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**SPIRITUAL
GROWTH**



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SPIRITUAL GROWTH

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- All articles in this issue are written by Ho Kee How, Assistant Editor of the Bible Witness Magazine and a preacher of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church.*
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ADD TO YOUR FAITH

(2 PETER 1:5A)

The moment we become regenerated, we are sanctified positionally. “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). This conversion of soul from darkness into light may be instantaneous, but we still need to go through progressive sanctification, which is ongoing throughout our entire Christian life. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God ... And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he (Christ) is pure” (1 John 3:2–3). This progressive (or practical) sanctification would entail constant vigilance, relentless battle (against the devil’s wiles, the world, and our flesh), and a continual “follow[ing] after righteousness”—as we swim against the tide and “fight the good fight of faith” (cf. 1 Timothy 6:11–12)!

Dear Christian, how well you fare on your Christian journey depends on how well you grow in your spiritual life, and how diligently you are “building up yourselves on your most holy faith” (Jude 20). Hence the apostle Peter’s exhortation in his second epistle: “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith

virtue; ... knowledge; ... temperance; ... patience; ... godliness; ... brotherly kindness; ... charity” (2 Peter 1:5–7).

Faith is Obtained, Not Earned

Notice that spiritual growth begins with “your faith” (v. 5a). Now, faith as used in the Bible can refer to either objective faith (the doctrines of faith) or subjective faith (the gift of faith to believe in Christ for salvation). So, which meaning is attached to “your faith” here? The clue is found in v. 1, where the same word (faith) is being used. Here, Peter is identifying himself as the writer and also specifying the primary readers of this epistle. He calls his readers, “them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (v. 1b), i.e. those who have been bestowed the gift of faith to believe in Christ for salvation. So, the faith here may be understood to refer to their personal born-again experience of belief in Christ. Notice that Peter uses an interesting Greek compound adjective (*isotimos*)—translated as “like precious”—to

describe their faith. It consists of 2 root words—“*isos*”, meaning “equal” (as in isosceles triangle), and “*timē*”, which means “honour”. Thus, this would underscore the fact that their faith is “of equal honour” or “of equal value” as that of Peter and the apostles themselves! Hence, our faith is of the same kind that will result in our spiritual quickening and new spiritual status, because it is faith in the same Saviour!

like precious
(Greek *isotimos*)
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and “honour” (*timē*)

Peter takes great pains to point out that we believers have “obtained” faith. We have not earned, nor won, nor worked for it. We have received it “through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (v. 1b)—Christ has earned it for us! As man’s Representative in obeying all the law on man’s behalf, Christ has earned the righteousness for us all. And as our Substitute in laying down His sinless life on the cross, Christ has suffered (once and for all) the punishment for sin on our behalf—as the only ransom that can satisfy the demands of God’s holy law and perfect justice. Christ’s active and passive obedience has paved the way for our faith. This faith is foundational, for “without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*” (Hebrews 11:6a). It’s given to us free,

upon the Holy Spirit’s convicting work of repentance in our souls. But how we build on (or “add to”) that foundation is most crucial to our spiritual growth and maturity.

Subversion of Faith by False Teachings

Unfortunately, within some of the local churches (that Peter is addressing), believers were faced with false teachings arising from liberal teachers working within the church! “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, ... (and) by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Peter 2:1–2). Peter had to counter this treacherous danger and expose the inroads made by those liberal, false teachers before they became deeply entrenched in the churches. He could see the pernicious mischief and potential subversion of faith caused by them. Hence, we read in 2 Peter 3:1—“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in *both* which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance”.

Peter realised the need for vigilantly putting the believers in remembrance of what he and the apostles had taught, that they may be rooted and established in their unfeigned faith. Whatever contrary thing they heard, they were to verify and check against “the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Peter 3:2), i.e. the Scriptures. It is

imperative that they take heed unto sound doctrine, that they be not “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of (false) doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). Just what “damnable heresies” are these false teachers advocating? Though not explicitly stated, these are alluded to by Peter’s description of the characteristics of these perverse teachers. They were covetous of material gain (2 Peter 2:3). They were greedy for money, being likened to Balaam (a prophet for hire in the O.T.), “who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Peter 2:15). They also “count it pleasure to riot (i.e. to participate in unrestrained merry-making) in the day time” (2 Peter

2:13). In exploiting naïve Christians by “allur[ing] through the lusts of the flesh” (2 Peter 2:18), they were advocating sensuality.

Undoubtedly, these samplings of traits highlighted by Peter tell us that these false teachers had no intention in living the high, moral life. They teach a kind of Christianity that disregards sanctification in one’s life and righteous living according to the Moral Law. To them, grace and forgiveness are all that matter—it doesn’t matter how you live. (Sounds like our modern-day “hyper-grace” advocates, doesn’t it?) Not only are they openly carnal and licentious, they unashamedly encourage naïve believers to do and live the same—“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption” (2 Peter 2:19a). The apostle Peter minces no words in describing their shameful and carnality! These liberals are “playing with fire”, and those who hear them are “gambling away” their souls!

Diligent Cultivation of Spiritual Growth

That’s why we see Peter writing the way he wrote in chapter 1; he is eager to remind his readers of their spiritual status as Christians—they have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4b)! Now that they are clean escaped from the pollutions of the world, they must be “giving all diligence” to discipline their life in the way Peter describes in vv. 5–7. The Greek word (*spoudē*) for “diligence”



denotes haste, earnestness and great sense of urgency in performing something. Human responsibility is alluded to here. Hence the Greek verb (*epichorēgeō*)—translated as “add”—used by Peter in v. 5, which speaks of a lavish engagement in a cooperative activity. Peter is saying that there must be full involvement and whole-hearted exertion on our part in the nurture of Christian character and spiritual traits, though we must readily recognise that all of our efforts are only by God’s enabling.

Note, interestingly, the Greek preposition (*en*) translated as “to” in vv. 5–7; it literally means “in” or “within”. In other words, Peter is literally saying, “in virtue (add) knowledge; and in knowledge (add) temperance; and in temperance (add) patience; and so on...” Thus, we do not compartmentalise these traits, thinking that each can be developed independently of the other. We do not wait for virtue to be fully flourishing in us before we work on knowledge; nor do we need to have full knowledge before we move on to temperance. Neither does it mean that only when we have mastered temperance can we then “graduate” to patience, and so on. No, far from it! Rather, while we are still in the process of nurturing one spiritual trait, we are to aim at the next spiritual trait. In fact, we are to aim at every one of them

throughout our entire life! There is no “graduation” in our spiritual growth—not on this side of heaven. All of these spiritual traits (in their various stages of development) are to be present in the character of a maturing Christian. Admittedly, the manifestation of some of these traits may be more evident than others at any one point in our Christian life. Hence, we are to continually give diligence to nurture them, that these spiritual traits may “be in [us], and abound, ... *that [we] shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 1:8).

