

The Vine Committee

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prospective son-in-law.

In the DE class we learnt of Jacob who worked 14 years for his father-in-law to get the hand of his two wives, Leah and Rachel.

Are there any Romeos or Casanovas in JCC who are willing to undertake the task of winning the hand of the millionaire's daughter for the sake of rebuilding JCC?

JCC needs to raise funds for the rebuilding and we wonder how to raise about \$20 million to build a 4 storey church building.

In the news, there is a Hong Kong millionaire who is willing to give \$80 million to his

The real question is really are we desperately in need of money or in need of faith to believe that God can provide for what we need? Indeed most of us, if not all of us put our trust in money. If we have money in the storehouse (bank), we will feel much more relaxed than if we had to trust God for our next meal. I know a friend who has more than a million dollars in the bank, own more than one house, his children are working in high ranking positions and asking him to retire but yet he is not willing to retire. Perhaps he is not prepared for a life of leisure or maybe, he just need to collect more wealth. He should take note of Psalm 49:10.

Whenever we talk of rebuilding, the spectre of fund raising comes to my mind. In the natural, I would dare say that it is impossible for us to raise the amount needed. Wouldn't it be great if we were one of the mega churches who could raise this amount in one day? For churches with 30,000 members, to raise \$20 million, each member need only give \$666 but for JCC with only 800 members, the sum become a faith stretching \$25,000 each. However, I believe that God works according to His timing and if we put our active faith in Him, He will also provide us the funds we need in His own way.

God can use King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:21) to provide for the rebuilding of the Temple. So He can use anyone to supply our needs.

Martin Cheah

DIFFERENT WORLDS – ONE CHRIST!

One of the things said about autistic people is that they often live in their own world, thinking and acting without understanding or care for what others (who are not like them) think. This implies that non-autistic people live in their own separate world of thoughts and actions. It can similarly be said that many of these non-autistic people think and act without understanding or care for what others (who are not like them) think. This is well demonstrated in the unfriendly ways that some non-autistic individuals react to the so-called quirks of the autistic individuals in public places. There is a lack of understanding between the two groups who live in two different worlds. Even if the two groups are at odds with each other, there is no need for either to claim superiority. **Let's say that the non-autistic ones are called "ordinary people" and their autistic fellows in the human race are called the "extraordinary people"**. Each group is entitled to its own space and to find common space to intermingle with the other with mutual respect. In divine reckoning, one is not better or worse than the other for acceptance simply by human jaundiced characterization.

Some time ago, I watched episode 4 of the Mandarin show "Stars For A Cause 明星志工队" on Mediacorp TV, which featured the autistic members at Taipei Autism Children Welfare Centre. Although the facility is called "Children Welfare Centre", some of the autistic members appearing on the show are actually grown-ups. The autistic individuals are actually lovely and lovable people who know how to feel happy or sad, enjoy simple pleasures, and have useful abilities and simple expectations. Besides, it is well-known that many autistic people acquire extraordinary talents in the arts, mathematics, stupendous memory retention and reading. Hence, it is not out of place to accord them the recognition for being extraordinary in some impressive ways. Non-autistic people who are not so blessed with such talents may just admire with mouths agape.

Albeit autistic people live in their own world, they have their endearing qualities of honesty and uprightness. Whatever they say, whenever they laugh or cry, we know the feelings and thoughts are real in their hearts and minds. They do what they do with candour; even in what they do excellently well, they exude a composed demeanor without any proclivity to boast. They do not act like actors do in a show; they do not don a mask. They are open for us to approach and befriend. If there is anything bad about this, it is that they may be taken advantage of by the devious

among the smart ordinary people who are clever with disguises. It is these smart ordinary black sheep who need disparagement because they know good and bad, yet choose to carry out the bad acts on the docile lambs. Perversely, such bad hats have the audacity to opine they are the finer members of the race while thumbing their noses at the extraordinary people whom they despise as not ordinary like them. The admonition in James 4:16-17 may be aptly applied to the cunning. They are full of their grandiose selves, boasting and bragging. They know the bad they ought not to do and they do it.

