

THE WINEPRESS

O taste and see that God is good



What's inside?

5 JCC develops coordinated digital footprint to strengthen outreach

7 The Vine: A throwback special

13 Stewardship in the new normal

PRAYER FOCUS FOR DECEMBER

As we celebrate the "Advent and Christmas Season", pray that each of us will align our heart with our King's heart to share the good news of salvation with our friends and neighbours. That we will do our part to saturate Singapore with 100,000 gospel booklets (#Project Kampung Spirit – "A Soul a Day").

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 Simply email us at jccwinepress@gmail.com



FROM THE VINE TO THE WINEPRESS

By Bryan Tay

In keeping with the times, The Vine has transformed into The WinePRESS! We thank The Vine team for all the years of hard work in edifying JCCians with encouraging and inspiring writings and church event updates.

Dream Big...it's harvest time!

Advancement in technology has enabled us to dream big to bless more people with greater efficiency and effectiveness. The vine produces grapes...we have grown enough grapes over the years...now is the time for harvest... Make Wine! And the first thing is to extract the juice from the grapes. That's why we need The WinePRESS!

Our Vision:

To make The WinePRESS an essential feed and channel of blessing for the Taman Jurong community.

Our Mission:

To bless the community through the power of Scripture-based writing and practical help in life situations driven by God's love.

What's in The WinePRESS?

The WinePRESS is underpinned by 5 key and evergreen components:

- 
1. P rayer Focus of the month. Promote alignment of vision and unity of heart as a congregation to reach the lost and bless the needy.
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2. R efreshing bytes. Encourage one another in daily living by sharing inspiring stories, testimonies, events and useful information in support of outreach efforts.
- 
3. E xhortative writing. Scripture-based articles and nuggets to inspire love for God's Living Word and obedience to His Commands, being doers of the Word, not hearers only.
- 
4. S cripture challenge. Bible quiz and learning activities to promote scripture memory, meditation and retention of God's Word. Look out for prizes!
- 
5. S ervice-in-Action
 A call to action for JCCians to serve God's people and the Taman Jurong community with their talent, gifting and material resources.

PASTOR'S FOREWORD



Pastor Anthony Loh

Lift up your eyes, See and Walk!

Greetings to you.

We are coming to the end of 2020 soon! There have been many unforeseen shocking events and unstoppable changes since the beginning of the year. Caught by surprise, countries, churches and Christians are still adjusting to the impact.

After many months of facing up to the Circuit Breaker restrictions, are we looking forward to returning to the good old days and to the familiar habits/lifestyles that we were used to; or are we ready to embrace new changes so that we can experience God deeper and be effective in our ministries and testimonies for the Lord in the new season?

“The Vine” newsletter is revamped, incorporating a refreshing new look with its name changed to “The WinePress”. I am reminded of the changing of water to wine—the 1st miracle Jesus did as he began His ministry. This miracle caused the people to experience the best wine that opened their eyes to the glory of God at work in their midst. May spiritually edifying articles and life-changing testimonies of JCCians via our WinePress create a deeper thirst in us for Christ!

While we continue to face the challenges in the coming years, let us not falter but persevere in faith and obedience to follow the way of God as we face up to the unknown.

There are 3 key anchoring faith actions that will not only help us to sail through the coming challenges but also to rise above the storms especially in our personal life and church ministry in the coming year!

Genesis 13: 14-17 gave us 3 key actions that God promised Abraham when he and Lot parted ways.

Continued on page 4

“Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, 15 for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. 17 Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.”

“Lift up your eyes”

It is so easy for us to have “downcast eyes” when we feel overwhelmed or discouraged. In the midst of despair, our eyes will always be on the ground as we grapple with the feeling of hopelessness! Yet we are called to lift up our eyes!

Today we are called to lift up our eyes.

Look and see

Abraham was called to look up and to see God’s great plan for him. What do we see in the midst of challenging circumstances? Do we see His promises to us? Do we trust His words of assurance found in the bible that help us to be steadfast in facing the storm? **Let us choose to seek and to see His plan and not the enemy’s plan.**

Walk

Will we walk by faith in this journey with the Lord? Abraham was called to walk through the land, a symbolic act of faith and obedience to God. The land was given by God. It was a good land for Abraham to enter and take possession, no longer just seeing it as a distant prospect by God’s promise. Are we able to trust God in His supernatural acts of transforming our lives to empower us to move mountains today – **to walk the land where we are placed, with faith and obedience to the Lord, to claim His blessings of immeasurable worth?**

As 2021 will be approaching soon, let us get ready for the Great King to usher in His great plan for us. All this begins with a relationship with Him. The “WinePress” reminds us to drink from Jesus. Because of His body that is “pressed” and “broken” on the cross, we have the “new wine”, the sweet wine of the Gospel that will satisfy and save us.

