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06 Jan 08

Being in the way (Genesis 24:27)

Seven years ago, with the blessing of the Elders in Jurong, my family and I left for Vancouver. Seven years later, by the providence of God and at the request of the Elders, we have returned. These past seven years have been a time of learning. Some people say that experience is a good but hard teacher, and to tell you the truth, there were times, I prayed that I did not have to learn that much. In my first year of my ministry in Vancouver B-P Church, I knew exactly what God meant when He said, *"Behold, I have refined thee...I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction"* (Isa 48:10). In that first year, I learnt lessons that no theology professor could have taught me. I dealt with issues for which no seminary could have adequately prepared me. It was a dark period. However, in the midst of darkness, there was light. Friends lent their support through prayer and encouragement. A dear Christian sister wrote me a note that included this verse: *"If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small"* (Prov 24:10). I also remember what God told Jeremiah, *"If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"* (Jer 12:5). So we stayed and persevered not by our own strength and resolve but by relying on the grace of God.

In the last seven years, we have seen the hand of God blessing the work in Vancouver B-P Church. The church is united. The people – young and old – are serving God faithfully. David wrote about the fragrance of Christian unity. *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments"* (Psalm 133:1–2). And truly, it can be said of Vancouver B-P Church that it is infused this precious fragrance – the fragrance of Christian charity and unity, of mutual encouragement, of zealous co-labouring, and above all, the fragrance of devotion to God.

Why then do we return to Calvary Jurong? The answer is *"I being in the way, the LORD led me"* (Gen 24:27). When we left for Vancouver in 2000, we had no intention of returning; that is why we divest ourselves of our material possessions in Singapore. Even when Jurong was going through the tumultuous times in 2005, and as much as my heart felt for her, I had said to the Elders that I would not return until it was clear to me that it was the will of God. It was in late 2005, that the idea of my returning to serve in Jurong was first mentioned. I took a year (2006) to pray and seek God's will. And *"I being in the way, the LORD led me."* These were the words of Abraham's servant as he undertook the task of finding a wife for Isaac. He was in the way, and the LORD led him. But what does it mean to be in the way of the LORD? How can we know that we are in the way?

The way of obedience

First, we must be in the way of obedience to God's Word. Abraham obeyed God when he told his servant that Isaac could not marry a Canaanite girl. Abraham knew that God had chosen him to be His own. He knew that from Isaac shall come the seed of the everlasting covenant (Gen 17:19).

Right from the start, there were some boundaries that were set by God. Abraham obeyed God, and his servant obeyed Abraham's God too. The servant had to work within two constraints. First, he was to go to Abraham's family and find a wife for Isaac (Gen 24:3-4). Second, if the woman refused to follow the servant to Canaan, he was not to bring Isaac to the woman (Gen 24:5-6).

These were not options. The servant had to obey because the Master had said so. Dear friends, if you want to know and do the will of God, you have to start by knowing and doing the Word of God. Life offers many options. However, when it comes to God's Word, we do not have the option to obey or disobey God's Word. Christians, are you in the way of obedience? Or are you a token Christian who practises situational and selective obedience?

The way of prayer

Second, we must be in the way of prayer. The gist of the servant's prayer is two-fold: *"O LORD God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham"* (Gen 24:12).

"Send me good speed" simply means that he was praying that God will act providentially to bring about the right circumstances so as to accomplish His own purposes. *"Shew kindness"* is a plea for God to extend mercy to Abraham. The servant is praying that God would show mercy and kindness to Abraham out of covenantal love and faithfulness. The servant is saying – "God I have done all that I can do. Now Thou must do what only Thou canst do."

This is the character of prayer. We pray to God because we recognise that we are unable and God is able. We pray to God because we recognise our dependence upon Him.

Dearly beloved, if we truly want to know and do God's will for our lives, we have to divest ourselves of our self-interests. We cannot be praying for God's will for our lives if we have the slightest inkling of self-interests in our hearts and minds.

The way of duty

Christians often make finding God's will more mysterious than it really is. We regard the whole process as shrouded in some form of mystic experience that is only attainable by the 'super-spiritual' people. Genesis 24:27 teaches that God's will is found in the way of obedience. The key to knowing and doing God's will is found in the way of duty. To know and to do God's will is to do what God would have us do at this present time.

Abraham told his servant – Go to the land of my kindred and take a wife for my son, and *"he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor"* (Gen 24:10).

The servant had a place to go, and he arose and went. He did not stop along the way. He did not make a detour. He did not decide to go to another place. The servant did his duty. He went to where he was told to go. If Abraham had not called the servant to go to Mesopotamia, he would have remained where he was, faithfully doing what he had been doing. A Christian who is not faithful in doing what God has called him to do has no right to expect God to lead to another place where he can spend his time in sloth.

There was a purpose for the servant's going to Mesopotamia. It was not a holiday. It was not an adventure. The servant did not make this trip for himself. He was going for his master. He was going to find a wife for his master's son. And he was never distracted from that purpose. *"Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master"* (Gen 24:56).

Our Lord Jesus tells us that those who put the hand to plough ought not to look back because if we look back, we can never plough right and plough straight. The point is that God has a purpose for every Christian. Do not serve God with as little as you can get away with. Rather, put your

hands on the plough, set your eyes on Christ, set your affections on God, and serve *“the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul”* (Deut 10:12).

There was preparation that the servant had to make for his journey. He had a caravan of ten camels with gold, silver, precious stones and raiment (Gen 24:10, 53). The servant made all the preparations to ensure that he would be able to do what the master set out for him to do. Dear friends, are preparing yourself to serve God?

Besides the skills that can be acquired through training, the most important preparation that you can make is your heart. In Genesis 24:9, *“the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning that matter.”* The servant made a solemn promise. His heart was right, and that is why his going was right. His heart was right, and that is why he did not pray amiss. It is a privilege to be serving God, and God forbid that we serve Him unprepared and without the total consecration of our hearts.

When the servant finally brought Rebekah to Isaac, he was comforted (Gen 24:67). Do not discount what you do for God. You may think that what your service has no real spiritual significance. But who knows who you would comfort by your faithful labour for Christ.

Isaac was comforted not just because of Rebekah, but because of God’s marvellous providence, a providence that was brought about because the servant was being in the way – the way of obedience, the way of prayer and the way of duty. He was being in the way, and the LORD led him.

13 Jan 08

Last week, we celebrated the 35th anniversary of our church. What a blessed gathering of the saints to praise and worship our Lord and Saviour. Truly, all that our eyes had seen, our ears heard, and our hearts moved were – as the psalmist said – *“the LORD’S doing; it was marvellous in our eyes”* (Ps 118:23). And what can we do but to confess *“Thou art my God, and I will praise Thee: Thou art my God, I will exalt Thee. O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever”* (Ps 118:28-29). Due recognition must also be given to those who worked hard behind the scenes – Elders Willie Low and Mak Kam Wak and their team who planned, organized, and looked into every detail of the Praise Service and dinner; the combined choirs under the leadership of Deacon James How for their music; the musicians, ushers, traffic wardens, etc. Thank you for your hard work, and may the Lord bless you richly for all that you have done for Him.

2008 also marks a watershed in the history of Calvary B-P Church. The Reverend James Chan has stepped down as pastor; he will now focus his attention on the mission field, especially in Thailand. We thank God for his faithfulness, which has been a hallmark of his ministry. The measure of the man is his “stickability.” As a church, we have benefited much from his leadership, and we praise God for His servant.

Our pastor has left for us a legacy on which we must continue to preserve as long as our Lord tarries in His return. That means that as a body of believers in Christ, we must continue to press toward the mark for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul in his counsel to the Corinthians said that as God’s people, we are in a race, and we run so that we may obtain. And that requires discipline. God willing, over the next few months, we will consider the spiritual discipline of a Christian that is so vital to his success in his spiritual life.

The Discipline of Godliness

Once in every four years, the best athletes in the world gather together to see who would run the fastest, jump the highest, and throw the farthest. In 2008, the 29th Olympic Games will be held in Beijing, China. It is the dream of every athlete to compete in this world competition. All aspire but few make it, and from the spectator’s perspective, Olympic athletes seem to succeed with effortless grace, but the road to the Olympics is a long and arduous one – one that requires discipline.

