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Hearing the Master's Voice

A Book on Celebrating the Lord in All Nations

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

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How to Prepare a Talk or Sermon? An Introduction

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

Importance of Preaching on the Mission Field

People in Asia and Africa expect a missionary to be both a preacher and a pastor. I believe that this is the case in South America as well. Missionaries who are able to preach well are highly valued in these nations. So, every person aspiring to be a cross-cultural missionary should have good preaching skills.

In this short paper, I'd like to present an outline that I've followed in my preaching class to train young students to preach well.

Preparation

1. Seek proper spiritual mindset through prayer and understanding of challenge.
2. Know the general purpose of your task ahead.
3. Know your audience.
4. Know the occasion.
5. Know yourself.
6. Know your subject.
7. Limit your subject to the time on hand.
8. Formulate a proposition.

Organization

1. Construct the body of your speech. Remember that the main body consists of two-thirds of your talk.
2. Determine the main points:
 - Main points should be no less than two and no more than five in number.
 - Main points should be related to the proposition or the thesis to ensure unity and coherence. It is usually wise to restate the proposition as and when each main

- point is presented. Repetition will drive home the essential things that you would like your audience/church to take hold of and ponder over later on.
- Main points should be determined by the nature of the content; these should emerge from the text and context.
 - Usual length of the sermon recommended universally is three points!
3. Reinforce the main points with sub-points.
- Select material carefully to strengthen and to clarify the main ideas.
 - Use example for proof; use illustrations for clarification.
 - Use transitions between points.
4. A good body may have the following features.
- Emphasis on main points.
 - Alliteration for main points. Asian, African and South American audiences usually relish the process of alliteration, use of synonyms, contrasting pairs of words, and some colloquialism from the dialects!
 - Contrasting statements for various points raised. See the examples given below for the verse The Rich Young Ruler in Mark 10:
 - He was rich, yet poor.
 - He was good, but not good enough!
 - He had religion, but not life!
 - He was so near, yet so far from the Kingdom!
 - Color your statements with illustrations, metaphors, verses, proverbs from the ethnic context, proverbs from the Bible, etc., in order to clarify the points.
 - Quote the authorities, who are highly valued by your audience. Give a brief introduction in case such authority is not readily recognized.
 - Adequate repetition. Remember Asian, African, and South American contexts appreciate repetition, but bear in mind the time available, and so do not ever overdo it or anything else!
 - Humour should rather be sporadic, interspersed in appropriate place and contexts. Seriousness of purpose and the learning element should be helped by your humour, and not dim these important elements.
 - In other words, do not joke simply for the sake of joking.

Build Your Introduction

- The Introduction
 - Is most important.
 - Introduces the subject.
 - Proposition is presented: Aim
- A Good Introduction

- Must be interesting. Must create interest in the sermon that is going to be preached.
- Must arouse curiosity.
- Must be short!
- Must be simple and straightforward.
- Must introduce the message.
- A good introduction is like the cherry on top of a delicious ice cream.
- Types of Introduction
 - Background material from a text and/or previous preaching.
 - Recollections and familiarization.
 - **Proposition:** State your aim (Only an eloquent speaker usually succeeds in state and accomplishing the aims stated beforehand.)
 - **Question-Answer.** But do not embarrass individuals by pointing out to them and demanding responses!
 - **State a fact.**
 - **Use a Quotation:** “Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity” for the story of Saul. “Behind every dark cloud, there is a silver lining” for the story of Job.
 - You could make surprising statements also: “There is one question that no one can answer. It may take all of eternity and still it will not be answered. What is it? What shall profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”
 - A humorous statement: “He who lies down with dogs gets up with fleas.” “Am I a dog that come at me with sticks?” 1 Samuel 17:43. Dog or no dog, he did it!
 - **Exclamatory statements.**
- **How to Begin?**
 - Start with an attention-getting statement.
 - Establish common ground.
 - Create a need to listen to your subject.
 - State your proposition.
 - An initial summary of your main ideas may be helpful
 - Choose a good transition into the main body of your speech.
- **Prepare Your Conclusion**
 - Restate your proposition.
 - Include a final summary.
 - Present an impressive concluding statement or appeal.
 - Remember that conclusion is very important. No sermon is a sermon without a conclusion. Think carefully how you’re going to end your preaching. Young students should write it out and even memorize it!
 - Why is it so important?

- Conclusion helps you move people to act, to decide on the future course of action.
- All the parts of your sermon are planned and geared toward this end, to cause a reaction and response.
- A good conclusion
 - Is short.
 - Has cutting edge (Acts 2:37; 7:54).
 - Leaves one with a sense of awe.
- How is conclusion presented?
 - Summary of points.
 - Last point of sermon.
 - Anecdote
 - Application: challenge, “Therefore, let us ...”
 - Hymn, verse, poem could be used.
 - A Question could also be part of the conclusion.

To Conclude

Preaching is a very important to communicate the gospel to people who have not heard it. It is also a very important tool to instruct, disciple, and guide people about the Kingdom of God.

Do not ever aim at becoming a preacher because it will bring personal glory to you.

The Truly Committed Christian

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

Worldly Philosophy and the Philosophy of God's Word

There is a philosophy in the world, which is selfish in application: "Every man for himself." Self love and self benefit is the heart of this slogan. The Bible, however, teaches otherwise: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus teaches that the Golden Rule which says, "In everything, do to others as you would want them to do to you." (Matthew 7:12).

The idea behind this exhortation is to care for people and help those who are in need. This principle gives motivation to all Christian charitable work.

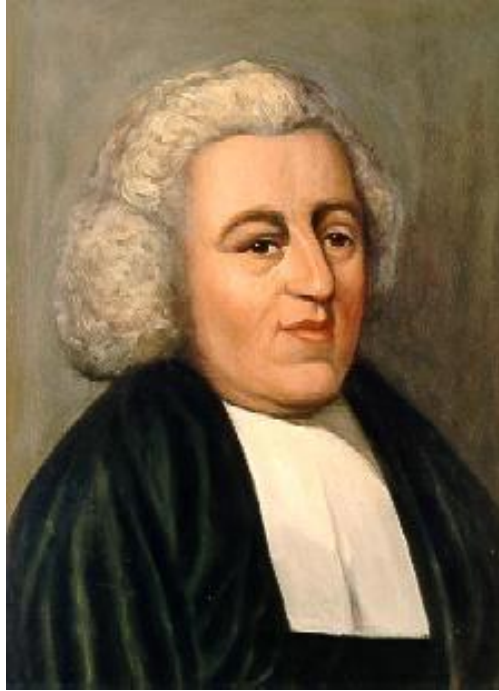
Encourage the Timid and Help the Weak

The Apostle Paul told the Christians in his day: "Encourage the timid, help those who are weak" (1 Thessalonians 5:4). The timid may have a psychological problem and the weak may have both physical and mental defects. Both are disadvantaged when facing a society that thrives on taking advantage of others, like "big fish eat small fish."

