temporary. At the end of the day, "they are going home". With that in mind, any hardships/challenges faced are only temporary. Their minds are all fixed on "we are going home".

Friends, how about you? Have you lost all direction in the busyness of life? Are you walking daily towards "home"? Have faith in Him! =)

Benedict
11th August 2008

ang bao money NOT ENOUGH

by John Lee

"ang bao money NOT ENOUGH" – reports "my paper" on 14th August.

It would be scary for poor folks like some of you and me if guests are expected by tradition to give what is enough to cover the costs of luxurious wedding banquets for which they have no say. What exactly is enough really depends on the extravagance of the host, and it has been advised that a \$100 gift may no longer be enough.

Imagine the case when a very wealthy family decides for a grand wedding celebration at six-star St Regis and guests are expected to be dressed in their super-formal-finery, but many of the invited guests are the young friends and colleagues of the bride or groom who have just started on their career. To add to these guests' financial anguish, they may have a number of wedding invitations lining up from among the many of marrying age in their social circle. Or the case of relatives who are obligated to attend the occasion but are not even a quarter as financially disposed as the

host to throw money at a posh dinner. The bride and groom may enjoy their day, but at the financial hurt of the underprivileged guests.

Rasa Sentosa Resort's assistant director of events management, who is getting married this year, said, "Personally, I'd rather have a guest who turns up with his heartfelt wishes without a red packet than a guest who doesn't turn up but sends a red packet as a means of congratulation."

It is very thoughtful of him to value the guests' attendance more than the gifts, and acknowledge that red packets are just a bonus. I trust that he will have a great celebration of his big day with a lot of friends and relatives in attendance to share his happiness. In contrast, it would be less cheery if a large number of guests simply send their red packets of congratulations.

The following is a sample of comments from readers of the "my paper" report:

“In Malay tradition, they don't expect to cover their cost from red packets given by guests. Instead, they feel it is an honour that their friends and families have come.

In western cultures, we receive gifts, but if we want to have a super grand wedding, that's our problem. If we end up spending tens of thousands of dollars or hundreds of thousands, that's our problem, not the guest's.”

I recall an occasion when I asked an Indian acquaintance casually about their cultural tradition regarding invitations and gifts. He was very quick and spontaneous in his response that the host would be most happy to see the guests turning up to share in the joy of the occasion; the amount of gift that the guests would like to offer is secondary.

I feel that the true meaning of “an invitation to celebrate” should not be lost to a hidden meaning of “an invitation to share with us the cost of our wedding extravaganza”. Ideally, a sincere invitation to share joy should be from the heart; and reciprocally, a sincere gift in cash or kind (regardless of size) should be from the heart and not from hard-nosed financial calculation of gain or loss. Regrettably, there exist some habits of counting and comparing gift sizes to measure the relative worth of the guests – be they friends or kin. Friends who are measured as of little worth will be off the list for future

invitations; in other words, poorer ones do not have friend-enough merit to share the joy of a wedding celebration.

Not surprisingly, “Three wedding planners my paper spoke to agreed that where the wedding dinner is held plays a big part, as does the relationship the giver has with the bridal couple. And guests should take into account the rising costs when deciding how much to give.”

Not surprising indeed that there is no advice by the wedding planners (being financially-interested party) to their potential customers about taking into account the financial wherewithal of the guests so that they do not end up being bankrupted by one invitation after another with an unhelpful expectation on their pocket. As a matter of reciprocity, if hosts expect guests to be thoughtful of their expenses, shouldn't the hosts likewise be considerate of the cost to their guests? If he who pays the piper calls the tune, conversely it must that those who call the tune (on the scope of celebratory indulgence) should be prepared to pay the wedding planners and the restaurants and not pass the financial responsibility to others.

If a poor friend attending a six-star wedding celebration is not friend enough to give an appropriately-sized red packet or to afford a formal suit/gown befitting the grandiosity of the event, surely it is not friend

enough for the wealthy host to impose on the poor guy to dig deep into his pocket to open up a big hole when his pocket is simply shallow. If the wedding couple are wealthy enough to hold a grand celebration, it must be implied that they can afford it and so the guests' financial contribution is not critical to the success of a joyful celebration. If, on the contrary, the wedding couple can ill afford the cost without the charity of guests to share joy of the occasion and the expense as a package, I would think that there is something not right with the wedding planning and the responsibility cannot be pushed to the guests. Ultimately, for the cost of the mistake in planning borne by the wedding couple and guests, the people laughing all the way to the bank are the commercial wedding planners and the restaurants!

