

03

MATURE AS A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST



Third **STEPS**

PART THREE →

Introduction to Third Steps

Third Steps is a continuation from the First and Second steps series and aims to help believers mature as disciples and be better witnesses to the watching world.

Through Third Steps, believers will recognize what it means to be disciples of Jesus and the cost of being one. Believers will also be challenged to fulfill the Great Commission as disciple makers and serve in the gifts of the Spirit.

In the journey of maturing as a disciple, one will encounter new challenges and different seasons and the Third Steps lessons aim to help believers to be anchored on God's truth as they go through these. Lastly, believers will be given biblical perspectives and practical tips to live as faithful witnesses of the Gospel as they navigate the complex and changing world we live in today.

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SESSION 1

Growing to be a Disciple of Jesus

In life, common sensibility will usually lead us to choose the path of least resistance – something easier, more comfortable, leads us to feel more secure or something more logical and socially acceptable. The few who choose to go on the road less travelled are sometimes seen as “brave”, “pioneers” or to others appear “fool-hardy” or plain “silly”.

In Christianity, Jesus invites us to go on the road less travelled. We start off our journey in Christ as new-believers, slowly growing into an intimate relationship with Christ and learning to relate to Him and our spiritual family. It does not stop there. Jesus calls us further – to grow out of spiritual infancy and to become a disciple of His. One that not only acknowledges who Jesus is, but knows Him deeply, follows Him whole-heartedly and serves Him faithfully.

What does it really mean to be a disciple and why is being a disciple akin to taking the road less travelled? This lesson will unpack the biblical imperative of being a disciple of Christ and how this is the expected norm for those who profess to be followers of Christ.

WHO IS A DISCIPLE?

The term “disciple” is commonly used to describe someone who adheres to the teachings of another. A disciple is a follower or a learner who follows his teacher’s teachings and life example.

Interestingly, before Christians were first called Christians or “little Christs” in the Antioch church (*Acts 11:26b*), followers of Jesus were simply called disciples (*Acts 6:7*). When Jesus first called His disciples, He spoke the simple words, “Follow me”. Hence, we are disciples of Christ upon making the decision to confess Jesus as our Saviour and Lord.

Mark 1:17

¹⁷ “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”



A disciple is a follower or a learner who follows his teacher's teachings and life example.

WHAT TRAITS CHARACTERIZE DISCIPLES OF Christ?

1. Disciples live in Christ

Disciples of Christ must be in relationship with Christ and abide in Him. Choosing to follow Jesus is not just an instantaneous decision at the start of our faith journey. Instead, it is a daily decision to relate to God, know Him more intimately and desire for His presence.

John 15:4-5

⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

In the following verse, Paul reminds the Colossian believers that as they have received Christ in faith at the beginning, they are to continue to walk in faith and strengthen their faith in Him. Disciples journey through the ups and downs in life by depending fully on God and trusting Him in everything.

Colossians 2:6-7

⁶ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.



How then do we know if we are living in Christ? The following questions can help us prayerfully reflect on the extent we are walking with Christ and maintaining a close relationship with Him:

-  Do I spend time praying, reading the Bible and worshipping God regularly?
-  Do I experience God's leading, guidance, encouragement or even gentle rebuke as I walk with Him?
-  Do I respond in faith and obedience when God tells me something?
-  Do I rely more on myself or others than on Christ?

A true disciple of Christ must firstly be in communion with Him. Participation in Christian activities like attending services, lifegroups and even serving in ministries or in leadership roles in church can be means for us to stay connected to God and hear from Him. In fact, they are so vital in our relationship with Christ!

However, mere involvement in these activities do not necessarily guarantee that we are living in Christ. We must never make the same mistake like the Pharisees, who were more concerned about performing the right religious activities and be seen doing so, without their hearts being fully devoted to God.

Matthew 15:8

⁸ These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Reflect: How would you describe your relationship with Jesus today? Are you still walking with Jesus daily and making conscious choices to trust Him? If not, what are some hindrances you face?

2. Disciples live like Christ

Jesus' call to His disciples to follow Him is also a call to imitate how He lives. Imitating Christ goes beyond mimicking His external behaviour but living like Christ did, with the right motivations and character.

1 John 2:5-6

⁵ *But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him:* ⁶ *Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.*

Romans 8:29

²⁹ *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

What are some of the ways in which we can imitate Christ as a disciple? One of the greatest hallmarks of Jesus' life on Earth was His perfect obedience and submission to God's commands. This was seen in how Jesus willingly submitted to God's will to go to the Cross to die for mankind even as it was physically painful and emotionally daunting. Jesus chose to surrender His self-will to the Father, trusting in Him completely.

Luke 22:42-44

⁴² *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* ⁴³ *An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him.* ⁴⁴ *And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*

As Jesus showed us what it means to obey God, we are to do the same as His disciples. The Great Commission has clearly stated that we are to "obey everything" Jesus has commanded us to (*Matthew 28:20*). Growing to be a disciple of Jesus means we are to know God's commands in the Bible and to obey them in increasing measure as we walk with Him.

1 Peter 5:3

³ *In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.*

Reflect: Is there any part of your life where you are willfully disobeying God in? If there is, come to the Lord in repentance and humility, trusting that He can restore and change you. If not, consider your life and to what extent you consciously try to live obediently to God's commands. Would God be pleased through your obedience?

Another way we can imitate Christ as a disciple is how He lived a life of unconditional love. In fact, loving others is the second greatest commandment and characterizes how a disciple of Christ should live.

Matthew 22:36-40

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

1 John 3:16

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

We may wonder what a life of love looks like in reality. Jesus showed it to us through living like a humble servant, putting the interests of others first, valuing others above Himself, making Himself nothing to the extent of sacrificing His very life on the Cross for us.

Philippians 2:3-7

³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Reflect: When others look at our life, will they see a life lived in love and servanthood? Perhaps we find it easier to love certain groups of people (e.g., friends) but struggle to do so for others (e.g., family, workplace). Allow God to bring to mind some individuals He has placed in your life that He is urging you to love with His love.

Living like Christ almost appears to be a tall order and impossible for us imperfect humans to ever achieve! This realization brings us to a healthy dependence on God's grace and a humble heart before Him. We need God desperately and hence we must abide in Christ daily and depend on Him to transform us from the inside out. In addition, we need to be in fellowship with God's people who can encourage us to keep on following God and urge us towards Christ-likeness!

“Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion -- it is a daily process whereby you grow to be more and more like Christ.”

■■■ BILLY GRAHAM

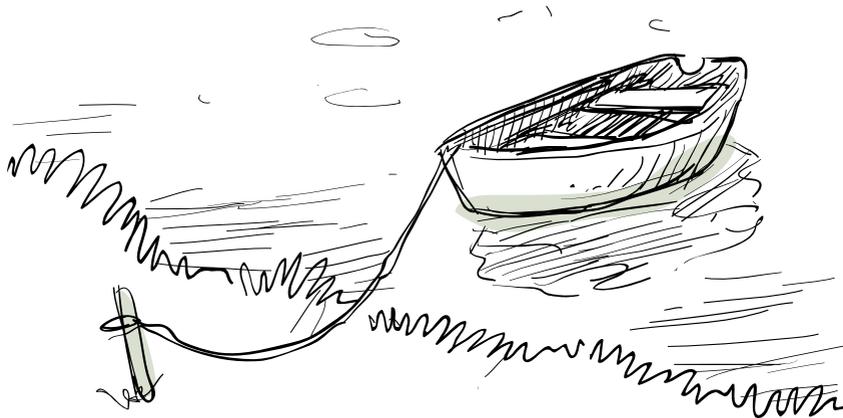
3. Disciples live for Christ

We all live for something or someone. Parents may live for their children. Business owners or career-minded individuals may live for success. Spouses may live for each other. But when Jesus called His first disciples, they chose to forsake their former lives and to go on this new journey of living for their Master.

Luke 5:10b-11

^{10b} Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.”

¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.



Living for Jesus means that we let go of our earthly ambitions and desires and make pleasing Jesus our highest aim in life. We become primarily motivated to live for God's purposes, instead of our own. While the world seeks for purpose and success in things like meaningful relationships, climbing the corporate ladder, accumulating wealth and material goods, raising 'successful' children etc., we find purpose in Christ Himself and living out His wonderful plan for our lives.

Romans 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Acts 20:24

²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

For disciples, the measure of a life well lived is how well we have stayed true to what God has called us to do (2 Tim 4:6-8) – to be His salt and light wherever He has placed us (Matthew 5:13-16), to proclaim the good news of the Gospel (Mark 16:15), to build His Church and to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20).

Reflect: Who or what are you living for today? Have you sought God prayerfully and earnestly to seek His plan and purpose for your life? What does it mean to you to live for Christ right now?

4. Disciples make other disciples

We who were once lost and estranged from God have been reconciled to Him through Christ. Now, God has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us and we are to proclaim the gospel and make other disciples.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

The early church leaders like the Apostle Paul also frequently taught the believers in the various churches to follow Him as He followed Christ. He disciplined the believers by teaching them, living as an example to them and challenging them to do the same for others.

Philippians 3:17

¹⁷ *Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.*

1 Corinthians 11:1

¹ *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*

2 Timothy 2:2

² *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.*

When Jesus spoke about the Great Commission, He was not directing it only to His inner circle, but to all His disciples. The task of making disciples is not reserved for church workers, or those with special abilities or those deemed most “mature” in the faith. Rather, all disciples of Christ have been entrusted with the sacred task of making more disciples, proclaiming the gospel to all, influencing people towards Christ and teaching them His word. A true disciple makes other disciples.

Making disciples is not a special call or gift of the Spirit to a few saints. It is a **lifestyle of obedience** expected of the whole household of God – a living demonstration of the priesthood of all believers.

■■■ EDMUND CHAN

**THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP**

In Deitrich Bonhoeffer’s book on “The Cost of Discipleship”, he writes, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Bonhoeffer was not referring to Christ leading a man to physical death, but he was pointing to the need for man to die to his own rights, desires and preferences, in order to pledge total allegiance to Christ.

In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus clearly taught His disciples that following Him meant walking a road less travelled. He promises to give anyone who will follow Him life to the full (*John 10:10*) but He also did not shy away from painting the reality and costs of being His disciple.

Matthew 7:13-14

¹³ *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

Luke 9:23-24

²³ *Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.*

Denying oneself is to renounce ourselves as the centre of our lives and to place Christ's will above ours. Taking up the cross means we are willing to pay any price, including shame, embarrassment, suffering or rejection, for the sake of Christ. Following Jesus is a commitment we make to walk with Him faithfully till the very end of our lives.

Jesus' challenge on the cost of discipleship is sobering. For those who may be hearing it for the first time, we may feel a little surprised at the high bar set for following Jesus. Some of us may even feel some level of discomfort or uneasiness at the price we need to pay to become a disciple. This is certainly a hard teaching that we may struggle with.

But someone once said, "It costs to follow Jesus, but it costs more not to." We can look to the Apostle Paul and draw encouragement on how he viewed the persecution and challenges he faced as a result of being Christ's disciple.

Philippians 3:7-11

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

The reality of discipleship is that it will cost us. On the flipside, these costs we bear for Christ cannot be compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord, being found in Him, participating in His sufferings and finally, experiencing the power of His resurrection at our death.

Reflect: Take time to ruminate on Luke 9:23-24 prayerfully. Are there specific areas in your life where the Holy Spirit is directing you to deny yourself and take up your cross in?



CONCLUSION ▼

In the world we are living in today, it is not uncommon to encounter people who profess to be Christians yet live a remarkably similar lifestyle to that of non-believers and one that barely resembles Christ. Our view of what it means to be a Christian may even be tainted or influenced by these examples around us.

In the Bible, there is no distinction between being a Christian and being a disciple. To be a Christian is to be a disciple. To be a disciple of Jesus means that we live in Him, live like Him and live for Him. We become Christ's disciples, knowing that it is the road less travelled and it will cost us. But we press on to grow as a disciple as we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (*Hebrews 12:1-2*).

Other Resources

Learn how to become a disciple maker through the Step D: Mentor Class. Find out more via the Grow Portal (grow.hopesingapore.org.sg) or speak to your respective congregation pastors about this.



REFLECT ▼

How long have you known the Lord and walked with Him? Think about how He has transformed you since the beginning and give thanks to God for growing you spiritually. Think about one or two areas in your life that you would like God to continue to grow you into Christ-likeness.

How have you been living as a disciple of Christ? Which aspect (living in Christ, living like Christ, living for Christ) do you think you need more help in right now?



RESPOND ▼

God may be challenging you to take your relationship with Him seriously by becoming a true disciple. Prayerfully commit your decision to the Lord, trusting that the Holy Spirit will empower you in godly living and in living a fully surrendered life to Him.

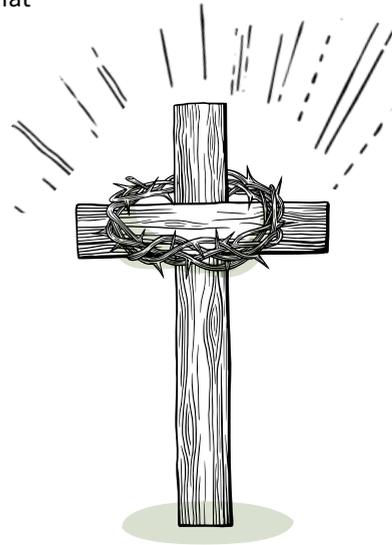
Is God speaking to you about making other disciples? Speak to your mentor or lifegroup leader on how you can learn to do so eventually.

SESSION 2

Living Victoriously in God

When people hear the word “victory”, they generally think about experiencing great success, triumph or achievement that is worth celebrating. It is usually accompanied by feelings of exuberance and elation. If it is something we can choose, all will naturally want to be on the side of victory, rather than defeat. In reality, life comes with its ups and downs, challenges and successes, victories and defeats. We will not always feel triumphant or on top of the world. Sometimes we may even feel that the world we are living in is a hopeless one.