I read that the average Olympian trains four hours a day at least 310 days a year for six years before he/she stands a chance to compete in the Games. By seven in the morning, an Olympic athlete would have done more than what the average person would do all day. One of the Japanese swimmers who competed in the Athens Olympics in 2004 swam thirty kilometers in the pool every day, and that was just a part of his routine training. Part of the Olympian’s success is the result of an innate gift blessed of God. The other part is discipline. Discipline is the key to the Olympian’s success, as in every field of human endeavour – sports, arts, music, etc.

Discipline is the Key

The truth is that no man can excel without discipline. The same applies to our spiritual matters, but with one additional disadvantage. While the Olympian and concert pianist can lay claim to some innate talent, the spiritual man cannot. He has no innate godliness. Every man is equally disadvantaged – we are all sinners (Rom 3:10-11). For this reason, discipline is the one and only way for a person to excel in his/her spiritual life.

Discipline for Godliness

The Apostle Paul told Timothy, *“Exercise thyself rather unto godliness.”* (1 Tim 4:7). The word “exercise” is *“gumnazo”* from which we get the word “gymnasium” – a place for physical training. The lesson is that believers must train and discipline themselves for the purpose of being godly.

Furthermore, the word for “exercise” has the added meaning of “training with no clothes on,” meaning to say that there ought not to be any encumbrances upon a person striving for godliness. Paul told Timothy, *“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life”* (2 Tim 2:4). The writer of Hebrews says that every believer must *“lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us”* (Heb 12:1).

What God desires in the redeemed person is the courage to discard every and any thing that would impede his pursuit of godliness. The first thing to discard is a person's self will and desires. Paul says that he brings his body into subjection (1 Cor 9:27). The Olympian runs hundreds of miles and devotes years of his life for an opportunity to run in a race that could be over within ten seconds. Dear friends, how much time and heart would you put into the race of faith with consequences that could last an eternity?

Rewards of Discipline

There are Christians who see discipline as a restrictive regiment that curtails their spontaneity and creativity. They rather be loose and lose their rewards. The truth is that the disciplined life is also a liberating one. To the disciplined writer, every empty page holds out the potential for a sonnet. To the disciplined artist, every canvas is a possible masterpiece. To the disciplined pianist, every keyboard brings the sweet sounds of music. And to the disciplined Christian, every moment of his life is a testimony for his Saviour.

But there is more. The Japanese swimmer who swam thirty kilometers daily did not win. I believe that only a handful of people will remember him. But even if he did win, the medal would count for nothing in the eternal scheme of things. The Apostle Paul asks, *“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible”* (1 Cor 9:24-25).

In the Olympics, the winner is the first person to cross the finish line and he receives a corruptible crown. In the race of faith, the winner is the one who finishes the race, and the crown is one of eternal value. So Paul exhorts, *“I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air”* (1 Cor 9:26).

Paul was convinced of the victory and reward that was his, so he ran. Dear Calvarians, we too have an incorruptible crown beyond the finished line. In the new year ahead, my prayer is that we would all discipline ourselves, run the race of faith with full confidence, and bring glory to our blessed Saviour.

20 Jan 08
The mind of Christ

Praise the Lord that we have seen an increase in the number of people attending prayer meeting. We have just begun our study on the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC). The WSC together with the Westminster Larger Catechism and the Confession of Faith form the doctrinal standard of our church. If you want to know what we believe and why we believe, we must at least know something about the Westminster Standards.

The Prayer Meeting is also a time for God's people to commune with God, to intercede for the church and other believers. The disciples of our Lord Jesus must have witnessed the effects of prayer that they asked Him, "*Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples*" (Luke 11:1). And our Lord did. Since then, the Christian's growing in faith and praying are inter-twined; as is his praying and serving; one cannot do without the other. Let me challenge you: make time for prayer in your own life, in your own home, and make time also for praying together with other believers in the church. This is the pattern of the first century church (Acts 1:14; 2:42). I am aware of the pressures that we face each day, so for a start: let us set a goal. If your whole family can be at the Tuesday prayer meeting, praise the Lord; if not, then let at least one member be present. Let your family be represented before the throne of grace every week. This is part of the spiritual disciplines that we must exercise in order to grow in faith.

We began last week looking at personal discipline as the key to spiritual growth. For the next few weeks, God willing, we want to focus on the discipline of the person. The first place to begin is the mind or the human brain. Someone made the observation that we are what we eat. We are also what we think. The brain is a most amazing instrument. It weighs about three pounds, about two percent of the body weight. But it consumes 20-30 percent of the body's energy (that means that if you want to lose weight, use your brain more). There are about 100 billion neurons in the brain, and each neuron is connected to the other nerve cells, and it is estimated that there are about one million billion (10^{14} connections).

Only the human mind is capable of creating and appreciating the sonnets of Shakespeare, the colours in a Matisse painting, or the sounds of a Bach fugue. With such potential, it sheds new light on the cliché that says that the mind is a terrible thing to waste.

More than just being endowed with the ability to appreciate sights and sounds, only the human mind is capable of having insights into the divine; only the human mind can know God and understand His divine revelation and will. As Paul said, "*We have the mind of Christ*" (1 Cor. 2:16).

With all the potential of the human mind, it is therefore outrageously scandalous that the majority of Christians today do not think like Christians. One writer says that "the Christian mind has succumbed to the secular drift," which he attributed to a loss of appetite for growth in Christ — a spiritual anorexia. The reality is that Christians allowed our brain cells to atrophy. We do not think biblically. We do not discipline our minds.

This reality is borne out in statistics. A study showed that the TV viewing habits of Christians are no different from that of non-Christians. The debate over whether the popular media should reflect or influence the values of the people is moot. Our values are shaped by what we think, and what we think is determined by what our senses absorb through what we hear, read and watch.

Do You Have the Mind of Christ?

The Bible says that every Christian must be "*transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*" (Rom 12:1-2).

God has given to us a new heart and a new life. But with regard to our thinking, as children of God, we must work with the Holy Spirit to be renewed in our mind. This is the discipline of the mind. In his epistle to the Philippian church, Paul says, "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*" (Phil 4:8).

Unless we want to relegate ourselves to be unthinking automatons, we have to exercise discipline over our thought life. To think biblically, Christians must exercise a conscious choice. To think biblically, Christians must also reject what is wrong and unbiblical. The disciplined mind chooses truth over falsehood, honesty over deceit, justice over prejudice, purity over vulgarity, loveliness over repulsiveness, good report over malice, virtue over vice, praise over denigration.

How to Have the Mind of Christ?

Stop the Trash: If the local reservoir is contaminated, you will never continue to use the water which you know is not safe. You will simply shut down the entire water supply. The Psalmist gives this advice for us who live in this entertainment age, "*I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way...I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me*" (Ps 101:2-3).

When the water supply is contaminated, consumers may have to resort to bottled water; the taste may not be as good; it will not be as convenient; it will be more expensive. Similarly, Christians have to look for alternatives to what the world offers, it will require effort; the choices will be limited, and they may be more expensive.

Read the Bible: It is one thing to stop immersing in the world's entertainment, but to think biblically, we have to have the mind of Christ. To have the mind of Christ, we must read the Word of God. In an interview, Gen. Tommy Franks (the US general who led the war in Iraq) said that he always travels with two things — his wedding ring, and his Bible. And he made it a point to read the Bible daily. General Frank's example tells us that it is possible even for the busiest of people and in the most stressful of situations to find time for the Word of God.

The psalmist states plainly, "*O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day*" (Ps 119:97). The simple fact is this — you cannot be influenced by what you do not know. To have the mind of Christ, you must read the Bible. William Foulkes, the hymn writer composed these words:

Take Thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray,

Give us the mind of Christ each passing day;

Teach us to know the truth that sets us free;

Grant us in all our thoughts to honor Thee.

Dearly beloved, the greatest gift that man is endowed with is that we can know God, think of Him and think like Him. May our thoughts indeed reflect our renewed nature and honour our Saviour.

27 Jan 08

We are coming to the end of the first month in 2008. Is it still a new year? Have your walk with God resumed its “normalcy”? Has your initial zeal and enthusiasm waned, and your spiritual life returned to its spiritual ordinariness? There is always the danger of Christians falling into a spiritual rut. One writer describes this as the tyranny of routine, in which God’s people are bound by a dull normality.

For the last few weeks, we have been considering the disciplines of the Christian. Every successful athlete is a highly disciplined person. Part of that discipline entails a daily regimen. The disciplined person keeps a schedule. There are essentials that he must do each day, and non-essentials from which he would not allow himself to be distracted. In the spiritual realm, the believer also has to discern what are the essentials and non-essentials of spiritual growth. An essential part of a believer’s spiritual growth is his daily meeting with God through the reading of His Word and prayer. Christians know this as Quiet Time or Personal Devotion.