As wedding dinners become more and more expensive, a word to describe the phenomenon is "inflation". What goes up may come down and what comes down may go up; it all depends on supply and demand. The people feeding the demand for high-cost functions are the wealthy (of limited numbers) and the not-so-wealthy (larger numbers) who 打肿脸皮充胖子 are encouraged and supported by the ang bao contributions. The commercial purveyors of profits will continue to test the market and push the price limit (just like landlords pushing up rentals), and at the same time encouraging continuing extravagant

consumption by a host of marketing ploys. Now, \$100 hongbao for a dinner is not enough; very soon, \$200 will not be enough. How will guests afford if hosts can't? If oil prices went up and then came down, hopefully dinner prices will also come down with smart consumers (those who pay) learning how to reign in their spending. They who spend irresponsibly will reap the consequence of having to contend with ever higher prices for any future wedding planning to come – whether personal or otherwise.

Going back to the "my paper" report, someone mentioned that his banquet for 290 people at a five-star hotel set him back \$25000. I believe that he was well able to afford it. This example does give us an inkling of the cost issue and it is well worth all who are planning their weddings to take into serious consideration. If you are planning a wedding dinner and you can afford a banquet at Ritz Carlton or Raffles, it should be fine for you to go for it. However, if you plan to invite me to share your joy by the Chinese tradition of "financial participation", then a dinner at a mid-level Chinese restaurant may be easier on my pocket.

Perhaps, Jack Neo should start planning his "Money No Enough 3" movie (alternative title: ang bao money NOT ENOUGH) to reflect this social issue.

From the Christian standpoint, the dignity and spiritual significance of a holy matrimony should not ride on extravagance, especially when it is beyond one's means. A beautiful nuptial for a happily-ever-after life together as a couple should not be embarrassingly commandeered by long-lasting debt-servicing – the price of splendour for a day. It would be highly regrettable if a once-in-a-lifetime celebration becomes an enduring misery due to financial imprudence. Let me conclude with this piece of quality advice from Ken Esau , who teaches Old Testament and marriage and family courses at

Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, B.C. (<http://www.mbconf.ca/home/>):

“The celebratory joy should come from the event and not from the extravagance of the flowers, location or reception, though all these can add to the enjoyment. Ideally guests should remember the strength and maturity of the couple as they committed themselves to one another and praised the awesome God who brought them together. Simplicity is more likely to keep the focus of the celebration on people and God rather than on the less important.”

John Lee

BOWLING AND BONDING

30 AUG 2008. The JE Abundance Cell had a nice fellowship and bonding activity.

Our Kings of Pins (Uncle Roy, Patrick Low, Juria, etc.) showed their prowess at the lanes together with our up-and-coming kid-stars.

It has been a long, long wait for this opportunity since the last time that JCC had fun together at the Taman Jurong Bowl some 3 years ago.

Fun and physical muscle strain aside, there was also a solemn moment when the prayer needs of a sister was attended to by fellow sisters-in-Christ, revealing the bond of love in the body of Christ where mutual care and concern is normal.

Yes, we were all very much rejuvenated to live the abundant life that Christ came to give us. (John 10:10)

Tony Koh



When We Pray, God Works!

Bishop Donald Hilliard

Two things about prayer are truly amazing: (1) God listens when we pray. "If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." (See Mk 11:24). You may not have much clout anywhere else, but when you pray God listens. (2) We seldom pray. We've the greatest privilege imaginable - access to the control center of the Universe -- yet we rarely use it. And our lack of prayer surprises God.

Through the prophet Ezekiel He lamented: "I sought for a man among them who would...stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one" (Eze 22:30 NKJV). Upon learning that Sodom and Gomorrah were going to be destroyed, Abraham didn't rush to warn the cities. No, he chose to "[remain] standing before the Lord" (Ge 18:22 NIV). When God said the golden calf warranted a nationwide death penalty for Israel, Moses interceded and saved them. One translation of Exodus 32:11 says, "Moses soothed the face of his God." An obscure priest by the name of Phinehas begged God not to send the plague, and it was checked. (See Ps 106:30 NIV).