William Shakespeare said in a poem, **“All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players.”**

Obviously, the world that the legendary English poet and playwright referred to is not the world of the extraordinary, but the world of the ordinary people who supposedly know the “right way” to socialize, to act and respond to their surroundings with the appropriate mask on for good reason – to gain approval or acceptance by carefully considered actions and words either to be socially/politically correct or simply to veil their true feelings and thoughts as a self-protective instinct. Yet, while we the ordinary ones justify our adept ways in life as necessary or a matter of course, keeping a tight grip on our privacy rights not to reveal more than necessary of ourselves to others, we are not always fair-dealing when it comes to poking noses into other people’s affairs, hunting for gossipy news and so forth. When something unpleasant happens to us and news reporters come a calling, we wave them away, cursing at them for being just busybodies. On the other hand, if something juicy happens to our neighbours, we are quick to call the reporters, “Please, quickly come, some newsy stuff to splash on your papers.” There is an obvious word that describes this aptly of many smart ordinary people.

To be fair to the inhabitants of the two worlds, both groups have their strengths and weaknesses. There is much the conscientious lot of non-autistic people can (as they have volunteered to) contribute to the good of our autistic brothers and sisters by teaching them the useful skills and helping them where we are stronger in our abilities. Respectfully, there is much we can learn from the humility and sincerity of our friends in the “autism world” who can always be trusted for being true to their thoughts and feelings unlike the annoying and frustratingly unremitting hypocrisy that so badly entangle human affairs in the world that we are more familiar with.

In dreamland, a thought came to me. What if there is only one world – the autism world? Everybody who dwells within is like every other person – wouldn't this mean all the inhabitants are normal to one another, and they socialize in the way they are born to be, all the same with straightforwardness and meekness, and so no discord sprouts? By their innate nature of simplicity and truthfulness, there is no guile and therefore the self-protective instinct to guard against vile and selfish advantage-seekers is unwarranted. Alternatively, we have a world like that with no evil, no terrorism, no cheating, no inordinate defence expenses with exasperating inconveniences, but instead with resources channeled for positive peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants. Everyone is at peace with one another. How would the experience be like to live in such a world?

Suddenly, as if a quake struck, I was jolted out of my dream. I am back to the real world. What a fantastic dream it was! You may call the real world a "normal world" or "sinful world". Inevitably, we just have to live by the way of this world, do we not? No, not really.

This world is not our home, we are just passing through. We may be in the world but we are not of the world. We can heed Paul's instruction in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order to prove by you what is that good and pleasing and perfect will of God." It is just like when you are with friends who are smokers and gamblers. You are with them, but you are not one of them; you are not infected by their habits. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." (John 1:5 NLT) Another illustration is that we are in the world where terrorism exists, but we do not become terrorists.

Be transformed by the renewing of our mind – to change our way of thinking into Christ-likeness. To be Christ-like must entail loving our neighbours as we love ourselves – whether they are beautiful or ugly, intelligent professionals or illiterate workers, wealthy or poor, genteel or boorish, people who "live in their own world" or people who "live in the same world as we"? What are our Christian values that we hang at the corners of our mouths to display to the world? Hopefully, we do cherish these values in our heart and work the words into life so that it is out of the heart that the mouth speaks:

"You don't get wormy apples off a healthy tree, nor good apples off a diseased tree. The health of the apple tells the health of the tree. You must

begin with your own life-giving lives. It's who you are, not what you say and do, that counts. Your true being brims over into true words and deeds.”
(Luke 6:43-45 MSG)

In John 8:21, Jesus said, “I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come.”

The Lord continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.” (v. 23)

According to the Reformation Study Bible, “Jesus speaks of His death, resurrection, and ascension. He clearly states the two destinies of humanity. Not all will be saved; some cannot go where Jesus is going. The only way of salvation is to believe (v. 24; 3:16, 18).”

So which destiny of humanity do we belong? Which world do we belong? “We are in this world, yet not of this world” is an apropos paraphrase of the Bible verses John 8:23, 15:19 and Romans 12:12. **Different worlds, but only one world of eternal significance – our heavenly home!** We have a new identity in Christ, and hence JCC’s vision: Be a Christ-like Church, living out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission!

JOHN LEE

EASY SUDOKU

Complete the Sudoku Puzzle with the letters: A, D, E, G, L, O, S, U, V.
 Rule: Each letter can only appear once in each row, in each column and in each 3x3 grid.

What to look for: After you have completed the puzzle, a hidden 3-word (10-letter) Christian message will appear. Look horizontally, vertically or diagonally for it.

Enjoy!