Conclusion

Dear brethren, we must be mindful that as God’s redeemed saints, we are to so order our lives, “that [we] may be blameless and harmless ... in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom [we] shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15). One irrepressible way that we “shine” in this morally dark and spiritually corrupt world is through the furnishing of our Christian faith with the spiritual traits (as mentioned in 2 Peter 1:5–7). As James rhetorically puts it, “shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18b). So, “giving all diligence, add to your faith”! ■



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ADD TO VIRTUE, KNOWLEDGE

(2 PETER 1:5B)

The Christian faith is necessarily a virtuous faith, for the Christian has been called out of darkness (of sin) into God’s marvellous light (of righteousness). It is not surprising therefore that the apostle Peter first calls our attention to “virtue” being added to our faith (2 Peter 1:5a). Virtue simply means moral excellence, which straightaway bears reference to the Mosaic Law, which reveals to us God’s righteous standards of man relating to God, and man relating to fellow men.

What virtue entails is succinctly captured by what the apostle Paul exhorts in Philippians 4:8—“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue...” So, the trait of virtue would encompass a whole list of attributes—truthfulness, honesty, justice, purity, loveliness, etc.—in short, moral excellence!

God’s Special Revelation

In our nurturing of virtue, we are to (according to 2 Peter 1:5) also grow in knowledge—knowledge (obviously) of God’s revealed Word, the Scriptures! And how do we attain this knowledge? Well, Proverbs 2:1–5 tell us, “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, *and* apply thine heart to understanding; ... then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.” Indeed,

the only way to know God at all is through the words God has revealed and moved “holy men of God” to record for us in the Scriptures. Man (apart from God’s revelation) will find himself existing aimlessly amid a world of uncertainty and relativism. With everything being relative to everything else, man on his own is lost and cannot find his bearings. To lead man in the right path, God must specially reveal Himself—which He did! For the words of the entire N.T. written by the apostles as a result of their inspired and infallible ministry of the Word (1 Thessalonians 2:13), under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26)], together with the words of the law, the prophets, and the writings (i.e. the entire O.T.) which God had “at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1), have given us “also a more sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19a). This is the Bible, which is God’s special revelation to us.

In the Bible are contained all that we need to know to gain salvation and entry into God’s kingdom, and the godly principles to live a victorious life as pilgrims in this sin-filled world. In the Bible are also contained the guidelines for relating to our fellow men, all the needful instructions for orderly governing of the church and conduct of its ministries, as well as all that we need to know to occupy ourselves as we await Christ’s return. All these precious truths—and more—which have been revealed to us through God’s Word, “*belong* unto us and to our children for ever” (Deuteronomy 29:29). They stand us in good stead for all our challenges in

life. No wonder the psalmist declares, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18)!

A Reasonable, Explainable Faith

Now, Solomon in Proverbs 2:1–5 did not tell us to stop at just receiving and hiding God’s commandments. To merely “receive” and “hide” God’s Word will not do much good until you “incline thine ear unto wisdom, *and* apply thine heart to understanding” of God’s truths. For that, we need the special work of the Holy Spirit. The “natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ... because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Man’s natural mind cannot perceive, let alone receive, God’s truths. Only a mind that has been illumined by the Holy Spirit and constantly renewed by God’s Word can. Note the verbs Solomon employed in the passage—“incline”, “apply” (v. 2); “seekest”, “searchest” (v. 4). The language used here tells us that this acquisition of biblical knowledge entails intense effort, with much exertions involved, much like searching for and unearthing hid treasures. This implies the need for constant reading, meditating and studying to rightly divide the word of truth. Indeed, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me (Christ)” (John 5:39)!

Regrettably, many these days have an ungrounded trust in Christ, while

they live indiscriminately according to their whim and fancy. They equate the Christian faith with some mystical experience, like many religions which entail some superstition and even require adherents to blindly follow—no questions asked! But you can’t do that with the Christian faith—you can’t bypass the thinking process. It’s all about turning from the grip of sin to peace with the thrice-holy God! Saving faith is that spiritual enlightenment of the mind based on a clear knowledge of Christ (as derived from Scripture), which is different from ignorant belief. The Christian faith is a reasonable faith—not a mindless “blind leap of faith”, apart from God’s revealed Word! In fact, we are to “*be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh [us] a reason of the hope that is in [us]” (1 Peter 3:15). Ours is an explainable faith.

Knowledge Kept Untainted by Error

Needless to say, it is very essential that we add to virtue, knowledge of God’s Word—not just of the content of the biblical message (i.e. biblical knowledge), but also of the intent of the biblical message (i.e. theological knowledge). That is why it’s so important to be in a sound, Bible-believing church where God’s Word is faithfully expounded. It is no exaggeration to say that there is a “famine” of biblical preaching of God’s Word in many of today’s churches. There appears to be an unspoken devaluation of preaching in the contemporary church scene,

where people seem to be entertained more than exhorted and admonished. The biblical church must realise the stakes are high. Undeniably, our youths and children growing up in these “perilous times” (cf. 2 Timothy 3:1) are continually being influenced by their secular educational training, the internet, shifting social mores and even the dominant political persuasions of the day (which may be subtly shaped by outspoken, deviant voices). It must be recognised that our vulnerable young generation are living, studying, (and in time to come) working in a world that is relentlessly bombarded by the prevalent views of politicians, educationists, celebrities, influential figures in society, etc. Simply, in the battle for men’s hearts and minds, silent truth is no match for outspoken lies! For our children and youths to be brought up in godly nurture, they must have constant access to sound biblical preaching, no less.

Let’s draw a sobering lesson from American evangelical churches in the early 20th century, where many young fundamentalist scholars had imbibed humanistic philosophies (which included evolutionism) spawned in the prestigious educational institutions of the land. The modernistic thinking and liberal theology embraced by such evangelical scholars soon made significant inroads into the Protestant churches (and even theological seminaries) in America, which gradually pervaded and deeply influenced ecclesiastical thinking and attitudes. Not surprisingly, many began to re-interpret long-held truths of the Bible, subverting the faith of

many more! Oh, beware: “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Galatians 5:9)! The only remedy was for God to raise up His servants to “preach the word, ... reprove, rebuke, exhort with ... doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). Hence the importance of God-ordained pastors and teachers to counter false doctrines and damnable heresies.

Dear Christian, be careful what you imbibe—it was John Sung who had said, “If you don’t eat, you may not die; but if you eat poison, you’d surely die!” May you not take sound, faithful biblical preaching in your church for granted. Pray earnestly for your godly and faithful pastors, and, better still, take advantage of every opportunity through the sound pulpit ministry to grow in your biblical and theological knowledge.