In John 16:33b, Jesus did not shy away from acknowledging the trouble we may face in this world. But He encouraged His disciples to “take heart! I have overcome the world.” Jesus had won the victory for us, but what does it really mean for us to live in victory and how can we go about doing so?



WHAT IS VICTORIOUS LIVING IN God?

Among believers, there are varying notions of what it means to live victoriously. Some may think that victorious living in Christ means living a life that is full of power, successes and positivity. Some may “feel” victorious after a worship service or think victory can be ours once we verbally “claim” it. Some equate victorious living to getting what we desire in life: a better job, a life-partner, having a kid etc. On the other hand, some find it impossible to live victoriously in Christ when they are constantly feeling defeated by repeated struggles with sin.

According to the Bible, living victoriously is not something we conjure up with our feelings or amp ourselves up to believe. Being victorious in Christ is not only reserved for the times where we experience successes and positive outcomes in life. On the contrary, believers can live victoriously despite how we feel and what we are going through, because it is not dependent on us but by the finished work of Christ on the Cross.

1. Being Right with God through Christ's Work on the Cross

Imagine being harassed and threatened by a debt collector daily for a huge debt that is impossible to pay off. How would you feel? Probably discouraged, defeated and even hopeless. This debt represents what we owe God because of our sins.

While God has every right to ensure that we pay the price for our sins, He has graciously sent Jesus Christ to take on the debt that we owe. Christ's death on the Cross rescued us from darkness and His resurrection gave us victory over our sins and even death itself!

Colossians 2:13-15

¹³ *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

Hence, our victory lies primarily in Christ's redeeming work on the Cross. Since that is an objective and historical fact, we can be assured that our feelings or circumstances cannot diminish or remove the victory we have in Christ. Romans 8 assures us that in the midst of handling bad times and trials, we are more than conquerors through Christ's love for us and nothing can separate us from it.

Romans 8:35-37

³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

³⁶ *As it is written:*

*"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

This positional victory we have in Christ is something we cannot earn, work towards or achieve on our own. It is freely given to all who put their faith in Christ. We no longer have to live in guilt or condemnation for our wrongdoings, or feel helpless and powerless in our struggle against sin. Rather, we can look to the Cross, knowing that Jesus has purchased victory and new life for us.

Romans 5:1-2

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² *through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.* And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Reflect: Our victory ultimately comes from the finished work of Christ on the Cross, not on our subjective feelings or experiences. How does knowing that help you in understanding what it means to live victoriously as a believer?

2. Trust God in Overcoming Sin and Evil in Our Lives

Even though Christ's work on the Cross has given us the opportunity to live a victorious life, we still face real struggles with temptations and sin here on earth. We still live in a fallen world where evil is evidently present. The Bible tells us that "your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

In Exodus, God was keenly aware of the Israelites' misery and heard their cries when they were slaves in Egypt. He didn't just acknowledge their struggles but acted upon them by rescuing them from Egypt with His mighty hand. That very same God of compassion is equally aware of our challenges with sin and He cares for us.

Psalm 103:8

⁸ The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Though the struggle with sin is real, the battles are winnable. As new creations in Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin. We can live in freedom, as long as we stand firm in Christ and do not give up fighting sin and desiring to overcome it.



Romans 6:6-7

⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

Galatians 5:1

¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Yesterday's failures do not determine the outcome of today's battle. We may feel like we have hit the wall in our fight for holiness. We may be weary from trying time and again to break free from the same old sins. We may even feel like the worst of sinners at times.

If you feel alone in your struggles against sin, take heart. Jesus too experienced temptations in His earthly life and understands what we are going through.

Hebrews 4:15

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.

We must remember that living victoriously in Christ is not the absence of defeat, struggles or pain. The nature of victory requires that there is a struggle to begin with. As strugglers in this journey of faith, what we need to do is to keep trusting God and choosing to follow Him.

Hebrews 12:1-3

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12 reminds us that our journey of faith is a race that requires perseverance. As Christ had endured our sin and shame on the Cross, we fix our eyes on Him as our role model and keep pressing on so that we can cross the finishing line. We may trip, stumble or even falter along the way, but if we put our trust in Him who is faithful, we know victory is already ours.

Reflect: What are some specific sins or struggles in your life that are hindering you from living in freedom? Do not be afraid to bring them honestly before the Lord for He cares and longs to help you experience victory.

3. Victory Over Forces of Evil

Christ's triumph on the Cross has also given us victory over forces of evil. Believers must not be oblivious or unaware about the reality of spiritual warfare around us. The Bible clearly tells us that though we belong to a physical world, there are battles being waged in the spiritual world.

In Exodus, God was keenly aware of the Israelites misery and heard their cries when they were slaves in Egypt. He didn't just acknowledge their struggles but acted upon them by rescuing them from Egypt with His mighty hand. That very same God of compassion is equally aware of our challenges with sin and He cares for us.

Ephesians 6:12

¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Even as we acknowledge the reality of spiritual warfare, we do not need to be afraid. Instead, Christ's finished work on the Cross means that the enemy has been and will be defeated. Ephesians 6 teaches us that we need to stand firm and keep on praying in order to remain victorious in the midst of spiritual warfare.

Ephesians 6:13-18

¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

KEYS TO VICTORIOUS LIVING IN Christ

Christ's work on the Cross has given us a decisive victory over our sins. In order to continue to live victoriously in Christ, we can practise the following:

1. Yield to the Holy Spirit's Empowering Work

When it comes to living victoriously, some believers emphasise the Holy Spirit's ability for triumphant displays of power, enabling us to perform signs and wonders and to overcome forces of evil. While it is true that the Holy Spirit can enable us to do miraculous works when we proclaim the Gospel, we must not forget or downplay how the Spirit also empowers us to experience victory over our sins.

Left to our own devices, we will never be able to live a life that pleases God. But if we allow our minds to be governed by the Holy Spirit, He can steer us away from our fleshly desires to pursue godly desires.

Romans 8:5-6

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

Galatians 5:16-18

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Most people love the idea of being in control of our lives. As such, we may struggle with the idea of yielding to the Holy Spirit. What does it mean and what could it look like?

We can liken yielding to the Holy Spirit with going with the flow of a lazy river. A lazy river is a water ride which consists of a shallow pool with a slow current that allow people to gently ride along lying on floats. When you surrender to the flow of the lazy river, you will be carried along effortlessly. However, you can also resist the current by choosing to stand up in the shallow pool.

Using this analogy, yielding to the Holy Spirit means we need to proactively surrender control and trust Him to lead and guide us. In order for us to experience victory over our sins, we need to yield to the Holy Spirit's empowering and sanctifying work in our lives.

Reflect: How can understanding the lazy river analogy help you as a believer to live a victorious life? What is the first step you need to take today to live a Spirit empowered victorious life?

2. Rely on our Godly Community's Support

As Christ followers, we belong to the body of Christ and live our lives as part of a bigger community. Fellowship goes beyond sharing a meal together, attending service and lifegroup, or having fun together, though it certainly includes these activities. True Christian fellowship should be one that spurs believers onward towards godly living and supporting one another in our battles against temptation and sin.

Hebrews 3:12-14

¹² See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. ¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.

For us to be able to rely on our godly community for support, we first need to choose to be vulnerable and open up our lives and struggles to them. We may feel intimidated or fear judgement from our fellow brothers and sisters. But we must realise that if we choose not to do so, we miss out on a vital source of help God has graciously given to us in experiencing victorious living in Him.

3. Stand Firm in the Gospel

While Christ had secured victory by triumphing over sin and death on the Cross, we still have to contend with the effects of sin and evil while we live on earth. There will be moments where we despair over our own sin and slip into hopelessness. There will also be moments where we feel frustrated and disheartened as we witness the downward spiral of mankind while waiting and longing for Christ's return. In these moments, victory may seem elusive.

Hebrews 10:23 encourages us to "hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."

Even when we fail in our struggle against sin at times, we can hold on to Christ and look to Him for forgiveness. His mercies are new every morning. We can give ourselves time and grace for the Holy Spirit to transform us into the likeness of Christ. We can choose to stand firm in the gospel and not let our struggle against sin strip away our confidence in what Christ had already done for us.

1 Peter 1:13

¹³ Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.



CONCLUSION ↘

The day will come where our agonizing conflict against sin and evil will be no more. The war will one day be over. The best news is that the outcome is definite – victory is ours to claim forevermore. Even as we face the realities of struggles in this present life, we can cling on to the blessed hope that we have, where Christ will reign victorious.

Titus 2:11-13

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ



REFLECT ↘

How do you usually respond when you are struggling with a particular sin or issue in your personal walk with the Lord? Why?

How does knowing that victory will come refine and shape the way you approach your present-day struggles?



RESPOND ↘

Think of an area of your life that you would like to see a breakthrough in. It could be a particular sin, struggle or a character flaw. Surrender this area to the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to experience victory in it.

Do you have godly friends who can support you in living victoriously in Christ? If not, start investing in godly friendships where you can mutually support one another in your spiritual journey. Be intentional to connect with them regularly to share your struggles and prayer requests.

Other Resources

Testimony of James Giam (tinyurl.com/jamesgiam)

SESSION 3

Persevering in Challenges with God

Have you ever had such secret thoughts? *“As long as I follow Jesus, life will be smooth-sailing.” “If I am faithful to Jesus and serve Him whole-heartedly, life should not be difficult.” “If I experience many difficulties in life, it must be because I am doing something wrong.”*

Somehow, many believers assume that if we are pious or sincere enough about our faith, God would reward us by giving us a life without challenges or hardship. Conversely, if we somehow keep experiencing problems in our life, there must be something we’re not doing right or perhaps something wrong with ourselves. Is it really true? If challenges are part and parcel of life, how can we hold on to our faith in these valley low moments? What anchors us and how can we continue to persevere in faith?

EXPECT CHALLENGES IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Bible clearly teaches us that challenges are not abnormal or unusual in the Christian journey. Instead, we are to expect them. Jesus said it plainly in John 16:33 that “in this world, you will have trouble.” When a loved one passes away, a relationship is broken, a financial difficulty happens, or one’s health suddenly fails, we experience the hardships of life. Challenges can come our way due to a variety of factors and can either cause us to drift farther from God or cling on tighter to Him.

1. Challenges as a result of our faith choices

Believers are sometimes called to make difficult or unpopular decisions that the world frowns upon precisely because of our faith. 1 Peter 4 tells us not to be surprised when we suffer for being a believer but to rejoice that we get to share in Christ’s suffering.

1 Peter 4:12-13

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

When we seek to obey God, we might make decisions differently from the world and possibly offend others who might not understand. Others may alienate us, mock us, insult us or even persecute us. It hurts to be doing the right thing but to be sorely misunderstood by those around us. The following passage from Scripture comforts us that it is ultimately a blessing and honour to bear the name of Christ even if it brings us challenges.

1 Peter 4:14-16

¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

2. Challenges as a result of the fallen world we live in

In the fallen world we live in, believers still wrestle with sin and sin comes with consequences.

Galatians 6:7-8

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

The destructive consequences of sin include feelings of guilt and condemnation, as well as broken relationships with others (*Galatians 6:20*). Whether we are the perpetrators (who have sinned against others), or the wounded (who suffered as a result of others' sin), we will at times bear the hurt and pain that we experience as a result of the fallen world we live in.

3. Challenges as a result of God's pruning work

Sometimes, challenges in life are not a result of sin or our faith choices. As a loving Father, God wants to cleanse our hearts so that we can grow in holiness to be more like Christ. This cleansing work is likened to a cutting and pruning process. It can be painful, even though His rebukes and corrections are done in love. What we need to remember is that He prunes purposefully, so that we can be even more fruitful in time to come.



John 15:1-2

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

The following passage from Hebrews teaches us that God disciplines us for our good. He puts us through momentary hardship because He alone knows what is best for us. We may not appreciate the tough times when we are in the midst of it. But we will be sanctified and transformed into holiness at the end.

Hebrews 12:7-11

⁷ *Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?* ⁸ *If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.* ⁹ *Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live!*

¹⁰ *They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.* ¹¹ *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

Reflect: What is your perspective towards challenges in the Christian faith? How do you honestly see them? How is it similar or different from what the Bible says?

SEE OUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY AS A MARATHON

Since challenges are expected in our faith journey, it is no wonder that the writer of Hebrews likens the Christian walk to a marathon. It is not a short sprint, but one that requires perseverance.

Hebrews 12:1-3

¹ *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,* ² *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* ³ *Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*



Let us consider the journey of a marathon runner. At the starting line, excitement and determination fuel the runner's spirit. As he races forward, he encounters fatigue, obstacles, and doubts. Yet despite the pain and weariness, he presses on. He draws strength from the cheers of the crowd, the encouragement of fellow runners, and the knowledge that the finish line awaits, promising the reward of accomplishment.

In our spiritual marathon, the writer of Hebrews reminds us of witnesses who have gone before us and surround us in encouragement (*Hebrews 11*). These early witnesses did not have the privilege to see God's promises fulfilled through Jesus' coming but for us, we have now seen the promised Christ that has already died for us on the Cross. We can keep running without losing heart because Christ Himself had already endured the greatest pain and suffering on the Cross for us.

In facing challenges, we need to remember that we are running a marathon. There is a need to persevere. Not just that, we have the means to persevere. We behold Christ as our example, fore-runner and reward. We can run with perseverance as we fix our eyes on Him.



HOW CAN WE PERSEVERE IN CHALLENGES?