	L		A	O		G	V	
		G		U			L	
D	O				L	S		
	V		D		E		U	
	E			V		A		L
A	G				U		S	
E	S		G	D		U	O	
				S		E	A	
O	D				V			

Happenings

On 22th September 2012, The Girls Brigade 51st company had a sushi competition. It was a very exciting day for me because sushi is one of my favourite foods. In this competition, all the groups were busy making sushi and my group, Love, was having great fun in the process. We were all busy making shapes with the rice moulds for the sushi and using healthy foods to decorate the sushi plate.



Finally, our group's sushi, composed of carrots, grapes, cheese and lots of other healthy foods, was completed. We brought our sushi to a table for it to be voted. Our whole group felt a sense of accomplishment as we completed making the sushi successfully. After the voting, our group did not get first place but it did not matter because we gained the experience of being in a sushi competition and that is something money cannot buy.



Nicolette Neo



Personal Retreat Reflection

Ps 8:3-4

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

It has been 5 years that I set aside time for directed silent retreats once a year or more for personal reflections. I begin to enjoy more and more of God's magnificent creation and how it displays God's glory and beauty.

I never fancy sunrise or sunset until at the kelong in Blue Mountain in Riau Island, Indonesia. I saw such beauty as the sun slowly rose from the horizon as if it came out from below the ocean waters. So beautiful that I captured the moments with my camera and displayed it as a background picture in my laptop. Each morning as I switch on my laptop to start work, God's creation, sunrise, greets me and reminds me that He is with me.

On my recent retreat back at the kelong end July, I watched the sunrise as usual but it dawned on me that as the sun rises to dispel the night darkness, the same God sent His Son to the world to dispel the darkness in our heart. All of a sudden it gave me a new awareness of the connection between the "sun" and 'Son". Both dispel darkness and both give out light.

It is so amazing now as each morning I see the sun in between or slightly above the trees beside Jurong Lake as I walk to Lakeside MRT. It reminds me of His Son and to be an example to dispel darkness wherever I go.

On another occasion at the kelong, there was a thunderstorm. The strong wind blew off a small portion of the attap roof in my room. The sea was choppy and cloudy tossing the waves up and down. When the storm died down, the sea was so calm and clear and I could see the fishes swimming so freely. It reminded me of God's power and might during the storm yet He is gentle and loving giving me the freedom like the fishes to swim so freely.

May I encourage you to rest from your busyness to see the beauty of God's creation. It speaks volumes and declares His majestic glory.

Lissa Low

Journal Record of 10 Sep 2012

“Remembering God's goodness and faithfulness, and moving forward”

Dream:

I had a dream:

I am going to have another baby. My mind thinks of the "difficulties" at this stage of life ... Even before my thoughts are over, I see the baby already on the bed all dressed up. A while later I cannot find the baby on the bed; it is found embedded in my iPad. Quickly I take the baby out and feel relieved that all is well, that it is not suffocated by the small space. It is a joy to see the baby well and I love this baby. I am all excited again.

Today incidentally is the birthday of my 4th baby who was born in 1999. He was conceived and brought into the world with much pain and fear. It was a turnaround point for me from carnality to knowing God all over again since I accepted Jesus at age 22 (also in a time of distress and desperation). It was a “can't be helped” moment that Jesus became my only help and answer.

Remembering the goodness and grace of God embedded with the joy and hope in sufferings, the lessons learned from these past episodes (still learning) have given Him a special and personal place in my heart.

It was the journey for Matthias (in my womb) and me at that moment of time out of hopelessness, a life-threatening condition and helplessness that I began to cry and seek Jesus to be my Lord again since I was already a believer but not a faithful follower in His ways.

Confinement in bed for six months was the lesson to still my soul and to stir my spirit to listen to Jesus through reading the story He has written in His scripture page after page from Genesis to Revelation (1st time in 1999). His patience, guidance and loving assurance encouraged me to put my trust in Him that my body would heal, together with the well-being of my unborn child. The bleeding stopped but the placenta was not positioned normal. The scan became a proof that it was right at the bottom and there was no way that it could be reversed except by a miracle. The doctor's report was ominous. It would be difficult and the safety of both mother and child could not be guaranteed. Thus, unavoidable was the battle between life and death during labour (50% chance of good outcome).

The negative report cut deep into my heart. My life was not in my own hands, not in the hands of man but in the Sovereignty of My Lord Jesus whom I had come to know more through the daily scripture reading in my bed. Hence, I tried to practise what I read and substantiated in my heart and mind to overcome my emotions that often weakened by spirit. I had to learn to walk by faith and not by sight, to believe in the impossible and to bring down every negative and wild thought daily as I awaited the day of labour and delivery.

