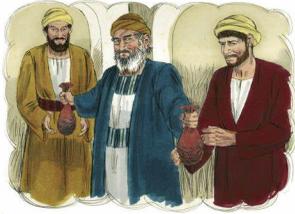


# The Vine



For Internal Circulation Only



**PARABLE – THE ELDER SON**  
by John Lee



**TRIBUTE**  
by Alicia Wong



**KINSHIP**  
by Joyce Tan



The Vine This Month

Editor:

Alicia Wong

Writers this issue:

John Lee

Alicia Wong

Joyce Tan

Photos:

Martin Cheah

Cover Photo:

Dialect Outing to

Singapore

Bicentennial



## HOM Editorial

Every morning I have the privilege to take taxi to work because of my early starting time (5:30am). The taxi drivers will use various routes to fetch me from my home in Jurong West to Tiger Brewery in Tuas. Some go by AYE, some by PIE, while others prefer to take the inner roads, like Boon Lay Way and International Road. Today, the driver travelled by Yuan Ching Road to International Road and then the AYE. I took the initiative to talk to him about the various routes that can lead me to my final destination.

I mentioned to him that it is like the allegory about many roads (religions) that can lead to heaven. However there is a caveat, all the taxi drivers can only bring me to the gate of the factory, but I am the only one who can get in because I have a gate pass. I left the story at this point and I hope the taxi driver got the idea.

I told the same story to my transport contractor and he smiled knowingly because he knows I am a Christian. Later in the morning, I told it to my colleague who is a temporary staff from Malaysia. He mentioned to me that he attended a Methodist church in JB in his teens but now he prays to Kuan Yin. When I ended my story, he said he got the point. However he tried to clarify that all religions taught people to do good. I agreed with him that all religions teach people to do good because we are all bad.

*“All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” Romans 3:12*

Then I asked him to read the small Gideon’s Bible which I got at the JCK graduation recently, pointing him to Romans 3:20, *“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.”*

I leave it to God’s grace that he may find *“This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”* Romans 3:22-24.

*Martin Cheah*

## PARABLE: THE FATHER & 2 SONS (LUKE 15)

---

The Elder Son reflecting the erring attitudes of  
believers

---

*In the September issue of **The Vine**, I shared the parable's message through [the younger son](#). Now, I share the parable's message through the elder son. At a later time, I shall share the parable's message through their father.*

*While the younger son was wayward in his preoccupation with the self, disregarding the rest of the family, the elder son was no saint as he later revealed himself also to be self-centred in thinking for himself instead of welcoming his repentant brother back with love.*

### *(1) Lack of grace:*

The elder son was a diligent worker, loyal to the father. When he heard about the father's forgiving treatment of his younger brother, he became angry. This revealed his self-conceit about his loyalty to his father. Although he was not like his brother, a sinner who ran away, his attitude spoke negatively of him as a sinner without the spirit of love.

**Faithful Christians who work hard in the Father's field, sowing seeds and reaping harvest should not let big feelings of self-importance set in.** They should avoid comparisons between brethren about lengths of service loyalty in years or the relative eminence of talent contributions to boast good works with an expectation (even if unspoken) of earthly rewards.

The elder son displayed visible responsibility in his work and would have been blessed in being close to the father. Yet, the spirit of love was missing in his heart. He worked hard as a dutiful child, but without joy. This elder son's lack in the spirit of love to forgive his repentant brother is thrown into sharp relief by the grace of the father to both sons:

- How the father welcomes back the lost son, with no question asked!
- What the father said to the elder son, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours."

**Christians are not to be like the elder son, missing the Gospel of Grace because they are focussed too much on the boast of good works.**

## *(2) My Way, Your Way ... but not God's way?*

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him." – v.28

A Christian, having served in the Church for decades, is warmly received in heaven. He compares himself to a brother who received Christ just one day before being received into heaven. Would the first Christian complain about unfairness of the Heavenly Father?

The elder son's anger betrayed his lack of understanding about his father despite his long time of being in the family. The elder son had his own mindset which he stubbornly stuck to. Acts of the father not in conformity with his way of thinking would be grounds for him to show his temper. He even "refused to go in" to see his father, and the father had to go out and plead with him. Arrogance of the son!

Christians must always defer to God's Way instead of the self-righteous and self-centred "My Way" attitude represented by the elder son in his impudence.

**If in the Church all decisions are centred on God's Way (sola scriptura) instead of My Way, Your Way, His Way ... there will be more unity, fewer divisions.**

### *(3) Wrong service attitude:*

"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends." – v. 29

The elder son indulged in self-pity, labouring under the false impression of not having received much from the father, not being given "even a young goat". In reality, he had much more than that to receive for being always with the father.