William Wilberforce and His Struggle Against Slavery

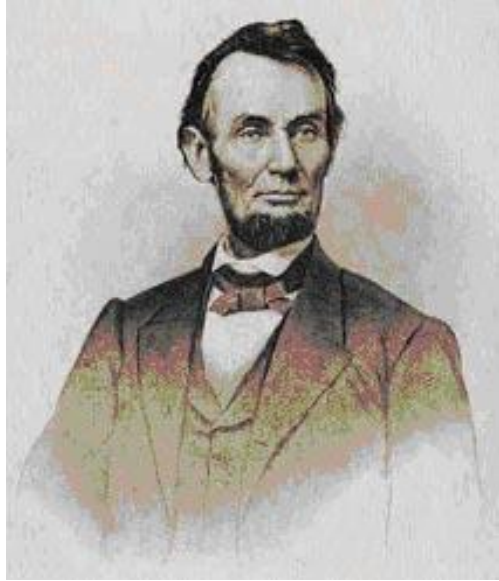


William Wilberforce in his day was concerned for a particular group of people downtrodden by society. They were the slaves-mainly the Blacks from Africa-captured or kidnapped from their homes and sold to rich white men who used them as "cheap labor" in their plantations and homes. These slaves were mistreated and mustered like animals in some cases. Wilberforce was greatly troubled by his Christian conscience and he spent his whole life fighting against slavery. A former slave trader and an ex-slave called John Newton joined forces with him in the fight against slavery in "Christian" England.



They managed to influence the politicians to vote against slavery in Parliament and they won. John Newton wrote the song, Amazing Grace, How Sweet the sound! This song continues to move the hearts of millions around the world, and gives great strength and confirmation to all those who come to Christ.

Now there is a movie honoring them and their work. In North America, Abraham Lincoln also fought to liberate slaves and succeeded.



These men were devout Christians who had a deep conviction about helping their fellowmen in distress. The slaves were the "weak" in their days and they were committed to help set them free. We may not have slaves today, but there are many enslaved by sin and Satan. They need to be set free from their chains of evil and evil habits. Let us help them by ministering to them the Gospel of love and power.

The Real Liberation from Slavery

The apostle Paul, "an old man and now also prisoner of Christ Jesus," said of a former slave Onesimus, that Onesimus became his (Paul's) very heart! Such is the power of freedom from material and spiritual slavery! Paul sends Onesimus back to his former master Philemon "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother." When people are liberated from slavery, both material and spiritual, they become so transformed that they become the most effective instrument of God.

Let us give the Gospel to the suffering world in bondage and sin, and help them liberate themselves from material and spiritual slavery.

Can a Missionary Be Demonized?

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

Can a missionary be demonized?

After all, a missionary listened to the call of our Master to follow Him and to go to the nations to preach the Gospel of Good News. How could such a person be demonized? How could a pious Christian be demonized? How could a faithful Christian be demonized?

To be demonized means to be tormented or oppressed and troubled by evil spirits. This is due to the invasion and inhabiting of demons inside the body of the believer. But a true born aain Christian cannot be possessed by a demon or demons. However, in many cases, demonization may even like possession.

How Does a Christian Get Demonized?

There are several ways that a Christian may fall into the trap of demonization. I'd like to touch on a very few items that could be the reasons for demonization among the Christians in this article.

1. Pre-Christian Hang-ups

Before coming to Christ, we may have opened the door to demons through the worship of false gods and other religious rituals. Secularized individuals who came to Christ are no exception to this process. They may not have worshipped gods and performed rituals. But, in their day to day living, there come across and get involved innocent-looking demonic activities.

Many believers did not repent and renounce these things. It is possible that the teaching they received when they turned to Christ focused enthusiastically on their current situation of accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. The teaching and discipleship may have overlooked their

past involvements with dark forces, and thus may not have taken appropriate steps to repent and renounce these things.

2. Ancestral Curses

The moment we mention ancestral curses many individuals think only of ancestral worship and consequent involvements. There is more to ancestral curses than mere ancestral worship that we read about and notice in some Asian and African nations. Ancestral practices that do not fall in line with the Word of God are most widely prevalent in families and societies. Individuals often think that since they have never been believers in such ancestral practices followed in their families and communities, they have nothing to do with these.

Many believers carry into their lives familial spirits from their forefathers. This may be in the form of genetic sickness and disease, witchcraft and demonic cultural practices passed down through the generations. While this is true of most tribal and clan practices called customs, people from the materially advanced communities are not exempt to these practices. These practices may take different forms, but the substance remains the same.

Every one of us is interested in tradition and given to building traditions. Traditions per se are not evil, but the motives and practices of traditions must be viewed critically to separate and eliminate things that are not approved by the Word of God.

3. Accepting Compromises

There are Christians, including missionaries, who compromise with the world. They do not take their Christian position seriously when things go wrong, when difficulties arise in the implementation of their projects, etc. In this process they open the door to demons by doing unholy things so as to please their friends or loved ones. For example, if you eat food offered to idols to please your non-Christian parents, you will be contaminated. This gives the devil a foothold to come in and destroy their spiritual life. Can they not show love to all and honor their friends, relatives and parents, in other ways without themselves indulging in unholy acts?

This world is full of compromises, and every time for this reason or another we are constantly enticed to making compromises.

4. Living with Sin

This is one dark area that Christians should immediately eliminate from their lives. Often, sinners believe that their sinful acts are done in privacy and secrecy and as such none would know of these. But our God has declared so many times that He knows our heart and everything

that we do in privacy and secrecy! Can we cheat our God and be friends with Him? Why have so many leaders, initially anointed by the Holy Spirit for specific gifts and roles in the Church, fallen in disgrace? They have assured and reassured themselves again and again that their private acts would not be known or that their co-participants in the sinful acts would not make their private sinful acts known to the world!