Conclusion

Dear brethren, as we grow in grace, we are also to grow “*in the **knowledge** of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18a). This knowledge, it goes without saying, is only through the revealed Scriptures. A good knowledge of Scripture will in turn lead to a deeper knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is the highest branch of learning which every born-again Christian (and for that matter, any human being) can attain to. For it stands us in good stead when it comes to understanding who we are, where we come from, where we are heading, (and ultimately) what we are going to do with our lives. Therefore, brethren, “add ... to virtue knowledge” (2 Peter 1:5b). ■

ADD TO KNOWLEDGE, TEMPERANCE

(2 PETER 1:6A)

We live in the midst of a pleasure-seeking, self-indulgent world, whose philosophies and lifestyles that it espouses run counter to everything that is conducive to our spiritual growth as a Christian. It is a world which promotes: “Eat, drink, and be merry—for tomorrow we die!” It is a world which craves for immediate satisfaction of sensual appetites, and puts self-gratification and self-enjoyment as its number one priority. In short, this world is anything but temperate!

Self-Control a Mark of Spiritual Growth

When Peter exhorts Christians to add to their knowledge, temperance (2 Peter 1:6a), he is mindful of the unbridled living prevalent in the Gentile world. In fact, he had earlier in his first epistle highlighted “the will of the Gentiles” being manifested in “lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries” (1 Peter 4:3). Christians, on the contrary, are to “run not with *them* to the same excess of riot” (1 Peter 4:4). That’s where the crucial trait of temperance comes in.

The Greek word (*egkrateia*) translated as “temperance” is a combination of two root words—“*en*” (which means “inside” or “within”), and “*krateō*” (meaning “to have power and rule over”). It literally means “control over self”. It conveys a picture of someone who has mastered his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites.

I think one of the best biblical descriptions of temperance is expressed by the apostle Paul himself—“I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:26–27a). We are not to give free rein to our appetites (no matter how legitimate they may be) or to the satisfaction of our bodily needs and comforts. There must be a good measure of control and moderation in our physical enjoyment of creature comforts. In the cultivation of temperance, we must also be selective in our recreation, entertainment, hobbies, friendships, holiday-trips, etc., that we may not be subject to undue temptation and undesirable influence. We must exercise restraint in the way we “use this world, as not abusing *it*: for the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Corinthians 7:31).

In fact, we may have to avoid many of the social and cultural activities or functions that we once enjoyed in the time past of our life before we became a Christian. “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33)!

Having said that, temperance involves more than just avoiding excesses and unedifying activities. Nature abhors a vacuum. There is something positive we need to do in nurturing temperance—we must engage in worthwhile activities that will fill our minds with lofty thoughts and high resolve, like worship services, prayer meetings, Bible seminars, fellowship retreats, church camps, and so on. Avail (and exert) yourself to the various means of grace, and “keep thy heart with all diligence (which alludes to self-control); for out of it *are* the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23)!

Sound Knowledge Vital to Self-Control

While the spiritual traits enumerated by Peter (in 2 Peter 1:5–7) should not be compartmentalised, such that only when you have mastered one trait then can you go on to think of the next, the order is nonetheless significant. It is not a random arrangement. So while, for instance, it doesn’t mean that you must have full knowledge before the trait of temperance can be cultivated, the arrangement of the order seems to suggest that you can’t have temperance without first having knowledge. Now, the Greek

word (*gnōsis*) for “knowledge” comes from the root verb (*ginōskō*) meaning “to perceive through something being shown” [as opposed to another Greek root verb (*oída*), which means “to know intuitively”]. In other words, this knowledge is not innate in us, but made known to us. Clearly, it refers to knowledge of God’s Word—which is firstly revealed to us (or else we have no way of knowing it), and then to be studied and meditated upon by us for our spiritual illumination, constant renewal of mind, and governing of our life as we pass the time of our sojourning here on this side of heaven. Thus, God’s Word is also aptly called “the law of the LORD” (Psalm 19:7).

There is certainly no denying the importance of knowledge of God’s Law to the cultivation of temperance. Just as without law, there can be no order in society, without God’s Law, there is no orderliness (or temperance) in the life of God’s people. We see this indisputable link of temperance with knowledge being played out in the biblical episode of the “golden calf” incident in Exodus 32:1–6.

Without God’s Law, No Order

The people of Israel had just come away from an awesome experience at Sinai (cf. Exodus 19). God had spoken to them through Moses, declaring His holy will in the Ten Commandments (cf. Exodus 20). As the people listened, they were greatly moved. The result was that they responded: “All the words which the LORD hath said will we do” (Exodus 24:3). But God knew how soon

they would forget, and even question what He had uttered. To reinforce their unchangeableness, God even wrote them down—on two tablets of stone to be given through Moses (cf. Exodus 24:12). In the meantime, Moses had stayed on Mt Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights, communing with God and receiving instructions from God (cf. Exodus 25–31). While Moses was away, the people’s faith wavered, and they grew impatient at his prolonged stay on the mount. They took things into their own hands and desired to run their affairs their own way, not wanting to be subject to any law imposed upon them. The apparent absence of continual exhortation and reminder from God’s Law soon opened the way for expression of ungodly, sinful aspirations. Shockingly, the Israelites blatantly demanded to make an idol for them to have something tangible to worship and look up to for guidance (in direct defiance of the 2nd Commandment), their excuse being “we wot not what is become of him (Moses)” (Exodus 32:1).

Aaron’s disappointing yielding to the people’s evil proposal showed his lack of moral courage and unfaithfulness to God’s Law. The result was: the engraving of “a molten calf” (Exodus 32:4), together with the erection of “an altar” and pronouncement of “a feast” in conjunction with the molten calf worship (Exodus 32:5). To add insult to injury, by rising up “to play” (Exodus 32:6), the Israelites engaged themselves in unrestrained feasting and lewd celebrations, with total abandonment to sensual enjoyment in connection with idol-worship. The overall consequent riotous revelry

and debauchery surrounding the worship of the graven image, created a disorderly and evil scene! The lack of instruction from the Law made them vulnerable (and eventually succumbing) to walking after the flesh. Indeed, without law, there is no order!

Similarly, the dearth of knowledge of God’s Word, especially in the lack of a God-appointed preacher to expound it, will result in our increased vulnerability to walking after the flesh and hardening of heart in pursuit after sin—in short, intemperate living! God’s Word preached is like a light shining in a dark place. With biblical hindsight, we know that Israel, God’s chosen nation, had been delivered from the pollutions of the world—from sins against God and sins against fellow men—whenever they adhered to the Moral Law. In fact, the Moral Law has become the pattern for many modern legal codes of the world’s nations—with good reason and resultant orderly governance. Undeniably, God’s Law serves as a restraint on our sinful passions and expressions of uncontrolled desires. We need God’s Law to keep us straight. It is also “a lamp unto [our] feet, and a light unto [our] path” (Psalm 119:105). Christians walking in its light are guarded from stumbling into sin.

Conclusion

Dear brethren, knowledge of God’s Law is indispensable to our Christian walk and spiritual growth. Without law (read “knowledge”), there can be no order (read “temperance”) in our personal lives. These are “perilous times”, where “men shall be lovers of

their own selves” and “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:1b–2a, 4a). In these days of widespread loose living and unrestrained indulgence affecting even the church, Christians do well to “add ... to knowledge temperance” (2 Peter 1:5b, 6a). ■



“The lack of instruction from the Law made the Israelites vulnerable (and eventually succumbing) to walking after the flesh. Indeed, without (knowledge of the) law, there is no order (i.e. temperance)!”