Despite stormy weather, let us **Lift up our EYES, LOOK and See**, and **Walk** with the Lord with faith and obedience to claim His promise under the New Covenant.

We thank our new multimedia ministry leadership team who serve all of us by connecting us to Christ and to each other!

*Blessings,
B. Anthony Loh*



JCC DEVELOPS COORDINATED DIGITAL FOOTPRINT TO STRENGTHEN OUTREACH

By Bryan Tay



We are living in the end times. Jesus is coming again. We must work while it is yet day. God created us and redeemed us with the blood of Jesus. We are doubly His. He desires that no one should perish and that the gospel shall be preached to all nations before the end of the world comes. Before then, He has given us, His children, all things to live a victorious and godly life. He has also commanded us to go into all the world to share the gospel, heal the sick and deliver those in bondage.

God's word says:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. 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?

Romans 10:13-14; NIV

What does that mean for us as Christians?

- Where is the “unsaved fish”...how do we reach them? Through which CHANNELS?
- What do they need to know...the saved and the unsaved? What CONTENTS?
- How do we engage them...to know and enjoy God? Strategies to forge CONNECTIONS?

What do we need to do?

Time is short. We need to do all these with good speed, scale and anointed power.

Technology has provided convenience and affordances to do things with better efficiency and effectiveness on many engagement fronts with scaled impact.

The Church (JCC) needs to move as one coordinated body, especially in the digital space to project a united front and present a common message thrust across different technology platforms and channels such as websites, social media and technology engagement tools, aligned with offline initiatives.

The Techannels Team

To that end, the Church Council has set up a committee, **The Techannels Team** and I am glad to be part of it.

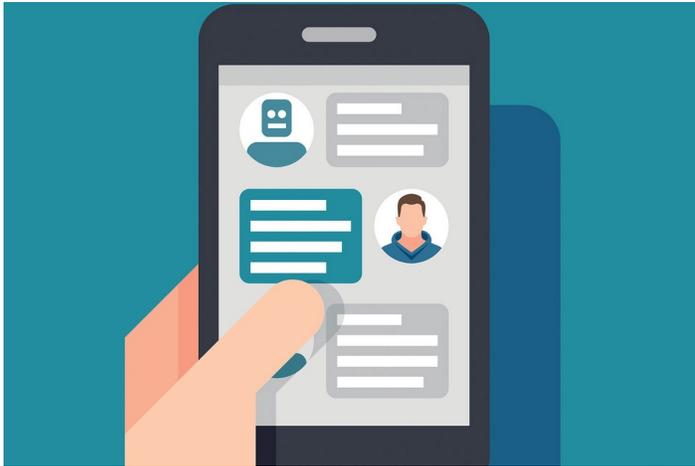
The Team seeks to tap the power of technology to accelerate and extend our reach in sharing God's Word and Goodness with our community and beyond.

We want to help people discover God earlier, faster and in more expedient ways so that they can receive God's salvation, peace, joy, healing and abundance in their lives. *Continued on page 6*

Team members

- Bryan Tay (Team Head)
- Justin Tay (JCKK)
- Caleb (JCC-Admin Office)
- Wayne (JCC-Chinese)

We will adopt a 3C approach to fulfill its mission:



• **Create Channels**

We need to keep abreast of technology trends to identify and employ appropriate channels to reach our target audience with God's goodness.

We aim to develop a channel network that includes Social Media, Community Engagement Portals, Chat bots, Electronic Direct Mail and SMS, to facilitate unified cross-platform outreach and engagement efforts.

• **Create Content**

The needs of our target audience vary depending on their demographic profile, life stage and spiritual growth stages.

We will need to develop a blueprint of content categories to serve a diverse range of purposes such as for building relationships, sharing of knowledge and life-skills, Christian education, edification and evangelism. These should be readily accessible across technology platforms and devices.

• **Create Connections**

With the available Channels and Content, we will need to develop a Digital Outreach Plan to connect with our target audience i.e. the young ones, the adults and the seniors. The choice of channels, content delivery methods and engagement frequency will need to be contextualised to meet their needs.