For most Christians, QT is a five-minute exercise (for some even shorter) in which one turns to the Bible, reads a couple of verses, reads a short commentary on the passage, utters a short prayer; and that is supposed to be good enough for the whole day. No five-minute devotions can yield mature Christians as surely as no five-minute training sessions can produce Olympic champions. Personal devotion is a discipline that demands the investment of time and conscious effort.

Reading the Bible

A time of personal devotion begins with the reading of the Bible. Personally, I prefer reading aloud because in reading, we not only see but also hear the inspired words falling on our ears. The Psalmist says, *“Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me”* (Ps 40:6-7).

The psalmist says that God had opened his ears. The word “opened” in the original language means “to dig.” God had spoken, but the people had not heard. They were deaf. Instead they busied themselves with the externals of religion and missed the Word of God. Devotion to God is not manifested in the outward show of piety but in the quiet spirit of seeking God through His Word. Like Martha, they were *“careful and troubled about many things.”* Unlike Mary, they had not chosen the good part.

Meditating the Scriptures

The Psalmist also exhorts believers to meditate on the Word of God day and night (Ps 1:2). Many people have compared meditation to chewing. This is an apt analogy because meditating has to do with mouth. The word “meditate” in Hebrew literally means to “murmur.”

Like reading Scriptures aloud, meditating involves the processing of the Words of God audibly. In so doing, the mind is engaged because the eyes and ears and lips are all engaged. In the same manner, the heart will be brought in line.

Why read and meditate? Why should the Bible be a vital part of your life? The answer is that personal devotion is directly proportional to your spiritual growth.

- If you want spiritual revival in your life, read the Bible – *“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul”* (Ps 19:7a).

- If you want to have the wisdom of God, read the Bible – *“The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”* (Ps 19:7b).
- If you want to live a life that is pleasing to God, read the Bible – *“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether”* (Ps 19:8-9).

No self-respecting athlete would go into a race for which he has not trained. By the same token, as a Christian, you cannot expect spiritual vitality and revival in your life if you have not invested time to read and meditate on the Word of God.

Praising the Lord

Most Christians regard praising God as something that they do in a worship service on Sunday mornings. The Psalmist gives us a different picture, *“So will I sing praise unto Thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows”* (Ps 61:8).

Psalm 19:1-2 reads, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.”* This daily and continuous praise is in the realm of nature. Nature abounds with the majesty of God; it resounds with the anthems of His glory. Every tree that grows and every flower that blooms speak of God's goodness. Every new day is a testament of God's faithfulness.

Jeremiah reminds us, *“It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness”* (Lam 3:22-23).

Dear reader, each morning before you start your day, contemplate the magnificence of our Creator, the majesty of our God, and the mercy of our Redeemer. Praise Him for Who He is. Thank Him for what He has done. And worship Him.

Praise is the heart of devotion, and when praise reaches its apex, there is worship. The Psalmist compares his desire for God as that of a deer searching for the refreshing spring in the heat of the midday. *“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”* (Ps 42:1-2).

Do you thirst for God? Do you look forward with excitement and anticipation to the Lord's Day? More importantly, do you thirst for God every day? The tragic thing is that we live in a time when even Christians engage in spiritual things flippantly.

I see this attitude in adults, teenagers and children in church on the Lord's Day, where there is an incessant chatter instead of a quiet meditating and waiting on God in preparation for worship. I would not be wrong to say that we are more respectful of our human dignitaries. I hear of adults who would rather sip coffee and chit-chat than be in the sanctuary. I hear worshippers who rather catch up on the week's news rather than listen to the preaching of the Word of God.

If this irreverent attitude is the norm in the church on the Lord's Day, I can only imagine worse outside the church on weekdays. Dearly beloved, beware of the contemptuous familiarity in things sacred that manifests in your life a lack of holy fear.

God invites us to “*come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb 4:16). By the grace of our Saviour, as one who has been bought by the precious blood of the Lamb, you may go boldly before the presence of God, but not brazenly.

That entrance into God’s presence is not a right; it is a privilege, and one that comes at a high price. Our Lord Jesus Christ walked the entire length of the *Via Dolorosa* (the way of sorrows) from Pilate’s hall to Golgotha for us; dare we do less for Him? The hymn-writer, Isaac Watts wrote:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,

That were a present far too small;

Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Personal devotion, as in all other areas of your commitment to Christ, requires discipline. I grant that in some young Christians, it may be a case of not knowing what to do during personal devotion; that is easy to rectify. However, I suspect that for most, it is a matter of not seeing the importance to spend time in the Word, reading, meditating, and worshipping; and that, I submit to you, is a heart issue, and one that can only be rectified by the tender submission of your heart to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

03 Feb 08
The discipline of worship

It has been a month since my family and I returned to Singapore. There are still many faces that are new to me; still many names that I have to match to the right faces. The first month has been for me a time of observation. Calvary B-P Church has changed in the seven years that I have been away. Changes are part and parcel of life and growth. However, there are some things that cannot and ought not to change, chief among which is our worship of God. I am glad to note that the way of worship has not changed. However, like all things familiar, it is easy to take our worship and make it lackadaisical. It is also easy to allow our attitude of worship to lapse into a routine of just showing up. The body is in church but the heart and mind are somewhere else.

Few people have the opportunity to walk into a room of over 6,000 people who are gathered for one single purpose. You would have expected the place to be full of chatter; there was none. Instead, there was hushed silence throughout the auditorium. The sweet notes from the organ floated around the building. Some people were reading the Scriptures. Others were praying. No jesting. No idle chatting. No loitering in the aisles or outside the doors. Is that possible? Yes! Because the people knew that they were there for one purpose — to worship God.

Granted the majority were students in a Christian university who would earn a stiff reprimand and may be a couple of demerit points if they violated the decorum and solemnity of the worship service. However, if we remember whose presence we are coming into when we worship, we would have that same reverent and solemn attitude.

We worship because it is God's command. We worship because it is God who seeks the true worshipper. Our Lord Jesus says, "*The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him*" (John 4:23). That means that the one who truly worships God is the one who worships Him in spirit and in truth. Worship is work. Like all work worth doing and doing well, to worship in a manner that pleases God requires several things.

Preparation: Worship requires the preparation of the minister and the worshippers. The worst thing that could happen on a Lord's Day morning are really spin-offs from Saturday nights. Some families have more fights on a Sunday morning than any other day of the week. Why? It all begins with a late Saturday night. Then, the alarm clock did not ring. So there was the rush for the bathroom. Baby brother had made a mess of his breakfast. Sister was fussing that she has nothing to wear. Mom was cleaning up the baby's mess, helping sister to pick up her dress, but Daddy was yelling because his shirt was not pressed and his Bible is missing. Is that a typical Sunday morning for your family? A lot of words have been exchanged, but there was no prayer to prepare the hearts for worship.

Most of the problems Christians face on Sunday morning can be avoided if they remember the Lord's Day worship service on Saturday evening. Pick up the clothes on Saturday night before you go to bed (and if you are like me, with only blue and white shirts in my wardrobe, the job is very easy). Go to bed early. Rise early. Prepare your children with prayer.

One Puritan writer puts it this way, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Christian! Betake thyself to thy chamber on the Saturday night [i.e. sleep early]...The oven of thine heart thus baked, as it were, overnight, would be easily heated the next morning...If thou wouldst thus leave thy heart with God on the Saturday night, thou shouldst find it with Him in the Lord's Day morning."

Anticipation: Anticipation is a natural outcome of preparation. Anticipation is a heart prepared to meet God. This is why it is important to pray for yourself, the preacher, the worship leader, the musicians, and every one who has a part to play in the worship service. It is impossible for a

prepared worshipper to leave the presence of God empty. Come 30 minutes earlier and join in the pre-service prayer meeting.

Needless to say, the preacher, the worship leader and the musicians must be even more prepared to serve God. An ill-prepared worship leader or musician is doing a great disservice. Bad preparation stifles, if not kills, the spirit of worship.

The preacher, who is God's mouth-piece, must come with heart and mind all ready to go. I shudder at the thoughts of those who take the pulpit without study. For those who have the privilege to preach, remember that preaching is not to kill or fill time. Dear Calvinians, prepare yourself to meet God by praying for the preacher.

Participation: Come to worship with a resolve to participate. Congregational worship that is reverent and God-honouring is able to lift the soul of a man to heights which he could not have reached if he were to worship alone. Conversely, irreverent congregational worship can drive a man's soul into the depths of wickedness which he would not have gone if he were alone.