ADD TO GODLINESS, BROTHERLY KINDNESS

(2 PETER 1:7A)

The apostle Peter is unambiguous in his teaching of a transformed life in Christ. Such a transformed life would manifest certain distinct traits, which are spiritual proofs of a genuine faith. For sure, salvation is by grace through faith alone (cf. Ephesians 2:8); faith in Christ is the starting point. But it doesn't end there. How we build up on our faith is most important.

Spiritual growth is not an option. That spiritual growth involves human responsibility is corroborated by Peter's use of the Greek word (*epichorēgeō*) translated as "add", which means "to supply or furnish". According to Peter, we are to furnish our Christian faith with the spiritual traits enumerated in 2 Peter 1:5–7. The order of these traits is significant, whose arrangement (bound by the use

of the verb "add" and the preposition "to") seems to suggest that you can't have knowledge without virtue first, or temperance without having knowledge first, or (for our discussion here) brotherly kindness without first having godliness, and so on.

Godliness Precedes Brotherly Kindness

That said, it is noted that godliness precedes brotherly kindness, which makes biblical, prudent sense. The Greek word (*eusebeia*) for godliness means "devotion, piety toward God". It denotes a reverential fear of God, which causes one to "be not wise in thine own eyes" and makes one to "depart from evil" (cf. Proverbs 3:7). Without godliness, any kindness or

affection shown can degenerate into taking advantage and the exploitation of another. Or it may merely generate a “feel-good” factor in being part of a great company showing tolerance and seemingly loving acceptance of one another in advocating a similar sinful lifestyle.

A little elaboration is in order. We know this world is an ungodly world, with all its immoral, godless practices. But most of the worldly people would think they are quite a loving, compassionate, tolerant bunch of people. We need not look too hard for ready examples. If you ask advocates of activist groups like “Action for Aids”, “Pink Dot Movement”, etc., they will say they are kind, loving, accepting people. But are they godly? Nay! They may raise funds for their causes, express great sympathy and solidarity in speaking out against social disapproval of fellow advocates, and do many helpful acts—but all these are in support of the perpetuation of one another’s sinful lifestyles! Without godliness, there is no true brotherly kindness (though they may say they are a caring bunch)—only mutual excusing of one another’s sins, in the name of so-called fraternal kindness and compassion!

That’s the non-Christian world. How about the Christian community? Sadly, how many unsavoury stories we’ve heard about Christians purportedly showing kindness to the vulnerable but ended up in illicit relationships with those they were supposed to be helping! Christopher Klicka (a well-known Christian author on home schooling issues), in his book *The Heart of Home Schooling*, wrote a

section on “Marriage is under attack”, where he highlighted a survey done on 246 men involved in the full-time ministry who had become unfaithful to their wives. They all had started well; they purportedly had strong marriages and a zealous commitment to the full-time ministry. Yet, all these 246 men had succumbed to sexual temptation! The survey yielded at least 2 common traits found among these men. Firstly, all of them thought it would never happen to them. Secondly, almost 90% of them had counselled women privately. They might have offered help and so-called kindness out of concern. But without godliness, there is no true brotherly kindness—only taking advantage of others and putting oneself foolishly in the way of great temptation, even if it’s in the name of so-called brotherly love!

Essentials of Brotherly Kindness

So, brotherly kindness ought to be exercised within the premise of godliness. Only in connection with godliness, we are to “add” (or furnish) brotherly kindness (2 Peter 1:7a). The Greek word (*philadelphia*) translated as “brotherly kindness” is made up of two root words—“*phileō*” (meaning “love”), and “*adelphos*” (which means “brother”). It literally means “brotherly love”. (In fact, that is how this Greek word is translated elsewhere in the N.T.) This Greek compound word depicts the warm, brotherly affection towards fellow members of God’s family. This disposition will seek to manifest itself, whenever opportunity arises, in outward acts of kindness

“unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (i.e. fellow believers)” (Galatians 6:10). This spiritual trait will prompt the Christian to be responsive to the needs of troubled saints suffering lack or poverty by the “communicating” or sharing of material gifts, as exhibited by the Philippi church (cf. Philippians 4:14–15). It will also seek to bring physical relief and refreshment to needy saints, as evidenced in the life of the beloved saint, Philemon (cf. Philemon 6–7).

One verse that captures the essence of brotherly kindness is, not surprisingly, penned by Peter himself—in his first epistle—“*be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous*” (1 Peter 3:8). Here, we see 5 attributes encompassed in true brotherly kindness. One outstanding mark of brotherly kindness has to be like-mindedness. Though members of God’s family are invariably of different temperaments, social status, educational attainments, etc., they are to be “of one mind”, implying unity of mind and a kindred spirit. Such kindred spirit would lead to us “having compassion”—this phrase is translated from the Greek word which means “heartfelt sympathy”. Indeed,

this ready feeling for others (especially in their plight) will cause us to “weep with them that weep” (Romans 12:15b). The next phrase “love as brethren” comes from the same root word as “brotherly kindness”, which speaks of a “heartwarming affection”. Such affection, being exercised in godliness, is not mere sentimentalism. It causes us to “*be pitiful*”, which is translated from the Greek word meaning “tender-hearted”. This intimates a feeling of identity with fellow Christians in their times of distress. That’s not all.

True brotherly kindness entails us to “*be courteous*” as well. The Greek word translated as “courteous” connotes being “humble-minded”. It signifies a humble opinion of oneself—hence the Scriptural exhortation in Philippians 2:3–4, “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look*

not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” Indeed, humility is a prerequisite of courtesy, for the humble person will be mindful to put others ahead of himself—that’s true courtesy.

Notice all these 5 marks depicting brotherly kindness (namely like-mindedness, heartfelt sympathy, heartwarming affection, tender-

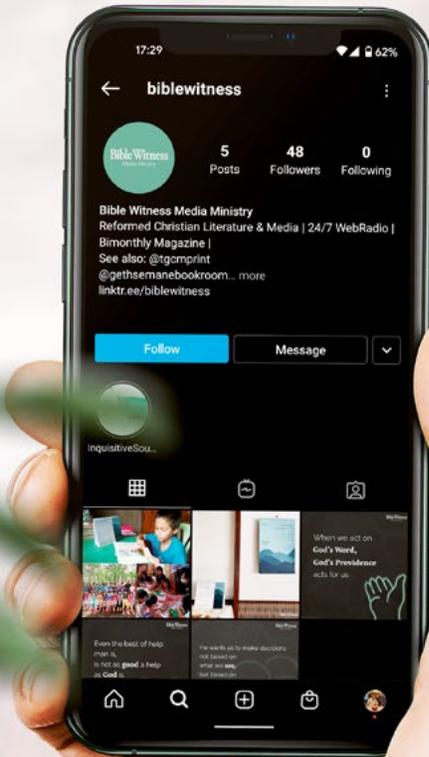
Five marks of brotherly kindness

**“Finally, be ye all
of one mind,
having compassion
one of another,
love as brethren,
be pitiful,
be courteous.”
—1 Peter 3:8**

heartedness, humble-mindedness) have one thing in common—they all portray dispositions of the heart and mind. Attitude of the heart and mind is all important, for it influences all our outward acts or expressions. It is not too far wrong to say that these essentials of brotherly kindness are also essential marks of a biblical fellowship. Indeed, true brotherly kindness paves the way for true Christian fellowship. Those who are knit together in the bond of the Spirit as members of Christ’s body, in exhibiting these essential marks, will cause the fellowship to flourish with unity and harmony among brethren.