My God proved to me that He is mighty and He is true to His Word. There is nothing impossible for Him. Even death cannot overcome Him, for He triumphed over it and brought life to all mankind whereby in Him and through Him we live from now and forever. He is faithful and true.

A miracle was given in the midst of my anguish: The placenta was lifted high to normal position at the 11th hour before labour. Now, both mother and son are living testimony.

Looking back with gratefulness and thanksgiving, for today is this baby's birthday.

He is no more a baby, not even under "child" category; he is a teenager from today. We are journeying into another part of His life and moving on to a future of hope.

This is a difficult and tough year for us. The obstacles along our journey seem challenging. But God is the same yesterday, today and moving on we know that God knows and holds our future and all that we embrace – our hope and our dreams are all written in His palms and we know that He lives in us and will faithfully and lovingly help us through the lifelong journey until we come to our destination fulfilling our roles that He has decided for us.

The Lord is our Rock and we shall not be moved.

Song: You Raise Me Up

Scriptural verse: Ps 23

Margaret Lee

The baby we prayed.....

Our daughter Chui Yin had been married for 3 to 4 years and had no plans or even considered starting a family or even wanting a baby. I was more anxious than Nancy and started to pray very earnestly asking God to give her a child. Both Nancy and I started to pray in December last year...one of those New Year resolutions.



I had wanted to write her a personal letter from a father to a daughter on The 10 Reasons why she should plan to have a baby. Before I could finish writing that letter, she called shortly after Chinese New Year in mid Feb to tell us she was pregnant. We were so happy with the news, rejoicing in the Lord and thanking God for such a quick answered prayer.

We felt that God heard our prayers and knows our heart desire.

But on 29 March, one week after she had her routine scan we received an email from her. This was what she wrote

"Last Thursday when I went for scan, the doctor told us that the baby has a high risk of having down's syndrome. This is based on some of the scan findings as well as some of the screening blood tests that they do for some of these diseases. One of my readings was very low, 20% of the normal person's average reading, and this is associated with down's syndrome, and is also predictive of poor pregnancy outcomes like stillbirth, growth retardation etc.

This test is 90% accurate, and the doctor advised that if 100% accuracy was desired, they can perform an amniocentesis at week 20, which is to put a needle into the amniotic fluid, draw out some of the baby's cells and do a DNA culture to diagnose exactly. I have declined this step. It carries a risk of miscarriage and this is only helpful for people who are considering terminating the pregnancy if it does confirm down's syndrome. Jack and I are both not planning to terminate the pregnancy regardless, so we have decided not to take the risk of doing the test. There are no other testing options and we will only have to find out at birth.

I hope you will both not be too sad, we trust that God gave us this baby at this time especially because I know that I did not plan or want to have a child. So although sad at the news at first, we have decided to accept whatever comes, clinging on with faith that God will help us to bring up the child well."

It is at this time that I am reminded to apply this verse that I love "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." 1 Thess 5: 16 - 18



For a moment our hearts sank and we were very sad. Naturally, we went into the Internet and read all about raising a down's syndrome child. The more we read the more worried we became. It was a low point in our lives at that moment.

We did not question God why?

But kept asking God, what is His plan for us? So we wrestled with



God for a few weeks. We said, God we asked for a grandchild and you answered but is this the condition of the grandchild you are giving to us? How can our daughter and her husband Jack bring this child up? She will have to give up her career to do so.

I did probe her that in bringing up this child, there will be much trouble and need lots of love and patience and the journey will be very long and difficult.

Have you consulted with your pastor and sought Godly counsel as to what to do? She told us they have prayed and are prepared and told us not to worry as their medical trainings should help them cope well to raise such child.

We shared these with Shanghai cell group and we prayed often during cell meetings. Nancy shared with some in the ladies group. We drew strength from the many prayers and support from these brothers and sisters.

For an example, on a Sunday when Pastor Daniel was leading the congregation in prayer, a husband and wife who sat a row behind me knew of my daughter's situation, laid his hand on me while our Pastor was praying for the church and I felt they were standing in the gap with us praying and interceding for Jack and Chui Yin.