What the elder son expected to receive would be a privilege for being the father's son and bestowed out of the father's love and grace, not an entitlement to be demanded. Whatever praise deserved by the elder son for his good works in the field was undermined by the lack of joy undergirding his service for his father's pleasure. Instead, he glaringly betrayed the frame of mind common to many who do work out of duty and for rewards whereby they harbour a lot of grouses and display their unhappy faces.

There is nothing wrong to recognise duty and enjoy rewards, but duty and rewards should come into the picture after we have grounded our service on the love for what we do to render positive outcomes. **In spiritual service in the church, it is not difficult to find people with the same wrong attitude as the elder son. There is no joy in service, but lots of grouses. There is no love underpinning the service that is performed out of duty** – "I am doing this because I am compensated to do it," "I am doing that because my ministry leader pushes it to me," "I have no choice but

to do the task because no one else is willing to do it,” “I do this but am not willing to do that because this is my job but I am not free for that which is none of my business” ...

**It is some encouragement to us that there are people in church who would be honest in saying, “I am taking up this ministry or job because I simply love the work and feel great pleasure in the calling to be a blessing, never mind if it means much pressure with not much recompense, and going the extra mile for God when needs arise even if it exceeds my normal duty.”**

People like the elder son (defined by self-interest) and his father (grounded in love) don't have to proclaim aloud for all to hear what types of attitude they possess. The attitudes are transparent.

**The contrasting attitudes of people (grounded in love or defined by self-centred self-righteous humanist philosophy) are plainly revealed by their words and actions.**

#### *(4) A good-weather brother?*

“Evangelism”, “Outreach” and “Missions” all convey one common idea; i.e., spreading the Gospel by sharing God's Word **and** personal witness.

Note that I have emphasized the conjunction “**and**” which I prefer to the word “**or**”. If we use “**or**”, we might be subconsciously condoning the idea that evangelism can be all words and no action. By using “**and**”, attention is drawn to the fact that words and actions must combine for the substance of the Gospel Truth, rather than just the words of preaching, to be carried across.

*Bind us together, Lord,  
bind us together  
with cords that cannot be broken;  
bind us together, Lord,  
bind us together,  
O bind us together in love.*

In the parable, there is no mention about how the two brothers related to each other in the time before the younger one turned prodigal. Nevertheless, it would be

difficult to imagine that there was never the natural brotherly love between them. So, I shall assume that there was this love between them, love that was easily unravelled by the prodigality that began to affect the relationship.

Obviously, the elder son was too ready and quick to untie the cord of love that bound him to his brother, all for a simple reason that the latter did wrong. If the elder son had prior love for his brother, he did not have a whit of love to direct it towards encouraging the lost brother who had returned (contrasting the father who remained steadfast in loving the lost son).

In a sense, Christians are not to be like the elder son who lacked any interest in “evangelism”, “outreach” or the “mission” to reach out with the Gospel of Love (John 3:16) to those whom we once loved as our own in the family of God.

**Within a fellowship of brothers and sisters, there are those we love ... but surely not with the love that stays only in good weather and becomes broken when sin interposes between the self-righteous and the straying sheep.**

### *(5) What an attitude!*

“... this son of yours ...” (v. 30)

What an attitude the elder son showed when speaking to his father!

The younger son was a sinner who turned back. Was the elder son in any way good in his personal witness of “righteousness”?

He put on a powerful display of multiple sins:

- Blaming the father for what the father did no wrong in showing his grace and love towards the younger son.

- Baring a heart hardened with anger and hatred, expressing an extremely unforgiving spirit of odium, declaring to the effect – “He is your son; he is not my brother!”
- Being self-righteous like the Pharisees in obeying the laws but not the Gospel of Grace – *“Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.”* (v. 29)

We are all human to face practical difficulties at times when witnessing with love to those whom we feel are “hard to love” or those who fall away from the family. **It is one thing to acknowledge the difficulty and our struggle with loving a prodigal who was once with us in a warm and caring fellowship; it is wholly another thing for us to outrightly disown the prodigal brethren and commit the same sins as the elder son.**

“Outrightly” is a strong word with synonyms like “absolutely” and “utterly”, yet it was exactly the manner of the elder son in completely (leaving no iota of doubt) disowning any blood relationship he had as an elder to a younger brother.

### *(6) Missing out on the joy:*

*“But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”* (v. 32)

It was a celebration time.

- The father was joyful for having his lost son back.
- The repentant son was joyful for being forgiven and feeling the warmth of his father’s love again.