"Why place such a premium on prayer?" Because when we work, we work. But when we pray, God works! Scripture attaches breathtaking power to prayer. "When two of you get together on anything...and make a prayer of it, my Father in heaven goes into action" (Mt 18:19 TM). Does any other activity promise such results? Did God call us to preach without ceasing? Or have committee meetings without ceasing? No, but He did call us to "pray without ceasing."

Getting Uncomfortable

How far will you go to reach a lost soul?

by Greg Laurie

Why on earth does God choose to use people to reach people? If I were God, I wouldn't use people. I would just do the job myself.

If I were God, I would roll the heavens away, poke my face through and say, "Hello, humanity. I am God. Believe in me now, or I will kill you." Aren't you glad that I am not God? At the very least, if I were God, I would raise up an army of mighty angels to preach the Gospel. Wouldn't that be powerful? I would never use people; they are flawed. They make mistakes. They fall short. They are inconsistent. Sometimes they contradict what they say by the way they live.

But God, in His great wisdom, has chosen to use people to reach people. Jesus has given us our marching orders. He said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20, NIV). This is not optional. It is the Great Commission, not the great suggestion.

In order to be effective in sharing our faith, we need a burden for those who do not know the Lord. Jesus showed us that we are to go outside of our comfort zone and reach people of all backgrounds. He went to the woman at the well in Samaria. In Jesus' day, not only would a rabbi not talk to a woman, but a Jew would never talk to a Samaritan. If you add the fact that the woman was immoral, she had three strikes against her.

But Jesus spoke to this immoral Samaritan woman. He engaged her in conversation and reached out to her in love. He was showing us that we need to go to all people, whatever they look like, whatever their race, whatever their background, whatever their socio-economic status. All of the messages on evangelism and all of the training classes you can go to will mean nothing if you lack this simple prerequisite: A burden.

Do you really care about lost people? We have to care and reach out to these people, even if it means going out of our comfort zone. Even if it means getting extreme.

Some time ago, we were in Hawaii holding a crusade. A father and his son were at Waikiki Beach handing out fliers for the event. The little boy wanted to go up to a burly, beefy biker dude. The dad looked at the guy and said, "I don't know if that's a good idea." The son was insistent and walked right up to this big guy and gave him an invitation to the crusade. The guy took what that little boy gave him, crumpled it up and threw it on the ground. That night at the crusade the father told us that when the invitation was given, the first man on the field was that biker dude—he came after all.

We all know someone who needs Christ. For you, it might be some cranky old neighbor. It might be your mom or your dad. It might be a person you can't envision ever being a Christian. She is so hard. He is so against God. You have written him or her off. Even thinking about witnessing to that person seems extreme to you.

Think again. Remember, no one is beyond God's reach. That person can come to Jesus. Pray for him; pray for her. Allow God to put a burden on your heart, and be

willing to reach out as God leads you. Are you willing to be extreme for Christ? He wants to use you today.

Greg Laurie is senior pastor at Harvest Christian Fellowship

A few years ago I met a 64-year-old handyman named Rich who had a passion for ministry. Not pastoral ministry, though. Rich was a greeter at his church, and he took his role very seriously. The most important part of being a great greeter, he told me, was remembering people's names. In his 30 years as a greeter he had memorized a staggering 3,000 names. He was especially eager to connect with newcomers. He exuded friendliness, greeting each visitor with a warm smile and a vigorous, two-fisted handshake.

"My name is Rich," he would say. "And you are?"

Today many members of Rich's church point to this man's welcoming presence as a key reason they ended up connected to the church and, as a result, to God. People might come to church once for the music or the preaching. But Rich taught me that they come back when they feel welcomed and loved.

MISSION MONTH 2008

This year, the Mission Month was assigned to various Ministries to do their bid for missions. The CG, Dialect, Kids' Church and Pulse Ministries took up the challenge and provided us with



songs, skits and video shows. The Kids' Church raised funds by selling food. The mission



month is over but I hope the awareness has been raised.