The Techannels Team cannot work or succeed alone. We will be working closely with the various ministries to better understand their needs and requirements.

We covet not only your prayers but also your contribution in any form to positively impact lives with the love and power of God and so, enjoy the pleasure of knowing Him and making Him known. We simply need to make ourselves available.

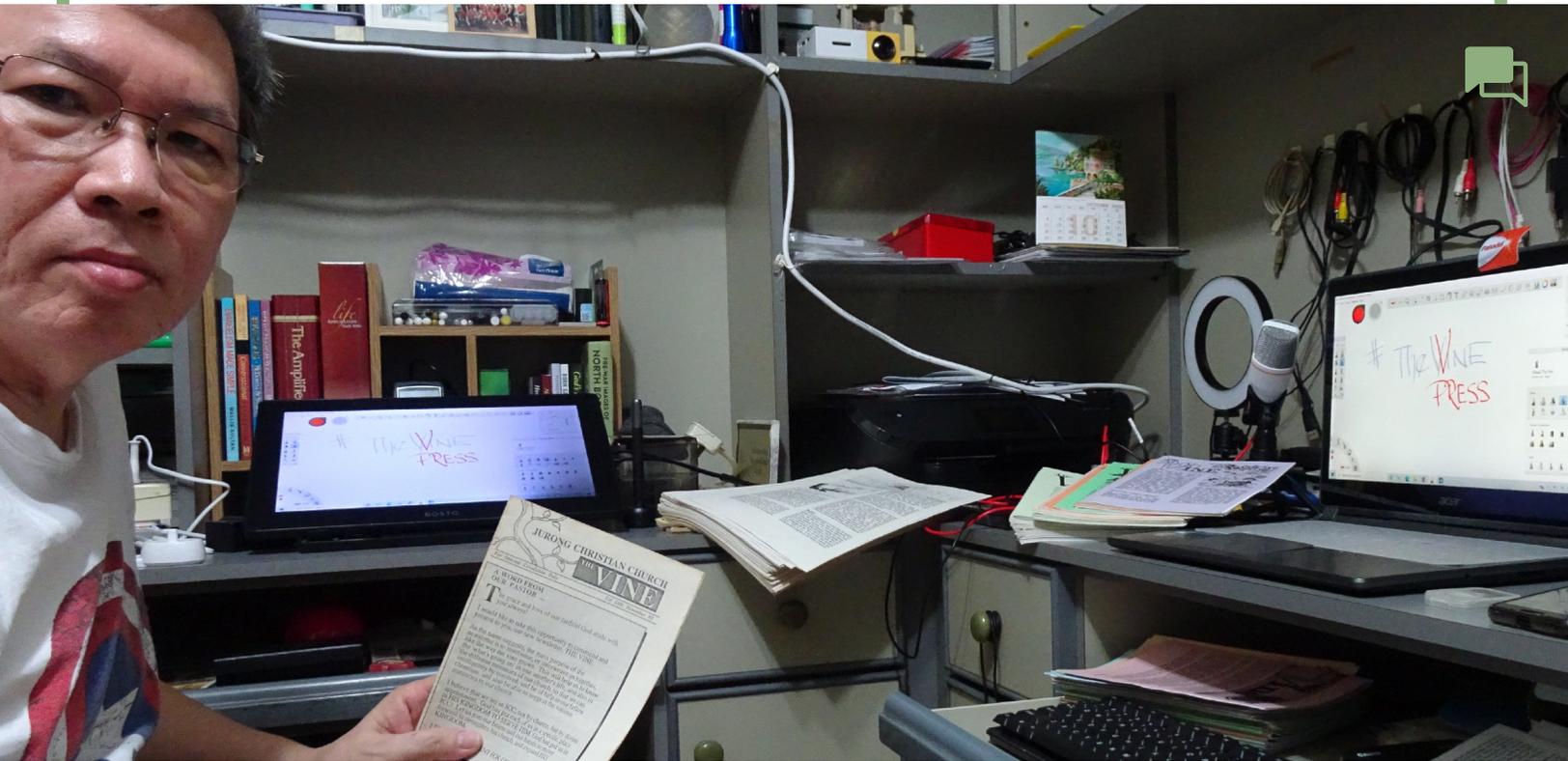


If you have ideas or skills to contribute to our mission, or if you would like to know more, I welcome a conversation with you.