- Alas! The joy was missed out by the elder son by the hardness of his own heart. He was not physically lost like his prodigal brother had been. However, while the prodigal brother had returned to a joyful reunion with the father physically and affectionately, the elder son became lost and lonely in the heart by his own choice to be away from the warm embrace of the father.

*“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” – 1 Jn 3:1-2*

Regrettably, the elder son did not know the father. In his self-righteous and Pharisaic conscience of obeying the father’s instructions (“laws”), he failed to see that the father’s love was extended not to him alone but to all his children. (In similitude, about Pharisaic self-righteousness, the point may be made that God’s love is extended not just to the legalistic Jews but also to the Gentiles, everyone else under the Gospel of Grace.)

As children of our Heavenly Father, do we often find ourselves detached from the warmth of the Father’s embrace by the hardness of our own heart with the unloving attitude of the elder son? Are we like the elder son, so near to the father and yet so far away in heart?

If we don’t feel “*what great love the Father has lavished on us,*” it is not for us to blame the Father. We should look into our own heart for the reason.

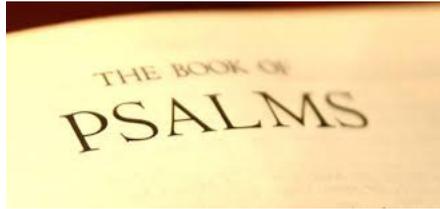
*John Lee*

---

## Tribute

---

Recently, I entered into the reading of Psalms, which were written not merely as poems but as songs for singing. For some reasons, I couldn't really identify with any particular Psalms.



Usually when I read a book in the bible, something will jump out and speak to me. It is only till today did I understand why nothing spoke.

I have my own Psalms to respond to.

Today, I randomly picked a contemporary Christian song instead of my usual playlist of contemporary music to warm up and somehow, parts of the lyrics in the song spoke to me. It's not a new song and I heard it before. Yet this time, certain words in the song shouted out to me. In the empty studio, I responded to Him through dance improvisation (spontaneous creation of movement).

*In You I find my worth, in You I find my identity  
Taking all I have and now I'm laying it at Your feet  
You have every failure God, and You'll have every victory*

From the decision of putting up a Christmas dance item to the process of executing it, it has been a faith journey. Nobody in their right mind with barely 2 years of dance experience in the classical dance genre (ballet/[contemporary](#)) with no prior dance background would dare put up a solo performance. However, God has been leading me throughout my 2 years of learning, putting me in the right places and in the favor of people who possess the ability to help me better my craft. I have

been told by more than one that the improvement I made has been startling. That I am still making vast improvement.

The coming Christmas dance item is my tribute to Him.

I place high expectations and demands on myself in this performance because He deserves the best. Along the way, some had advised me to tone things down a little as God sees the heart. Maybe they think I am being showy? Some people do think dance as showy, right? Well, I particularly chose [contemporary](#) as the dance genre to perform in as it is an art form that speaks the expression of the body, mind and soul, requiring raw emotions. It hides nothing.

It is my desire to offer an honest unblemished sacrifice up at the altar and nothing short will cut it. God saw my desire and arranged to have a professional in the field to guide me, teaching me the ropes of the trade as well as creative ways of working around the space constraints in the stage while maintaining the ability of presenting His freedom, grace, beauty and infinity to the audience.

This sharing is by no way a summary of my faith journey. I don't really know what a middle age woman with an imperfect body structure (knocked knees, old and new injuries) can do for Him.



It's a lonely path  
but I am not alone  
because He is with  
me. He calls and I  
simply respond.

Alicia Wong  
20 November 2019

# From Singapore to Singaporean

## The Bicentennial Experience

### for our Dialect Uncles and Aunties



If you had not already known, now you should know that in the dialect congregation we have quite a number of history buffs. On 20<sup>th</sup> Nov 2019, they were keen participants on a

climb of Fort Canning Hill for the Bicentennial Experience of the historical milestones of Singapore as she celebrates her 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, counting from the year 1819 when Sir Stamford Raffles landed on our shores.

Ok, the dialect folk, comprised of mostly seniors, did not actually climb the hill on foot with climbing gear. 😊 They must be thankful to be blessed with a comfortable bus ride (with air-con and cushioned seats to boot) that took them to the doorstep of Fort Canning Centre where the special exhibition with the theme **“From Singapore to Singaporean: The Bicentennial Experience”** was held.

While the exhibition is publicised as a bicentennial celebration, which means relating to 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it actually “reflects on our history over a span of 700 years” – going back to the time of Sang Nila Utama, a 13<sup>th</sup> Century Palembang prince.