If there is no immediate repentance and total turning around, sinful acts certainly open the door to the devil and to the terrible and destructive process of demonization.

Christians should not tolerate sin in their lives. When you do not get rid of your sinful ways and habits, you give the devil a chance to trouble you.

Unforgiveness is another way the devil invades your life. That's why Paul tells us not to "let the sun go down on your anger" (Ephesians 4:26-27). That will allow the devil to take advantage of us. Missionaries, especially, should be prompt in putting this advice in practice. They face a lot of trouble on the trouble, and they begin to get angry. Anger grows in them, and along with this their heart could be hardened to the level of not forgiving the troublemakers.

5. Avoid the Use of Human Devices to Know the Heart of God!

Remember that to be free from demonic activity we need to confess all our sins and renounce any involvement in occult and witchcraft such as fortune-telling, palmistry, charms and amulets, etc. Examine your day to day activities and do your best to recognize which of these may have been based on assumptions that are not in harmony with the Word of God, and which of these go directly against the Word of God. Our Father has given us free will and intellect to pursue him with all over heart and soul.

We must maintain living a holy life and give no opportunity to demons.

The Need for Proper Missionary Training

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

On To Mission Field Without Training

One section of Airport Departure Lounge was filled with noisy church young people and a sprinkling of adults and a mother in tears. They were saying farewell and bidding Godspeed to a young, excited and committed girl. She, barely 20, was being ushered into the mission field. She had joined a Mission agency to begin her missionary career in Central Asia. Upon further enquire, I learned that she had completed her "A" level and worked as an insurance agent for a while. Then she felt the "call" to missions. She had no Bible School or any Missionary Training - just a few months of Orientation.

How Long Will She Last on the Mission Field, I wondered!

On To Global Business With Training!

At another corner of the Departure Lounge, some of us were saying farewell to another person - a 35 year-old bachelor. He was on a foreign assignment of five years to China, being sent by his multi-national firm. He has a post-graduate degree relevant to his job, been in the company for 8 years rising up the promotion ladder.

Now he is being sent by his firm to be the Regional Manager in Shanghai. He had also done his national service (compulsory military service in Singapore) and had the rank of a Lieutenant!

There was no doubt in our minds - those who came to send him off - that he would likely do well. His qualifications, experience, track record and confidence of his superiors were a testimony to his ability.

The Contrast Was Agonizing!

I couldn't help but think of these two people leaving Singapore to begin their new lives and careers in a foreign land. Then I asked myself,

"Why is that the commercial world would only send out well-trained, matured and experienced personnel overseas while the Church and Mission Agencies are in such a hurry to send out those who are young and immature and have no relevant training to the mission field? Are we sending them to their 'deaths'? Are we being fair to them? Would the army send out soldiers without training to the war zone or battlefield?"

The answer is obviously "No." Then why are we sending our Christian soldiers to the spiritual battlefield without proper and relevant training?

Simple Training With Good Knowledge -- Not Enough!

Here is yet another story that tells us that simple training with good knowledge is not adequate.

Fresh from Bible College (after 4 years' study of Bible and Theology), the young missionary arrived at the tribal village for his missionary service. Full of 'faith' and excitement, yet with much apprehension he approached his new field philosophically. After all, he didn't know what to expect. Nor did he know exactly what to do. Nor did he know exactly what to do. This was a whole new ball game altogether.

He and his partner were the only Christians and missionaries in this pagan village. Getting to know the people and culture was fun, but learning the language was quite a task.

But he wasn't quite prepared for the shock that awaited him a few weeks later. No, that's quite an understatement!

A Terrible Encounter!

While walking towards the center of the village, where all the 'official' activities were held, he came across a commotion. There seemed to be a religious ceremony taking place, where almost the whole village was gathered. Many were in their 'funny' religious costumes, with painted faces and all the usual paraphernalia.

Then he saw the ghastly sight! In the middle of the circle with all the chanting and the drums rolling was a weird looking guy jumping like a monkey and uttering screeches and mumbo-jumbos - to the chorus of screaming women. "What's going on here?" he thought, as he drew near.

Then it happened. The witchdoctor had heard about him and his partner, coming to 'evangelize' their village. Observing his approach, the witchdoctor suddenly stopped his mumbo-jumbo stuff and pointing at him, said: "You! Come here. If you Jesus is so great, come and challenge me!"

Immediately he went into a trance and began to exhibit black magic and witchcraft power,' to the roar and approval of the villagers.

The young missionary was stunned. No - paralyzed! He didn't expect such a rude confrontation - not so soon anyway. As if in a dream, he heard the witchdoctor say, 'Show me your power! Let us all see what you can do!'

What can I do? Lord, I don't know what to do? My Bible School didn't teach me such things. I only learned Bible and theology.

What, if you were that young missionary? What would you do?

I was that young missionary over 40 years ago. I did not know what to do. What an embarrassment! I do not want this happen to any of our young missionaries that we train and exhort them to go on to the mission field. So, now I encourage that all students learn about spiritual warfare and practice it boldly!

Church Planting

"Why Must I Join a Church?"

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

A Question Raised on the Field

Often a new Christian or a seeker asks the missionary on the field a very important question: "Why must I join a church?" Is this not enough for him or her to worship the Lord Jesus Christ privately, in his or her own way and in secrecy? After all the Lord Jesus himself said, "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

A follow up question often is as follows: "Why must I join a church and be a member? Isn't going to church to worship God enough? Does it matter which church I attend so long as I worship God in a church every week?"

Church Hopping

Church hopping is a very familiar phenomenon in places where there is more than one church. The proliferation of independent denominations as well as the competition between established denominations to attract new Christians to their fold further accentuate the problem.

Our missionary training needs to identify and discuss the reasons for the believers to join a church and be an active part of the church.

What Does It Mean "To Join a Church"?

To "join a church" means to put in our roots there and be part of that community in serving God and honoring Him with our gifts. It is basically a commitment to the Lord through the visible community meeting in His name. It is an expression of loyalty and faithfulness to God in ministering to Him and His people. It is also a viable to witness to outsiders that there is a church -the Body of Christ-where people have experienced the reality of God in their lives and want others to know.

Some Simple Reasons

Let me give a few simple reasons for being part of a Local Church.