We want to help people discover God earlier, faster and in more expedient ways so that they can receive God's salvation, peace, joy, healing and abundance in their lives.

Reach out to Bryan Tay, Head of The Techannels Team. Drop him an email at bryantayhh@gmail.com

This month, we're celebrating 31 years of The Vine with a refreshing change. But first, how did this ministry start? What challenges did the team go through? Let's hear from the early and faithful Vine warriors.



THE VINE - HOW IT ALL BEGAN

By Martin Cheah

Rev William Chang wanted to have a newsletter for JCC and he gathered together Se Ping to lead the ministry and some others including myself to form the newsletter committee. The first issue in Nov 1989 was only 12 pages (A5 size) and a far cry from today's standards. At that time I was using an IBM XT compatible PC, now I am using an Acer laptop with Intel i7 CPU.

Se Ping stepped down in July 1991 to go on maternity leave and had not come back yet. John Lee came on board in Nov 1992. If you ask me why I carried on with The Vine all these 31 years, it seems like it was meant to be because when Se Ping stepped down and if John was not in, I would have left too.

Rev William Chang left in Dec 1993 and during the interim, I took over the Front Page. John also wrote the Front Page in May 1994. By June 1994, Rev Fredric Lee took back writing the Pastor's Word. The last time a pastor wrote the Pastor's Word was in Jan

2002. John wrote the Front Page once more in Jun 2002. Thereafter, I have been writing the Front Page waiting for someone to take over the lead.

In 2016, Alicia Wong and Joyce Tan came on board as writers/editors. In my mind, it was a God-sent replacement for John and I, but they were not prepared to take over. Then in 2019, Soon Eong joined the team and again I thought he was the one. In 2020, Jia Lin, June Lim and Bryan Tay signed up for the MMM. 2020 is also the year when the JCC English Website and Live Streaming of Sunday services became part of MMM and 2021 will be the year when MMM goes into Social Media.

Paper has given way to electronic mail, analogue is replaced by digital and cash is replaced by cashless, so also The Vine will be The WinePress.

"Time, like an ever-rolling stream, Bears all its sons away...." — Isaac Watts



HOW THE VINE STARTED

By Se Ping

I never cease to be amazed by the power of God in keeping the Vine continually in publication month in and month out. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations (Psalm 100:5).

It seemed just like yesterday that the Vine was started. Today it has completed 31 years of successful publication and it is indeed a matter of joy.

The Vine was started with almost nothing in the year 1989. I was appointed by our then pastor, Rev William Chang, as the editor; and working together with a small team.

In the 1980s, there was already a church newsletter, but it was being produced now and then. Thus, the pastor was looking for a small team to pioneer a regular publication. That was how the ministry was born.

I recalled on our very first meeting, we got down to picking a name for the newsletter—either the Grapevine or the Vine. Without a doubt, the name “Vine” was chosen as vines do grow quickly just like our purpose for the Vine is to share what God is doing through people. Besides, Jesus is our true Vine whom we can depend on for everything.

Looking back at past 30+ years, I see God’s goodness

and provision at the right time all the times. When we started out, there was no personal computer or photocopier in church or at home. I was then working as a systems analyst and therefore had access to the use of a Macintosh in the office. Our Vine then was limited to a few pages (A4-page), and some 20-30 copies were printed for each issue. We even attempted to print on A3-page a few times. Likewise, for both John and Martin, we produced the Vine largely using borrowed resources during the early years.

In late 1991, I had my first child, and subsequently handed over the reins to both John and Martin who are still helming the Vine today. They may be more able to chronicle the growth of the Vine. Since then, as we know the world has undergone remarkable transformation with new waves of technology being rolled out relentlessly.

Today, almost everyone of us owns a laptop and a mobile phone. We can have easy access to all types of information including sermons and testimonies via the Internet.

This new era certainly poses new challenges to the Vine ministry team. My prayer for you is that the Vine continues to be inspirational, as well as garner more participation from its passionate readers.



5 MINUTES WITH JOHN LEE

The Vine was first published in November 1989, and it has been an exciting 31 years. Now, we are moving on ... from The Vine ... to The WinePress with additional members in the team with their new-generation capabilities.

It is not just a change in name for JCC's newsletter but also a refreshing change that aims to make the publication more attuned to the changes in reading habits due to advancing technology.