Then In April we received an email from Derek and Christine Oh asking whether we will be in Shanghai and wanted to stay at our place when they come in May for our church retreat. I had a business trip to Houston that same week and Nancy was to travel with me and no one will be at home. But we happily said, "Ok we will let you stay at our place while we are away" and requested Christine to extend her stay till we come back so both Nancy and Christine can share tips on grand parenting not knowing that God was sending Angels to strengthen our faith and blessed us with their testimonies. They just went through a very similar miracle the month before where their daughter's baby was also said to be high probability of down's syndrome but turned out to be a normal baby through faith and prayers. It was Divine appointment for them to choose to stay at our place to lift up our spirit as many of Christine's friends were asking why she did not chose to stay with them.



We also requested prayers from amongst our close friends and relatives, Cell group members, Church friends and Swee Leong who shared with us on Godly man's word of faith.

My wife and I started a Friday fasting and prayer from week 12 onwards.

Our prayers to God was

- thank you Lord for this gift in our daughter's womb
- we trust that our Heavenly Father give good gifts to His children when they asked.
- that this child will have the exact number of chromosomes in him as per His design/likeness
- grant favour to Jack and Chui Yin according to the measure of their faith and obedience.

- and will accept whatever is His plan for this young couple.

With this, we surrendered our worries and burdens to Jesus and find Rest in Him.

Jack and Chui Yin also found rest in Jesus as they went about their routine work and church activities. They went to the church retreat in Kuantan during June holidays and later in the young adults 2 days camp outside Singapore in July. She helped out in the children's school holiday camps in the church.



Then on 29 Aug, her water bag broke one month early but had no active labour.



Doctors started inducing her labour and told her if nothing happens overnight, they will proceed to do caesarean the next morning. We prayed and asked God to grant her a natural birth to avoid caesarean that may result in other complications due to her situation.

The next morning, she had a short labour and delivered a 2.3 kg baby boy and the baby was premature but a normal and healthy baby and did not have to be in the incubator or in the ICU. My God is Great and All Glory

Be unto His Name. He not only gave us a normal grandson but also shortened our anxiety by 1 month and we could also break our fast earlier less by 4 Fridays. Hallelujah.

We are blessed in experiencing and learning to hold on our faith in Him during these difficult moments in our lives and learned to rest in Him in whatever situations we face.



Through this life experience:

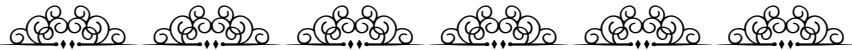
- Jack and Chui Yin has grown stronger in their faith and developed greater affections and love for babies (other than their own) as she had journeyed through this valley during her pregnancy.
- That cell group ministry is beneficial to our Christian living as we shared and expressed our love, support and care for one another as we went through this difficult journey from early April to end August.

Thank You Lord Jesus for hearing our cries and the many prayers of our relatives and friends here in this church and in Shanghai, who cares for my family and the health of this baby.



All Glory Be Unto You O God. Amen.

Rennie and Nancy



DIALECT MINISTRY NEEDS

Have the thought crossed your mind that you are too young for the Dialect Ministry? Then think again. Paul said to Timothy (1Tim 4:12), “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young.....”

So sign up as a musician in the Dialect Ministry. We need you.



Seeking and Preferring God's Will

(This article is a construction based on penned notes from IDMC 2012 - The Gethsemane Principle.)

Seek God's will in all that you do.

Christians are familiar with the frequent exhortation to seek God's will. The question is: How is a believer to seek God's will?

In order for us to succeed in seeking God's will, we must make a start somewhere. A good start is to abandon our misconceptions that often stymie our quest. One common misconception is that only "super Christians" have the ability to know God's will: "I am just a Christian babe; my faith is so low and I don't think I can know God's will myself. Maybe I should check with my pastor ..."

Such is the fallacy of many believers' thought that is a stumbling block.

Ps. 119:105 tells us that God's Word is "a lamp to my feet and light to my path". This means that the Word follows us inseparably in our walk and provides the illumination that shows us the way forward. Can the Word lead us to God's will or away from God's will? The answer is obvious. If you are a so-called "super Christian", maybe you can walk with wider strides; but if you think you are an "awful" "unworthy" Christian, you can still take your spiritual walk with smaller steps with the lamp tied to your feet, with the Word of God shining the path forward for you. So long as you don't extinguish the light beam, you are less likely to lose yourself to the darkness. Your strides may be small, but slow and steady you will still get to discover God's will – your destination. God's will is revealed to us "progressively" a step at a time in our spiritual walk with the Word of God as our guide.