If you think that our senior citizens would be bored by lifeless pictures and fine texts needing magnifying glass to pore over, you are very wrong. The whole indoor exhibition (characterised as “**Time**

**Traveller**”) is all high-tech: A visual and aural feast of special light and sound effects with strobe lights, whole-floor revolving platform and panoramic screens on which the history of Singapore is projected for the audience to enjoy a great sensory experience. We saw a large group of kids with their teachers. They were obviously delighting in the experience.

If you think that Singapore history is boring, because you consider her as only a young nation, you are wrong. The whole highly visual presentation of the history spans 5 Acts (or parts), each Act being presented in a different exhibition hall specially designed for the show.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Act, there are actors on a rolling stage synchronising their performance to the audio-visual projection about the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Singapura Kingdom on the screen directly behind them. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Act, we meet Sir Stamford Raffles on the deck of a ship and learn about his comrades such as William Farquhar. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Act, we see rapid economic development (the good) bringing forth challenging social problems (the bad). In the 4<sup>th</sup> Act, we feel the pain of the British withdrawal and 3 years of Japanese

Occupation (including the infamous Sook Ching operation). In the 5<sup>th</sup> Act, we feel the pride in taking charge of our own destiny on the road to independence.

### Oh no ... it rained in the exhibition hall during the 5<sup>th</sup> Act!



😊😊 Everyone had an umbrella, and no one was complaining. The “artificial rain” that came pouring down was actually a creative design of the exhibition for us to reflect on how Singaporeans as a people did not flinch but stayed cheerful when real rain

poured down on everyone during our 1968 National Day ceremony as we saw in the screen presentation. After the “rain” was “fine weather” and we put away our umbrellas. What an experiential symbolism of Singaporeans’ perseverance!



At the entrance with the Palembang prince



Waiting area for groups to enter exhibition halls



School Holiday Outing for: Grandmother (dialect regular), grandfather, granddaughter, grandson



Getting to know each other



After the Bicentennial Experience: “Jin Jia Ho!”

700 years very creatively wrapped up in a lively and entertaining package!



Even if we just absorbed a fraction of the historical information, we now have the bragging right to say, “I have been there for the Bicentennial Experience!”

The Bicentennial Experience was certainly a strong appetizer that made us feel hungry enough to relish a good lunch with an additional side tour of the traditional fashion market in Chinatown Complex. Thereafter, we made our way back to church, inserting a short detour through Orchard Road for a preview of this year’s Christmas decoration.

A wonderful excursion indeed!

*John Lee*

# KINSHIP

There is a saying in Chinese, “家家有本难念的经 Trad. 家家有本難念的經”. Every household has its own story to tell and every family goes through its problems. (Idiom) It is no surprise that mine came in the most unexpected and somewhat wonderful way. Giving thanks to God!

<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. Exodus 20:12

My cousin and I (both Christians) embarked on a journey with our parents and auntie to visit our relatives in Hatyai (Thailand) in early October 2019. The objective is to visit my mother’s eldest brother and his family there.

My uncle has not been well and according to my eldest Thai cousin (a neurosurgeon by training). He miraculously survived major failures in his organs eight years ago. He needed 18 doctors to attend to him then. It struck me that my uncle could not attend my grandmother’s funeral because he almost did not make it to stay alive. I was just thinking how devastated he could have been as he could not see his mother (for decades) on her last breath.

I remembered my dad challenging me on this verse below and indicated that Christianity asked people to leave their parents and families. They asked for money as donations too. What kind of church and religion do that? Those were the days as I looked back, I couldn’t provide a decent reply to such questions as a teenager and a young Christian. You see, my dad said he read the Bible and went through scriptures of other religions too. It was a difficult situation then.

<sup>25</sup> “Large crowds were now travelling with Jesus, and He turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> And whoever does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be my disciple.” Luke 14:25-27

I give thanks to God that I was posted to an Anglican school and had the chance to start my journey with Christ; learning about Him in my own pace through the “ups and downs” in life.

I am also thankful to God for my parents, family and friends that I have/had all these years, especially those who are still with me or at least in contact with me. Some left or kept their distance from me as they could not agree with my

faith and even the choices that I made in life. On hindsight, I am glad to have known Jesus Christ. This is because situations changed and people do too.

So, will I be able to answer such questions if I am asked again after so many years? Well, perhaps not in a theological manner and showing years of biblical studies behind me. I think and know that I could at least provide a reasonable and simple answer. What relevance is this to the trip I had with my parents in addition to a prayer on my bucket list that I hope to be able to travel with my parents again and take care of them?