1. The Example of the Early Church

On the day of Pentecost, after they believed, the 3,000 were baptized and then gathered regularly to worship God (Acts 2:40-47).

Baptism speaks about commitment to Christ because it is in obedience to His Command. Baptism is the "entry" requirement to be part of the visible church, in order to become a "member".

2. Commitment to the Local Church

The 120 had been baptized previously. Now 3,000 are added through that same baptism. Together they are identified as a people committed to one another in worship, service and witness. The result: "Day by day the Lord added to the church" (Acts 2:47). God honors and blesses such commitment.

3. Loyalty to Christ as the Head

Christ is the Head of the Church, and being committed to the church as a member shows our loyalty to Him. Read the following verses:

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. Colossians 1:18

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27

The Church is the visible Body of Christ, and therefore commitment to the fellowship shows that we acknowledge His Lordship in our life.

4. Recognition of Authority Over Us

As a member of the church we submit to the Leadership God has placed over us. That shows that we recognize and accept God's plan for the church. Non-members have no allegiance or submission. In Hebrews, we read:

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7

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Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Blessings Flow From Obedience

Christians and Christian communities have been equipped with means to help the poor and the needy around the world through their disciplined obedience to the Leadership placed over them, a Leadership that seeks to emulate Jesus our ultimate Leader.

Faith Grows Unhindered!

Let the new Christian know for sure that his or her faith grows unhindered in the church. The freedom to be part of the community gives greater freedom to the individual under God.

Grace and Deeds as Necessary Elements for a Missionary

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

We Cannot Live Without the Grace of God

One of the things we cannot overlook in the Bible is that we humans, being sinners, are not good enough for God. No matter how hard we try, we are useless. It is only the grace of God that makes us good and useful. This is an important faith matter that the young missionary under training must recognize and apply to his or her life.

A missionary may be an adventurer not because he or she goes to unusual places to preach the gospel but because he or she steps out in great faith that the grace of God will abound in him or her if they obey the Word of God. The missionary should recognize that our whole life is a work in progress. And progress is made possible only through the grace of God.

Saved by Grace

The Bible says, "we are saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest any should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Sinners cannot save themselves, as nothing we do will be good enough for heaven. The grace of God reached down to us in Christ even when we were helpless and unable to save ourselves.

Serve by Grace

It is also this same grace that will enable us to serve God, to learn the language and culture of the people we are called to serve, and to be part of the community of believers. The Apostle Paul knew this, and so he said, "I do not deserve to be called an apostle...but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

This verse implies that God by His grace called us to service even though we are not good enough. His grace overlooks our frailty and inadequacies and makes us His servants. It is also His grace that enables us to serve Him. The spiritual gifts we have are gracelets -better known as gifts of grace (charisma). He imparts His grace through the release of gifts to enable us to serve God effectively.

We Are Strengthened by Grace

Paul told his young disciple, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:1). Serving God can be very demanding and the possibility of a "burnt out" is always there. However, God's grace is available to us to strengthen both our inner and outer man.

When Paul was undergoing much difficulty because of his "thorn in the flesh," he prayed three times for God to remove it. But God didn't. the reason: "But He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). God did not remove the thorn but He gave sufficient grace to enable him to overcome his difficulties. Paul experienced God's power in a new way in his weakness. His faith was also strengthened through this experience.

A missionary must realize that God does not always answer our prayer in difficult times. He does something better: He enables us to overcome them by His grace that we may be stronger in faith.

Having briefly discussed the necessary and sufficient element of God's grace in missionary living and training, let us consider the role of deeds in our missionary living and training.

We Cannot Live Without Deed

As missionaries and missionary trainees, we must recognize that we cannot live without deeds. There are many Christians (so-called believers) who say there are "converted" but do not show any evidence of their faith. They are more "worldly" than spiritual in their lifestyle and value system. They be "Sunday" Christians but certainly lack commitment in the way they live.

Prove Your Faith By Deeds!

The Apostle James says that such people are not true believers. His challenge to us as missionaries and missionary trainees is given in these words: "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:18,26).

In other words, we must prove that we are sincere and true Christians by our action! It is so easy for everyone to say, "I believe" but it is quite another to live up to that confession. Just lip service will not change anything-it certainly will not get us to heaven. And it will not enable us to live a victorious and satisfying life in Christ.

Some of the evidences of True Faith are as follows.

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Life Transformation

The first proof of true faith is the transformation of life and values: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things pass away and all things become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). New experience, new life, new value system. No missionary or missionary trainee can ever succeed without heeding to this advice, demand and requirement.

New Desire and Motivation

The caterpillar-ugly and greedy-eats leaves constantly. When it becomes a butterfly, it doesn't crawl any more. It now flies and eats honey. It is no more ugly but beautiful. Everyone notices the difference. So, is the born-again Christian. The Apostle Paul writes,

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

New Purpose and Goal

The unbeliever lives in the flesh and lives for the flesh and the world. The carnal mind is death, Paul tells us,

And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:5-8).

The Christian is commanded not to love the world but to crucify it:

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world-the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does-comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

The true believer lives for Christ and seeks to glorify God:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh- (Philippians 3:3)

A missionary's goal is to be like Jesus and to fulfill His high calling:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:10-14)

The Question Before the Missionary and the Missionary Trainee

The question before us is this: Are we true believers? Then have we the "works" to prove that? We must "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Hearing the Master's Voice

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

God has promised that He will answer us when we call Him:

Call unto Me and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not. Jeremiah 33:3

Since God is answering our call, it is imperative that we need to hear him in addition to developing a sensitivity to see, feel and recognize His answers. Hearing God's voice needs certain changes and preparation in the life of any individual who wants to follow his Master. Missionary preparation demands that this aspect is well grounded in all of us.

Age and Gender No Barrier to Hear God's Voice

At a very young age, Samuel learned to hear God's audible voice (1 Samuel 3). That changed his life and Samuel would never be the same person again.

Hearing God is an integral part of the Christian life. How can we know God's will if we don't hear Him?

The Lord Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice; I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

An Attitude of Expectancy

To hear God is to adopt an attitude of expectancy in listening to Him.

We can listen while reading God's Holy Word daily. He will speak to our heart through the inner ear of the spirit man. But we must expect to hear Him; then we will hear His voice speaking inside us.

The prophet said,

The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the Word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears... (Isaiah 50: 4-5).