WinePress is associated with harvest. (Dt 16:13-15). As we savour a new flavour in this newsletter, below are some nostalgic recollections. May our Lord Jesus continue to grace this ministry with His blessings of harvest for the Kingdom!

Q: How did The Vine start?

John: I was not a founding member of The Vine. Based on my understanding, JCC was without a newsletter for a few years since the former newsletter called "Christian Nurture" had its final publication in early 1985 during the time of Rev Edmund Lim, who was our first Singaporean pastor under the LCS. Prior to that, JCC was served by missionary pastors.

The Vine was inaugurated in Nov 1989 when Rev William Chang was our pastor.

The founding committee comprised Pastor Chang, Se Ping, Martin Cheah, Joo See and Amy Saw.

At that time, The Vine was not a regular monthly issue.

Q: What was fun?

John: I joined The Vine committee in Nov 1992. I was formerly a member of Bedok Lutheran Church. I became officially a member of JCC in Dec 1986.

When in BLC, I was in the newsletter committee there. So, having departed from the newsletter work which I started in BLC, there seemed to be a void in my ministry engagement.

It was therefore exciting to join The Vine committee in Nov 1992 to brace The Vine to become a monthly newsletter at a time when the committee keenly strived to keep a budding ministry going.

There was also the pleasure of feeling a void for God's service filled.

Q: What were the pains?

John: In joining The Vine team, I was very conscious of my intent to brace it as a monthly publication.

From Nov 1992 to Aug 1993, we were able to keep going with 10 monthly issues without break.

Then it happened: We didn't publish for 3 months from Sep 1993 to Nov 1993.

It is not difficult to guess the reasons; ranging from a lack of inclination by readers or workers in ministries to contribute even short articles or reports, to the challenges that The Vine team members faced in the demands on their time and energy due to many commitments. *Continued on page 10*

Q: What were some memorable hiccups and/or rewards?

John: After the 3-month break from Sep – Nov 1993, The Vine resumed publication in Dec 1993, followed by Feb 1994 and thereafter was able to continue regular monthly publication for many years.

In the 5 years from 2007 – 2011, we were stressed to switch out of monthly publishing and combine months for some of the issues. Thankfully, we were able to resume monthly publishing for the years thereafter.

Whatever hiccup in service is salvaged by the knowledge that blessings have been flowing out to profit many and blessings flow back: **Blessed to be a blessing** as well as **Blessed in blessing others!** I thank God for the rewards of

personal blessings gained in terms of reflected spiritual nourishing and the honing of old and new skills (that have other places of use) in the course of the ministry effort.

Q: Why did you get involved?

John: On hindsight, I think it can be said that it was not really my human decision to get involved. Rather, it was God's call with the Spirit leading me on.

It began when I started the newsletter ("The Lutheran") ministry in Bedok Lutheran Church while a young chap who was still not officially a member of that church.

Without really thinking much of my ability to involve myself in that kind of ministry, I just popped the idea to the pastor there (Rev John Nelson) and he readily accepted

and then a newsletter team was formed. I served in "The Lutheran" all the way until I left the church when I moved to Jurong.