Participation in worship service includes singing and reading of Scriptures. Note what the Psalmist says about singing: "*Sing unto the LORD a new song...Make a **joyful noise** unto the LORD, all the earth: make a **loud noise**, and rejoice, and sing praise*" (Psalm 98:1-4). Congregational singing has two distinctives — it is to be joyful, and it is loud.

The eagerness and volume of a man's conversation is an indication of his heart's desire. Just go to a football game. The people would raise their voices to the oblivion of the rest. Why? Their heart and mind are in the game. When it comes to worship, our voices are reduced to a whimper. Why? Could it be that the hearts and minds are not engaged in worship?

The Work of Worship

Worship is work. That is why it is called a worship service. Let us go through our order of worship and redefine it with reference to work.

- The Prelude is the work of meditation – silently praying and reading the Holy Scriptures.
- The Call to Worship and Invocation is the work of submission and adoration – God invites us into His presence, and we come reverently.
- The *Gloria Patri* is the work of glorifying God. We lift our voices to praise God. This is a hymn that should be sung with the whole heart.
- Reading the Scriptures is the work of hearing. "*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*" (Matt 11:15). The Scripture is to be read "*for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*" (2 Tim 3:16).
- Singing the Hymns is the work of praising God and rejoicing in His presence. "*Make a joyful noise unto God*" (Ps 66:1). Sing also with spirit and understanding (1 Cor 14:15).
- Giving of tithes and offering is the work of consecration. The one who gives must first give of himself (2 Cor 8:5; Rom 12:1-2).
- Pastoral Prayer is the work of intercession. It is the pastor who leads in prayer, and every worshipper must engage in the prayer with silent or verbal agreements.

- The Sermon is the work of conviction and edification. It is the most necessary work of the worship service, and the most difficult as well. Stay awake. Keep the Bible open. Follow the Bible text. Take notes. Make application to your personal life.

Worship is work. It is the necessary work for the well-being of our souls, a work which requires our whole heart and soul. May our Lord help us to discipline ourselves to worship Him.

10 Feb 08
The discipline of Purity

On this Chinese New Year Sunday, let me wish you and your family a good and godly new year; for certainly, what is the point of having a good year if it is not also godly. Let me encourage you therefore to *“exercise thyself rather unto godliness...[for] godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come”* (1 Tim 4:7-8).

At the outset of this series on the characteristics of a godly man, we noted that a person who wants to make a difference for Christ in this present world must be different. Before we can change the world, we must not be conformed to it; instead, we must be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2). The godly man is disciplined in his mind, disciplined in his spiritual exercises both in his private devotion and public worship.

The Will of God – Be Holy

Holiness is the natural fruit of salvation, and sanctification is its natural course. Every redeemed person is set apart and exhorted to walk in the way of our Lord. As our Lord is holy, so we are. *“As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (1 Pet 1:15-16; 1 John 3:3; 1 Tim 4:12).

Sometime ago, I asked some young people if they would do God's will if I could show them from God's Word what was His specific will for their lives. The response was a little tentative. I suspect I would get the same reaction from Christians of all age groups. The reason for the tentativeness is that Christians often regard God's will as some kind of unpleasant assignment that He has foisted upon us, such as to be a missionary to Zimbabwe, or to be a preacher in a church in some remote town.

It is true that God has called some to be preachers and evangelists. But to do the will of God is really to be what God wants us to be, and the first thing that God wants us to be is to be holy. The point is this – if you are holy, you will be doing God's will no matter what you may be doing.

Paul wrote, *“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit”* (1 Thess 4:3-8).

One writer expresses the failure of a believer to do the will of God this way – “the man who carries on an act of impurity is not simply breaking a human code, nor even sinning against the God who at some time in the past gave him the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is sinning against the God who is present at the moment...This sin is seen in its true light only when it is seen as a preference for impurity rather than a Spirit who is holy.” A decision to walk according to the lust of the flesh is a preference for impurity over holiness.

The Work of Being Holy

We do not just grow into holiness in the same way we all grow old. Like wisdom, holiness does not come with age. So the Word of God gives us this commandment, *“Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come”* (1 Tim 4:7-8).

Dear Christian, it is time to exert yourself spiritually. Enough of sloth. Enough of lukewarmness. Enough spiritual mediocrity. Enough of being a spiritually average person. It is time to start being holy. Here are a few things to get you going.

Hold yourself accountable to some one: If you are married, your mate will be the ideal person. If you are a young person, you may want to look for a spiritual mentor. You can begin by asking this person to check on whether or not you have done your quiet time each day. This person must not be afraid to ask you tough questions. This person is someone with whom you can be completely honest, to whom you can freely confess your weaknesses. This is a person who will keep you on the strait and narrow path. This is a person who is committed to praying for you.

Be faithful in your spiritual exercises: We have considered the discipline of prayer and doing personal devotions. Pray for yourself. Ask others to pray for you. Study God's Word. Memorize Scripture. The Psalmist asked, "*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to Thy word...Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee*" (Ps 119:9-11).

Build your defences: One of the reasons Christians fall into sin is because they have been desensitized to it. The popular media had flooded our society with so much immoral filth that even believers have grown accustomed to having profanity and vulgarity as being part of life. Christians must never underestimate the power of the devil's temptation. Many a Spirit-filled Christian who says he will never succumb to the lust of the flesh is probably standing on the threshold of moral failure. King David fell into sin at the height of his career. He fell because while the rest of his generals were on the alert against the enemies, he thought that he was safe in his own palace. His guard was down. The sinful thought that came by way of what he saw in Bathsheba found its way into David's heart. David sinned, so could you! The way to avoid such a fall is to build strong defences to keep the enemy out. Parents have to be especially vigilant with what and who you invite into your homes through your television and the internet.

Develop a keen sense of God's presence: The Bible has many examples of men who were keenly aware of the presence of God in their lives. Joseph knew that when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife. He could not sin against God (Gen 39:9). David knew he could not kill God's anointed king even though Saul was wrong and even when David was presented with the opportunity (1 Sam 24:6). So sensitive was David to God's presence that he was guilt-stricken by cutting off a part of Saul's robe. Daniel knew that and he purposed in his heart he would not defile himself (Dan 1:8). Christians must develop that sensitivity to God's presence.

The world has enough examples and stories of Christians who fell in to sin and brought reproach to the name of our Saviour. God forbid that any one of us should be counted in this company. So, let us do the will of God and be what He wants us to be – be holy as He is holy.

17 Feb 08
The discipline of prayer

This Chinese New Year was the first in seven years that we celebrated with our families in Singapore. We had to reacquaint ourselves with some of the Chinese phrases that are commonly used when we visited friends and relatives. To the elderly, one would say, "have a healthy body." To the young, "grow tall and up quickly." To those who are working, it is the common "Have a prosperous new year." For believers, we Christianize our greetings from "prosperous new year" to a "blessed new year." But what is your idea of a "blessed year"? Is it the same physical health, and material success and prosperity that the world yearns for?

The problem is that most people only take care of the body and pay scant attention to the soul. A well-fed body with a malnourished soul is as useful as a one-ton tow truck with a one-litre engine. When the physical body is not exercised, it atrophies. Similarly, when the soul is starved, it becomes dysfunctional. E.M. Bounds wrote in his book, *The Essentials of Prayer*, "When the angel of devotion has gone, the angel of prayer has lost its wings and it becomes a deformed and loveless thing."

How true that is! The man who cares not for the Word of God in his daily life is also the man who cares not for prayer. The Christian who does not read the Bible will also find it hard to pray because the spiritual exercise is strange to him. When he is on his knees, he fidgets, his mind wanders, but nothing comes forth from his lips except perhaps a few platitudes.

Pray and Faint Not

Our Lord Jesus told His disciples, "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). There is a direct correlation between prayer and spiritual strength. This is why throughout the Bible, we have many exhortations to pray: Pray with the help of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27). Pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20). Pray continually (Acts 1:14; 2:42; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5:17). Pray for other people (Eph 6:18; 1 Tim 2:1; James 5:15-16). Pray with persistence (Luke 18:1-5). Pray for strength (Mark 14:38).

Pray when you have a difficult decision ahead. Pray also for the routines of life. Pray for the big things as well as the small. The main thing is that we must keep prayer a vital and integral part of our lives. When Christians do not pray, we short-change ourselves; we fail to avail ourselves of the power of the Holy Spirit.

I Call, But does God Hear?