1. We remember God and His promises in the Word

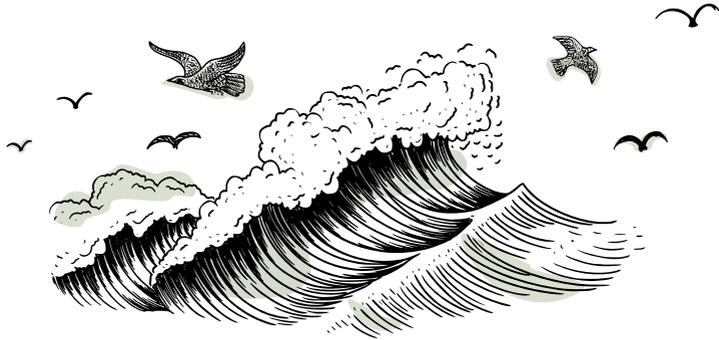
In times of challenges, what we truly believe will be revealed. Jesus illustrates this in the form of a parable in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:24-27

²⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

The phrase "the rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house" is deliberately repeated twice in Jesus' parable to show that the same storms hit both the foolish and wise men. No one is spared from the storms of life. In those days, people did not have the technology to dig deep to see how deeply rooted a house was, whether it was built on the foundation of sand or rock. The only way the foundation is revealed is when the storms come and whether the house withstands or crashes.

When the storms of life come, will our house stand firm or will it come crashing down? Have we built our house on the unchanging truth from the Word such that it can withstand the storms of life?



During peace times, we must focus on building our faith strong by learning God's character and His promises in the Word. When the storms beckon, it will be too late for us to scramble to build the right foundation. We may not have time or be in the right frame of mind to start looking out for verses on God's promises. In our everyday life, we need to consistently develop intimacy with God and store up precious truths from the Bible so that even when challenges come, we can be firmly rooted in Him.

Sometimes when we are in the midst of challenges, the promises of God in the Bible and the descriptions of His character can feel completely conflicting from what we are experiencing. When that happens, we need to choose to place our faith on His unchanging truths instead of relying on subjective interpretations of our circumstances.

Reflect: How did you go through a recent challenge in your faith? What did God reveal about Himself and about yourself through it?

2. We turn to God in prayer

When Jesus went through the most emotionally challenging night in the Garden of Gethsemane, He looked upward to God in prayer. Even though He was the Son of God, He dreaded the painful journey to the Cross and knew He needed to spend time in prayer.

Matthew 26:36

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

Matthew 26:39

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

We turn to God in prayer because we know that He hears us and is fully present in our time of need. Truth be told, prayer is not just an avenue for us to pour out our struggles to God, but an opportunity to hear God's voice and re-orientate ourselves towards Him. Without positioning ourselves humbly in prayer before God, we are defenseless in our struggles and get discouraged easily.

Besides Jesus, the Bible is full of examples of others who cried out honestly to God in prayer as they faced challenges. The book of Psalms and Lamentations contain examples of emotional prayers to God where the writers faced the harsh realities of life. David, who wrote a large part of the Psalms, conveyed his fear and helplessness as he was betrayed by his sons and pursued by his enemies. Jeremiah, who wrote Lamentations, mourned over the sorry state of his people as Judah was taken away to captivity in Babylon.

These biblical examples assure us that we can come as we are before the Lord, with our questions, concerns and even complaints. The Lord who loves us allows us to go to Him without pretense and will meet us in our time of need.

3. We find support in the body of Christ

As the son of God, Jesus Himself wanted the support of His three closest disciples Peter, James and John in His darkest hour in the Garden.

Matthew 26:37-38

³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

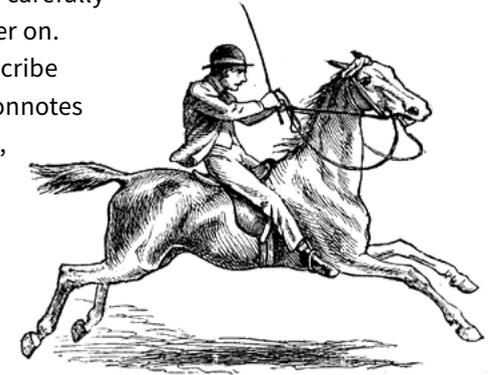
In one of Jesus’ greatest moments of distress, He also desired companionship. In His humanity, Jesus showed us how we all need to draw strength from those around us especially when we are going through hard times.

A pair of chopsticks on its own can be easily broken. Ten pairs of chopsticks put together in a bunch are much harder to break. The enemy loves to isolate believers when we are going through challenges. He whispers lies to convince us that no one else understands, that people do not care enough, or that there is no point in sharing our struggles with others. These are not true because God has placed us in a spiritual community for us to spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:23-25

²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The writer of Hebrews urges believers to carefully think about how we can spur one another on. The Greek word for “spur” is used to describe the action of horses being whipped. It connotes a sense of how the truth in love can hurt, yet is necessary to keep us on the right track. In the body of Christ, we will take turns to go through challenging seasons. We can grieve and cry together when one part of the body is mourning. When we go through our own valley moments, we know that we are not alone and can be spurred on by others. This is the beauty of the church.



Reflect: How can you be a support to someone in the spiritual community around you who is struggling? How often do you share your struggles openly with others in the lifegroup? What might be stopping you from being real about your struggles?

4. We trust in the blessed hope

One of the hardest things when we are in the midst of challenges is not knowing when we will see “the light at the end of the tunnel.” The days and nights feel long and dreary. Thankfully for us, the Bible has promised that we have a blessed hope to look forward to. The term “blessed hope” comes from Titus 2:13 and refers to the second coming of Christ when He returns in glory. When that happens, the tough times will come to an end. He will make all things right.

Revelations 21:4

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

When Christ returns, the old order of things will pass away. The challenges we face in our faith, the tears and the pain of sin in this fallen world, the struggles in our brokenness, will all be gone. In the meantime, we are not exempt from the troubles this life will bring and there will still be many things we struggle to make sense of. But we know for certain that Jesus will judge justly at the very end. All the wrongs will be made right and sin will no longer be able to torment or harm us anymore.

The reality is that most of us are short-sighted beings who live for the here and now. We also have a tendency to focus more on ourselves than on God when we face challenges in our faith.

“ Yet the Bible is clear that we are called to fix our eyes not on the temporal, but on the eternal. ”

Colossians 3:1-2

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

We have a blessed hope that far outweighs the struggles and momentary troubles this earthly life brings. Difficult as it is, we can rely on God to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. What is seen is temporary in this life, but what is unseen is eternal and lasts far beyond our lives. Trusting in the blessed hope does not make going through challenges any less difficult, but it reminds us that He is always faithful and He keeps His promises.

Reflect: How do you feel when you remember that Jesus is coming back again? How does knowing His future return affect how you view your current challenges?

CONCLUSION

The great Apostle Paul was no stranger to challenges even with his great ministry accomplishments. He writes about a thorn in his flesh which caused him much misery. He even wrestled with God in prayer, asking for it to be removed. God's reply (v9) may not have been what Paul desired yet he accepted it and chose to see his weakness as an opportunity for God's power to be shown.

2 Corinthians 12:7b-10

^{7b} *I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.* ⁸ *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.* ⁹ *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

¹⁰ *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

What if our current challenge is the very opportunity God wants to use to display His miraculous works in our life? What if the trial we are in is what we need to experience the sufficiency of God's grace? While the world tells us that we need to be strong and have it all together, the Bible shows a contrasting perspective of the value of weakness. Our weakness and challenges may very well be our greatest strength – for it manifests God's power in ways our strengths never do.

Challenges in life will come but they are momentary in light of the blessed hope we have. When we come to the end of ourselves, we can cling on to God's grace which is sufficient to carry us through. Most importantly, we take comfort that Christ who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, has gone before us and holds us through the storms.



REFLECT



What are some weaknesses that you struggle to believe God's grace is sufficient in? How do you think God's power can be made perfect in your weaknesses?

How often do you openly share your struggles or challenges with others in the lifegroup? What might be stopping you from being real about your struggles or challenges?

RESPOND



Of the 4 ways to persevere in challenges, which is the most relevant for you? How can you practically apply it?

Take some time to respond in prayer and ask God to help you to persevere through a challenge in your life. Alternatively, intercede for a brother or sister who is going through challenges and finding it hard to persevere.

Other Resources

- Testimony of Joel & Jeremy (tinyurl.com/joeljeremy)
- Video Sermon "Keep on keeping on" by Pastor Benny Ho (tinyurl.com/keeponkeepingonn)
- Video Summary of Book of Job by Bible Project (tinyurl.com/bibleprojjob)

SESSION 4

Navigating the Faith in Every Season

Life is a journey that takes us through different transitions from cradle to grave. Strangely enough, while we are in a particular season, we tend to wish we are in another.

When we are young, we long to become adults so we can finally assert our independence. But when we become adults, we miss the times where we have a carefree childhood, without having to deal with ‘adulting’ issues. When we have young children, we can’t wait for them to grow up so we can have more time for ourselves. Yet when they grow older and leave the nest, we can’t help but to wish they could be with us just a little longer.

Some seasons may come due to life station transitions: when we start working, get married, have kids, retire. Some seasons come as a result of choices we make: a change of job, moving to another country. Yet there are other seasons that come as unexpected or unwelcomed surprises: the death of a loved one, a sudden illness, a mental health issue.

Why is it so hard for some of us to accept and be fully present in the current season we are in? What can we do to make the most of every season, even the unwanted ones that come our way?

THE TRUTH ABOUT SEASONS

1. God Ordains the Seasons of Life

The book of Ecclesiastes forms part of the wisdom literature found in the Old Testament and teaches us precious lessons on how to cope with the complexities that life can bring. In particular, the passage below touches on the topic of different timings and seasons we go through in life. It establishes how God is the one who set things in order and ordains the seasons of life.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

- ¹ *There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:*
- ² *a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,*
- ³ *a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,*
- ⁴ *a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,*
- ⁵ *a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain
from embracing,*
- ⁶ *a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,*
- ⁷ *a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,*
- ⁸ *a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.*

Whether the season we are in came about due to a decision we made or was beyond our control, we can be assured that God has sovereignly allowed it to happen. We are not at the mercy of evil cosmic forces trying to destroy our life. Nor is our fate controlled by random coincidence in which we have no choice but to be resigned to. Regardless what happens, we know that we are ultimately in the hands of our loving Creator who has a purpose for all that we go through.

Romans 8:28

²⁸ *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

When believers go through a particularly tough season, some would question God and even demand an explanation from Him on why we have to go through it. We see a similar response from the biblical character Job. Job went through a season of immense suffering despite living a righteous life and he too questioned God's justice and wisdom. However, as God revealed His power over creation and sovereignty to Job (*Job 40:6-41:34*), he responded by humbly submitting to God and repenting for questioning Him.

Job 42:1-6

¹ *Then Job replied to the Lord:*

² *"I know that you can do all things;
no purpose of yours can be thwarted.*

³ *You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?'
Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me to know.*

⁴ *"You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak;
I will question you,
and you shall answer me.'*

⁵ *My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.*

⁶ *Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes."*

God may not always reveal the reasons why He allowed us to go through a particular season of life, especially when we are in it. But we must remember that the one who ordained the seasons of our life is not just all-powerful but also all-loving. As the author and perfecter of our faith (*Hebrews 12:2*), we can entrust the unknown to Him. Even in chaos, confusion, suffering or grief, He is in control and we can draw comfort by turning our attention to who He really is.

Reflect: How does knowing that God is ultimately in control over the seasons of life that we go through help you? What does it mean for you to trust in God's sovereignty?

2. Recognize the Futility of Self Dependence in Any Season

Across history, we see how man has the tendency to depend on ourselves and choose our own way across various seasons. Israel's story as a nation serves as an example and a warning for us on the futility of counting on human leaders, kings or even on ourselves.

In Joshua 24, Joshua led the Israelites to renew their covenant with God after they entered the Promise Land. However, as they went into a new season of settling into the Promise Land after Joshua had passed away, the Israelites turned their backs on God once again to worship idols (*Judges 2:11*). While they experienced a season of blessings and success, they forgot their Provider. Because of their unfaithfulness, God allowed the Israelites to be plundered by their surrounding enemies.

During this new season of fighting and being oppressed by their enemies, the Israelites continued doing evil in the eyes of God, showing their desire to be independent of their Creator. For a season, they depended on human judges to deliver them from their enemies. For another season, they demanded for a king to rule them like other nations (1 Samuel 8) as they believed that was what they needed. Again, their self-sufficiency did not achieve the results they desired. Israel ultimately fell into the hands of her enemies. Israel's story shows that what they needed was not another person to rule or save them. What they truly needed was a Saviour King.

As we mature into various life stations or seasons, we may unknowingly follow in the Israelites footsteps. This happens when we take things into our own hands and attempt to control or change our circumstances. We assume that we have what it takes and rely on our experience, wit or abilities to figure life out on our own. We forget our mortality and how finite we truly are.

In Ecclesiastes 3, the speaker ponders about how there is an appropriate season for everything. After which, he appears frustrated when he observes that while things will be made beautiful at God's appointed time, no one can truly understand what God is doing at the present. The knowledge of the times belongs only to God, who is above all. Man's appropriate response then is to remember we are mere created beings who can only rely on our Creator. God is God and we are not.

*Things will be made beautiful
at God's appointed time.*



Ecclesiastes 3:9-11

⁹ What do workers gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

As we learn to right-size our view of ourselves and of God, we can then embrace our humanness and in tandem, accept our utter need to rely on God in every season we are in. Whether in mountain high or valley low seasons, we recognize the futility of looking only to ourselves and choose the better thing – which is to look Godward.

Reflect: In the current season of your life, are you more self-sufficient or God-reliant? Why? How is that helping or hindering you?

MAKING THE MOST OF LIFE IN EVERY SEASON

Since God alone is in control of the seasons we go through, what are some ways we can practically make the most of life in every season, whether good or bad?