I learnt that this must be taken in context on the “Cost of Discipleship”. There are similar verses which would give a better perspective on what this means.

<sup>37</sup> “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” Matthew 10:37

<sup>25</sup> “Whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” John 12:25

It is to put God as priority in our lives and it does not mean that our parents, children and other people are not important in our lives. Sure, we should continue to live in the world and not be of the world. We will still fall and rise up again for God. We can always go back to Him because God has given us the chance to do so the moment that Jesus died on the Cross and was resurrected. He gave His life for us so that there is nothing else in this world that could offer us anything greater than His Love for us. Of course, there are more things involved on this subject matter which will include leaving behind our old self and putting on the new self in the Spirit of God. What do we want to do about it?

<sup>9</sup> “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” Colossians 3:9-10

We have been given this chance. Sometimes, I recall my parents asking me, “Eh! How come you didn’t go to Church?” What a difference when I hear that from them versus, “How come you are still going to Church?” Imagine if my parents read this article?! ☺☺



I realised that being with them matters as their daughter. The trip helped to show what I could do as a Christian and a daughter to them in my life. It does

not matter if I am accomplished or successful or not. (Well, I think it does help though success is quite subjective! At least, I am still doing ok, I think? ☺).



It was heart-warming to see my Thai cousins, cousins-in-law and their children (for those who could travel back from the different parts of Thailand/ overseas to meet

us) on this trip. Arrangements were made that we visited my eldest uncle and auntie every day when we were in Hatyai. It was one of the best trips I had with my family so far!

We do not know if there will be future trips like this one. The seniors are not well and a few of them have difficulty walking. It is our hope and prayers that they will continue to stay in touch and visit one another when possible (especially for those in Singapore).

My Thai Eldest Cousin, his wife & eldest daughter



My Cousin & her father (my mum's 2<sup>nd</sup> brother)



I reminisced the time when I told my dad that he gave good advice as he mentioned that girls should be independent financially and emotionally, especially in this current world. It does not matter if you have a family or not,

girls should learn to be strong and do good at all times. If there is a chance, I would have added that it was even better because by knowing Jesus Christ and being a Christian, it changed my life. There is always hope despite the failure of men and women in any circumstances in life. What would your choice be in the face of God's love for us?

The greatest reward came when my mum mentioned on the trip that one day, maybe one day, she will go to Church! Imagine the joy when my cousin and I heard that. It was a remark out of the blue and most unimaginable outside temple grounds! Humph!

I have not seen such smiles from my parents for a long time; amidst the grouchiness and nagging which happen so often. Yes, parents will be parents no matter how old you are. ☺

Everyone of us have our stories to tell. Many of you I believe, are like me, keep many things to ourselves. I am praying that you will be able to share your life stories with the Church (via The Vine too) someday. ☺

For many of you, who are in similar situations, do not give up! It is going to be tough. Yes, it is and it will continue to be. I waited 30 years just to hear and see such moments. I am unsure how long this will last. Have faith and continue the good works in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may have your struggles as we go through the various stages in life. Do continue to pray, serve God with your gifts/ talents and be assured that one day, just one day, there will be that "moment" when you know that God has been working through you to reach out to your loved ones for their salvation.

It just takes us to share who Jesus Christ is with them with your life. It is for God to do His work through us!

Giving thanks for the kinship. God bless!

*Joyce Tan*

# The Last Page

A **Shofar** is used for:

## **Battle call**

Numbers 10:9, Josh 6:4 -20, Joel 2:1, Jer 4:19,21, Jer 6:1,17

## **Induce fear & confusion in the enemy**

Judges 7:22

## **Proclamation/Announcements**

1 Sam 13:3, 1 Kings 1:34, Ex 19:16 & 19, Ex 20:18

## **Call to Worship**

2 Ch 29:26-28, Ps 98:6, Ps150:3, 2 Sam 6:15, 2 Sam 6:15 1 Chron 15:14

## **Announcing and ushering in the weekly Sabbath and yearly festivals**

More than just a musical instrument, it is like the US Calvary's bugle calls which signals attack, retreat, etc.



---

## **24<sup>th</sup> Nov** – Commissioning the mission team to **Nias**.

The team of adults with children will visit Pastor Michael at Tomorrow's Hope.



---

## **15<sup>th</sup> Nov** – Joint CG study on **Justification**

Swee Leong gave a talk for both the JWCG and TJCG in the BB Room at the 3<sup>rd</sup> level. More than 20 CG members turned up for the lesson.