Knowing God's will is also not merely circumstantial or based on feelings. While circumstances and feelings do allow us insight into what God is trying to speak to us, they do not in themselves affirm what God's will is. For example, when Paul was in Ephesus, he faced strong opposition. Such was the circumstance that some servants of God might contemplate, based on their feelings, that it was the signal for them to depart: "Maybe it is God's will for us to go elsewhere where we are welcome and the seeds we sow would not be in vain."

Against the dictates of the circumstance and predictable human sentiment (feeling), Paul saw it as God revealing His will for him to stay on "because a great door for effective work has opened to me ..." (1 Cor. 16:9) We

cannot grab everything by feelings; but if feelings are not opposed to God's principles, and there is no contradiction between our circumstance and the truth revealed in His Word, then we may identify in them the will of God being revealed to us through our experience, and we will not have any doubt about it. We have to be careful never to gratify in our comfort zone and thereby mistakenly adopt anything as God's will so long as we feel cozy with it. Doing so would be dealing with God's will in vain; this we must not do, just as we do not use God's name in vain.

God's will can be broad-based instead of being restrictively confined to a dot. For example, you grow up in a Christian family and have been very faithful in attending Church since young, and you have the conviction that God's will for you is to serve him in the preaching ministry as you have won praise for your oratorical skill and depth of knowledge of Scripture. Your circumstance and feelings do not seem to contradict God's will and your desire to serve Him. However, much as you seek, the position of a full-time Christian minister or equivalent keeps escaping you; so you wait and wait and wait for a real sign of this very specific dot (with no room for variance) of God's will manifesting in an opportunity for you. Unfortunately, the opportunity never comes while you miss out on a lot of other opportunities of serving in preaching and teaching in a broader sphere of Christian engagement as the Lord's faithful servant. Your circumstance and feelings do bear out God's will for you, but you missed it by inflexibly insisting that it must be "on the dot". Knowing God's will is not merely a matter of being "on the dot". God's will is not always revealed in a very exact expression. It would be regrettable if Christians are fixed-minded in chasing after precise dots in different stages of their lives and find themselves disappointed either because they end up with many missing dots or they have all the dots connected forming a strange-looking chain inconsistent with a fruitful Christian life.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked His disciples to pray. He was in extreme anguish and pain, and he prayed that God, the Father, would take away His suffering, ending His prayer with a very significant expression of His submission, "not my will, but yours, be done." The Garden of Gethsemane was a place of pain. It was a place of choice (of life vs. death). Jesus made His choice of submitting to the Father's will. He offered Himself as the Lamb of sacrifice for man's sin. Gethsemane was thus a place of the Lord's consecration, and a fulcrum of victory over death.

The principle we can draw from the Gethsemane example of Jesus is that the will of God does not necessarily entail a problem-free experience. The principle is also of submission to the Father's will, nevertheless. Jesus' personal example was a submission unto death. Submission to God's will can involve agony for us. It is easy to die for Jesus but it is hard to live for Jesus. For example, one bullet shot unto death is easy but to be tortured alive for Christ is difficult. In my daily walk, I do not just seek to know God's will, but also seek to submit to His will. I know my Father will sustain me, with a true strengthening and deepening of my faith through dependence on His grace.

George Mueller, a man of great faith and prayer, said in regard to seeking God's will:

"I seek at the beginning to get my heart into such a state that it has no will of its own in regard to a given matter. Nineteenth of the difficulties are overcome when our hearts are ready to do the Lord's will, whatever it may be. When one is truly in this state, it is usually but a little way to the knowledge of what His will is. Having done this, I do not leave the result to feeling or simple impressions. If so, I make myself liable to great delusions. I seek the will of the Spirit of God through or in connection with the Word of God. The Spirit and the Word must be combined. If I look to the Spirit alone without the Word, I lay myself open to great delusions also. Next I take into account providential circumstances. These plainly indicate God's will in connection with His Word and Spirit. I ask God in prayer to reveal His will to me aright. Thus through prayer to God, the study of the Word and reflection, I come to a deliberate judgment according to the best of my ability and knowledge."

The Gethsemane Principle is all about preferring the will of God, which is absolutely perfect, with heart-openness to the Word in the knowledge of Him. Even if obedience to God leads us deep into another garden – of pain and sorrow – the final outcome will be victory. Many Christians do not have their heart ready to prefer the will of God. They act more like Balaam.