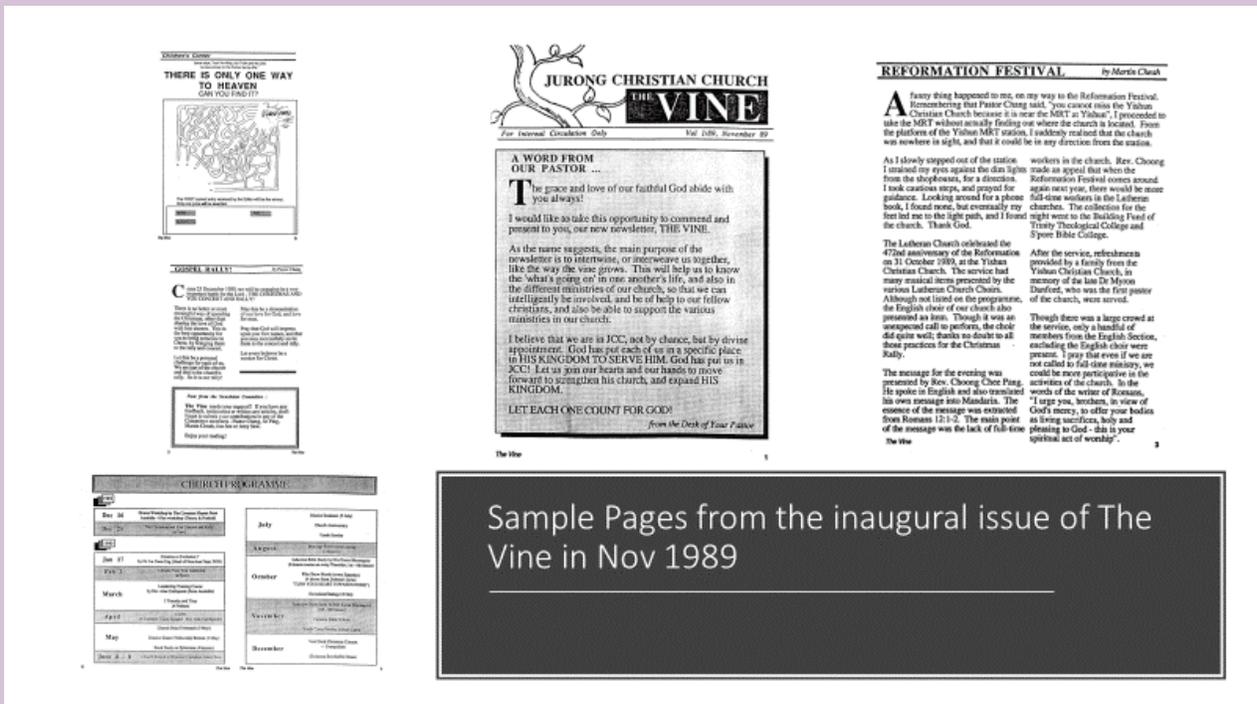
When I joined the team of The Vine in JCC, it was either humanly speaking an "accidental participation" in view of the nascent ministry with capacity for new team members; or spiritually speaking, God's hand at work.

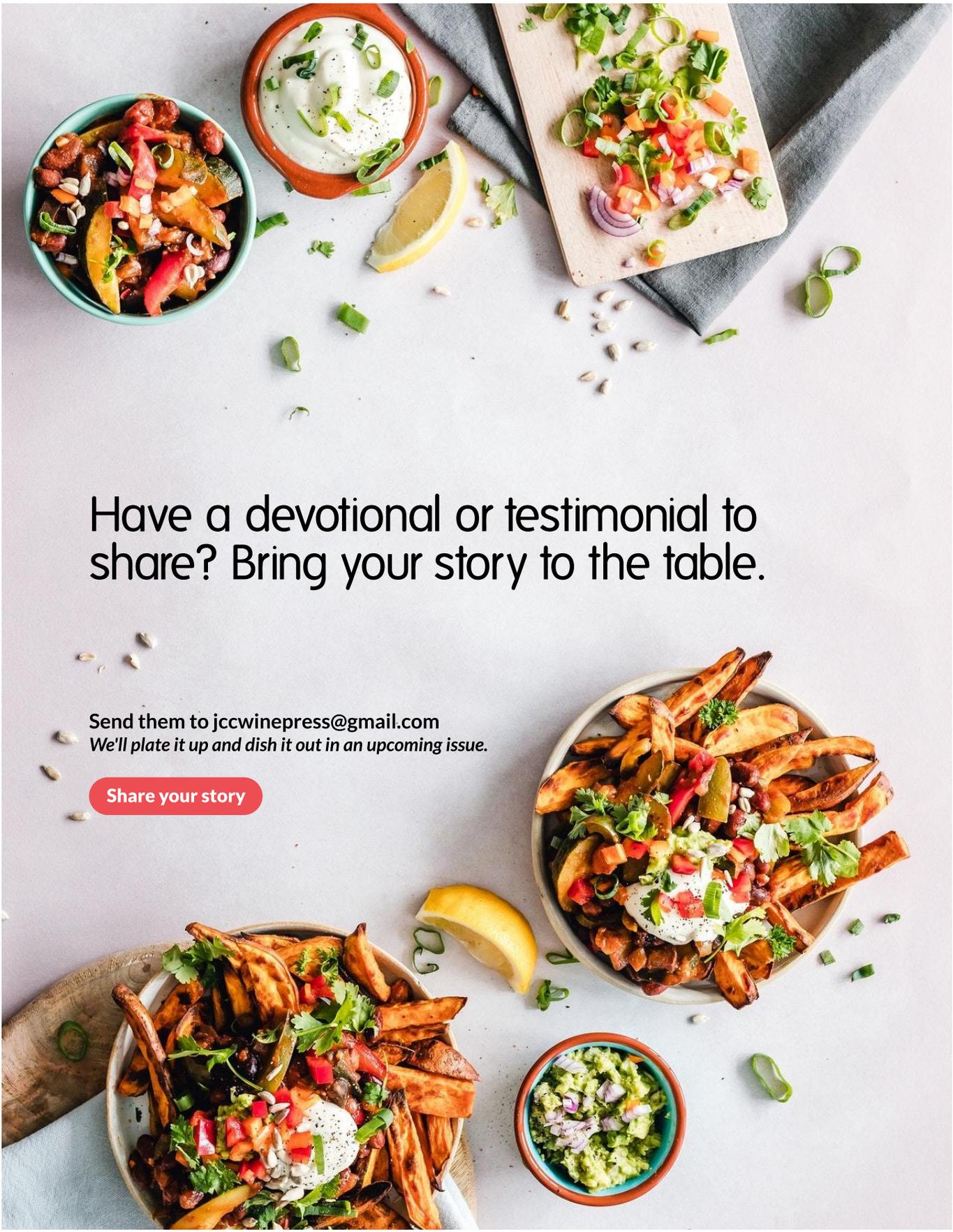
Q: What did you hope for?