1. Live in Obedience to God's Truths in Every Season

We will experience new highs and new lows as we go from season to season. In each, we will encounter new situations and face new costs of obedience. Fortunately, the Lord has given us the Bible, His unchanging word, that contains timeless truths for every season. God's word refreshes, guides, brings joy, lead us to righteousness and has utmost value.

Psalm 19:7-11

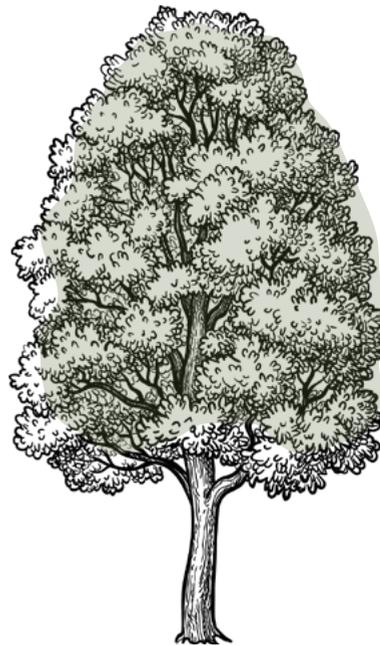
⁷ *The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*

⁸ *The precepts of the Lord are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.*

⁹ *The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm,
and all of them are righteous.*

¹⁰ *They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.*

¹¹ *By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*



It is one thing to recognize the benefits of God's word in our lives but another to consistently live it out in every season. In the following verse, James exhorts us to keep looking into the Word continually, remember it and to continue putting it into practice in our lives.

James 1:25

²⁵ *But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*

God can use seasons in our life to teach us precious life lessons, mould us into Christ-likeness or to test our loyalty and obedience to Him (*Deuteronomy 8:2*). Whatever the reason, we can look to the Bible which teaches us how we can approach God through different seasons. Through the positive or negative life examples of biblical characters, we can learn from their faithful example or be warned by their mistakes. God's Word is sufficient to carry us through any season. We can draw strength from His Word and reap the blessings of walking in obedience to Him no matter what we are going through.

Reflect: Do you still read and meditate on God's word on a regular basis? When was the last time you intentionally chose to obey God's word? Take time to read and meditate on Psalm 19:7-11.

2. Seek to Know God Anew in Every Season

It is common for seasoned believers to feel that they have known enough about God or there is not that many new things they can discover about God. Here, it may be helpful to differentiate between *knowing about God and knowing God*.

Knowing about God entails understanding His attributes, how God acts and what He is like. This knowledge about God is necessary for us to know God experientially, personally and intimately. While we may have knowledge about God, there is always room for us to grow in our personal engagement and intimacy with God in every season of our life. We need to know God in truth, as revealed in the Scriptures. We also need to know God experientially for He is ever working in our lives.

Jesus Himself prayed that His disciples would know God (*John 17:3*). Paul also prayed for an increase in the knowledge of God among the Colossians.

John 17:3

³ *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Colossians 1:9

⁹ *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,*

Consider how a young believer may first experience God's provision through a simple answered prayer for God to hold the rain. In different seasons, God's providence could be experienced in a very different way and perhaps in a greater depth. It could come in the form of a supportive spouse in a season of grief. It could simply be an acknowledgement of God's daily mercies in a prolonged period of trial. God's providence could even be the ability to breathe and live another day when one battles a terminal illness.

For the biblical character Joseph, God allowed him to go through painful seasons of being sold as a slave by his brothers and even banished to jail for an offence he didn't commit. Eventually he rose up the ranks to become the right-hand man of Pharaoh and these experiences prepared and positioned him for God to use him to save his family. Similarly, God may allow us to go through certain seasons in life to mould or prepare us for something He has in store for the future.

In every season, there is always more of God we can know and experience. We may have experienced His goodness, love, or mercy before but God is always longing to draw His deeper into His presence and to show us a greater depth of who He is. We can yearn to seek new revelation of God and desire to experience Him in a greater measure through the ups and downs in life.

Reflect: What is God speaking to you about in this season of your life? How are you experiencing Him anew through what you are going through?

3. Develop Contentment in Every Season

To scale Mount Everest, the highest peak in the world, climbers often take around two months for the entire journey. However, once climbers reach the summit, they are only able to stay for a few hours, in order not to endanger their lives due to the low oxygen levels.

In our journey of life, we may assume that life is only about the mountain-top moments. We spend much time, energy and effort to get to the mountain-top. But in reality, how much of life can truly be made up of such moments? If we only find significance in our mountain-top moments, our joy can be short-lived. But if our significance can also be found in the journey, we can learn to be content and enjoy what God has given to us in every season. In Ecclesiastes 5, the speaker muses about how life is brief and work can be laborious. In spite of that, it is possible to find contentment in this life.

Ecclesiastes 5:18

¹⁸ This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot.

Godly contentment is not based on circumstances but can be developed when we look to Christ for strength. Paul has set an example for us through how he learned to be content, even as he was imprisoned in Rome at the writing of his letter to the Philippians.

Philippians 4:11-13

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

As we go through seasons, we may look at others' lives and feel discouraged at the state of our own. In order to cultivate contentment, we need to guard ourselves against contentment killers, like envy, greed and ingratitude. Let not our heart constantly compare our lives with others and be troubled by the season God has ordained for us in comparison to our peers.

Proverbs 14:30

³⁰ A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

¹⁸ Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

4. Tune Your Heart to Worship in Every Season

God knows that we will go through seasons where we struggle to bring ourselves to seek His face and to worship Him. As such, He has graciously included many passages in the Bible to encourage us that it is still possible to tune our heart to worship Him despite how we feel.

The Psalms contain songs unto the Lord by various authors going through different seasons in life. Some Psalms are exuberant, praising God for His works yet there are also other Psalms which reflect the gloom and despair of the Psalmist. One unifying theme across the Psalms is how the Psalmist lays bare his emotions to the Lord and looks heavenward for his needs.

Psalm 34:1-3

- ¹ *I will extol the Lord at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips.*
- ² *I will glory in the Lord;
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.*
- ³ *Glorify the Lord with me;
let us exalt his name together.*

Psalm 42:11

- ¹¹ *Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?*
- Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.*

This theme of looking to God and finding joy in who God is can also be seen in other parts of the Old Testament. In Habakkuk 3, the prophet Habakkuk describes the devastation to come upon Judah with its impending attack by the enemy. However, he resolved to rejoice in the Lord even in such dire circumstances, knowing that He is still worthy of worship.

Habakkuk 3:17-18

- ¹⁷ *Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,*
- ¹⁸ *yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior*

Another example can be found in the book of Lamentations, which was written by an eyewitness to the fall of Jerusalem. While the author mourned over Jerusalem being destroyed by her enemies, he remembers who God is and worships Him.

Lamentations 3:22-23

- ²² *Because of the Lord's great love we are not
consumed,
for his compassions never fail.*
- ²³ *They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

In the Bible, joy is evoked not from circumstances, but from a keen awareness of God's presence and character. In order to navigate the changing seasons of our life, we need to train ourselves to be sensitive to God's presence and to tune our hearts to worship in response to who He is.





CONCLUSION ↘

The thing about seasons is that they are never permanent nor indefinite. Though some may feel longer and drearier, seasons are transitory and temporal. Amidst the changing seasons, we can cling on to Christ, who is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (*Hebrews 13:8*). In Him we place our hope and joy forevermore.



However unstable I may be, however fickle my friends may prove, *God changes not*. If He varied as we do, if He willed one thing today and another tomorrow, if He were controlled by caprice, who could confide in Him? But, all praise to His glorious name, *He is ever the same*. His purpose is fixed, His will is stable, His word is sure.

■■■ A.W. PINK

Other Resources

- Desert Song by Hillsong (tinyurl.com/desertsongg)



REFLECT ↘

What season of your life do you think you are at right now? What are some recent learnings or challenges you face with your walk with God during this season?



RESPOND ↘

Think about the four teaching points on “Making the Most of Every Season”. Which is most relevant in your life now? What can you practically do to apply it?

Spend time in prayer to seek God about the current season you are in. Humble yourself before Him and yield to His moulding work in your life. Ask Him for a new revelation of who He is and what He is doing in you.

SESSION 5

Serving in the Gifts of the Spirit

When we think about gifts of the Spirit, some may think of a force that believers tap into to heal the sick or prophesy over others. When someone exercises gifts that seem more supernatural, we may assume they are more anointed or spiritual than us. Or if we happen to know someone who exercises the gift of evangelism, we bring our friends to that person because he seems more effective than we are in sharing the Gospel.

These beliefs we hold about the gifts of the Spirit may stem from certain misconceptions we have about it. What are the gifts of the Spirit about? What did God really have in mind when He gave us these gifts? What are the purposes of the gifts of the Spirit and how should we go about exercising them?



WHAT ARE GIFTS OF THE Spirit?

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he spent time helping the believers develop the right understanding and perspective on gifts of the Spirit. Since each of us have received the Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Christ, we too need to be informed about the gifts of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:1

¹ Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed.

1. Gifts of the Spirit are given graciously by God

Romans 12:6a

^{6a} We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

“Gifts of the Spirit” in the Bible literally means “graces” or “grace things”. They are gifts of His grace. We cannot earn these gifts by being more obedient, praying more or serving God harder. A gift would not be a gift if we could earn it. Gifts of the Spirit come from God’s gracious enablement, not from our own abilities or strengths.

2. Gifts of the Spirit are given to all believers

As all believers have received the Holy Spirit, all receive gifts of the Spirit too. The Holy Spirit graciously allows each member of the body to exercise spiritual gifts for God’s purposes.

1 Corinthians 12:11

¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Through the Holy Spirit, each believer receives at least one spiritual gift. Like a father who distributes gifts to his excited children during special occasions, no one is left out. The Holy Spirit does not neglect or forget any child of God in distributing the gifts.

We may wonder why God does not choose to be more selective. He could choose to only give gifts of the Spirit to those who are more Christ-like or those who bring more people to know Him. Yet He chooses to use every single one of us as His vessels.

The truth is God delights in giving gifts to His children for He is as a wonderful Giver. He longs for the church to use their gifts for His purposes. He longs for every believer to partner with Him to bring people back to Him. What a joy and privilege to be able to partner with the Holy Spirit as we exercise our gifts!

3. Gifts of the Spirit are different

Though all believers receive gifts, there are different gifts of the Spirit listed in the Bible.

1 Peter 4:10-11

¹⁰ *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.* ¹¹ *If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

Romans 12:6-8

⁶ *We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith;* ⁷ *if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach;* ⁸ *if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

In the passages above, Paul gives different examples of the gifts of the Spirit. However, these lists are not meant to be comprehensive.

1 Corinthians 12:4

⁴ *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.*

We do not all have the same gifts. In fact, no believer has all the gifts. These different gifts are distributed across the entire church but they all come from one common source which is the Holy Spirit.

4. Gifts of the Spirit are given according to God's sovereign will

Unlike how we might ask someone what gift he or she would like for their birthday, the Holy Spirit alone determines who receives what gift.

1 Corinthians 12:11

¹¹ *All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.*

This means that while we might have a certain preference regarding what gift of the Spirit we would like to receive, we do not have the liberty to pick and choose. God, in His great wisdom, knows best what gifts to distribute to each of us.

5. Gifts of the Spirit are incarnational (Spirit working through flesh)

1 Corinthians 12:6

⁶ *There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.*

When we say that the gifts of the Spirit are incarnational, it means that the Holy Spirit is ultimately at work when believers exercise their gifts. Having said that, the Holy Spirit can only work through us when we choose to partner with Him and rely on Him.

Because the Holy Spirit is the one who empowers us, moving in the gifts of the Spirit remind us that it is not about us, but about God. We cannot exercise these gifts based on our own strength or abilities. But as we depend on Him, the Holy Spirit reminds us that He is with us.

6. Gifts of the Spirit are not a sign of holiness or maturity

One of the reasons Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians was to correct the church's understanding and practices in exercising the gifts of the Spirit. While the Corinthian church did "not lack any spiritual gift." (1 Corinthians 1:7), they experienced many internal issues like disunity, sexual immorality and lawsuits amongst themselves. They were gifted, but immature.

Instead of being a badge of maturity, gifts of the Spirit demonstrate God's grace to the church. Though spiritual maturity can help one to exercise these gifts with the right heart attitude, they are not reserved only for the spiritually mature. We do not need to reach a level of "holiness" or spirituality to receive or exercise them.

There are well known believers who exercise gifts of the Spirit powerfully. When some are later revealed to have fallen into sinful lifestyles, we can be shocked and confused. This is because we might have equated the exercising of the gifts with holiness. This does not mean that the gifts they exercised were not genuine. God could have used these people to minister to the people He loves. But it is important that we exercise the gifts of the Spirit for the right purpose and with the right heart attitudes.

WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF GIFTS OF THE Spirit?

1. Gifts of the Spirit enable us to be priests to minister to others

God desires for His people to serve others and show who He is through us. The priests played this role in the Old Testament. They represented God to His people and brought their requests before Him. You might be wondering how being priests relate to us in our modern day lives. Did you know that even today, all believers are called to be priests – to represent God to others and to stand in the gap on people's behalf before God?

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

This new identity as priests means all of us have a privilege and responsibility to minister to and serve others. We are called to declare God's praises to others because He has saved us and given us a new life in Christ. We can also pray and intercede on behalf of others who have yet to come to know Him. That is what being priests means.

Declaring who Christ is to those around us might not always be easy. That is why God has given us the Holy Spirit who enables us to fulfil our role as priests through gifts of the Spirit. Though the Holy Spirit is invisible, others can see how He is working tangibly when the church exercises the gifts of the Spirit.

2. Gifts of the Spirit build up the body of Christ

Gifts of the Spirit are given to build up the church, so others around may also see God's glory and join in praising Him. This means that the gifts of the Spirit we have are not meant for self-edification, but for mutual edification.