Some may say, "God does not seem to answer my prayers." God always answers the prayers of the man who seeks Him with his whole heart. God told the people of Judah, who were by any measure, a rebellious and stiff-necked people, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you" (Jer 29:11-13).

Likewise, God has His thoughts toward us, and when we turn our hearts to Him, He will hear us. But prayer is not about getting God to do what we want. Prayer is coming into the presence of the Almighty and seeking to do God's will and walk in His way.

John Bunyan describes prayer this way: "Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God had promised, or according to the Word of God, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God."

Our Lord Jesus also warns about lengthy and eloquent prayers with the purpose of impressing others, "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matt 6:7). Prayer is not just speaking a great number of words. The more common problem here is that many are fearful to pray aloud because they are afraid of what others may think of their spoken English/Chinese. The drowning man has no concern whether his call for help is grammatically correct. Prayer is simply a cry from the heart of the redeemed to that of the Redeemer.

Teach Us to Pray

The disciples understood this need for prayer and that was why they asked our Lord Jesus to teach them to pray. They learnt the lesson on prayer, and this was evidenced by the prayers of the disciples after the ascension of our Lord Jesus. The first century church was a praying church because the believers were praying people.

We can be a praying church too. The school of prayer is open to every Christian. The only prerequisite is discipline. To help you along, here are some suggestions to help you to be a successful student in the school of prayer.

Prayer Meeting: Our church has a prayer meeting every Tuesday evening at 8:15pm. Come and pray with us and for the church. Let me encourage you – come with your family. If that is not possible, send a representative for your family. Let every family in the church be represented before the throne of grace at every Church prayer meeting.

Prayer List: Together with the prayer meeting, our church produces a prayer bulletin every week. The bulletin will help you to stay on focus when you pray. It will remind you of the things that you ought to be praying for. In place of a prayer list, use the church directory. Go down the list alphabetically; pray for a few families each day. Then as a word of encouragement, write a note or send an e-mail to the people to tell them that you have been praying for them.

Private Prayer: There is a time for corporate prayer, and there is a time for every Christian to withdraw himself into the closet and seek God on his own. There is no one fixed time that works for all. It very much depends on you. Our Lord Jesus prayed early in the morning (Mark 1:35). The time of prayer is not as important as setting aside time each day to pray. Personally, I find that the early morning hours are the best. At other times, I pray during my walks. The main thing to remember is that there must be a discipline in keeping your "quiet time."

Prepared Heart: "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matt 6:6). Our Lord gave this instruction for a purpose. If you want to be disciplined in prayer, you must find a place where you can pour out your heart's cries to our Saviour without distraction. God exhorts us: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10).

Prayer as Work

Most Christians do not think of prayer as work, but it is. Paul exhorts us, "Praying always [all the time] with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Eph 6:18). Note the all's in the Christian's duty to pray. Prayer is not something you do if you like it, or when you have time to spare, or only if you are good at it. Prayer is a responsibility; it is duty; it is work.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, our Lord Jesus, "being in an agony He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:44). His prayer was "not My will, but Thine, be done." Prayer was hard work. Lest we think the best

praying is one of great emotional outpouring, let me say that an actor can go on stage and exhibit great emotions, but he is still an actor. The best praying comes when the mind (intellect), heart (devotion) and will (determination) are united as one. May the Holy Spirit help us to engage and excel in this ministry of prayer.

24 Feb 08
The discipline of church

I praise the Lord for your faithfulness in coming to worship on the Lord's Day; that alone is evidence of your love for God; that you belong to Him. I praise the Lord also for those who see the need to be identified with a local church. In this day of wishy-washy Christianity, there are some church-goers who see membership in a local congregation as a burden. The doctrine of the local church – a group of believers in a specific location – has taken a beating. Today, more emphasis is placed on the individual's personal relationship with Jesus Christ than his role and responsibility as a member in the body of Christ.

Hitchhikers in the Church

To be sure, salvation is having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. However, we must never extrapolate from that doctrine to conclude that the Church – the Body of Christ – is of little importance to the Christian. Some one made the observation that the church today is "infected with a malaise of conditional loyalty which has produced an army of ecclesiastical hitchhikers." The hitchhiker's mentality is that the driver buys the car, pays for the gas, does the driving, and he is on just for the ride. So it is not uncommon for these ecclesiastical hitchhikers to church-hop, to show little commitment, to have no accountability in a local church.

God the Father, Church the Mother

Churchless Christians is a 21st century phenomenon. In the New Testament church, membership in the universal Church was expressed in participation in a local church. The two is never separated.

The 16th century Reformers placed strong emphasis on the importance of the local church. The subtitle of John Calvin's fourth book in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is "The True Church with which as Mother of all the Godly We Must Keep Unity." Calvin added, "The Church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and governs in the Lord both kings and commoners...Those who neglect or despise this order want to be wiser than Christ. Woe to their pride!"

The creeds that came out of the Reformation state the same. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that "No one can be saved out of the Church because *out of the church, there is no Saviour, and hence no salvation.*"

The Second Helvetic Confession states, "For as there was no salvation outside Noah's ark when the world perished in the flood; so *we believe that there is no certain salvation outside Christ*, who offers himself to be enjoyed by the elect in the Church; and hence we teach that those who wish to live ought not to be separated from the true Church of Christ."

The Baptist Confession of Faith teaches, "All believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches when and where they have opportunity so to do...It clearly follows that when churches are planted by the goodness of God they ought also to hold fellowship among themselves to promote peace, increasing love and mutual edification as and when they enjoy an opportunity to do so to their advantage."

The Westminster Confession of Faith also affirms, "*The visible church*, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel...consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and *is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.*"

Are local churches perfect? By no means, the Reformers recognised that there are churches that are more like synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, the consensus of every Protestant creed is that the local church is important. No one who claims to be a disciple of Christ – redeemed by His precious blood – would stay out of the body of believers.

The Bible on Believers

The picture of the believer is always presented in the Bible as being part of a larger body. He is never alone. He is a member in the Body of Christ (Rom 12:4). He is a saint in household of God (Eph 2:19). He is a lively stone in a spiritual house (1 Pet 2:5). He is a sheep among a herd under the care of the great Shepherd (John 10:14-16). He is a branch among many that sprung from the Vine (John 15:5).

The pictures are unmistakably clear. The biblical injunction is just as direct. *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”* (Heb 10:25).

The Discipline of Church

The early Church theologians were right when they described the church as the Mother. By her, believers are nourished with the pure milk of God’s truth. From her, believers receive comfort and mutual help. In her, believers find the warmth of friendship and encouragement. However, this can only be true if to her, believers give their commitment.

The Christian life is all about commitment. Every institution – marriage, family, church – that is ordained by God demands commitment. None of these will flourish if there is no commitment from its members. What are the commitments of the believer to the church?

The discipline of worship. This is the Christian’s first commitment. Some Christians misapply John 4:24 – *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* – to mean that they need not come to church to worship as long as their worship is in spirit and in truth. While it is true that worship is not determined by the physical location, yet it is also true that no true believer would stay away from the assembly of believers for worship.

One special aspect of worship is coming to the Lord’s Table. The bread and the cup remind us of what our Lord Jesus had accomplished on our behalf, and who we are in Christ. There is no greater motivation for our commitment to our Saviour than to have His love of Calvary rehearsed regularly at the Lord’s Table.

The discipline of giving attention to the Word. Attendance to the Word. In worship we give our praises to God. In giving attention to the preaching of God’s Word, we receive the spiritual nourishment for our souls.

The discipline of regular attendance. If God is central to your life, then the Church must also be at its very centre as well. In practical terms, your schedule must be dictated by your commitment. Even when you are on the road – for business or pleasure – find a church to worship on the Lord’s Day.

The discipline of membership. If you are not a church member, you need to covenant before God and find a Bible-preaching church and commit yourself to support the ministry through your giving and service, and submit to her discipline.

The discipline of service. *“We, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy... or ministry... or he that teacheth... exhorteth... giveth... ruleth... sheweth mercy... not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord”* (Rom 12:5-12). The Apostle Paul’s point is that every believer must give himself to serve God in the church. The church is a ministry of lay people.

May the love of our Lord Jesus constrain us to commit ourselves to Him and His church for the glory of His Name and for the good of our souls.

02 Mar 08

Make up the hedge and stand in the gap

God told the prophet Ezekiel that He *"sought for a man...that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Me for the land"* (Ezek 22:30). As the election of the Church Session draws near (26 April 2008), Calvary B-P Church too needs to look for faithful and spiritually mature believers to make up the hedge and stand in the gap.