Hearing and Listening Should Lead to Obedience So That We Hear More From Him!

To hear or listen also means to respond in obedience to what we hear. When God speaks and we don't respond, then He may not speak to us again. That may be the reason why many Christians have not heard or are not hearing God speaking to them.

Many times God warned His people in the wilderness:

If you hear His voice, harden not your Hearts. (Hebrews 3:7)

Our Lord said that His true disciples are those who "continue in My Word" (John 8:31). This word continue also means "to hold on" or "to obey His Word."

God Speaks to Us Through the Holy Spirit

God speaks to us also by His Holy Spirit. He does this by the rhema Word of God. When we "walk in the Spirit" and keep in step with Him (Galatians 5:16, 25). He will speak to us in His "still small voice." The Lord said, "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). The words *be still* means "to cease from all our strivings" and listen to what the Spirit is saying. It was while in prayer that Peter heard the Spirit speaking (Acts 10:19). While the leaders at Antioch were worshipping and ministering to the Lord, the Holy Spirit spoke to give direction (Acts 13:1-4).

What Is It Meant by "To Be Led by the Spirit"?

"To be led by the Spirit" is to hear what He is saying and follow His instructions. That is the pathway of success and victory. It is practicing the presence of God in our life.

Hindrances

There are several things that hinder us from hearing our Master's voice. God is always speaking, but somehow we are not listening, or we can't seem to be hearing His voice. The hindrances to hearing God's voice may be due to the following reasons:

1. Our ears are dulled.

This means there is a blockage-there is "wax" in our ears. People who listen to loud rock music soon lose their sense of hearing and become half deaf or totally deaf. This is also true spiritually: we can get so much used to hearing the wrong things so much so we cannot hear the God of truth. We hear so much negative things-internally or physically-so that we cannot discern the positive things of God and His Word.

2. Our sins dull our ears.

Sin hardens not only our hearts, it also dulls our spiritual ears. The sins of unbelief and disobedience are the main culprits. If you don't believe you can hear God's voice, then you will never hear. If you keep hardening your heart through disobedience then God may never speak to you again. What is the use of God speaking to you, when you have made up your mind not to obey?

3. Dulled Through Selective Hearing.

Some of us choose to be selective in our hearing and then do what we think we like. We hear only what we like and do only what we think will "benefit" us. That is dangerous.

For example, some people would line up for prophecy (like going to a fortuneteller) to hear what they like-that they will be prosperous and successful, etc. -but don't want to hear the conditions or the rebuke. So they will go from one prophet to another to hear the "pleasant" things only. This will open the door for deception to enter into our hearts and cause us to lose our spiritual sense of direction.

God wants to speak to us and He wants us to know His perfect will. But we must be ready to listen and remove all barriers so that we can hear Him properly.

The Christian Impacting the World

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

Our Lord stated that every one of His disciples is to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." In other words, He expects the Christian to make an impact on the world. Men are to be influenced for Christ as a result of the Christian's life and commitment to Christ. It means that the Christian, having experienced the blessings of God, is to become a blessing to all the peoples of the world.

This concept is nothing new. In the Old Testament, God had stated this intention when He called Abram. He said, "I will bless you ... and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3 NIV)

This Abrahamic covenant is also applicable to all Christians, because we are the sons of Abraham by faith. (Galatians 3:6-7, 14, 29). It is also because the purpose of God in Abraham was fulfilled in Isaac, and subsequently in Christ. Through Christ, that same blessing has come to and through the Christian.

Now the question is, how are we as Christians to "guarantee" that we will impact the world for Christ?

1. Keep the Vision Alive

God gave to Abraham the vision of multitudes like the stars in the Milky Way and sands on the seashore (Genesis 15:5). God kept reminding him of that vision, especially when things weren't going well (Genesis 22:17; 26:4). This vision kept him going even when the odds were against him. It inspired his faith.

Paul also had a vision on the road to Damascus. That got him going even when the chips were down. Standing before Agrippa at his trial he declared "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision ..." (Acts 26:19). What was this vision? He saw the risen Christ - yes; but the Lord gave him another vision in the form of a commission.

I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles - to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive (the blessings of) forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Me. (Acts 26:16-17 RSV)

The vision Christ gave him was that through him (Paul) many Gentiles will be blessed, as God promised Abraham. Thus Paul became an apostle to the Gentiles, which was also endorsed by the leaders in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:8-9).

We need such a vision to keep us spiritually alert and motivated in our life and ministry.

There is another reason: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18 AV). If we don't share our blessing of salvation with the unreached then they will perish.

The RSV translates this verse thus: "where there is no prophecy ("revelation" in NIV) the people cast off restraint". It was through prophetic revelation in the old days that people received the Word of the Lord. Usually this came through visions given to the prophets. In Samuel's day, we read, "In those days the Word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions" (1 Samuel 3:1). So God called Samuel to be a prophet and spoke through him.

Proverbs 29:18 thus implies that when God does not give His Word (be it through vision or prophetic revelation), the people are "unrestrained" - i.e. they lived without any restraint against sin and evil. In other words, to maintain vitality in our Christian life and to be effective in our witness, we need to always keep our vision alive.

2. Have the Right Aspiration

Paul's aspiration was "to know Christ and the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). He knew how important this was, as he always prayed for the Christians that they too may know "the surpassing greatness of His power towards us who believe" (Ephesians 1:19).

It is in knowing Christ intimately that we learn to trust Him more and thus be empowered to serve Him more effectively. "The people who know their God shall do exploits" (Daniel 11:32 AV).

The secret of Paul's power and authority lay in his intimate relationship with Jesus. There are no short cuts to spirituality and anointed ministry. It is found in the prayer (Luke 6:12, 22:40-43); and the constant waiting upon the Lord. (Isaiah 40:31)

A Christian's witness can be likened to that of a concert pianist. On an average, he spends eight hours daily practicing daily on his piano to stay "tuned" in his professional standard of performance. When he neglects it the public notices right away and his performance becomes mediocre.

When a Christian neglects his "closet" time and intimate walk with his Master, he does not shine as brightly as he should. The opponents of the early church noticed immediately the difference when Peter and John stood before them: "they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13 NIV). They certainly made an impact on the world!

3. Live with a Sense of Mission

To make an impact for God and on the world, we must also take the Great Commission seriously: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel ... make disciples of all peoples" (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). We must make evangelism a way of life, not just an incidental "outreach" program.