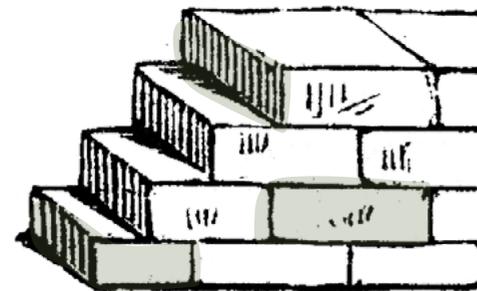
1 Corinthians 12:7

⁷ *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

Whatever gift we have received, we are called to serve God and others faithfully. God is the ultimate Owner and we are just stewards. Our gifts only have value when they are exercised faithfully to build the church.

Ephesians 4:16

¹⁶ *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*



ATTITUDES IN EXERCISING GIFTS OF THE Spirit

In order to exercise the gifts of the Spirit, we must first belong to the body of Christ. Imagine a floating eye or a toe, separated from the rest of the body. Disturbing as it sounds, that is what happens when a believer is not rooted in a spiritual community. Away from the body, there is no life. We must root ourselves in the church to serve God and others.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14

¹² *Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.*

As we belong and serve the church with the gifts of the Spirit, what kind of godly attitudes should we have?

1. Serve with love

1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:1-7

^{31b} *And yet I will show you the most excellent way. ¹ If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.*

² *If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

⁴ *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

Love is the most excellent way. Love gives value to the exercise of our gifts. Without love, our gifts have no substance. Without love, the gifts have no real significance for we are nothing. Love is the foundation of all our service to God. We love because we are first loved by Him.

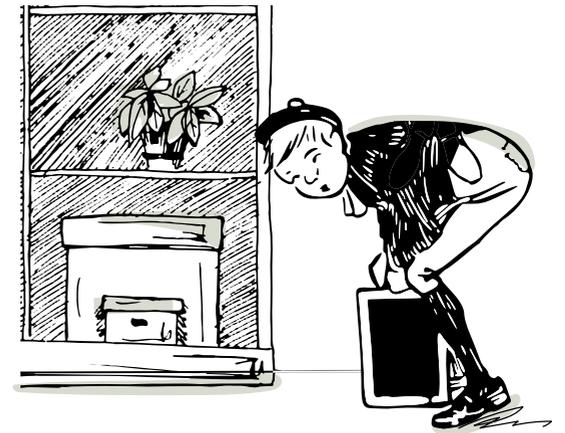
When we serve in gifts of the Spirit with love, we treat others with grace as we have first received grace from the Holy Spirit. Love puts others' needs above our own. Love wants the best for others and has no limitations. Love means we are not self-focused but others focused.

2. Serve with humility

Gifts of the Spirit exist for the church's mission, not for our own selfish gain or self-fulfilment. Jesus modelled what it means to serve with humility when He laid aside His rights to wash the feet of His disciples. He showed that though He had all power and authority, He made Himself a servant to serve others. We as His disciples are called to do the same.

“When I was a young Christian, I thought that God kept His gifts on shelves and the best gifts were on the highest shelves and I would have to reach up. I learned later the best gifts are on the lowest shelf and I had to stoop down.”

■ ■ ■ D.L. MOODY



When we focus on serving others and value them above ourselves, we exercise the gifts of the Spirit in humility. We recognise that there is no hierarchy of gifts because all gifts are important and play different roles. This means we do not take pride in our gifts, boast in them or compare them with others'. Instead, we humbly acknowledge that no matter what gifts the Spirit sovereignly distributes to us, we are all serving the same God as one.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

The Holy Spirit can work powerfully through us when we exercise the gifts of the Spirit. However, we claim no credit for the good work. Serving in humility means that we always remember to point people back to God, the ultimate source.



UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Have you attended a music concert before? As the lights dim, the crowd quietens to a polite hush. The first strings of the guitar are plucked, and piano keys are hit. As the conductor cues in more instruments, melodious music fills the hall. There could be solo parts whilst other instruments support the main instrument in the background. They take turns to shine. Though every instrument sounds different, they come together as one to create lovely symphonies. That is a wonderful picture of unity in diversity. In the same way, the Holy Spirit has given different gifts to us for the common purpose of proclaiming God's goodness. There is beauty and unity despite the differences.

1 Corinthians 12:21-25

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

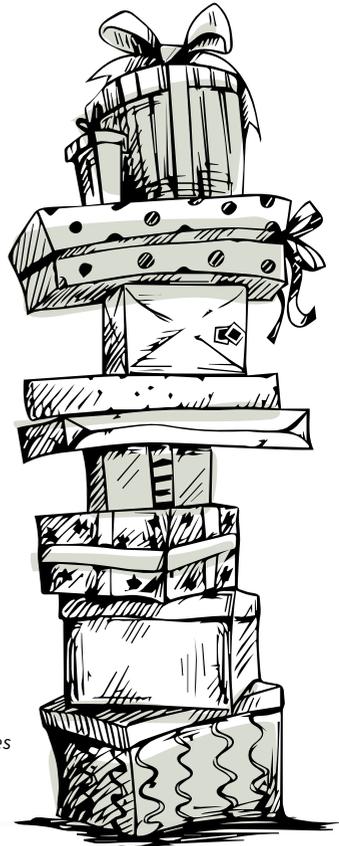
All members of the body are important and rely on one another. None of the parts can function or exist on its own. The whole body cannot just be an eye or a head because then there is not a body at all. Every part of the body should also be honoured as we serve together, even if they might seem weaker or less honourable. Every member learns how to submit to other members as they exercise different gifts of the Spirit. We grow to recognise and appreciate the different gifts of the Spirit.

DISCOVERING OUR GIFTS OF THE Spirit

A natural question we might be wondering about is “What gift of the Spirit have I received?” Gifts of the Spirit are discovered through our service to the church. This means that we should serve widely and slowly discover our spiritual gifts along the way. As we obediently serve wherever God has placed us, we will slowly discover our gifts along the way.

Rather than being overly concerned what gift we have received or limiting ourselves to serve only in our gift, we can learn to be open and ready for God to use us wherever the church needs. He will equip us with gifts of the Spirit to complete the tasks He has called us, to build up the church.

No matter what gifts the Spirit sovereignly distributes to us, we are all serving the same God as one.



CONCLUSION

It is impossible to build God’s church solely on human effort and ability. That is why God has given us gifts of the Spirit as building God’s church is spiritual work. As we partner with the Holy Spirit and the gifts He has distributed to us as a body, we can all grow more towards Christ.

If every believer in church depends on the Holy Spirit’s empowerment and serves in our respective gifts together, ultimately God is praised. As a body, we draw attention to God’s goodness and encourage others to believe in Him when we exercise our gifts.

1 Peter 4:10-11

¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.





REFLECT ↴

What are your motivations for desiring gifts of the Spirit? How can knowing their purpose refine your motivations?

Are there any gifts of the Spirit that you desire more than others? Why or why not?

Have you heard about how believers are called to be priests to minister to others? How does it change your understanding of gifts of the Spirit?



RESPOND ↴

Now that you are a little more informed about gifts of the Spirit, what is one thing that God is leading you to respond in as you serve the church? (E.g., Be more connected to the community, serve and contribute more, eagerly desire gifts to build up the church)

Other Resources

- Holy Spirit and End Times HopeSem Class
- Unwrapping Your Spiritual Gifts for the Church (tinyurl.com/unwrapgifts)

SESSION 6

Fulfilling the Great Commission as a Disciple Maker

In the Eighteen Century, the Great Awakening marked a period of revival where many claimed their hearts had been stirred by God. However, years later, many who have supposedly come to faith in Christ displayed no transformation in their lives. In response, Jonathan Edwards wrote his sermon “Treatise on Religious Affections” to address the issue of deficient discipleship and authentic faith. In his writing, he sets out distinguishing marks of true discipleship and how a life of a disciple should be marked by “holy affections” - longing after God, a zeal for God’s work and obedience to God’s call.

Indeed, Christianity was never intended to produce Christians, but disciples. Yet in order for disciples to be made, there needs to be disciple makers. All are called to the task of disciple making, not just the pastors or leaders in the church. As Jesus gave His disciples the command to fulfil the Great Commission, He also calls us to play a part in His redemptive plan for the world.

THE COMMAND FOR DISCIPLE MAKING

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

In the Great Commission, Jesus clearly lined out that His followers are to go and make disciples. Not first and foremost to “do daily devotions”, or “help the needy”. It is no mere coincidence that He said this because following Christ means making disciples.

We are called to save souls by proclaiming the Gospel, but our task does not end there. We do not merely want people to escape hell but we want to help them grow in Christ, be transformed into His likeness and to eventually become a servant who does God’s will.

Colossians 1:28-29

²⁸ He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

THE APPROACHES FOR DISCIPLE MAKING

1. Proclaiming the Gospel

• Proclaiming the Gospel with Words

As the Son of God, Jesus began His ministry by urging people towards repentance and to believe in Him. Subsequently, when Jesus sent out His disciples, He also gave them the same task of proclaiming the Gospel.

Mark 1:14-15

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Matthew 10:7-8

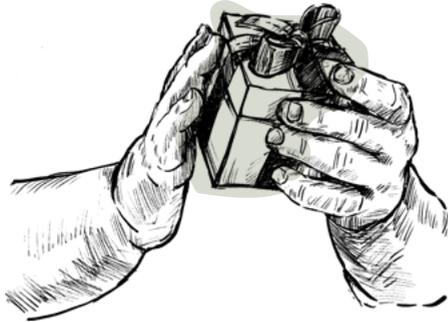
⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Jesus’ response to the crowds in Luke 4 reveals His priorities. After seeing how Jesus had the power to heal and cast out demons, the crowds pressed in on Him, probably seeking Him to do more for them. But Jesus was clear that His main priority was not merely to perform acts of miracles to wow the crowds, but to proclaim the good news. Instead of pandering to the crowds’ desires, Jesus went on proclaiming, for that was why He was sent.

Luke 4:42-44

⁴² At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. ⁴³ But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." ⁴⁴ And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Proclaiming the Gospel is not an option for disciples of Christ, but a necessity. It is not a task reserved for the extroverted or those with an inclination towards evangelism. It is a command for all disciples. As people who have tasted and seen the goodness of God, we cannot afford to be selfish and keep the Good News to ourselves.



With many marching towards **Christ-less eternities**, we must become serious about doing all we can to **share the love of Christ** to those around us.

Romans 10:14-15

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

We need to be ever-ready to tell others about our faith and to do so in a God-honouring manner. Arrogance has no place in our Christian witness. We may persuade and testify, but we must never be offensive or quarrelsome as it will discredit the gospel and dishonour the name of Christ. In fact, 1 Peter 3 teaches us to always share our faith with gentleness and respect.

1 Peter 3:15-16

¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Reflect: Proclaiming the Gospel should be a priority, not an afterthought. As a follower of Christ, is proclaiming the Gospel a priority in your life? Why?

• Proclaiming the Gospel with Deeds

The German poet Heinrich Heine once said to Christians “You show me your redeemed life and I might be inclined to believe in your Redeemer”.

Proclaiming the Gospel goes beyond sharing about Christ with our words. It also entails living out such a Christ-like life that will lead others to be curious and drawn to Christ Himself. Proclaiming the Gospel with words and without deeds is hypocrisy. We may even be pushing people away from Christ if we do not reflect God’s character through the way we live.

1 Peter 2:11-12

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.’

As we live upright lives and treat others with love and respect, opportunities to share our faith will come. People will think we are worth listening to and sharing their troubles with, because we are trustworthy.

What if you are the only Christ-follower someone may ever cross paths with? What you say, how you live and the way you interact with others will affect their perceptions of the Christ you proclaim. As we obey God’s call to preach the gospel, we remember to do so both in words and deeds.

Colossians 4:5-6

⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Reflect: How much do I faithfully represent Christ in my life? Is my witness balanced with both word and deed?

2. Investing in Disciple Making Relationships

In His short earthly ministry, Jesus intentionally chose twelve disciples and invested in them to prepare them to carry on with ministry after He ascended to heaven. In the Greco-Roman world, a rabbi’s followers would go everywhere with him. Beyond learning from the rabbi’s teachings, his disciples would experience first-hand how he lived and would mimic what he did.

Mark 3:13-15

¹³ Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons.

Shortly before Paul’s death, he wrote to his close friend and co-worker Timothy. It was clear that Paul knew that solid transmission of the faith would not be as effective through the crowd, but through personal investment in individuals.

2 Timothy 2:2

² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

In our church, we believe that it is crucial for disciples to fulfil the Great Commission by discipling other believers. We call this ‘mentoring’. Mentoring is an intentional relationship where we walk alongside fellow disciples to encourage, equip and challenge one another towards maturity in Christ. The mentor will make disciples who will in turn make other disciples.

We intentionally disciple other believers in the following ways:

- **Teaching the Word of God**

The Word of God is key to discipleship for it reveals who God is, His plan for the world and how He desires for us to live. For believers to live differently from the world, our minds need to first be renewed by the Word of God.

Romans 12:2

² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

When we disciple others, we must not only give wise or biblical sounding advice or counsel. We need to build our disciples on the foundation and authority of God’s Word, for it is the truth. God’s Word can speak to the myriad of experiences we may face in life, if only we take time to read, understand and earnestly seek God through it.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Psalms 19:7-8

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

Reflect: If you are a disciple-maker, reflect on how much you help your disciples understand and apply the Word of God in their lives. How can you better help your disciple encounter Christ through His living Word? What is one step you can take to help yourself do so?

• Modelling a Christ-centered Life

A disciple maker walks the talk. Teaching the Word of God is important, but role-modelling a life that exhibits Christlikeness is equally important. Disciple makers who do so have the credibility to inspire and encourage their disciples to do the same.