FEAR FACTOR

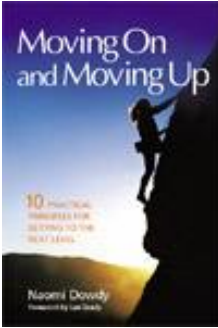
Anyone of you watched the reality game show “Fear Factor” on TV, where all the participants had to compete against each other to complete a series of dangerous stunts or eating disgusting and gory stuff to see who is the bravest and fastest to win the grand prize of big money? It seems that money does wonders to conquer fear, for these people come out from their comfort zone and brave all kinds of dangers and dread to do what they wouldn’t do under normal circumstances.

Whatever be their motivations, the contestants in “Fear Factor” believed that they could do it, and so they tried. Failures notwithstanding, there were those who succeeded against odds, because they believed and dared themselves to try. They might have been encouraged or nudged by their friends or family, “Don’t be afraid; just believe you can and go for it. The prize is good!”

This reminds me of what Jesus told Jairus, whose daughter the Lord raised from the dead, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” (Mark 5:36)? In other words, don’t be afraid, but believe that you can and you shall conquer fear.

This game show came to mind on a Sunday when my church’s sermon touched on this topic. It’s about faith, fear and building a lasting legacy in our life. Do not leave without a trace. God is calling us to build upon our Christian foundation, by touching lives and impacting destinies; by building God’s house and serving passionately. Yet, everytime God asks us to come out from our comfort zone, we run away. Just like Moses, the fear factor kicked in everytime God asked him to do something. Putting aside the greed factor (for prize money), there is the belief factor that we can take a leaf from the Fear Factor contestants – the belief that we can pull up enough will power to conquer fear. No, we don’t go after irrational acts; but we can conquer irrational fear to do the rational deed of sharing the Good News. When it comes to the matter of faith, God has put new possibilities in us. Just like in Exodus 3 & 4, when God commanded Moses to throw his staff to the ground, God was teaching Moses not to trust in his own strength and wisdom but to lean on God and be humble. Immediately the staff turned into a serpent, and God asked him to reach out his hand and take hold of the snake by its tail, and it turned back into a staff in his hand. The staff symbolised faith. By faith, Moses discarded his fear and new possibilities emerged for him.

What about the David and Goliath story in 1 Sam 17 where everyone was afraid of the giant? Frequently, we are totally paralysed by a fear factor in our life too. The giants in our life – Financials, Education, Relationship, Employment, Death – put us off doing many things that we ought to do. All the giants are the same in God’s



eyes. We are told not to be intimidated by them. We should not be paralysed by the fear factor. We've got the name of the Lord God Almighty to claim. We have faith in the Lord God Almighty. So, as Christians, we are liberated from the fear factor. There is nothing to fear. Have faith in whatever we do and we shall conquer the odds.

In John 6:1-13, God multiplied the small things, until the little boy got his share and more because he did not keep the food for himself. He broke away from the fear factor (of not having enough) by giving his only lunch to Jesus.

In 1 Kings 17:13, Elijah said, "Don't be afraid". Elijah addressed the fear factor that would rob the miracles and blessings from us. Elijah was teaching the widow, "God first, not me first". He will never fail us.

Moses established the legacy when he threw the rod on the ground.

The little boy established the legacy when he gave his only bread to Jesus.

The widow of Zarephath established the legacy when she used her limited oil & flour to make Elijah a small cake first before preparing for her family.

Maybe it's time for me to step out from my comfort zone, and do God's bidding? God puts resources in our hands and faith in our hearts, and I hope God will show me how to move on and up to the next level gradually.

I like this book very much: "*Moving On and Moving Up*" by Naomi Dowdy. It's about transitions in life and how to determine and make changes necessary to move to a new level. It's an inspiring read for wisdom and knowledge.

Sally Lee

Teachers' Day Celebrations – 31 Aug 2008

Sunday School Teachers were treated to a buffet lunch in recognition of all their hard work.



The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery.