"REASONS" FOR NOT STANDING IN THE GAP

I can think of many reasons and excuses that a person would give for not wanting to stand for election in the church session or to take an active role in the leadership of the church. To each of these reasons and excuses, I can think of a need and a passage of scripture why you should. And I also dare say that your reasons are not much different from that of Gideon and Jeremiah, and Moses when God called them to serve Him. Moses tried to convince God to send some one else to Egypt instead of him.

Who am I? Moses' first excuse, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exod 3:11). Your version of excuse, "I am a nobody."

God's reply, "And [God] said, Certainly I will be with thee" (Exod 3:12). It is not who you are, but Who is with you and Whom you serve that is of paramount importance.

Who are You? Moses' second excuse, "They shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them?" (Exod 3:13). Your excuse could be, "God, I do not know You that well."

God's reply: "I AM THAT I AM...I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exod 3:14). You know more than what Moses knew. He looked through a glass darkly, but you know the glory of God in its fullness.

They will not believe me. Moses' third excuse, "Behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee" (Exod 4:1). Your excuse could be: "The people will not see me as a deacon or an elder."

It was presumptuous of Moses to know how the people think. In any case, it was not his job to make the people believe, but it was his duty to obey when God has called. However, God responded by giving Moses a symbol of his authority.

The symbol of authority of God's servant today is the Word of God. "The gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom 1:16). The basis of our power to serve is from Christ Himself (Matt 28:18-20). God has given us more power than He gave Moses.

I am not eloquent. Moses' fourth excuse, "I am not eloquent...I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exod 4:10). Your version of the excuse could be, "Lord, I have no gifts."

God rebuked Moses for even suggesting this, "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (Exod 4:11-12).

First, it is false modesty on Moses' part to say that he was not eloquent. In Acts, we read that "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). Second, it was a mistake to think that God did not endow him with gifts. "As every

man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet 4:10). Third, to deny that he was not eloquent is self-deprecation, which like self-confidence, is the sin of self-centredness.

Send another. Moses' final excuse, "O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send" (Exod 4:13). By that, Moses was telling God that since there are many whom God could have called, God should use them so that Moses could be excused. Your reason could be the same, "God, not me, anyone else but me. It would be better if You sent someone else."

"The anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses" (Exod 4:14) because for all of Moses' protestations that he loved God, by his rejection of God's call, he showed otherwise. John Calvin wrote: "Nothing is more pleasing to God than to maintain the authority of His word, and that men should suffer themselves to be guided by this rein. God had pardoned [Moses'] slowness and unwillingness to the work; but beholding that he obstinately refused, He spares him no longer. Hence we are warned cautiously to beware, lest if God bears with us for a time, we give way to self-indulgence, as if we were permitted to abuse His patience with impunity." The Bible tells us that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam 15:22). As you think of the reasons that you can't serve, be careful that they are not excuses that you won't serve. But even in His wrath, God met and provided for Moses' claims of inadequacy, and just as He did for Moses, so He will do the same for you.

GENUINE FEARS OF STANDING IN THE GAP

Just as there are "reasons," I also believe that there are believers who are genuinely fearful of such aspirations to church leadership. Generally speaking, most believers are cautious about being a church leader. When we approach people to take up positions of leadership, the usual and normal response is some form of hesitation and reservation. And that is right because the Bible warns against being "many masters" (James 3:1). However, we must bear in mind this warning is directed at those who talk more than they know. The Apostle Paul also warns about the man who thinks "of himself more highly than he ought to think" (Rom 12:3).

So, in a sense it is right that Christians must not jump into leadership so freely. The one who thinks he can because he has a proven track record in the world is probably the one who will fail. And the one who thinks he cannot and has sincere reservations about his own ability is the one who will be used of God for His glory. The reason is that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Cor 1:27-28).

Paul realized the burden and the responsibility of the ministry. So he asked, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor 2:16). He gave this answer, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor 3:5). That is the right place to start as you seriously pray about whether you would be the one whom the Holy Spirit has impressed upon your heart to make up the hedge and stand in the gap.

09 Mar 08

Aspiration, position and motivation

As our church prepares for the coming election of Session, it would be wise to look to the Holy Scriptures for instruction as to why we need to go through this triennial exercise. There are several reasons. First, election to the session is necessary because the church needs succession. The Apostle Paul [the first generation] told Timothy [second generation], "*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men [third generation], who shall be able to teach others also [fourth generation]*" (2 Tim 2:2).

Second, the Session is necessary because it is the biblical pattern. Wherever the apostles went, after a season of instruction, they organized a group of local leaders. Paul told Titus, "*For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee*" (Titus 1:5). Paul wanted Titus to follow his pattern of appointed leaders to the local church.

Third, the Session is necessary for the proper functioning of the local church: as a witness of our Lord Jesus Christ, as a messenger of His Gospel, as an overseer of His flock, and as a defender of His truth.

the aspiration

"*This is a true saying, If a man **desire** the office of a bishop, he **desireth** a good work*" (1 Tim 3:1). By the phrase "true saying," Paul is stating a basic truth that requires no additional proof. The important truth is the necessity of continued godly leadership in the church. The Bible is replete with good and bad examples. The success of Moses was passed on to Joshua because there was godly leadership passed down from one generation to the next. The failures in the book of Judges were due in large part to the fact that there was not a faithful generation to take over the elders. After the deaths of Joshua and the elders, "*there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel*" (Jud 2:10).

It is important to realize that it is the sovereign God who calls a person to that position. No believer can and ought to stumble into the Session. However, Paul also says that the person must also desire the office of a bishop. The word

means "to aspire." It is also translated covet, and used negatively in 1 Timothy 6:10; "*For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some **coveted after**, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*"

It is used positively in Hebrews 11:16 to describe the faithful who "***desire** a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city.*"

The person who desires the office of a bishop is exerting effort to reach for, stretching forth to get something. The word describes a person who is taking steps toward assuming a leadership role in the church. He equips himself in the Word of God. He demonstrates concern for the church.

Paul also says that this person also "*desireth a good work.*" Literally, it means to set upon one's heart, and here it describes a man's internal motivation. A leader must be passionate about the ministry.

Paul, then, is describing a person who is preparing himself both inwardly and outwardly for service. There are some people who are externally equipped. They know the Bible well, but they lack a passion. There are others who are passionate, but they lack the devotion and the self-control of preparation. The Session member must be both – inwardly passionate and outwardly equipped for the ministry.

The position

*“This is a true saying, If a man desire the **office of a bishop** [episkope], he desireth a good work” (1 Tim 3:1). In Acts 20:28, “bishop” is translated as “overseer.” *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseer [episkopos], to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”* In other words, the bishop is one who has oversight of the church. The Presbyterian church does not have an elaborate hierarchical structure. We do differentiate between deacons and elders, but the differentiation is not for purpose of rank or status, but for purposes of economy. The elder, by virtue of his experience, is one who shoulders more responsibility than the deacon. The elder must also be one who is exemplary in his conduct and testimony. *“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.”* (1 Pet 5:1-3).*

The motivation

What Peter intimated above is in line with what Paul said, *“If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a **good work**”* (1 Tim 3:1). An elder/church leader should not aspire for the office because he desires a good title, or a good social standing, or a parking slot under the porch, or that he can be first in line for favours. The person who aspires must be that he desires a good work, meaning to say that it is honourable, glorious and worthy; but make no mistake, it is work.

Our senior pastor thus cautions that session members “carry grave responsibilities.” And they must be willing to serve, and *“not by constraint.”* Dr Tow also states the following:

- Members of Session must be faithful in their own devotional life, giving adequate time to prayer and study of God’s Word daily.
- Members of Session must be exemplary in attendance at Public Worship and Prayer Meeting.
- Members of Session must be prepared to attend all Session meetings, unless prevented from doing so by urgent and unforeseen circumstances.
- Members of Session must be prepared to participate in the ministry of the church under the direction of the Pastor and to devote due diligence, time and attention to the duties assigned.

“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Tim 3:1). To be sure, the work of a Session member is not glamorous, but it is good. It is good not just because of the nature of the work – it is spiritual work; it is work of saving and building souls. *“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”* (Rom 10:15).

It is a good work because of the Master for whom we work. He is good. A good Master and a good work deserves your good labour, and so *“let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not”* (Gal 6:9).