The Apostle Paul took care of the Thessalonica church by proclaiming the gospel to them and doing life together with them. In his letters to the church, he instructed them to work hard and showed how he himself laboured to earn his own living, as an example for the church to follow.

1 Thessalonians 2:8b

^{8b} Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.

Jesus Himself did not just command His disciples to obey God and love people. But through His very life, showed us what it meant to do so at all costs, even to the point of death.

• Relying on the Holy Spirit

It is liberating and comforting to know that the responsibility of transforming lives lies not on us as disciple makers, but wholly on the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies believers and we are mere vessels He uses in the process.

1 Peter 1:2

² ...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

The thought of discipling someone else may feel daunting. We may feel like we not know the Bible well enough, do not have enough experience or are not mature enough to disciple another person in Christ. In fact, some of the issues we need to counsel our disciple on may be complex and challenging. The good news is, we can rely on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit as we make disciples. We take heart in God's promise that He is "surely with us, till the very end of the age" (*Matthew 28:20*).

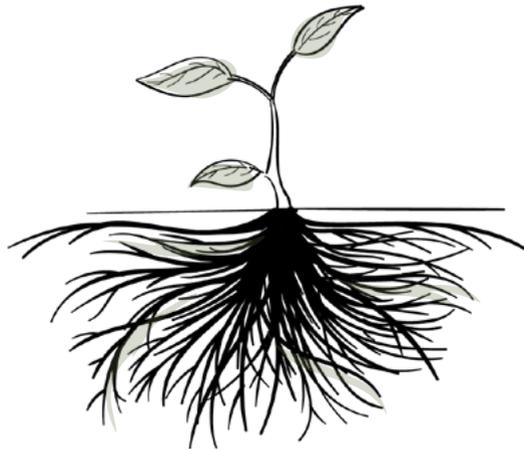
At the end of the day, it is humbling to know that God is ultimately the one who causes growth in people's lives. We claim no credit when our disciples grow and are transformed. On the other hand, neither will our limitations inhibit His work.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7

⁶ *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.*

⁷ *So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.*

Reflect: What fears or reservations do you have towards being a disciple maker? Why?



God is ultimately the one who causes growth in people's lives.

THE MOTIVATION FOR DISCIPLE MAKING

The journey of making disciples comes with joys, disappointments, successes and setbacks. It can be absolutely rewarding to see your disciple experiencing breakthroughs. Yet at times, it can also be extremely heartbreaking when your disciple turns his back on Christ, or refuses to change his ways, despite your best efforts. Without the right motivations to make disciples, we may lose heart.

In his farewell speech to the elders from the Ephesus church, the Apostle Paul shared his motivation for disciple making, despite experiencing opposition and setbacks. He valued the church which Christ died for and made it his life goal to help others experience the good news of God's grace.

Acts 20:24-28

²⁴ *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.* ²⁵ *“Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.* ²⁶ *Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you.* ²⁷ *For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.* ²⁸ *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

Ultimately, our motivation for disciple making should come from a deep appreciation of what Christ had first done for us on the cross. This way, our conviction to make disciples will not waver despite the changing seasons of life or issues we face in disciple making. We fix our eyes on the Cross and draw strength from the abundant love and grace Christ had first lavished on us.

Ephesians 1:3-8a

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us.



CONCLUSION

The Dead Sea is famous for its inability to contain living creatures. Several rivers flow into the Dead Sea, but none flows from it. As a result, its water becomes so saturated with minerals that nothing is able to live in it. The same is true for us. If our faith has no “outlet”, we can find ourselves becoming like the Dead Sea – lifeless and spiritually dead.

On the other hand, if we allow ourselves to be vessels used by God to proclaim His name and build others' up in Christ, we can continually experience spiritual revitalisation and intimacy as we rely on God. We can be assured that as we avail ourselves to be used by God, He is pleased and will reward us in due time.

1 Peter 5:2-4

² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.



REFLECT ↻

Think about who you were before you came to know Christ. How did Christ change and save you? Come to Christ in gratitude and praise Him for His wonderful work in your life.

What are some obstacles or challenges you face in preaching the Gospel or investing in disciple making relationships? What can you do to overcome them?



RESPOND ↻

Being a disciple maker means we proclaim the gospel to our pre-believing friends through word and deed and invest in disciple making relationships. Which do you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to respond in? What is one step you can take to do so?

Learn how to become a disciple maker through the Step D: Mentor Class. Find out more via the Grow Portal (grow.hopesingapore.org.sg) or speak to your lifegroup leader about this.

Other Resources

- Equip yourself with skills to share the gospel through helpful resources from the Grow Portal (grow.hopesingapore.org.sg/workpad)

SESSION 7

Living In But Not of the World

Fish live and swim in the water. They depend on it to survive but are not made of water. Similarly, as believers, we live in the world and depend on resources it provides, but we are called to be different from others living in it. We are not defined by the world's values, principles and priorities.

Why does God place us in the world? Why not take us out of the world? Why not separate us from others who have not come to believe in Him? What is His purpose for us as we live in this world?

LIVING IN THE WORLD

As believers, we do not live in our own little bubble, segregated from the world. Jesus prayed for His disciples the night before He went to the Cross because they will remain in the world to fulfil His mission.

John 17:11

¹¹ I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

1. We have compassion for the world

Jesus models for us what it means to have compassion for others in the world we live in. When He saw people in need, He stopped for them and showed love to them.

Mark 6:34

³⁴ *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.*

He taught them, sometimes patiently, sometimes rebuking them directly. Like a shepherd with a rod and staff, He was the perfect balance of love and truth. Sinners and tax collectors, who were considered the worst of the worst, were attracted to Jesus. He did not shy away from them, even though others did. Jesus fellowshiped with them and these interactions with Him sometimes transformed their lives.

Luke 15:1-2

¹ *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.*

² *But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”*



Though God could easily take us up to Him after we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, He lets us remain here to be His hands and feet in this broken world. While the world might shun the poor, the sick, the outcasts, and the sinners, we are called to show love and compassion towards them as He did.

Matthew 22:37-39

³⁷ *Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*

Loving our neighbors means not completely disassociating or separating ourselves from them. Instead, we can ask God to show us His love for them, so we might learn to see them through His eyes of compassion. In compassion, we can connect with them and relate with them as Jesus did. As we show sincere and genuine love, we will naturally influence them.

Reflect: Who are the forgotten or shunned in our society? Are there people in your life whom you find difficult to love or reach out to? How do you relate with them? How might Jesus relate with them? Ask God to give you a heart of compassion to see them through His eyes.

2. We influence the world

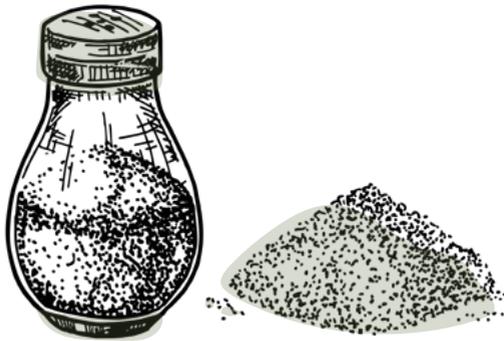
Whether we realise it or not, we are influencing those around us either towards or away from Christ. Through the decisions we make, the lifestyle we lead and the way we relate with others, we are influencing those around us in the world we live in.

Matthew 5:13-16

¹³ *"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.* ¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.* ¹⁵ *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.* ¹⁶ *In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven..*

Salt is meant to fulfill its purpose. Without its saltiness, it fails to be what it is designed for.

We are called to be light in darkness. In a dark room, a small lit candle or a little handphone torchlight is enough to bring light to it. The light is not overcome by the darkness, but when light comes, darkness flees. We are called to be light in a dark world, to point others to the True Light that is Jesus Christ.



1 Peter 2:11-12

¹¹ *Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.* ¹² *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

The Bible calls us foreigners and exiles in this world. This is because this world is not our home. Our final destination is not here, but our heavenly home. At the very end, Jesus will return again for His people and make everything right. Until then, we have been placed in the world to influence those He around us.

We are called to lead lives of integrity and goodness, even if others might accuse us. We are to live in such a way that those who have yet to know Jesus can see our lives and know that there is something different about us. As we point others to Jesus through our lives, more will have the opportunity to hear what Christ has done for them.

Reflect: How is your testimony as a carrier of God's light? When others look at your life, are they able to see your good deeds that point to Jesus? Take some time to pray for the Holy Spirit to empower you as God's witness.

LIVING NOT OF THE WORLD

While we might be living physically in the world, we are called to live differently from the values and behaviour of the world.

1. We are hated by the world

Jesus warned His disciples that if the world hated Him first, they would also hate His disciples.

John 15:18-21

¹⁸ *“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.*

The word “hate” is a very strong word, but it brings out how completely different worldly values are from Christian values. Have you ever been called “old fashioned” or “holy moly” for some beliefs that you hold because of your faith? Are there people who are more hostile towards you simply because you are Christian? Or have you been singled out in front of others to answer difficult questions about why Christians think completely differently from the rest of the world?

Jesus makes it clear that the world is completely opposed to the values we hold onto. We will stick out like sore thumbs even though we live in the same world. Christians were never meant to just blend in and flow with the rest of the world. In fact, Jesus goes even further to say that we can even expect to be persecuted for our faith.

1 John 3:1

¹ *Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.*

This can be shocking for some of us especially if we have not yet experienced opposition for our faith. But the reality is that Jesus clearly warns that persecution will come someday. As we bear the name of Jesus, we will be treated badly by those who oppose our master’s teachings.

John 17:14-16

¹⁴ *I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.*

Instead of asking the Father to take us out of the world, Jesus prays that His disciples will be protected from the evil one. Jesus’ prayer gives us a glimpse of how we might undergo these difficulties. We can look to Him and trust in His protection. We may not be spared from suffering or pain, but we can persevere on prayerfully, knowing that His tangible presence is with us.

Reflect: Does it shock you that the world hates us as Christians? Think back about a time when you were mocked or treated badly just because you were a Christian. How did Jesus respond to persecution? How can you prepare yourself for times of persecution?

2. We are set apart for God

When we think of the word “holy,” perhaps we tend to think of someone pure or someone who does good deeds. But what does the Bible say about holiness and what it means to be holy? The main theme of the book of Leviticus is the holiness of God and how the Israelites were to relate with this holy God. In Leviticus, God instructed His people on how they should approach and worship Him through the tabernacle. God dwells among His people but they were not to be careless about His holy presence.

Leviticus 11:44-45

⁴⁴ *I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves along the ground.*

⁴⁵ *I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.*



Repeatedly, God calls His people to be holy just as He is.

Leviticus 19:2

² *“Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’”*

What does it mean when God says He is holy? “Holy” is not only a word used in Israel to describe God, but a common word used by other nations in the Old Testament world. Simply put, it means “that which is other,” something distinctly different from the rest. Another common way to understand holiness is “set apart.”

When something is given to a god, it becomes “holy.” It belongs exclusively to this god and can be used for his purposes only. Think of a pot that is reserved for use in a temple. That is a holy pot. They also believed that when something becomes “holy” to a god, it takes on the character of that god. In those days, a woman dedicated to a fertility god then becomes promiscuous like the goddess.

There is only One being in the universe who is truly “other” – The God revealed in the Scriptures. He is not only holy in that He is unlike us, but He is also holy in character. Unlike the other ancient gods who might be immoral, our God is righteous, faithful, has integrity and demonstrates self-giving, sacrificial love to His people. Just as God is holy, we are called to be like Him. Holiness is possible since it is commanded by God.

1 Peter 1:14-16

¹⁴ *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.* ¹⁵ *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;* ¹⁶ *for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

Someone who is set apart is then different from others who are not. This is why Christians are called to live differently from the world. Being set apart means we are to reflect God’s character in this world. As we continue to walk with Him, we take on God’s characteristics as well. The more we relate to the One we worship, the more we will eventually become more and more like Christ.

1 John 2:15

¹⁵ *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them.*

We are called to love the people in the world, but not the things of this world. Being set apart means we are to be careful to live in a way that pleases God, not the worldly culture around us.

Romans 12:2

² *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

We are set apart even in the way we think. We are not to follow how the world thinks or what the world does, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Christians may go through similar experiences and challenges that non-Christians face, but we are to face them with an eternal perspective and with trust in our God.

HOW CAN WE LIVE IN BUT NOT BE OF THE WORLD?

How can we practically live as people set apart for God?

1. Be sanctified by the truth

When Jesus prayed for His disciples to withstand the challenges in the world, He prayed for them to be sanctified by the Word.

John 17:14, 17

¹⁴ *I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world...* ¹⁷ *Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*

In order to be set apart, we must first allow the Word to cleanse us daily. We have God's Word to guide and lead us and we must allow it to be our anchor. Only through knowing the Bible can we learn to differentiate godly values from worldly values. Through connecting with the God in the Bible, we grow to know what pleases God.

Imagine you are lost and need to rely on the GPS (Global Positioning System) in your phone. The Bible is like a moral compass that helps us to navigate the maze of life in this world. This compass guides our decisions and actions so we can stay on the right path even when faced with complex choices. We can follow this compass because it is trustworthy.

Sanctification by the Word is a life-long process. As we continue to immerse ourselves in God's Word, our worldview and values will be increasingly different from the world's. They will look more and more like the God we worship.

2. Die to ourselves daily

Someone who is set apart for God lives differently from someone who has yet to know and experience Him. We can see this through the daily decisions we make and what we choose to prioritise in our lives.

Luke 9:23-24

²³ *Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.*

Denying ourselves means giving up our rights and surrendering them to God. Taking up our cross daily means putting aside our selfish desires and dying to ourselves. Following Jesus means allowing His will to be done in our lives and yielding to Him, even when it might often be different from what we prefer or hope for.

Ephesians 4:22-24

²² *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

We are called to say goodbye to how we used to live before we came to know Jesus. We have a new identity as new creations in Him, called to be righteous and holy just as He is.