John: There was the hope for the newsletter to steady itself as a monthly publication to bless members of the church.

Q: What kept you motivated?

John: The satisfaction that the ministry has been a blessing to readers. I can't really imagine how I would have been able to stay if not for God's sustenance.





Have a devotional or testimonial to share? Bring your story to the table.

Send them to jccwinepress@gmail.com
We'll plate it up and dish it out in an upcoming issue.

Share your story



INSIDE OUT

By Alicia Wong

Jeremiah 2:32-33

32 Does a young woman forget her jewelry,

a bride her wedding ornaments?

Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.

33 How skilled you are at pursuing love!

Even the worst of women can learn from your ways.



Like many women, before I head out, I might take a shower and then get ready to meet the world by picking out an outfit (preferably something that makes me look slimmer), do my hair and draw my eyebrows. Then I add jewellery, matching shoes or purse, ready to meet the day.

The care involved in my routines begs the question:

How much time do I spend getting ready spiritually each day before stepping out of the house? Do I take any time at all to ask God to guide me through the day? Do I read the Scriptures, meditate or pray so that I can be more patient, kind and loving to my spouse? Do I worry more about getting out of the door than about the condition of my heart?

The prophet Jeremiah noted that while women are unlikely to forget their accessories, God's people are prone to forget Him.

To be honest, we will admit we are very much like the Israelites too. In the midst of our lives, God often gets pushed to the bottom of our to-do-lists.

What can we do about it?

Amid reading through my devotion, I happened onto this tip:

- As I shower, praise God for the cleansing of my sins through Jesus
- As I am getting dressed, thank God for clothing me with His righteousness
- As I apply moisturiser onto my skin, ask God to soften my heart to His leading throughout the day
- As I apply make-up, thank Him for being the foundation of my life
- When I put on my contacts, ask Him to give me eyes to see His workings in the world
- As I put on matching accessories, thank Him for beautifying my life with the fruits of the Spirit

**Guys, you can probably follow the same tip but adjust accordingly to your manly rituals.*

If I run through this list before heading out, who knows? After talking to Him during my preparations, I might not even need caffeine to start the day!



STEWARDSHIP IN THE NEW NORMAL

By June Lim

When we think of good stewardship, we may think of how we manage our finances and our faithfulness in paying tithes and offerings. However it is more than just the management of our money, time and possessions. Stewardship is our total obedience to God's sovereignty.

It is what motivates the followers of Christ to take action and to serve wholeheartedly. Faithful stewardship by definition, means utilising and managing all resources God provides for the glory of God and the betterment of His creation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way the world interacts and we have been ushered forcefully into the new normal. Trusting God in hard times necessitates good stewardship. Affluence can lead to laziness and financial carelessness, which makes it challenging when it is suddenly time to tighten the purse strings. Poverty may induce people to be greedy,

stingy and to guard what we own fiercely. This is actually an opportunity to demonstrate how faithful stewardship can help us flourish in God's teachings during trying times.