Conclusion

Scripture is unequivocal in its teaching that true piety (i.e. godliness) is accompanied by genuine brotherly love. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:20–21). So, beloved, “add ... to godliness brotherly kindness” (2 Peter 1:5b, 7a). ■



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MAKING YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE

(2 PETER 1:10)

When you read through the entire second epistle of Peter, you can't help but sense the apostle Peter's underlying yet palpable urgency in invoking spiritual vigilance against "grievous wolves" and false teachings infiltrating into the church. Peter did not allow his Christian readers to be under

any illusion that all would be well and plain sailing in the local churches (in particular) and the ecclesiastical realm (in general). On the contrary, he strongly alludes to the troubling scenario among the churches of unguarded believers “fall[ing] from [their] own steadfastness” (2 Peter 3:17). A prelude to that “fall” would inevitably be the infiltration of false doctrine and compromising conduct and practice into the church (cf. 2 Peter 2:1–2, 18–19). Dear brethren, it is the same today as it was in Peter’s day. The only safeguard is to “make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).

Effectual Calling

Now, the word “calling” is translated from the Greek word (*klēsis*), which comes from the root verb (*kaleō*) meaning “to call”.

It refers to “the divine call by which believers are introduced into certain spiritual privileges”. In Scripture, there are generally two kinds of “calling”—a “salvific” calling and a “ministry” calling. The first pertains the same to all true believers, whereas the latter pertains

differently to different believers. A couple of Scriptural references will suffice to highlight the distinction. When the apostle Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 1:26, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many

wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*”, he is referring to believers’ call unto salvation (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:24). However, in 1 Corinthians 7:20, “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called”, he is talking about a believer’s calling in his life’s work and station. So, which of the two is this “calling” in 2 Peter 1:10?

The clue is found in the next phrase, “and election”. It is instructive to note that in the Greek sentence construction, “calling” takes on the definite article, but “election” does not have the article. Greek grammar has this rule: When 2 nouns are connected by the conjunction “and”, if both have the article, they refer to 2 different things. But when the first has the article and the second does not, they refer to the same thing.

klēsis

(Greek, from root *kaleō*;
translated as “calling”)

It refers to the divine call
by which believers are
introduced into certain
spiritual privileges.

Thus, “calling” and “election”, being united under one article, are portrayed as closely related. You can’t have “calling” without “election”, nor can you have “election” without ultimately experiencing the “calling”. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate

(another word for “elect”) ... whom he did predestinate, them he also called” (Romans 8:29–30). Now, we know that “election” comes from the word “elect”, which means chosen. When Peter writes to the believers, referring

to them as “**elect** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:2a), he is indicating that God has chosen them to be saved because He had lovingly known them from before the foundation of the world. So, this “calling” (also termed as “effectual calling” by theologians) is about God’s invitation to man to accept the benefits of His salvation. It follows that making one’s calling and election sure has got to do with one’s assurance of salvation. How can one be sure that one is truly saved? That’s the underlying probing challenge Peter is highlighting here when he urges believers to “make [their] calling and election sure”—which is a pertinent and equally relevant challenge to the contemporary church of our time.

Many “Christians” So-Called, but Few Disciples

The modern church, unfortunately, is full of “self-called” (not God-called) Christians, which means they have no divine calling to make sure in the first place. They like to sing Christian hymns, be called by Christian names, wear a cross, partake in pious ceremonies (like infant baptism and wedding solemnisation in majestic church settings), and be part of the respectable, dignified church pomp and aura. Many are Christians so-called, but few are true disciples! Come to think of it, Jesus is not so much as interested in calling people to be “Christians”. [This term is actually coined much later after Jesus’ ascension, when people (being stirred

by the powerful testimony of the disciples for “turning the world upside down”) invariably associated believers with Christ whom they follow—hence calling them “Christians”. In fact, “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26b).] Rather, Jesus, during His earthly ministry, calls people to be His **disciples**.

What is a disciple? Well, Jesus left no one in any doubt as to what is *not* a disciple. “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). Now, the Greek word (*mathētēs*) for “disciple” means “a pupil who not just accepts instructions given, but also makes those teachings the rule for his conduct”. In other words, he has head knowledge and heart conviction.

On the contrary, many among the modern Christian crowd are not called, though they love to associate

mathētēs

(Greek, translated as
“disciple”)

It refers to a pupil
who not just accepts
instructions given,
but also makes the
teachings the rule for
his conduct.

with the church and all things Christian, which somehow appeal to their sense of respectability. They are not willing to “forsake all” by abandoning their sinful ways and be dead to the world, and walk in the newness of the Spirit. No wonder the increasingly entrenched declension in the spiritual state of affairs in many of the churches today! Such spiritual declension is nothing new. It was already prevalent in Peter’s day. Peter could see the potential trouble brewing in the local churches when Christians fail to “make [their] calling and election sure”. And that’s Peter’s utmost concern here in his second epistle.

Spiritual Stability Lies in Spiritual Growth

Peter had been made aware of false teachings making the rounds in some of the local churches that it didn’t matter how they lived their Christian life, or how they built on the foundation of faith in Christ. He could see the treacherous danger posed by those liberal teachers. Hence his overriding purpose in “stir[ring] up [their] pure minds by way of remembrance” of the Holy Scriptures from which they had been taught (2 Peter 3:1–2). His refutation of the false teachers in chapter 2 indicates to us that making one’s calling and election sure behoves one to be vigilant against “false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, ... (and) by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2

Peter 2:1–2). Such liberal teachers are trifling with the precious souls for whom Christ died to redeem! Have nothing to do with those advocates of “damnable heresies”. Rather, “a man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3:10)! Negatively speaking, making our calling and election sure would entail vigilance against false doctrines that encourage compromised and unbridled living, such as those promoted by the “hyper-grace movement”, “health-and-wealth gospel”, “antinomianism” (teaching of abrogation of the Moral Law), among others.