For each of us, dying to ourselves to live for Christ could look different. For some, it could mean setting aside our time, talent and treasures to serve Him. For others, it could mean taking a risk to stand firm in our beliefs as a Christ-follower in our workplace.

Reflect: What does it mean for you to die to yourself when it comes to living in the world but not being of the world?

3. Surrender to the Holy Spirit

Being holy is not something we can achieve by relying on our willpower or strength. We can only do so when we depend on the Holy Spirit, who leads and guides us into truth.

John 16:13

¹³ *But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.*

As we surrender to the Holy Spirit, we learn not to insist on what we want, but to respond to what God wants instead. We learn to give up our rights as we wrestle with the Holy Spirit.

John 14:26

²⁶ *"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."*

The Holy Spirit will speak to us and teach us how we should respond when worldly values clash with our Christian values. Our role is to listen to Him and not limit Him. As we yield to Him, He will guide us in engaging the world.

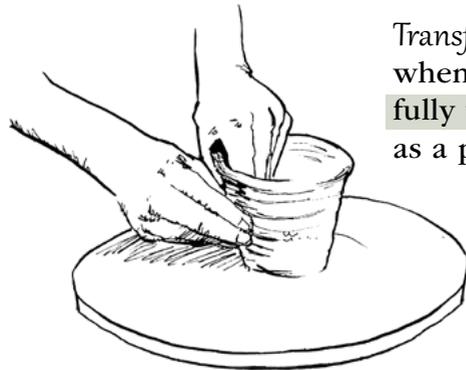
Transformation takes place when we offer ourselves fully to Him to be molded as a potter molds the clay. As we allow the Holy Spirit to live in and through us, we can be witnesses for Christ in this fallen world.

Acts 1:6-8

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ 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.”

After Jesus’ resurrection, He appeared to the disciples. They were excited and thought that He would restore God’s Kingdom in the world. Instead, Jesus told them that this was not what they should be concerned about. He re-directed their focus to how the Holy Spirit will empower them to be His witnesses.

In the same way, we are not to be concerned about when the world will be restored to the way God has created it to be. Instead, we are called to live as people set apart for Him. We rely on the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses. **We are in the world but not of the world, sent to the world to influence the world.**



Transformation takes place when we **offer ourselves fully to Him** to be molded as a potter molds the clay.

**CONCLUSION**

Christianity has seen many martyrs through the ages, some famous and some nameless. Some of them were willing to die for their faith rather than renounce Christ. This shocks and awes us at the same time. It reminds us that the world first hated Jesus and persecuted Him. We too, will not be spared from the same treatment. This may strike fear in some of our hearts.

As we are reminded that the world hates us, let us also remember that we are fully known and fully loved by a God who sent His one and only Son to die for us. This is why we can have compassion and influence the people in the world who have yet to know Him.

Because God is holy, we are also called to live differently from the rest of the world. Our lives should cause people to wonder about the God we proclaim. God may not lead all of us to die for our faith, but are we willing to die to ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him in our daily living? We might look like fools to the rest of the world, but are we willing to look like fools for the sake of Christ?

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

■ ■ ■ **JIM ELLIOT**, missionary killed while trying to evangelise to a tribe in Ecuador



REFLECT ↻

What does holiness mean to you? How is it similar or different from what you have learnt from this lesson?

Recall a time when you struggled to stand firm on your faith, how did you respond eventually?

What are some ways that Christians are called to be set apart from the world? What are some decisions you make because of your faith in God? (E.g., Choosing to make time for the community, serving the church, prioritising Quiet Time daily etc)

RESPOND ↻



Of the 3 areas of how to live in but not of the world, which speaks most to you? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to obey Him in 1 of these areas.

Find out more about a Christian martyr who died for his or her faith. Discuss and share with your mentor or lifegroup and spur one another to live for Christ together.

SESSION 8

Engaging Culture in Evangelism

THE NEED TO ENGAGE CULTURE IN EVANGELISM

Hope Singapore is called to be part of a global church planting movement which seeks to fulfil God's commission of making disciples of all nations (*Matthew 28:18-20*). Local and global evangelism is thus an important portion of this vision. Given that Singapore is a cosmopolitan city-state, it is also inevitable that we come across different people from different cultures.

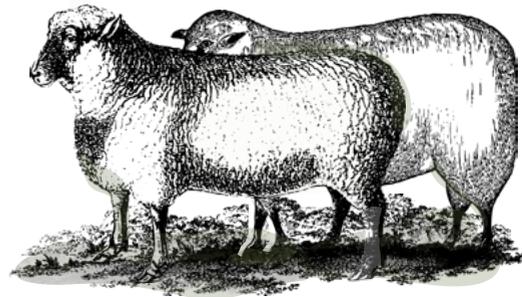
But what is culture? Culture is a mix of visible and hidden behaviours and practices that people learn and share, often represented through symbols such as art or rituals. The shared beliefs, traditions and values makes the different groups of people unique, since their collective identity is rooted in their traditional ideas and the importance they place on them. As such, culture influences how individuals perceive the world around them, how they relate to others, and how they express themselves. It encompasses everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts to the deeper unseen values, assumptions, and worldviews that shape their thoughts and behaviors.

Moreover, cultures can also shift across generations. Even within the same people group, different generations will grow up being exposed to different types of media and environments. For example, the Gen Z grew up using newer social media tools, such as TikTok, compared to their older counterparts who used Facebook (or MySpace) in their younger days.

As such, we not only need to engage the cultures around us by understanding them, but also continually keep ourselves updated with the different shifts in cultures, so that we can present the Gospel in a relevant and comprehensible manner to the world.

LESSONS FROM PAUL'S EXAMPLE ON ENGAGING CULTURE

The Bible is not devoid of examples of cultural engagement. Jesus regularly used familiar images of seeds, harvest and sheep to teach his disciples. In fact, the apostle Paul was a Jewish Christian called to reach out to the Gentile (*Romans 1:5*). Being a Roman citizen who grew up in the Greek city of Tarsus and studied under the tutelage of a renowned Jewish teacher (*Acts 22:3*), Paul would bridge the gap between the Jewish origins of the Gospel and its broader application to the rest of the world.



1 Corinthians 9:19-23

¹⁹ *Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.*
²⁰ *To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.*
²¹ *To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.*
²² *To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.*
²³ *I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul defended his rights as an apostle but concluded in verses 19-23 that preaching the gospel is more important than his rights as an apostle. As such, he strived to win the Jews and Gentiles (those not having the law) alike by engaging with them and their culture. He demonstrated this in his introduction of the Gospel to the Athenians (*Acts 17*).

1. Paul engaged with both Jews and non-Jews (Acts 17:16-17)

Upon arriving in Athens, Paul engaged immediately with the different people he could find in the synagogue. After all, Athens was one of the major Greek cities of Paul's days and it was the home of the most prominent universities in the Greek world, meaning that that was a fertile ground for meeting people of different intellectual and cultural persuasion.

Acts 17:16-17

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

Moreover, the Jews and non-Jews would share different cultures, with the Jews being more stringent in their observance of the Mosaic laws of the Old Testament (such as circumcision).

2. Paul connected with the cultures of the Athenians (Acts 17:19-23)

As a result of Paul's engagement in the synagogue, he was invited to the Areopagus to present his teaching to the council. This Areopagus was effectively the government of Athens and was the proper channel for admitting new gods and goddesses into the already wide range of deities that the city was worshipping.

Acts 17:19-23

¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean." ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) ²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

In response to the Areopagus' invitation, Paul proclaimed that he was not introducing a new deity. Instead, he made use of the fact that the Athenians were worshipping an unknown god to make known to them the Creator of heaven and earth. In the process, he engaged the Athenians' religious beliefs and philosophies in order to preach the gospel to the people. This was shown to be effective when Acts 17:34 mentioned that some of the people "became followers of Paul and believed."

In summary, through Paul's example in Athens, we saw how Paul did not shy away from interacting with people outside of his culture, and in fact, connected with the culture of the times. Likewise, as believers, if we were to imitate Paul just as how he imitates Christ, then we can learn to engage the culture of our times, whether we are evangelising locally or globally.

PRINCIPLES TO ENGAGE CULTURE

How then can we engage culture in evangelism? There are 4 principles that we can bear in mind:

1. Recognise the Bible as our Authority and Blueprint

Regardless which culture we are engaging, we need to remember that we submit to the authority of God's Word. God's Word, as revealed in our Bible, is sacred because it has its ultimate origin from God Himself. If we really affirm that the source of the Bible is God, and not man, then it has the final say over the decisions we make while engaging cultures.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

In being useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, the Scripture also affirms that we need to measure ourselves by its standards. This means we cannot simply have the Bible app installed on our mobile devices. We need to use the Word and trust that it has effects in our lives. This is especially important when we are engaging cultures. Different cultures will have its own set of beliefs concerning morality and meaning. Practically speaking, this means that we should not only be measuring ourselves according to the values of our own culture. We should also not measure the other cultures according to the values that they espouse.

This also means that when the values and practices of cultures we are engaging clash with biblical principles, we need to take reference first and foremost from the guidance of the Bible. This is not saying that we shove the biblical views of things down the throats of other, but at the end of the day, to truly be the salt and light, we need to stand firm in our convictions that come from the Bible.

Reflect: Are you basing your approach to culture on the Word of God? Or do you treat the Bible as merely some good suggestions when you are reaching out to different cultures?

2. Identify Issues That are Non-Negotiable

Given that we need to treat the Bible as our final authority, it also means that there are non-negotiable issues that we must take a firm stand in. The non-negotiables refer to the core aspects of our faith that are unchanging regardless of cultural context and societal shifts. These have to be the anchor points of our evangelism when we engage with culture. Examples of these core aspects include the belief in Jesus as the God incarnate who came to earth to die for our sins, the universal need for salvation due to sin and the hope that comes from the resurrection and the future Second Coming of Jesus. This means that if there are cultural issues that force us to compromise on these core aspects of our faith, we are to stand firm and not compromise in a gentle manner.

Daniel 1:8

⁸ But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

Daniel was one of the examples in the Bible who showed that he was willing to stand on the non-negotiables while engaging with the culture around him. Even though he was akin to a political prisoner in Babylon and was supposed to learn the ways of the Babylonians, he had non-negotiables as God's people and chose to exercise control over his diets so that he would not get completely assimilated into the Babylonian cultures. It is likely that the diet would have caused him to compromise on his faith, given that the food would likely involve unclean food or food that has been sacrificed to idols. The entire episode showed that it was possible for Daniel to engage with the culture while remaining faithful to the non-negotiables of his faith.

John 17:18

¹⁸ *As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.*

Since we are sent into a world where the cultures generally won't accept our core beliefs readily, there are many ways in which the cultures around us will challenge how we live our lives in order to accept us. Therefore, it is important for us to reflect on the way we stand firm in the non-negotiables while navigating around the complex web of cultural practices that we are evangelising in.

Consequently, there are non-spiritual cultural issues that we can thread carefully and weave into our evangelistic efforts. These do not infringe on the non-negotiable issues but are "grey issues" involving elements within the cultures that can be beneficial in bridging the gap between the timeless truth of the Gospel and the daily realities of the lives of these cultures. Examples of such issues may include emphasis on family and ancestral ties, importance placed on good values such as diligence and hard work, or even parenting techniques. As disciples who are interacting with the different cultures, it is possible for us to identify these elements within the cultures and contextualise the gospel message to make it relatable and tangible for the hearers from these cultures.

James 3:17

¹⁷ *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

Contrasting actions which demonstrate unspiritual wisdom, James highlighted the actions that demonstrate godly wisdom. Since we are God's people, we need to wholly and sincerely commit to follow God's direction and bear no unspiritual motives in our actions. As such, we need to act in accordance with godly wisdom when discerning how to engage these elements of culture.

Some of these considerations include:

- a) Gather information about that element of culture as much as possible. A lack of information or misinformation can make the difference between making a God-honoring decision or a decision that compromises our faith. Having these information will also help in the contextualising process.
- b) Ask ourselves these questions such as:
 -  Will participating in this issue lead me to violate the non-negotiables of our faith?
 -  Am I acting in love for others, i.e. will my action in engaging this element of culture stumble anyone and cause misunderstanding about my Christian faith?
 -  Will my actions help or hinder my witness for the gospel?

At the end of the day, we have to keep the end goal in mind. If engaging with a particular cultural element helps to advance the preaching of the Gospel, build bridges and foster genuine relationship, then it is beneficial for us to reflect how we can engage these elements. If it dilutes or creates unnecessary barriers for people to truly comprehend the core messages of Christianity, then we simply cannot negotiate and engage.

Reflect: What are the non-negotiables that you need to share when presenting the gospel to a non-believer in a culture that you are in? How do you think you can contextualise the gospel to them without compromising on these non-negotiables?

3. Be Led by the Holy Spirit in Cultural Engagement

Engaging with complex and shifting cultures require more than just understanding what the non-negotiable and beneficial issues are. Given that many of these issues are “grey” areas and that the Bible does not directly address such issues, engaging cultures in evangelism will often require us to call for guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8

⁸ ...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."

Before Jesus ascended back to heaven, his last word was to require the disciples to wait for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit before they go out there to be his witnesses. Note that the instruction was given in Jerusalem, in a Jewish setting but the end goal was “the ends of the earth,” which would have easily included non-Jewish people. This means that the disciples were expected to rely on the Holy Spirit when they evangelise to the non-Jewish world.

Note that in Acts, the Holy Spirit not only emboldened the disciples to speak God’s word boldly and (*Acts 4:31; 7:55*) and lead some to preach in unthinkable places such as the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-29, but it will at times prevent the believers from doing or going certain places. For example, the Holy Spirit prevented Paul and his companions from preaching the Gospel in the province of Asia during his second missionary journey (*Acts 16:6-7*). Note that by this time, Paul was already preaching beyond the Jewish world and was already reaching out to the non-Jewish people.