William Carey, "the Father of Modern Missions" as he is often known, was a cobbler. But he lived with a sense of mission. He was known to say often, "I am a Christian first, a cobbler second. As a Christian, my life objective is to win souls; I mend shoes to pay the expenses."

He had the right perspective. Often we are so obsessed or bogged down by our careers, we forget to realize that there are souls around us perishing. We become so self-centered and success oriented in our work, we fail to see people in need - they need the Lord. In this way we withhold our blessings from them.

The story of the irresponsible soldier seems so applicable to many of us: "And while your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." (1 Kings 20:40 NASV). In our busyness and frantic paper chase or career development, we often let precious souls slip through our fingers, sometimes into a Christless eternity.

There's nothing wrong with career development or paper chase. But we must keep them in proper perspective. We must have the right sense of values and set our priorities right. We must put first things first.

I had this call from a friend who had studied overseas and returned home highly qualified. He said, "I need your prayers for God's guidance. I've had two job offers and I don't know which one to take."

On further enquiry he said, "one pays \$12,000 per month and is a five-day week. The other pays \$11,000 per month and is a six-day week". To most, the choice was quite obvious, so why pray about it?

"But I really want God's will," he said. I promised to pray for him.

Two months later he revealed that he had taken the \$11,000 job. Noting my surprise, he said, "You know, I prayed about it, and I discovered that I could really serve the Lord in this job, while I couldn't do it in the other better paying job. Here I can share the gospel with my staff and colleagues freely. I have even got a Christian Fellowship going and people are coming to Christ. Praise the Lord!"

He has a sense of mission. He has direction. He is constrained by the love of Christ. He is one Christian who impacts the world.

Are there more like him?

Some Suggestions to the Young Missionary who is Beginning His Journey

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

This is Only the Beginning of Your Journey

I want to congratulate you for the successful completion of your studies. Your hard work has paid off and now you have graduated. And you are now ready to enter the field.

Remember, this is only the beginning of your journey in the ministry that God has called you.

A Word From an Experienced Missionary

As a veteran servant of God who has been in the ministry for 44 years, may I offer some pointers to help you along the way. These have helped me till this day, and by God's grace, I am able to look back and say, "Indeed, God is faithful."

1. Make Christ the main reason for your life and ministry.

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For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Phil.1 : 21).

This means giving your life completely to Christ and live for Him alone.

It is the evidence that you appreciate His love and what He has done for you (2 Cor. 5: 14 - 15):

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

2. Fix your eyes on Jesus.

Don't look to men; they will disappoint and discourage you. Keep trusting in Jesus for all your needs and direction. He will never fail you.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12: 2).

3. Take Time to worship and seek the Lord.

O God, you are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you,
my body longs for you,
in a dry and weary land
where there is no water.

I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.

Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you. Psalm 63 : 1-3

You must hunger and thirst for God like the deer pants for water.

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God. Psalm 42 : 1

You must deliberately discipline yourself every day to read God's Word and pray. The reason our Lord Jesus was always victorious is because of His discipline in spending time with the Father.

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Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1 : 35.

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. Luke 6 : 12

4. Always walk in obedience to God God's Word and will.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ..." Hebrews 10 : 5

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Luke 22 : 42;

But Samuel replied:

"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king." 1 Samuel 15 : 22-23).

Obedience is the hallmark of our love and faith in the Lord. It is the proof that we really mean business with God:

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? ... Luke 6: 46.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. Hebrews 5: 8).

May the Lord bless you as you go forth in His name!

Walking in the Spirit

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

Our Lord tells us that we "will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" (Acts 1:8). Paul tells us that He is the "Spirit of power, love and sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7).

Without the Holy Spirit in our life, we cannot live victoriously. The weakness of our flesh and the human spirit makes us fall too easily into sin and evil habits.

The bondage of evil spirits is too strong for us, and unless the Holy Spirit enables us we will not be victorious. So, "walking in the Spirit" is the only way to overcome the flesh, the world and the devil.

To begin with, how can we "walk in the spirit"? I'd like to take up two major points in this short paper.

1. We need to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit."

The word baptism means to be "immersed with" or to "go under" as a piece of cloth goes under the dye liquid to be fully colored. To receive the baptism of the Spirit, one needs to surrender totally to Him - to "go under" His complete control.

Paul illustrates this in Ephesians 5:18: "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit."

Just as a drunkard is totally under the control of wine, so must we be so full of the Spirit that He will control our life. When that happens, the Holy Spirit will manifest His character and actively in our life.

The result: we will display the "fruit of the Spirit" in us (Galatians 5:22-23).

Many want to be "baptized or filled with the Spirit" but are not willing to yield their all to Him. That means we must surrender our life, career, ambition, wealth, relationships, etc., to Him-all that we are and have. Not so easy, is it?

2. We need to be disciplined in walking with the Spirit.

The command, "Walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16) is in the present tense. In other words, there should be no time at all that we are not "walking in the Spirit."

The correct and literal rendering of Ephesians 5:18 is "be continuously being filled with the Spirit." It takes discipline and sincerity to want to be continuously walking under the authority and submission to the Spirit. Then we will experience the "freedom" (from sin and evil habits) that Christ has given to us (Galatians 5:1).

The words, "sound mind" in the King James Version of 2 Timothy 1:7 also means: "discipline." The Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Discipline.

Missionary Service, Remaining in the Fellowship of the Church, and Loyalty to Organizations

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

When the 3,000 new believers were saved on the Day of Pentecost, the first thing they did was to remain in the fellowship of the Church. Acts 2:42 says, "They devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching and to the fellowship..." As a result they became strong spiritually and vibrant and "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (verse 47).

These new believers were walking in victory and power because they continued steadfastly in the teaching, worship and fellowship of the church. Many Christians suffer defeat in their lives because they are not faithful to the Lord in remaining steadfastly in the fellowship of the church. Being faithful to the church is also a sign of loyalty to Christ.

Why is remaining in the Church Fellowship so important?

1. We receive the Spiritual Covering.

Being faithful members brings us under the spiritual covering and anointing of God's appointed leadership of the church. God puts His name there in His Church and therefore His protection and blessing are there. This is our spiritual protection.