Mark Van Doren

HAPPINESS

In the movie, “The Pursuit of Happiness” (note spelling emphasizing Happy), Chris Gardner played by Will Smith is a family man struggling to make ends meet. Despite his valiant attempts to help keep the family afloat, his family is buckling under the constant strain of financial pressure. No longer able to cope, his wife leaves him. Chris, now a single father, continues doggedly to pursue a better paying job using every sales skill he knows. He lands an internship at a prestigious stock brokerage firm, and although there is no salary, he accepts, hopeful he will end the program with a job and a promising future. Without an income, Chris and his son are soon evicted from their apartment and forced to sleep in shelters, bus stations, bathrooms, or wherever they can find refuge for the night. Despite his troubles, Chris continues to honor his commitment as a loving and caring father, using the affection and trust his son has placed in him as an impetus to overcome the obstacles he faces. Eventually Chris rises up in his career, starts his own firm and becomes a Wall Street Legend. A movie reviewer notes:



“Chris Gardner is at the top of his game. Money. Power. Looks. Houses. Cars. A beautiful woman. A closet stuffed with hundreds of custom-made suits. A Rolodex (name card holder) stuffed with thousands of name-brands, from Michael Jordan to Nelson Mandela, from society glitterati to Wall Street chieftains.” Chris pursued happiness (note spelling) and found it. Has he?

This Hollywood movie typifies what the world regard as success and happiness? I saw this move on a plane flight and it left me wondering how many people are caught up in this so called pursuit of happiness, thinking that material success through accumulation of assets, adulation through association with the upper echelons of society, and perhaps the envy and admiration of many who want to be like him.

J P Moreland and Klaus Issler in “The Lost Virtue of Happiness” writes:

Christ also invite us to be like him, He invites us to follow Him, but warns that losing our lives is the first step.

“If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26)

It’s an invitation to *happiness*. But what exactly *is* happiness, and how do we obtain it?

Webster’s New College dictionary defines happiness as “a sense of satisfaction.” Happiness is identified with a feeling of pleasure, the good life if a life of good feeling.

According to ancient thought, happiness is a life well lived, of wisdom, kindness and goodness. For the ancients, the happy life is a life of virtue and character. Not only did Plato, Aristotle, the Church Fathers and medieval theologians embrace this definition, but Moses, Solomon and (most importantly) Jesus did, too. Sadly their understanding is widely displaced by the contemporary understanding of happiness defined as pleasure and satisfaction, a subjective emotional state associated with fleeting, ego feelings.

J P Moreland, a Christian theologian and author notes the differences:

Contemporary

Understanding:

Happiness is —

1. Pleasure and satisfaction
2. An intense feeling
3. Dependent on external circumstances
4. Transitory and fleeting
5. Addictive and enslaving
6. Irrelevant to one’s identity, doesn’t color the rest of life and creates false/empty self
7. Achieved by self-absorbed narcissism; success produces a celebrity

Classical

Understanding:

Happiness is —

1. Virtue and character
2. A settled tone
3. Depends on internal state; springs from within
4. Fixed and stable
5. Empowering and liberating
6. Integrated with one’s identity, colors rest of life and creates true/fulfilled self
7. Achieved by self-denying apprenticeship to Jesus; success produces a hero

How can we be certain Jesus is inviting us to a classical understanding of happiness in Matthew 16:24-26? The parallel passage in Luke clarifies Jesus’

teaching by replacing “*his soul*” with the word “*himself*” (Luke 9:25). The issue is finding one’s self vs. losing one’s self. More specifically, to find one’s self is to find out how life *ought* to be and learn to live that way. It is in losing our lives for Christ’s sake, it’s to become like Jesus, with character that manifests the fruit of the Spirit and the radical nature of Kingdom living; it’s to find out God’s purposes for one’s life and to fulfill those purposes in a Christ-honoring way.

Kingdom living makes the presence or absence of contemporary happiness simply beside the point and not worth worrying about. It means to live lives of goodness, truth and beauty. It encompasses all the “little” details of our “ordinary” lives, for even little details and ordinary activities become big and extra-ordinary in the light of true happiness.

When Christ calls us to deny self, He doesn’t mean living without money, goods, recognition or any of the things that bring pleasure and satisfaction, but it implies that these things can’t be your *goal*. Neither does self-denial require putting yourself down or disliking yourself. Jesus said, “*Take up your cross.*” Taking up your cross means refusing to let self be your own central concern. It means living for God’s Kingdom, finding your place in His unfolding plan and playing your role well. Taking up your cross means giving your life to others for Christ.