16 Mar 08
Qualifications

As we prepare for our Election of Session, I would encourage all members to take this matter seriously. Let me also speak a word to those who have been approached to stand for election. Before you decide, pray and look to our blessed Saviour. The responsibilities are grave, but it is a good and necessary work. Last week, we considered the aspiration, position and the motivation of the church session member. This week, we turn our attention to the qualifications.

The ministry of the church thrives when God's people are called and are moved to stand in the gap and make up the hedge. The ministry of the church is stifled when there are people who can but will not serve. However, more dangerous than that is the situation where there are people who desire to serve but should not. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Paul is giving a list of qualifications for those who will be pastors and elders. We can apply this list to those who will be Session Members. Positively, Paul says that "*a bishop then must be...*"

- *Blameless.* Paul is not saying that the session member must be sinless, but he must be one who shows a pattern of godliness. The blameless believer is one who constantly strives to walk in the path of righteousness in accordance to God's Word. When he sins, he is quick to confess and repent.
- *Husband of one wife.* Paul is not saying marriage is a qualification of a session member. Paul himself was not married. Rather, Paul is emphasizing the marital fidelity of those Session members who are married, and by inference the chastity of those who are not married.
- *Vigilant.* The session member must be watchful about his own conduct. He must be on his guard against sin.
- *Sober.* The Session member must be one of a sound mind. He is a reasonable man in the sense that he follows sound reason. He is one who controls his passions and desires.
- *Of good behaviour.* The Session member must be one who conducts himself honourably with regard to his speech, manners and appearance. One writer says that no Christian "can do good...by disregarding the rules of refined intercourse...the refined, courteous, polite person in the ministry, will always do more good than he who neglects the rules of good-breeding."
- *Given to hospitality.* The Session member must realize that the church is the business of winning and edifying souls. God's people are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves. God's leaders must take the lead in this area of ministry.

Negatively, Paul says that "a bishop must not be..."

- *Given to much wine.* The immediate context is the consumption of wine, but Paul's exhortation can be applied to the control of one's appetites. Paul warns, "*Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit*" (Eph 5:18). There is no question that a Spirit-filled Christian is diametrically opposed to a person who is drunk.
- *A striker...brawler.* Titus 1:7 has two similar qualifications – "*A bishop must be...not selfwilled, not soon angry*" (Tit 1:7). An arrogant, stubborn and overbearing man is the very antithesis of the meekness and humility exemplified by our Saviour. Such a man makes for

a poor leader. The Session member is to not to be “*lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock*” (1 Pet 5:2-3).

Who is the striker and the brawler? One writer suggests, “Look for the man who, when his mind is made up on some difficult and complex subject, takes the attitude that anyone who questions his conclusions is questioning God Himself! Somehow people of this stripe seem to have pipeline to heaven that the rest of us missed.”

Rather than being a selfwilled brawler, a Session member is to be patient, meaning that he is to be gentle; “*to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men*” (Tit 3:2).

- *Greedy of filthy lucre...covetous.* Covetousness and greed for material wealth have been the downfall of many of God's servants. Many have been hindered by money in their calling to follow the Lord Jesus. Session members must bear in mind that money, material possessions, social status do not stand in the way of their doing right and doing the will of God.
- *Novice.* A Session member must not be new to the faith. The word “novice” literally means “newly planted.” It pictures a young plant whose roots are still shallow, and whose stem is still weak, and one who is not prepared for the harsh elements. Likewise, a new convert may not be able to stand up to the rigours of the ministry. Paul highlights two dangers of the novice assuming a leadership position in the church. First, he may fall and stumble others along the way. Second, he is more susceptible to pride.

I also hasten to add that the new convert refers to those who are new in the faith as well as those who are old but still immature in the faith. These immature old converts are just as likely to be lifted up with pride and fall.

Paul added two more qualifications for elders. An elder must be apt to teach, and he must be apt to rule.

- *Apt to teach.* The Session member must be one who holds “*fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers*” (Tit 1:9). The Session member who is apt to teach must also be teachable. This qualification necessarily presupposes that the Session member must be a diligent and conscientious learner of the Holy Scriptures because he could not possibly teach others what he himself has not learned.

Paul is not saying that every elder or deacon must be a gifted public speaker. There is a diversity of gifts in all believers. Not all can stand before a crowd and preach, but at the very least, every Session member must be able to give God's counsel in a private setting, applying the Word of God to the needs of the individual.

- *Apt to rule.* The teaching and ruling ministries cannot be clinically separated. One teaches by ruling, and one rules by teaching. In 1 Timothy 3:4, 12 we read that elders and deacons are to be “*ruling their children and their own houses well.*”

This does not mean that the children of church leaders must be perfect. The Bible does not even promise that parents who teach their children in the way that they should go would definitely not depart from the instructions when they are grown. The Bible has many examples of godly parents whose children were wayward. But “*apt to rule*” does mean that church leaders must do their best as Christian parents to nurture their children in the holy faith.

All Session members will have a public ministry of the Word. This is not to say that they should have equal shares in this preaching and teaching ministry. Session members have to recognize the gifts that God has bestowed upon them. While not all Session members are equally gifted in the area of preaching, all Session members must be prepared to teach the Word of God if not to a large group, at least to an individual face to face.

As Bible-Presbyterians, besides these biblical qualifications, our Church constitution also lays down some distinctives which Session members must abide. Those who are nominated to stand for election to Church session would do well to study Article 13 of our Church Constitution.

Article 13: Election to the Church Session

13.1 Candidates shall satisfy the requirements listed in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and 1 Peter 5. Additionally, and to ensure better objectivity in selection, they shall fulfil the following conditions:

13.1.1 Demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt, and over a sufficient length of time, that they are faithful and mature members of the Body of Christ and faithfully devote themselves to personal prayer and study of the Word.

13.1.2 Attend public worship and prayer meetings of the Church regularly unless prevented from doing so for valid reasons.

13.1.3 Make a careful study of the Constitution, in particular the Principle and Practice of Biblical Separation and fully accept it.

13.1.4 Be willing to participate wholeheartedly in the ministry of the Church, with the Pastor, and to devote time, talents and resources in such ministry which shall include serving in the various departments of the Church.

23 Mar 08
Becoming the resurrected Christian

Thank God for your prayers during my time of travel. Praise the Lord for a first hand knowledge of the mission field. I was most encouraged by the ministries of Preacher Phan and his wife, Hao. They are both zealous in the Lord's ministry despite the difficult conditions. Please continue to pray for them, and that the Lord will prosper their ministries.

This morning, we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. A study of the Gospels would give us a unified view of the events surrounding this blessed event. Early in the morning, on the first day of the week, the ladies went to the tomb expecting to embalm our Lord, but they were met with two angels standing at the entrance to the tomb, and the angels said to the ladies, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen" (Luke 24:5-6).

Hallelujah! Christ is risen! The resurrection of our Lord Jesus would be the message of the first century church – Peter preached it at Pentecost; Stephen preached it before he was stoned to death; Philip preached it at Samaria; Paul preached it throughout Europe. The resurrection of Christ ought also to be the message of the 21st century church, and the message of every resurrected and born-again believer.

The New Life

God's eternal plan included not just the nature but also the timing of the death and the resurrection of His Son. In God's perfect plan, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus would take place at the beginning of spring, when the trees are receiving their new coat of green leaves, the flower piercing out of their buds, and the birds are returning from their winter hiatus. Signs of new life abound in spring, and Christians are reminded again of the new life we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor 15:22). Adam, by his disobedience, introduced the sting of death to humanity. Christ, by His obedience, removed that sting forever.

As one writer says, "The Bible is not a script for a funeral service, but it is the record of God always bringing life where we expected to find death."

The power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that gives us new life. The Word of God expressly points to the fact the redeemed person is a "new creature . . . all things are become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

The resurrection enables us to live differently because we have been remade and transformed. And it is a transformation that touches at the very core of who we are — our values, our attitudes, our thinking, our relationship with people, our perception of life situations. Christ must reign supreme in the heart of the resurrected man. His reality must fill our consciousness and penetrate into everything we do.

The New Love

The new life begins with a new love. The relationship between Christians and the Saviour is primarily determined by the extent of our obedience to His Word. "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

The question that every believer has to answer is this — “Do I obey God’s Word?” And we have to be honest with ourselves because ultimately, the answer to this question is the measure of our love for our Lord Jesus. I am afraid that there are too many Christians who love biblical truth, but they do not live it. There are too people who wear the label “Bible-believing Christian,” but they do not obey the Bible. They are too many who strive for the purity of the Word, but their works are dead. They are too many who quote the words of Jesus and the apostles, but they do not follow in their ways.