An organization is not the church. Many Christians who are involved with ministries but not members of the church often get attacked by the devil. Accidents, misfortunes, sickness and disease may be some of the means the devil uses to attack them. Don't be involved in any ministry outside the church, unless you have the blessing of the leadership of your church. Remember, an organization cannot replace the church!

2. We receive our spiritual nurture there.

The church is where we receive our spiritual teaching, training and guidance. Our Lord started and built His Church, not to be part of an organization, but he cannot do so with the church. A Christian may choose not to be part of an organization but he cannot do so with the church. He is

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commanded to remain in the fellowship of the church, because it is built by Christ and He commands believers to worship in His church. Hence being faithful members of the church guarantees protection and victory.

3. We show our loyalty to Christ.

Christ is the Founder and Lord of the Church:

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16 : 16-19)

God commands us all to worship and serve Him in the church. If any organization takes any member away from the ministry of the church then it is wrong. An organization cannot replace the church. It is supposed to help the member to be more competent in serving God in the church, and not take members away from serving the church. Loyalty to an organization at the expense of serving the Lord in the church is in conflict with our loyalty to Christ and breaks our pledge to the church when we join as a member. Breaking a covenant is a serious offense in the sight of God:

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. (Ecclesiasts 16:16-19)

4. We acknowledge the leadership that God has appointed over us.

It is a misconception to say, "the church is the Body of Christ, so if we serve the organization, then we also serve the church." Organization leaders will tell you that. But it is wrong and not true. God has placed us in the local church to serve there under His appointed leadership.

In Revelation 2 and 3, when Christ wrote to the seven churches, He addressed the letter to the leader of each church. Why? That's because He respects the leader He appointed. In the same way, organizations should not and cannot take church members to serve in their organizations

without the permission and blessing of the leadership of the church. That would be going against protocol and professional ethics, not to mention going against Biblical principles.

When a member serves in an organization without the blessing of the leadership, he has no spiritual covering and will be vulnerable to the attacks of the devil.

When I minister in another church, I will not do anything without the permission of the pastor. I cannot just say, "The Holy Spirit told me to do this." The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of order and not confusion.

Even in the exercise of spiritual gifts Paul says we are to do things "decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). A Spirit-filled leader will respect the pastor of the church.

5. Our Responsibility in Giving to the Church

There is yet another important matter on being a faithful member which also enables us to have victory in our Christian life: our responsibility in giving to the church. The Lord commands us to give our tithes and offerings to Him and there is a curse attached if we disobey (Malachi 3:8-10). The command is, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse." In the Old Testament, the "storehouse" was the Temple. Today, the equivalent is the Church. Notice the specific command, "Bring the whole tithe." In other words, the complete tithe of 10% of our income must go to the Church and not to an organization or any non-Church body.

Notice God didn't mention "offerings" to bring into the storehouse. It is compulsory to bring the tithe into His Church and permissible to give offerings to organizations. Otherwise we will be robbing God in order to pay others. Preferably we should be giving both our tithe and offerings to the church, God's storehouse. However, based on verse 10, it does seem God insists on the whole tithe being given to the church alone and then offerings are not insisted on.

Members involved with organizations should take careful note of this command from the Lord! If you have been giving your tithes to an organization or any Fellowship and not to your church, then you are robbing God. You can give generously to any organization or fellowship, but you are wrong in giving your tithe which is reserved for God's Church alone!

Membership has its privileges but also responsibilities as well. To be a member of God's church also has its responsibilities, among which are serving God in the Church and putting our tithes into His storehouse. Obedience to His command brings protection and blessing. May we be good and obedient members of His Church.

Change of Name, Change of Destiny

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

Naming and Name Changing!

Throughout the Word of God, we notice that objects, places, phenomena and persons are named for some descriptive reason. For example, take the name Bethel:

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said:

"I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. (Genesis 28:10-18)

Bethel means house of God.

Change of name entails change of destiny in the Word of God

Another name change we read of is that of Jacob, which means "supplanter" or "heel-catcher" due to his being born catching Esau's heel. The name also implies being a "cheat, deceiver, thief". Calling anyone by that name is like cursing him- cheat, thief, deceiver. According to Proverbs 18:20-21, the power of the spoken word will activate the curse or blessing it speaks:

From the fruit of his mouth a man's stomach is filled;
with the harvest from his lips he is satisfied.
The tongue has the power of life and death,
and those who love it will eat its fruit.

When Jacob met God on the banks of the River Jabbok (Gen.32), he surrendered his life to God. The Lord then blessed him and gave him a new name- "Israel", which means "prince with God". From a deceiver and supplanter, he became a prince of God. From that day onwards, he would never be the same again.

This new name changed his life and destiny. From a crook he became the Father of Israel- producing 12 sons which in turn became the 12 tribes of Israel. The history and destiny of the whole world became affected by that change. From Jacob's lineage came Joseph, David and Christ. What an impact on history and the nations of the world they made!

The Story of Jacob-Israel

Let us examine the life of Jacob-Israel and see how he became thus:

There was a surrender and commitment to God. For over 25 years Jacob lived his own sinful, deceptive life. He had been cheating his own brother and others and in turn also got cheated. No end of trouble in his life. Then he met God in a special way in Jabbok. God wrestled with him until he yielded to the Lord.

Upon his surrender, God changed his name and life. His destiny was also turned around. The blessing and favor of God suddenly descended on his life and never stopped. He enjoyed long life, peace and satisfaction.

Hebrews 11:21 gives us an indication of his life. He worshipped God and walked by faith even in old age. That means from that day he met God, he had been faithful in his walk with God:

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

The above three points must be kept in mind if we are to see a new experience and to have our destiny turned around.

But more importantly, it is not just our wanting to change the name. It is God who must tell us to change our names. If you are naming a child, you should seek God for a name and not anyone else (not even the grandfather).

Names of Endearments

Those who have ever fallen in love and married their sweethearts will remember that during their courting days they gave nicknames to one another. These are endearing names which express their devotion and love for each other.

God also does that, as He is the greatest Lover of all times. He gave names or descriptions to some special people with whom He had a special relationship. For example, He Himself called David "a man after My own heart". He addressed Jesus as "My beloved Son".

The Joy and Tragedy in the Story of Solomon

The one special name God gave to Solomon at his birth was "Jedidiah" which means "beloved of Yahweh" or "Beloved of Jehovah". That was how much God loved Solomon which means "peaceable". All people referred to the king as Solomon but God called him by his special name, "Jedidiah" (2 Samuel 12:24,25).

Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.

Jedidiah means 'loved by the LORD'.

This name implies that God's desire was to draw Solomon close to Himself and show Himself to him. There was to be such an intimacy between them that no one in this world could have with God. That was why God personally appeared to Solomon twice. The first time it was to give him wisdom, wealth and greatness (1 Kings 3:1-15).

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

"Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for-both riches and honor-so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." Then Solomon awoke-and he realized it had been a dream.

The second time God appeared to Solomon was when he had built the grand Temple for Him (1 Kings 9: 1-11).

When Solomon had finished building the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do, the LORD appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The LORD said to him:

"I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

"As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.'

"But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?'"

People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them-that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them.' "

How pleased God was with their relationship. Solomon would have been greater and more blessed if he had continued that relationship.

Pride and Lust Bring Downfall

However, after 20 years in his walk with God and enjoying the goodness of God like no other men in history had, two things crept into his life that destroyed everything. Pride slowly crept in when he became more famous and more powerful. He started to marry for territorial gain-taking the daughters of the kings of heathen nations to be his wives. The attention he gave to his 1000 wives replaced his love for God and time with God. Pride and lust destroyed him, his kingdom and his soul. What a sad end! How many great men of God since then have also fallen due to these evils?

God's Love for Us Expressed through Loving Names

God also wants to call us by endearing names. He actually does, the moment we gave our lives to Him (Isaiah 62: 4,5).

No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.

But you will be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;
for the LORD will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.

As a young man marries a maiden,
so will your sons marry you;
as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so will your God rejoice over you.

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So let us not be like Solomon. Let us start well and end well. Let's remain His "*Hephzibah*" (My delight) and "*Beulah*" (My married).

Humility and Name Change

Another name change is that of Saul of Tarsus. After he became a believer and a preacher of the Gospel, he took on the name of Paul. The name Saul in Hebrew means "asked for". But knowing the history of King Saul who was dethroned by God and cursed, as well as his own experience of persecuting Christians and allowing Stephen to be stoned, he might not have wanted to be known by that name. The evil memory of the name Saul may have determined his change of name.

I think this is true of our experience. Some names do insinuate a curse each time we call them. Or we may not want to be associated with a name like Judas, Lucifer, or even Balaam. Whether God asked him to change his name or not, we are not told. However, knowing him, he would not have done it without prayerful consideration.

The name Paul means "little". Figuratively speaking, Paul would have considered himself "little" in the sight of man and God. It could imply his humble attitude towards himself like the Baptist who said, "He must increase, I must decrease" (John 3: 30). What we do know about Paul is that he was indeed a great man who achieved great things for God, yet he said of himself, "I am the least of all the saints" (Eph. 3:8) and "I am the least of the all the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:6).

I do think that it was because of his humility that God honored and blessed him. He had the sense of unworthiness in the presence of a holy God. He wrote to his young son in the faith, "I am the worst of sinners, yet God poured out His grace abundantly on me" (1 Timothy 1: 14-15).

Is it any wonder then that God used this humble servant so mightily? Paul was little in his own eyes but great in the sight of God. He thought and talked little of himself, but spoke highly of his great Master Jesus Christ. He was drawing people to Christ, and not people to himself, like some preachers do. Humility is a rare commodity these days and very hard to find in people. Yet God's promise is: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up" (James 4: 7, 10).

God's Heart Beats for Missions

Dr. Tan Kok Beng

We worship the God of Missions. God's heart beats for missions. We know that because He has revealed this in His Word

God's will is that all men be saved. Consider the following:

who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (1 Tim. 2:4-5).

It is not God's will that any person should perish, but desires that all men come to repentance in Christ (2 Pet. 3:9):

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Hence He commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30-31):

In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

If we don't repent we will perish (Luke 13: 3):

I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.

God Loves Us and Gave His Son for Us

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[a] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16).

God proves His love for all mankind by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die for all sinners (Rom. 5:8):

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

How can we not believe His love when He has sacrificed His Son for us? This fact must also make us realize that He wants all men to know Christ and be saved. If we are not involved in this mission of God then we don't really love God.

God Commands Us to Preach the Gospel

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. (Mark 16:15).

This is called the Great Commission.

Christian is a Supernatural Person - A New Creation

Remember that a Christian is a supernatural person, unlike others. The reason being that he is a new creation in Christ and has the power of God, the Holy Spirit, living in and through him. That makes him a "miniature" Christ, and therefore more is expected of him: he must live like Jesus!

Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:6).

This is our primary goal in the mission field.

Holiness Is Commanded of Us!

One hallmark of Christ-likeness is holiness. Christ is the Light and therefore His followers are also lights shining in this dark world:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out[a] the word of life-in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. (Phil.2: 14-16).

It is in living a holy and righteous life that we show the world we are different. Paul tells us that the Church is like a pure virgin and spotless, holy bride:

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. (2 Cor.11:2)

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶to make her holy, cleansing[a] her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Eph.5:25-27).

Thus the Christian is committed to keeping himself holy and unstained from the world. Only then can he make an impact on the world and qualify for heaven:

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Heb. 12:14).

Only in holiness can he have an intimate relationship with his Master.

The Reasons for Living a Holy Life on the Mission Field and Everywhere

God is holy and all His children must be holy:

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy. (1 Peter 1:15-16).

That is the divine standard; anything less is displeasing to Him.

God's calling and will is holiness:

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control his own body[a] in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. (1 Thess.4:3-7).

Not to do so is unbecoming of a Christian.

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The New Creation

The new creation makes us new people, so that the old life is gone.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Cor.5:17).

We have received the new nature of Christ and therefore must live like Him:

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Col. 3:5-12).

The power of God in us, the Holy Spirit, enables us to live a holy life:

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8).

No Excuse for a Christian Not Living a Holy Life!

A Christian cannot excuse himself for not living a holy life, because God's DNA is in him:

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9).

The Bible commands us to be separate-not to live and behave like those who do not know the Lord. We are to free ourselves from the contamination of flesh and spirit so that we may "perfect holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor.7:1).

A true believer is committed to living a holy life that is pleasing to God. Only then will we live in victory and abundance, enjoying the blessings of God.

Since there is always the grace of God as we seek Him, we not only serve Him and His creation on the mission field,, but we also help our own salvation through obedience to Him. God's heart is always beating for missions.

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