Positively speaking, we are to be diligent to nurture spiritual traits. Spiritual steadfastness lies in “do[ing] these things”, that “ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10b). These things would refer to the spiritual traits enumerated by Peter earlier, which are hallmarks of a growing, flourishing Christian life. By way of recapitulation, below is a summarised reiteration of these traits:

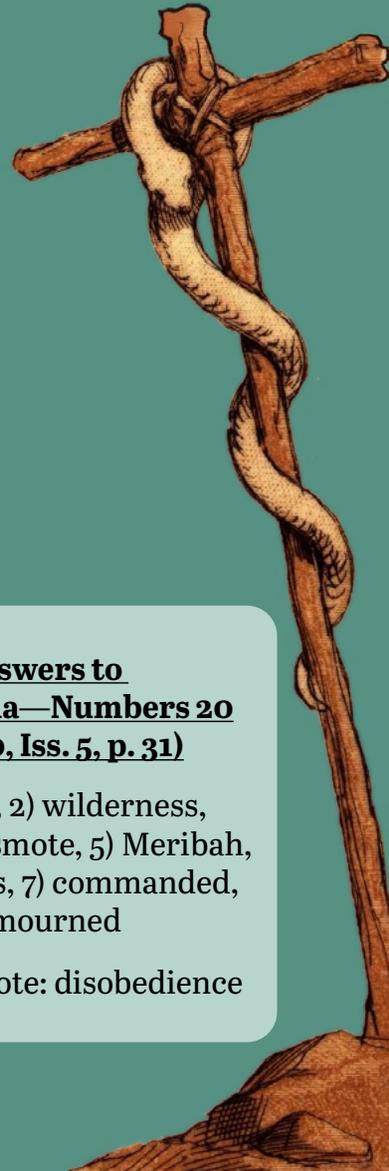
- **Virtue**—moral excellence. Such moral excellence should pervade all our dealings with fellow men.
- **Knowledge**—of God’s Word. The Holy Scriptures are “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).
- **Temperance**—self-control and restraint. This is standing against the tide of this pleasure-seeking, self-indulgent world.

- **Patience**—ability to bear under. This speaks of endurance and perseverance amid adversities or trials.
- **Godliness**—piety, or deep reverence towards God. A reverential fear of God will guard us from being profane or frivolous, and instil in us a kind of soberness and gravity in life.
- **Brotherly Kindness**—warm, brotherly affection towards fellow members of God’s family. This disposition will manifest itself in acts of kindness towards fellow believers.
- **Charity**—unconditional love. This denotes a concern and willingness to seek the welfare of another in need (irrespective of the other party’s deservedness), even if it entails difficult duties and bearing unpleasant burdens.

Conclusion

In our diligent cultivation of the above-mentioned spiritual traits, we not only make our calling and election sure (being assured of our salvation, as evidenced by a flourishing spiritual life), “an entrance shall be ministered unto [us] abundantly into the everlasting kingdom” as well (2 Peter 1:11). That means we’ll have great heavenly rewards! The Bible says, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done in his body*” (2 Corinthians 5:10a). “If any man’s work (after being revealed by fire) abide ... he shall receive a reward” (1 Corinthians

3:14). It follows that works that are manifestations of *virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity*, borne out of an unfeigned faith, are like “gold, silver, precious stones” that will stand the test of examination “by fire” (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:12–13). For Christians who are diligent in their cultivation of these spiritual traits, rich rewards in heaven are assured. To God be glory both now and for ever. Amen. ■



**Answers to
Bible Trivia—Numbers 20
(Vol. 20, Iss. 5, p. 31)**

- 1) buried, 2) wilderness,
3) speak, 4) smote, 5) Meribah,
6) garments, 7) commanded,
8) mourned

Lesson to note: disobedience

BIBLE TRIVIA—NUMBERS 21:1–9

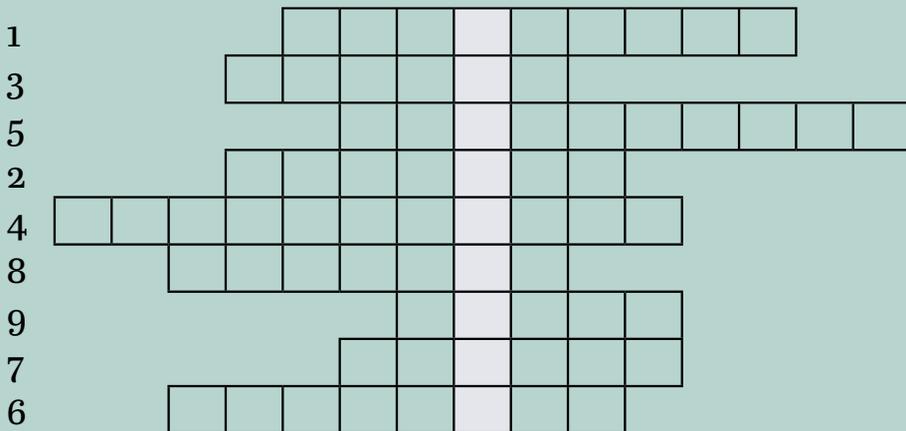
SARAH YONG

A. Read Numbers 21:1-9, and then fill in each blank in the following passage with a suitable answer taken from the verses.

The Canaanite king fought against Israel and took some of them 1) _____. Israel vowed unto the LORD that if He would 2) _____ the enemy into their hand, they would utterly destroy their cities. The LORD hearkened to His people and made them to triumph over the Canaanites, and He called the place 3) _____.

As they continued their journey, the soul of the people was much 4) _____ because of the way. The people questioned why God had brought them up out of Egypt to die in the 5) _____. As a result, the LORD sent fiery 6) _____ among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. The people came to Moses in remorse, confessing they had sinned and had 7) _____ against the LORD. They asked Moses to pray unto the LORD to take away the serpents. The LORD told Moses to make a serpent of brass and set it upon a pole, so that when anyone who was bitten 8) _____ upon it, he would live. Moses did as he was commanded, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he 9) _____.

B. Use each respective answer above to fill in the crossword below, according to its corresponding number.



Comparing Scripture with Scripture, when you read **John 3:14-16**, you would realise that the setting up of the serpent of brass upon a pole is an intended picture of the lifting up of the Son of man, even Christ, (to die) upon the cross – that whosoever believeth in Him should receive _____. (Hint: the word is formed by the letters in the highlighted column of the crossword.)

HUDSON TAYLOR (1832-1905) PART V

**RETOLD BY JENNY LOK
ILLUSTRATED BY ANDRONICUS KOSHY**

Retold from:

- “*To China With Love*” by Hudson Taylor, published by Dimension Books, Bethany Fellowship, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, the United States
- “*Hudson Taylor—God’s Man in China*” by Dr & Mrs Howard Taylor, published by Moody Press, Chicago, Illinois, the United States
- “*Hudson Taylor and Maria, Pioneers in China*” by J. C. Pollock, published by Kingsway Publications Ltd, the United Kingdom
- “*God’s Adventurer*” by Phyllis Thompson, published by Overseas Missionary Fellowship (IHQ) Ltd, Singapore

It all happened when he was asked to attend to a middle-aged male patient who was suffering from foot gangrene. His condition was worsening, but he did not seem to realise. Hudson was told that the dying man was extremely hot-tempered and a drunkard too. Oftentimes, if anyone tried to share the Gospel with him, he would react violently and scare the wits out of that poor fellow. The warning sounded loud and clear in Hudson’s ears: “It’s no use speaking to him about religion. He’s an atheist. He won’t hear a thing about religion. We asked a Scripture reader to come and visit once and he got on a towering rage and ordered him out of the room.” Hudson was rather disturbed in his heart and he felt even more helpless when he heard the second warning: “The Vicar of the parish had called on the man. The furious invalid man shouted at the top of his voice and even spat in the Vicar’s face when he came near to his bedside. The Vicar was so frightened and confused that he left immediately!”