Pursuing happiness

If happiness is a pursuit of pleasure and satisfaction, our consumerist society seeks to create in us a constant sense of dissatisfaction and an insatiable need to be filled with pleasure. Pleasurable satisfaction make a poor life time goal – as the focus will be on oneself, we become self absorbed and cannot live for any larger than who we are. This leads to an individual whose goal in life is to accumulate goods, experiences, the right look, the correct image, networking with the right people, all self centered goals. This leads to the empty self, as it lacks community, shared meaning, personal identity and worth and meaningful connections with other. For the empty self, the whole universe revolves around my internal pleasure – ME. His life goals are set in isolation from others and with little responsibility to live for the concern of others in the broader community. The empty self suffers from chronic emotional hunger, the values and habits of thoughts, feeling and behavior of the empty self make it extremely difficult for him or her to respond to Jesus’ call to be like him.

If we aim our lives at pleasure and satisfaction, we’ll spend all our time looking inside ourselves, constantly taking our happiness temperatures. Our activities and relationships will become means to our own feelings, ceasing to serve anything higher or other than ourselves. This sort of life leads to narcissism – this is an

inordinate and exclusive sense of self infatuation in which the individual is pre-occupied with his self interest and personal fulfillment in total disregard to others. Narcissists manipulate relationships with others including God to validate their self esteem and cannot sustain deep attachment or make personal commitment to something larger than his ego.

The worldly definition of happiness does not lead to happiness, it thinks it would, but it leads only to emptiness.

A Critical Choice

The classical and contemporary notions of happiness produce radically different kinds of people, demands that we make a lifestyle choice.

If virtue and godly character are our goals, we will learn to see ourselves in light of a larger cause — being part of God’s plan and Kingdom. We’ll be preoccupied with finding our role in that cause and living it well. We’ll passionately see life’s activities as occasions to draw near to God and become more like Him. We’ll hunger to become people who make life better for those around us. Our long-term focus will be on giving ourselves for Christ and to others – loving God and loving man.

It’s critical that we understand the nature of Jesus’ assertion that we only gain our lives when we lose them for His sake. Jesus isn’t *commanding* us to do anything. He’s simply describing reality. He’s accurately characterizing the way we’re made, telling us how we prosper (or perish) as image-bearers of God. His assertion is saying if you want to be a happy person, denying yourself for Christ isn’t optional. This isn’t true simply for believers. It’s true for all of us, whether we believe it or not. If you want to flourish as a person, you must deny yourself for Christ’s sake. Only by taking this path — only by rejecting the contemporary notion of happiness — will you find *true* happiness.

The Sunday School song based on Psalm 144:15

"... yea, happy is that people, whose God is the Lord." reminds us:

Happiness is to know the Savior,
Living a life within His favor,
Having a change in my behavior,
Happiness is the Lord.

Happiness is a new creation,
Jesus and me in close relation,
Having a part in His salvation,
Happiness is the Lord.

Tan Swee Leong

The Story of Amnon and Tamar

from 2 Samuel 13

I came across this story while doing my quiet time recently. It is the story of how Amnon, King David's first born son raped his step-sister Tamar, the sister of Absalom. Absalom waited two years before he took revenge on Amnon by killing him. Many commentators like to talk about this story as a punishment for King David because of his sin with Bathsheba.



However, the study guide I am using has another focus to this story. It focused on the word “love”. 2 Samuel 13:1 states: “Amnon son of David fell in *love* with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David.” It seems that Amnon really loved Tamar, “Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar” (2 Samuel 13:2). With the help of his cousin, Jonadab, Amnon tricked Tamar into coming into his room and there he raped her. However, after he had done that, he began to hate Tamar. “Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her.” (2 Samuel 13:15)

Why did this love turn to hate? The amateur psychologist in me tend to assume that Amnon hated himself for doing such a rotten act but he channeled his hatred to Tamar instead of himself.

I quote directly from Encounter with God:

It is curious that one and the same word, love, should indicate such different realities. I often wish that “I am sexually attracted to” could be depicted by words other than “I love”. For love, rightly understood (Paul’s depiction in 1 Cor 13) is an attitude, with related action, that seeks the well-being of another person. Yet sexual attraction is almost always, at least in part, a matter of self-seeking. Interestingly, however, the biblical writer uses “love” in that same ambiguous and ambivalent sense that is has in English, though the effect of such use in this narrative is to point up how unreliable the feeling of love is.