The new life in Christ necessitates a new love for Him and His Word. “If a man love me, he will keep my words” (John 14:23).

The New Lord

It will be a tragic mistake if we look at the resurrected life as just mere enlightenment of the mind. No man can satisfactorily justify the injustices we see around the world today. When a person is saved, he is not given all the answers to the difficult questions of life.

The good thing for the redeemed, however, is that we do not have to if we hold on to the fact that our Lord is good and compassionate. Some would say this is fatalistic stoicism. No! There is a far cry between stoicism and Christianity.

We must look at this from the perspective of a child-father relationship. A child may not be able to understand why the father takes a particular course of action, but he will always know that the father is good. In the same way, as God’s redeemed people, we may not always know why, but we can always know why we trust God who knows all the why’s.

Just as the child confidently slips his hand into the father’s palm when crossing the road, in the same way, we entrust our lives into the hands of our Lord, knowing that he will also bring us safely home.

And it all begins now

The Apostle Paul wrote, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (1 Cor 15:19). Paul was of course addressing the question of life beyond the grave. What is the hope of man, and the meaning of our new life if the end of it all is death? What, indeed, is the purpose of this new life in Christ if it does not go beyond the grave?

This is an important question for the Christian. Consider this, if the benefits of our faith in Christ do not extend beyond this life, then surely, it would have been better for man to seek instant gratification of every carnal desire imaginable. It would have been better for him to eat, drink and make merry. But the Bible states there is a life beyond death, and the future of every redeemed person on the other side of eternity is significant before God.

Knowing this truth about our future must surely affect our lives in the present. It makes the struggles of this life meaningful. It also drives home the point that the new life of the redeemed person begins at the moment of his salvation; the new life begins now. Eternal life is the life of eternity brought forward to start in time. The hope of the Christian is not in the future; it is now.

There are Christians who look at this life on earth with drudgery. To be sure, life on this side of eternity is full of trials and tribulations, as our Lord had warned us, but He also said that we are not to despair because He had overcome the world (John 16:33).

A Christian is not one who grits his teeth and endures the adversities of life; that is a defeatist. A Christian is not one who pretends that bad things are really good; that is a hypocrite. A Christian is not one who laughs himself silly in the face of sorrows; that is a lunatic. Rather, a Christian is one who lives with the assurance that God will take his problems and trials, his sorrows and discouragements, and weave them together for good — a good which he cannot see as yet.

It is definitely not the purpose and will of God for the redeemed to live defeated lives in the present and only to be equipped for glory in the future. The Apostle Paul said of himself, “by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor 15:10). He lived triumphantly, laboured abundantly while he was on earth, and now he is rested gloriously in Christ. Paul lived the resurrected life as God had intended for His people. May that be also true of us.

30 Mar 08
The servants know?

We praise the Lord for a wonderful week of meetings in our church. It began on 15 March with a Gospel Rally by the Mandarin Congregation. There were 25 guests who came and heard the Gospel. Let us continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in their hearts, and that the Gospel seed will bear fruit in due time.

We praise God also for the two evening services (Thursday for the Mandarin Congregation and Friday for the English Congregation) to remember the sufferings of our Lord Jesus. We praise the Lord for the good attendance.

On 23 March, we thank God that a good number of you turned up at Jurong Hill for our Easter Sunrise Service. It was an uphill task to get Jurong Hill for our venue for the Sunrise Service. First, our initial applications were turned down by JTC, but through much prayer, and with the help of our Member of Parliament, JTC finally gave the go-ahead. This probably will be the last time that we have the use of Jurong Hill as our venue. If you have a location which you think we can use for the Sunrise Service, please let us know.

This year, as in other years, we are required to have a permit from the police to congregate at Jurong Hill. But unlike previous years, the police wanted a synopsis of my sermon. I was informed of this requirement when I returned from Vietnam on 14 March (Please read Dn Peter Goh's report on the mission trip to Vietnam). I submitted my sermon outline on Monday morning, and the permit was given. I take the whole exercise as an opportunity to put the Gospel on paper, which I pray that the persons who read it will receive a clear presentation of who Christ is and what He has done for sinners. Praise the Lord for every opportunity to share His Word in and out of the pulpit, through preaching or in writing.

Here is something more about sharing the Word of God in writing. The *Daily Manna* has been a blessing to many outside of Calvary BPC. We are into our second quarter of our second year, and of late, the church has been receiving requests from outsiders for *Daily Manna*. One caller going for an operation was so anxious to get a copy of the *Daily Manna* so that he could read it during his recuperation. We have also received encouraging comments on the website on the promptness in which the sermons were put on-line.

Continue to pray for me as I will be ministering to Vancouver BP Church (VBPC) from 27 March to 18 April 2008. The purpose of my trip is to conduct VBPC's Annual Congregational Meeting, and the Election of Session. Pray also for the Rev. Colin Wong as he stands for election as pastor of VBPC and the approval of his work permit. VBPC remains as Calvary's mission outreach in Canada.

The blessings received by those who read *Daily Manna*, by visitors to Calvary website, by the old folks at Lentor Home and the Hokkien Fellowship, and by our mission stations are the ministries of our church that is made possible only because of your prayers and support. *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Cor. 15:58).

These spiritual blessings that flow from Calvary remind me of an episode in the second chapter of John's Gospel. The setting was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Our Lord Jesus was an invited guest, but before the wedding banquet ended, the wine was finished. This would have caused much embarrassment for the hosts. Mary, the mother of Jesus said to Him, *"They have no wine"* (John 2:3). Our Lord Jesus then told the servants to fill six waterpots with water. Each waterpot holds about two to three firkins of water. According to the Bible dictionary, a firkin is about 8

gallons (or 37 litres). In other words, the servants would have filled anywhere between 440-660 litres of water. That is a tiring job.

“The ruler of the feast...knew not whence it was.”

When the ruler of the feast drank the water that was made wine, he *“knew not whence it was”* (John 2:9b). The host did not know where the wine came from. But in parenthesis, we read, *“but the servants which drew the water knew”* (John 2:9b).

The same should be said of our ministry. The ones who enjoy the spiritual blessings of the *Daily Manna*, the church website, and the countless people in our various mission stations locally and abroad do not know – and they need not know – Calvarians who labour behind the scenes for their spiritual benefit.

Take for example the *Daily Manna*. There is a team of dedicated writers; we are not professional writers; we are not trained theologians, and most of us have full-time jobs and families to take care. That is why many of the submissions that I received through the e-mail are time-marked in the late hours of the night and some in the early hours of morning.

The encouragement is that our Lord has deemed it fit to take our meagre efforts, bless it, multiply it, and use it for His glory. The Lord, as it were, has taken the words written by our hands sweeten them when they were read by His people. Now there are discussions to translate the *Daily Manna* into Thai and perhaps Mandarin, and the blessings will be further multiplied.

“But the servants which drew the water knew.”

The ruler of the feast does not know where the wine came from, but the servants which drew the water knew. The servants were fully aware of who He was that turned plain water into sweet wine, and they never claimed credit for what they did not do. The servants knew our Lord Jesus was the fountain of spiritual blessing.

Likewise, the recipients of God's blessings through Calvary need not know the source of blessing, but all of you who serve know. That knowledge is good enough for all who serve the Lord. Like the servants who drew the water, we dare not claim glory which belongs to God alone. As God's servants, we are happy just to be that channel of blessing.

That knowledge that Jesus could turn water into wine must also surely be a great encouragement to the servants. That knowledge must also surely motivate us in our service for Him. If we would see the power and glory of our Lord Jesus, we must enter whole-heartedly into His service, in the lowliest of tasks and in the humblest of ways.

“Kept the good wine until now.”

The usual practice of a host is to offer the best first to impress his guests and keep the not so good till the latter part of the feast. In the case of the wedding at Cana, the governor of the feast commented that the opposite was true; *“Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now”* (John 2:10).

That should also be the way in our Christian walk with and service for the Lord. The initial efforts may be as good or rewarding, but as we persevere, we become better — better at what we do, and better Christians. One writer says, “There must be a constant progression in the

blessings of the divine life. We never get to the end of them; indeed we never get to the best. There is always something better yet to come.”

Sweeter as the years go by, sweeter as the years go by,

Richer, fuller, deeper, Jesus' love is sweeter,

Sweeter as the years go by.

I trust that the chorus of this hymn speaks of our desire: to keep us serving our Lord Jesus as channels of His wondrous blessings.

Lovingly in Christ,
Pastor Isaac Ong

---The End---