“Oh Lord, how shall I ever show your love and forgiveness of sins to such an angry and rebellious soul?” Hudson sighed, shaking his head.

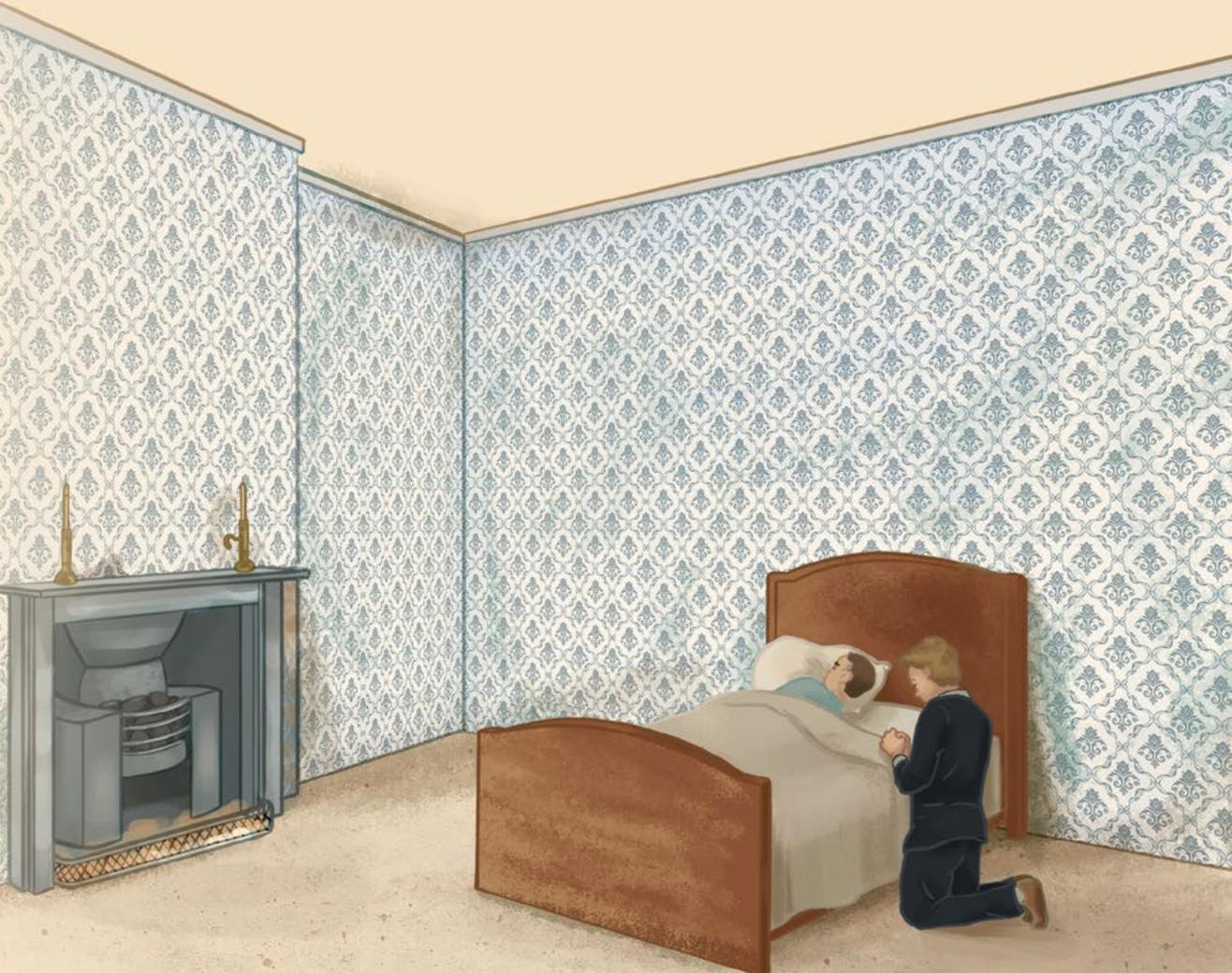
With a heavy heart, Hudson prayed for the man every day and many times over. He wanted so much to reach out to the poor soul who was truly in need of Christ.

On his first visit to the home of the man, Hudson attended to his diseased foot very patiently. He was careful to handle his foot gently, and with his skills, he was able to help reduce much of his pain. For the next 2 to 3 days, Hudson continued

to care for the dying man without speaking to him anything about his sins and salvation. However, the need to share the Good News about Christ was constantly on his mind. Hudson persevered in prayer. He reminded himself to “Learn to move men through God by prayer”. Eventually, he noticed a change in the man—he appeared to be more friendly and even expressed words of appreciation.

“This is indeed the right time to tell the poor soul about Christ!” Hudson’s heart grew excited. He began by sharing how God had helped him as a medical student. Then he slowly explained that everyone needs God’s forgiveness of sins and His great mercy. Hudson could tell that the man was trying very hard not to scold or hit him. He pursed his lips together in a tight grim line, rolled over in the bed so that Hudson could not see his face, and then ignored him altogether. Though discouraged, Hudson knew it was a good beginning. Since then, Hudson pleaded daily for God’s mercy to save the suffering man before his death.

Every day without fail, Hudson would visit the man to dress his wound, taking special care to relieve his pain. Having done that, Hudson would then talk to him about Jesus and His love for him. This continued for some time until Hudson felt



that perhaps, it was pointless trying to reach out to the dying man. So one day, after changing the dressing on the man's foot, Hudson decided to take his leave instead of going to his bedside to speak to him as usual. As Hudson reached the door and was about to turn the handle, tears started flowing down his cheeks. He could not bear the thought of the man being lost in hell. In a few quick steps, Hudson was back to the bed. With teary eyes, Hudson pleaded with the man, saying, "Oh, friend, you must listen. If only you would let me pray with you!" To his great surprise, the man did not ignore him but said, "Well, if it will relieve you to do it, you can!" Immediately, Hudson fell on his knees and prayed aloud: "Oh God, please open the eyes of this dear man! That he might know that God is real, that Jesus Christ had died to save him from the punishment due for his sins. Oh, that he would ask for thy forgiveness!"