Acts 4:31

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 7:55

⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

Acts 8:26-29

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Acts 16:6-7

⁶ Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.

This thus requires us to be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit when we are engaging culture, instead of relying on our own human wisdom. Even if there are cultural issues that we can weave into our message at certain points in time, the Spirit might prompt us beyond our own understanding and stop us from doing so. But when there are times where we might feel inappropriate to speak up, the Spirit might guide us to speak boldly in the face of possible opposition and difficulties.

The manners in which the Holy Spirit can lead and guide our involvements includes:

-  Navigating difficult conversations when faced with cultural beliefs or practices that contradict the core messages of Christianity;
-  Discerning cultural practices while deciding whether to participate, abstain or modify the participation of these practices;
-  Nudging us towards particular people groups with whom we can build genuine relationships, leading to deeper discussions about faith;
-  Guiding us to choose appropriate contents from media from various cultural backgrounds that can help start conversations about faith;
-  Inspiring us to incorporate appropriate elements from different cultures for diverse groups of people;
-  Sharing our personal testimonies of our own encounters with Christ in a manner that showcase his love while bridging the cultural gaps;
-  Moving us to participate in miraculous healing/prophetic ministries that can help to demonstrate the power of God in the eyes of the different people groups

Reflect: What are some of the cultural issues that you have encountered in your evangelism? How have the Holy Spirit guided you in handling these issues and how have you obeyed/disobeyed the guidance of the Holy Spirit?

4. Prioritise Proclaiming the Gospel

Regardless the cultural issues that we are engaging in, our main priority is to be the witnesses of Jesus and make disciples of all nations, teaching them all that Jesus has taught us.

Acts 1:8

⁸ 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.”

Matthew 28:18-20

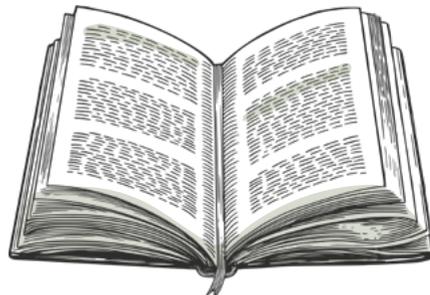
¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

While understanding and navigating the cultural nuances is crucial, it should never overshadow the primary message of salvation and transformation through Christ. No matter the cultural context, the truth of Jesus’ work on the cross must be the main message that we share.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

At the end of the day, cultural engagement does not mean assimilation at the expense of truth. Our mission is to fulfill the Great Commission. While we should strive to understand and respect other cultures, our allegiance must first be to Christ and his teachings.



CONCLUSION

In an increasingly globalised world, we are bound to encounter different cultures as we continue to fulfil God’s Great Commission. Some cultures might be furiously religious, while cultures which used to be Christian might be becoming increasingly secular. We must not simply withdraw from engaging these cultures, nor believe that our Christian faith must be subservient or dominate these cultural values. Instead, to be faithful to the Scripture, we have to think holistically with wisdom on how the gospel can better be proclaimed in these cultures, so that the people in these cultures can come to know the one and only eternal God who is the Creator of all nations.



REFLECT

Identify one cultural trend in your society that you are finding challenging to navigate in. Reflect how you can engage it biblically while evangelising to the people who are involved in this culture.



RESPOND

What are some of the people groups/cultures that you encounter in your immediate context (e.g., workplace or study)? How can you identify the issues that will help you to bridge the gospel message into your interactions with the people in these settings?

Other Resources

- Grow Class on Cross-Cultural Ministry by Hope Singapore

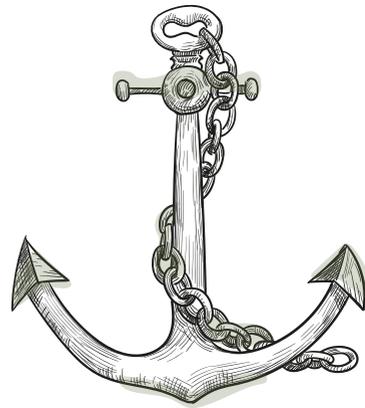
SESSION 9

Anchoring Our Lives Upon the Gospel

When a ship at harbour encounters a bad storm, the crew drops the anchor to prevent her from drifting away dangerously or worse, capsizing in face of heavy swells and winds.

When it comes to the ebb and flow of life, what do we anchor our lives upon? Left to ourselves, we instinctively rely on our wits, abilities, and connections to weather through storms and steer towards the ideal life that we desire. Yet regardless of how successful we are in life, our flaws and brokenness inevitably affect our lives and relationships, weighing us down while we try endlessly to stay afloat.

Fortunately for us, we have the Gospel, which we can look to and anchor our lives upon. As a concluding teaching for the Third Steps series, we want to revisit the fundamentals of our faith and re-centre our life on what truly matters.



SIN: THE ROOT PROBLEM OF ALL PROBLEMS

Nobody would disagree that the world we live in today is problematic. But people may differ in what they perceive as the real problem. To some, gun violence is the problem. Mental illness is the problem. Stress is the problem. Greed and political agendas are the problem. Injustice is the problem. Broken marriages are the problem.

What we see in society today are symptoms of the real problem. By tackling these issues in whatever capacity we can, we are merely plastering a temporary band-aid and relieving the symptoms. The root problem of all these problems is sin. As believers, we recognize that the brokenness in and around us ultimately stem from sin.

Romans 3:22b-23

^{22b} *There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,*
²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

Romans 3:10-11

¹⁰ *As it is written:*

*“There is no one righteous, not even one;
¹¹ there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God.*

The Bible is clear in indicting all man of sin but what is sin really? A complete and accurate view of sin is essential to better appreciate why we truly need the Gospel so much.

1. Sin as Defining God on Our Own Terms

The book of Genesis traces mankind's persistent rebellion against the Lord right from the beginning. Despite the Lord's attempt to judge and "reset" humanity through the flood in Genesis 6, it did not solve the problem of sin. In Genesis 9, God commanded the descendants of Noah to "increase in number and fill the earth". Yet the people chose to congregate to build a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens.

Genesis 11:4

⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

The problem with the tower of Babel was that it was man's attempt to "bring God down" and to define God on their own terms. It was a misconception that man can build a tower for God to dwell in such that they can have access to Him. As such, God judged the people by scattering them and confusing their tongue.

“As believers, we recognize that the brokenness in and around us ultimately stem from sin.”

Genesis 11:5-9

⁵ But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶ The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

⁸ So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. ⁹ That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

The events of the Tower of Babel once again reflected man's decision to decide for themselves what is right. Man's rebellion was shown by how they defiantly tried to manipulate God to be who they wanted Him to be.

Reflect: Where does our understanding of God come from? We need to carefully guard against forming our own preferred or desired ideas about God. We need to rely on God's revelation of Himself through the Word, above our own definitions.

2. Sin as Ungodliness and Unrighteousness

We often define sin as wrong acts that we commit. These are tangible behaviours which could include sexual immorality, stealing, murder etc. On closer examination of what the bible constitutes as sin, we find that sin is both ungodliness and unrighteousness. Unrighteousness refers to behaviour that goes against what God commanded. On the other hand, ungodliness is an inner attitude that is invisible but seeks to usurp God's authority and role in our lives.

Romans 1:18-19

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them

For many of us, the sin of ungodliness could be more insidious and prevalent than we realise. While we may appear to be doing the right things on the outside, we need to evaluate our inner heart attitudes and ensure God is in His rightful place.

The following questions could be helpful as we ponder about our inner heart posture towards God:

 Is God the ultimate authority over my life? Do I choose God's ways or do I choose my own preferences and ways?

 Am I dependent on God and His ways? Or do I live independently and take things into my own hands?

 Do I recognise my finitude and limitations and "let God be God" in my life? Or do I attempt to exert control over my life?

Reflect: Sin is more than the "wrong things" you do. It has its root in our heart where we refuse to acknowledge God nor acknowledge our utter dependence on Him. How do you view the sin in your life (heart attitude towards God) beyond the unrighteous acts you commit?

THE GOSPEL: GOD'S LOVING SOLUTION

Sin is the root of all problems that we see in humanity. Our refusal to follow God and His ways is the primary culprit that results in the brokenness we see around us. This is the bad news.

The good news is that there is a way out of this. The Gospel is God's loving solution to our sin-wrecked relationships and struggles. The Gospel is a solution to someone who knows he has a problem. For us who have experienced the weight of sin, the debilitating effects sin has on ourselves and the relationships around us, the Gospel offers us a new life, a fresh start.

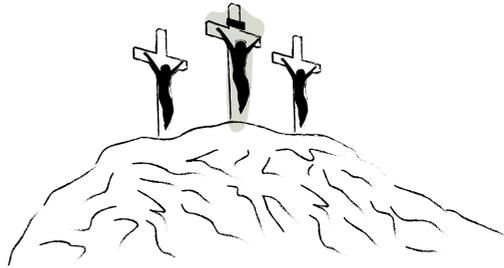
Titus 2:11-14

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

The Gospel is the bedrock of our Christian faith. It is simple in its message, yet profound in its implications. Even as it may be an immensely familiar message to us as believers, it is something we need to continually behold, be grateful for and to centre our lives upon.

The lyrics of the song “May I Never Lose the Wonder” is a reminder for us to never take Christ and His wondrous work on the Cross for granted.

“ May I never lose the wonder
The wonder of the cross
May I see it like the first time
Standing as a sinner lost
Undone by mercy and left speechless
Watching wide eyed at the cost
May I never lose the wonder
The wonder of the cross



Reflect: Think back on the time when you first encountered the love of Christ and how He transformed your life. Where would you be if not for God’s grace that rescued you? Take time to give thanks and behold the wonder of the Cross in your life.

OUR RESPONSE

Sin is the root problem of all problems and the only solution is the gospel. These fundamental perspectives give us a lens in which to view humanity, the world and people around us. But at a more personal level, how does this inform the way we should live? What does anchoring our lives on the gospel entail?

1. Be Messengers of the Gospel

As people who have tasted and seen the goodness of God through the gospel, we owe it to the world to bring the solution to them. The Apostle Paul describes himself as being obligated to preach the gospel to all people groups. He was eager to do so as he believed in the power of the Gospel to bring salvation to all.

Romans 1:14-16

¹⁴ *I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.* ¹⁵ *That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.*

¹⁶ *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*

The Bible also calls us ambassadors of Christ. We have been given a precious message and as ambassadors, we are called to represent it, share it and live it out.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Try as we might to help others in their struggles and problems, we must know that Jesus is the only one who can meet the needs of another perfectly and completely. We are mere vessels of God's love who point people back to the Saviour they need. We are the hands and feet of Jesus to serve and witness to the world, till Jesus returns.

“ Sin is the **root problem** of all problems and the only solution is the Gospel. ”

Reflect: God has given us relationships and connections with people, not by chance. Do we purposefully seek to represent and share Christ to these people around us, even if they may be individuals whom we struggle to love? How can this re-frame the way we view family/workplace/neighbour relationships?

2. Live a Life Worthy of the Calling We Have Received

In the eyes of the world, living a life of significance likely entails racking up accolades, achievements and being able to afford a certain type of lifestyle. However, in God's eyes, He is more concerned about our character than our achievements, our service to others than our status.

In Ephesians and Colossians, Paul exhorts the believers to live a life worthy of God. The word “worthy” carries the idea of “matching up.” To live worthy means to live in a way that reflects the new life we have in Christ. It includes exhibiting Christ-likeness in character and bearing fruit in every good work.

Ephesians 4:1-3

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Colossians 1:9-10

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God

When we consider the gains we have from being in Christ, everything else we can do in our lives pales in comparison. In fact, the only thing worth investing our lives in is pursuing and following Christ whole-heartedly. Every other experience, pleasure or material good we can acquire on earth simply cannot match up to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

Philippians 3:7-8

⁷But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ

Reflect: Consider what you are currently investing your time, energy and finances in. Do they truly match up to the calling you have received in Christ? What does it mean for you to live a life worthy of the Gospel?

3. Cling on to the Firm Hope We Have in Christ

Much of modern life consists of us trying to build some semblance of security into our lives. But life is fragile and unpredictable. All of the things that make us feel safe and secure could be gone in an instant. Thankfully, we have a firm hope that we can anchor our lives upon no matter what happens.

The author of Hebrews was writing to believers who were facing hardship and persecution for their faith. Here, he encourages them to hold on to the hope they have in Christ. Biblical hope is not based on mere positive thinking or optimism. Instead, it is reliant on the certainty of God's promise in Christ.

Hebrews 6:19-20

¹⁹We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, ²⁰where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

No matter what circumstances life may throw at us, we have an eternal hope in Christ. No matter how the world may continue to descend into greater immorality or chaos, we cling on to the promise that Christ is coming back to set all things right one day.



CONCLUSION ↴

A cheerful elderly Christian was asked the secret of his joyful attitude. He said, “I’ve read the last book of the Bible, so I know how the story ends. I’m on the winning side!”

Indeed, we know how the story of the world will end. We are on the winning side. Christ is coming back again to reign in glory and victory. As such, whatever we may do in our lives, nothing compares to the gospel. Whatever views we may hold of the world, we learn to see it through the eyes of the gospel. Whatever we do before God, we let it be anchored upon the gospel.



REFLECT ↴

How do we feel when we look at the state of the world today? Hopeless? Nonchalant? Optimistic? Overwhelmed? How does understanding the problem of sin and the solution of the gospel help frame your perspective?

The message of the gospel is familiar, yet timeless. What is an aspect of God’s saving work in your life that the Spirit is leading you to reflect on and give thanks for?



RESPOND ↴

Think of one actionable step you can take to anchor yourself firmly on the gospel such that you will stay faithful to the Lord till the end.



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