The king of Moab (Balak) summoned Balaam to curse God's people, but Balaam said that he couldn't and he stood there to bless them instead. It is strange that although Balaam seemed to do everything right in obedience

to what the Lord said to him, in blessing the Israelites, God was still angry with him. Note that God was not angry with Balaam with regards to the cursing that the king instructed him, but was angry with him because of his numerous errors such as:

- His alliance with the king, an enemy of Israel (Num 22:5-7, 22).
- His wicked advice causing a plague to strike the Lord's people. (Num 31:14-16).
- He "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2Pe 2:15-16).

Even Jesus mentions about the evil of Balaam "*who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.*" (Rev. 2:14)

The above is just part of a long list of the errors of Balaam even though on the surface he seemed to do right with God. In short, although he obeyed God's will in the blessing of the Israelites against the wish of Balak, his heart was not there in preferring the will of God. His mindset was, "I must be careful to speak what the Lord puts in my mouth" (Num 23:12); but his heart was coveting the money that Balak would pay him to curse the Israelites. He made the final choice by God's will because he had no other choice under the pressure of God, not because of preference for the will of God. His way of heeding God's will with reluctance was contrary to God's way and fundamentally wrong. In the end, he was punished with death at the hands of the Israelites. (Jsh 13:22)

When seeking God's will, we sometimes face a blank. This could be either that God is silent for the time being or our spirit is not sensitive to the answer from Him. Ps. 106:15 says, "*He gave them exactly what they asked for— but along with it they got an empty heart.*" (MSG) When you are in the dark, hold fast to what God has revealed in the light and continue to seek divine guidance through the following seven steps:

- The revelation of God's Word
Taking care that our thought and action do not contradict God's Word.
- Consecrate Prayer
Jesus prayed the Consecrate Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is a prayer of surrender to the Father's will. To

many Christians, surrender is often overrated (by mouth saying) but under-estimated (by action; failure to do what we ought to). A Consecrate Prayer should be a transforming prayer as we join our heart with the power of His Blood.

- Counsel of godly people
God uses His people to speak into our life.
- Responsibility in decision-making
God gives us our mind for a purpose. We need to use our mind to think, to weigh the pros and cons of any decision. This means that we do not act on impulse or blindly go with the crowd. Any decision is carefully thought through and we do not succumb to superstition.
- Confirmation of Peace
This is not about feeling, but about our spirit joining the transforming Spirit whereby the Shalom of God comes to us. We then have peace within ourselves and peace with Him.
- Confirmation of Circumstances
The people around us whom God has called us to work with, and the state of affairs with events and relationships, can point out what is fundamentally right or wrong.
- Purity of Motive
Ego has no part in God's calling. Abide by the Gethsemane Principle of "not my will but Your will". What we do that is God's will may be contrary to personal will (or desire); it is not to satisfy our curiosity or to calm our fears and anxieties. Seeking God's will is not seeking God's endorsement of our plans (that are already conceived). God's will is sought, and then our plan is made to conform to it.

JOHN LEE (expanding on Rev Anthony's notes)

NO EASY ANSWERS

In chapter 2 of the book, author William Lane Craig tackles the problem of Unanswered Prayers.

He began with Jesus saying, "Whatever you ask in My name, I will do it." Jesus repeated this many times throughout the Gospel of John in chapters 14, 15 and 16. How can this be when every one of us knows that sometimes God does not answer our prayers?

The author highlights some obstacles to Answered Prayers.

- **Sin** - If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened (Psalm 66:18)
- **Wrong Motives** - When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:3)
- **Lack of faith** - But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt..... That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord. (James 1:6-8)
- **Lack of earnestness** – we casually pray in the prayer meeting for some request and then forget all about it.
- **Lack of perseverance** - And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? (Luke 18:7)
- **Not according to God's will** - This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of him. (1John 15:14-15)

He concludes the chapter by suggesting that we take inventory of the hindrances to prayer in our lives. Repent, ask God's forgiveness. Make a prayer list and set aside time to pray each day for these. Check against every prayer that has been answered. As you see God work, your faith will increase as you learn to trust Him for more.

God will give to you what His good and acceptable and perfect will decrees. You may not always get what you ask for, but God knows best what will serve to advance His kingdom. You can trust Him for His answers.

I have summarized 15 pages into the short article above. Please borrow the book and read the complete exposition.

Martin Cheah