For the next few days, Hudson had no problem speaking about Christ to the man and praying with him. A change had indeed come over the man! Finally, the day of rejoicing came—the man accepted Jesus as his personal Lord and Saviour! It was a memorable day for Hudson as he recalled God's Word in Psalm 126:6—He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." Hudson had learnt a precious lesson: he must long to win souls for Christ and would preach the Gospel everywhere, even if some would not listen to him.

It was early summer in 1853 when news about an ongoing revolt within China spread throughout Europe. It was reported that the Taipings had won the uprising and set up the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace (T'ai-ping T'ien-kuo) after the fall of Nanking (the Chinese southern capital) in March. To the Chinese Evangelisation Society (CES) in England, it was really good news! The victory of the Taipings

Summer, March 1853

War in China

NANKING HAS FALLEN

Taiping Heavenly Kingdom wins



meant that CES could henceforth enter China freely with the Gospel. The rebel leader of the Taipings apparently became a Christian after reading some tracts given to him by a Christian Chinese. Thereafter, he was also in brief contact with a western missionary. For Hudson, the time had come for him to go to China. The CES was truly excited about sending another fellow-worker to support the work of their only missionary named Lobscheid, a German, who was stationed near Canton. A letter was quickly dispatched to Hudson to inform him of the society's decision to appoint him as their missionary to China. Hudson was ready to go any time, even if it means putting an end to his medical studies. Finally, the day had come for him to fulfil his calling to China! Soon after, on 9 September 1853, a Friday evening, the CES held a meeting to commend Hudson to God's care and blessing as he would soon begin his missionary work in China.

Ten days later, on 19 September, at Liverpool, England, Hudson was set to sail in a small vessel called the "Dumfries", which weighed less than 470 tons. Down at the stern cabin, Hudson's father, mother and Mr Pearce gathered around Hudson, who looked excited, yet at the same time feeling heavy-hearted. A short service was conducted to commit him to the Lord. As soon as it ended, Hudson was notified of an unexpected delay in the departure time of the Dumfries. Both his father and Mr Pearce decided to take their leave as they had urgent work to attend to and could not wait any longer. After they had left, Hudson and his mother were alone in his cabin. Tenderly, her hands went over the little bed (which was to be Hudson's place of rest for the next 6 months or so) to smoothen it. Side by side, mother and son sang one last hymn together and then knelt down to pray. What a sweet and comforting prayer from a loving mother! Would he ever hear that again?

Soon it was time to part. Hudson's mother was thankful and rejoicing that her son had kept God's Word in Acts 20:24 close to his heart – "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Nevertheless, she tried very hard to fight back tears of sadness as she gave her farewell blessings. Hudson knew that he might never see his dear mother again. Silently, he prayed, "Oh God, I know you'll watch over my mother. Please help me not to waver in my calling. Amen."

Hudson's mother went on shore and sat on a piece of timber nearby. She felt a sudden chill and was trembling all over. The ship started moving towards the dock gates. Hurriedly, she stood up and followed it. Waving her handkerchief to Hudson, she tried to catch a glimpse of him as he waved back to her. Afraid to lose sight of his mother, Hudson sped up into the rigging and continued to wave to her while holding onto the ropes with his free hand. He could hear the flapping sails above him and the masts creaked loudly as the *Dumfries* was slowly approaching the dock gates.

Hudson could only see a faint outline of her mother still waving with her handkerchief. Finally, the ship made its way through the gates, and suddenly, in the distance came a loud piercing cry. It must be his mother! Holding back his tears, Hudson burst out, "Dear mother, your cry just goes through my heart like a knife! Perhaps, you would have understood the great love of God for the lost in this hour more than in all your life before." That very hour of parting with his mother was painful for her as much as it was for Hudson. All at once, he understood that the love of God for the perishing was so great that He had sent His Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross to save them from hell fire.

Indeed, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Hudson was so struck by God's sacrificial love that he was determined to follow Christ and obey the Great Commission to preach the Gospel according to Matthew 28:19–20, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

(To be continued)



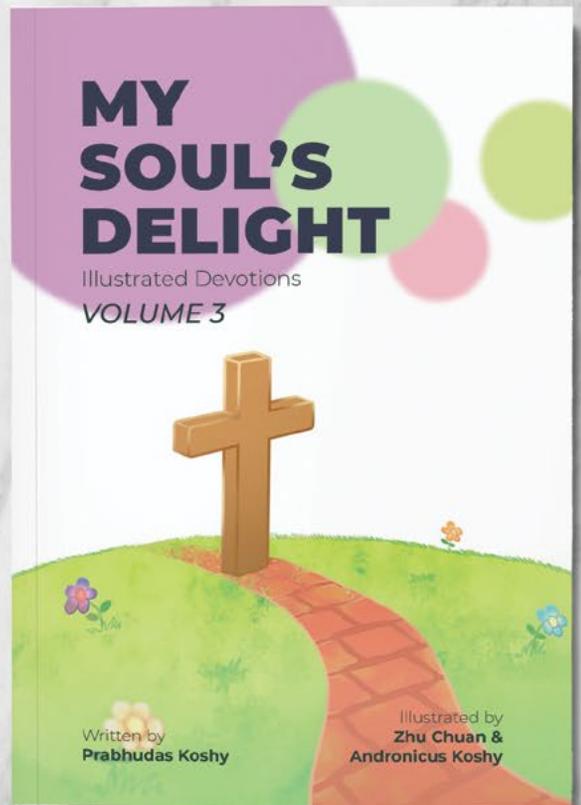
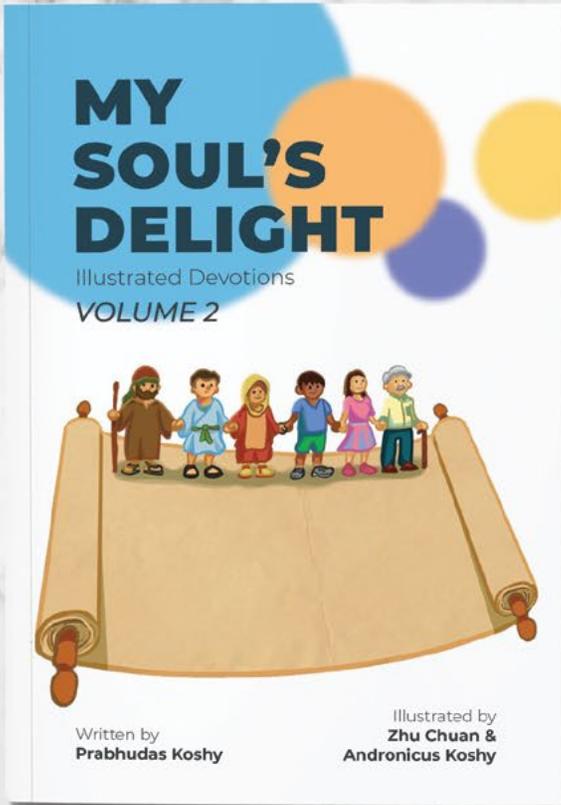
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