The Life Application Study Bible gives it take, as follows:

Love and lust are very different. After Amnon raped his half sister, his “love” turned to hate. Although he claimed to be in love, he was actually overcome by lust. Love is patient; lust requires immediate satisfaction. Love is kind; lust is harsh. Love does not demand its own way; lust does. Lust may feel like love at first, but when physically expressed, it results in self-disgust and hatred of the other person. If you just can’t wait, what you feel is not true love.

What is the learning point in this story? For the young people, I will say – Love can wait. If you think you are in love, than plan to get married not plan to fulfill your sexual urges before marriage. There was a story of a young man who claimed he loved a girl very much. When the girl asked him if he was willing to die for her, he answered, “No, mine is an undying love.”

For the old man, I can safely say – it is lust, so control yourself. If King David had controlled himself, he would not have faced so much grief with his family following in his footsteps.

King David should have left the roof and fled the temptation. Instead, he entertained the temptation by inquiring about Bathsheba.



To flee temptation, ask God in earnest prayer to help you stay away from people, places and situations that may tempt you. Memorize and meditate on portions of Scripture that combat your specific weaknesses. Find another believer with whom you can openly share your struggles, and call this person for help when temptation strikes. (Life Application Study Bible)

I hope there is no temptation to drive you away from church.

Martin Cheah

God open our eyes....

God has always been faithful to this Church, and as I look at the people that he has blessed us with he has given us many faithful leaders who desire to see the growth of the church. With the recent renovation of the church and the hope to see the church rebuilt in the next 10 years or so. I'm reminded about what Rev Chang shared on the need for the church to grow and be build up as a body of Christ before we plan for the physical rebuilding of the church. So to build the church spiritually first make sense.

Recently what has been weighing upon my heart is the new youths who have come to this church and have left due to various reasons. Though I also thank God for the people whom he has brought to this church whose parents are not attending this church and they have remained faithful to grow and serve, e.g. Josel, Roger, Zhiqiang, Zhenglin, Junhao, the BB boys, Peiqi, Alicia, Caleb, Stephanie, Marcus, Ken, Wenbing and Lynnest.

Lynnest was baptized some years back and now her mother, Alice is regularly attending the dialect ministry and serving as well. Slowly through one, God will bring the household to himself as last week we saw Francis, Lynnest father attending the dialect ministry as well. Do keep him in your prayers.

I have been asking God how do we grow as a church, we have been 'trying' for the past 41 years with very faithful and hardworking leaders. God open my eyes in the most unexpected way for me. I recently turned 30 about a week ago, so my JC friends from the first 3 months JC, wanted to celebrate for me. We arranged to meet at Vivo city to eat at Sushi Tei. During dinner, I started to share with them the burden I had for the new people who have come and left the church and the struggles that I faced. My friends tried to encouraged me and on the way back home I took bus with one of my friends, Favian. He shared with me that their church started out as a family church like ours, about 200 people. They were a fundamentalist church, meaning that they were very traditional and strict in certain teachings of the Bible. Then their pastor began preaching on the work of the Holy Spirit and to be filled with the Spirit, empowered to do the will of God, his mission for the church. They started a 'netcasting' movement, which is essentially an evangelism thrust. So evangelism is not done only by the evangelism ministry but it is the mission of the whole church as a body. Everyone has their part to play to reach out. They were all trained to use their gospel tracts and actively went out to share in pairs.

God honored their obedience to his call for the church and their church grew from about 200 members to 1000 members. That sharing with my friend really opened up my eyes to see the harvest. The movement of reaching out to the community through the sharing of the gospel is not new to me as I received training from Campus Crusade for Christ a number of years back. But the difference now is that the Holy Spirit has convicted me and now gives me the burden to share that is not out of reluctance or of the flesh but of the Spirit. I know that it is not me but Christ who is going the do the sharing of the gospel. What he requires of us is obedience to his call, the great commission.

My prayer is that God will open up our eyes and convict us by the Spirit as we go forth to share with our friends, family and the community. The church is going to have a Christmas outreach during Christmas Eve where the planning is still in progress, so let's be ready to invite them. We need to be prepared to share the good news and reach out and prepare the way for Christ who is coming again.