1 Peter 4:10

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

Instead of concerning ourselves with material distractions or the gloomy economic outlook, focus our time and money on the tasks entrusted to us by God. Every person has gifts, talents, and abilities the Lord has given us. We should learn to invest our gifts and become a shining beacon to those around us.

Continued on page 13



2 Timothy 1:14

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

When we are tempted by quick gains or shortcuts to wealth, we should remind ourselves of the godness that resides within our spirit. Stewardship is being wise to the ways of the world, so we do not fall prey to it. Even if situations get desperate, we should not succumb to deceit or unscrupulous ways to survive the challenging circumstances.

Mark 12:41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

True stewardship means reminding ourselves that we are temporary stewards of God-given resources and we should always be willing to let go or share with others to follow His lead.

Hope this article serves as a timely reminder of Stewardship!



WORK VS OVERWORK

By Joyce Tan



I struggled a lot about the concept of “work” and at which point it is considered as “overworked” i.e. How much that we need to work.

Yes, you may say that it is simple. Hence, what is there to think so much about? When you work until you fall sick or feel frustrated or begin to neglect your family and friends around you, do you realise that you have “overworked”? It has gone beyond the “workaholic” syndrome!

So, as some would say, “You just have to manage, balance your time and priorities in your life. Do something about it.” But then, is that all? Not really, I think.

What is the difference on the thinking of “work” between Christians and those who are not? Isn’t it the same as we are all in the marketplace?

This thought piqued me especially when we spend so many hours at work as if it is like our second home.

Does the love of God make a difference in how we should view “work” and provide a perspective of how we should handle “work” in our lives?

After so many years, I finally stumbled upon an article, [“Made to Flourish through Work” from Salt and Light](#). Please have a read. *Continued on page 14*



Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Colossians 3:23-24

The article may not have all the answers, but it resonated on the realities of work encountered in my workplace and previous workplaces.

The truths of work and how it forms the culture of our thinking, influencing our lifestyle as a Christian. We are Christians at work which we try not to be of the world, but in the world; staying strong and relying on God to see us through work and life.

Have I become a one-day Christian (which is on a Sunday) and being active in Church serving God (just looking good in the eyes of others)? Do you feel unfulfilled though it seems like we are doing the right things, at least for God?

It is like a routine that made sense, yet quite senseless because it does not give you the joy when you work and serve God? Yes, even as Christians, we may not have understood what is the meaning of work and works for God.

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

1 John 2:15

What struck me most is the importance of what we decide to do about our thinking and belief of work once we know what is more important than work itself. The meaning of work started before the fall as quoted in the article too (Gen 2:12).

We are asked to work and should work as it is from the beginning of time. How should we treat work?

This seems easy right? I realised that we cannot run away from work and what work brings with it.

In one of the bible study sessions on “Vocation” taught by Swee Leong, arranged by the Abundance Cell Group, it struck me that I may have finally had a better understanding of work in my life after so many years.

Regardless of whether it is work in the marketplace or serving God; doing His work, it is all under the umbrella of God and it is of God.

We rely on God in all that we do and that is the fundamental of what work is and how it is a part of our life in Christ.

You shall eat the fruit of the labour of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you..

Psalm 128:2

Let us commit our work to the Lord (Proverbs 16:3) and let God lead us in the work that we do in the marketplace; in our family; in church; in missions and wherever we are. In every situation, let our toil be of glory to Him as we fight the good fight to finish the race with Him.

So, would you “Work for a living or work for a living God”?



JCKK GRADUATION 2020: VIRTUALLY, EMPTY HALL

By **Martin Cheah**

On 27 Oct 2020, Justin Tay, Chairman of JCKK Management Committee, presented the certificates to the 2020 graduating students of JCKK. Unlike previous years, the Sanctuary this year was empty except for the JCKK teachers, students and a few JCC members helping out with the sound and video equipment.

The students march up to collect their certificates and give a wave to an empty hall, imagining their parents will catch a glimpse of their achievement at home on YouTube. They will also present a skit and a few song and dance numbers (hopefully captured well on my video cam and given a polish by Isaac's video producing skills). But they will not hear the accolades from proud parents.

Mr Tharman was not present on site but he had forwarded a video to the principal.

Comparing this to the EPL, players cannot hear the fake stadium sounds. The crowd noise that viewers hear is broadcast only through the TV coverage. What players hear inside the stadium, in terms of crowd noise, is nothing.

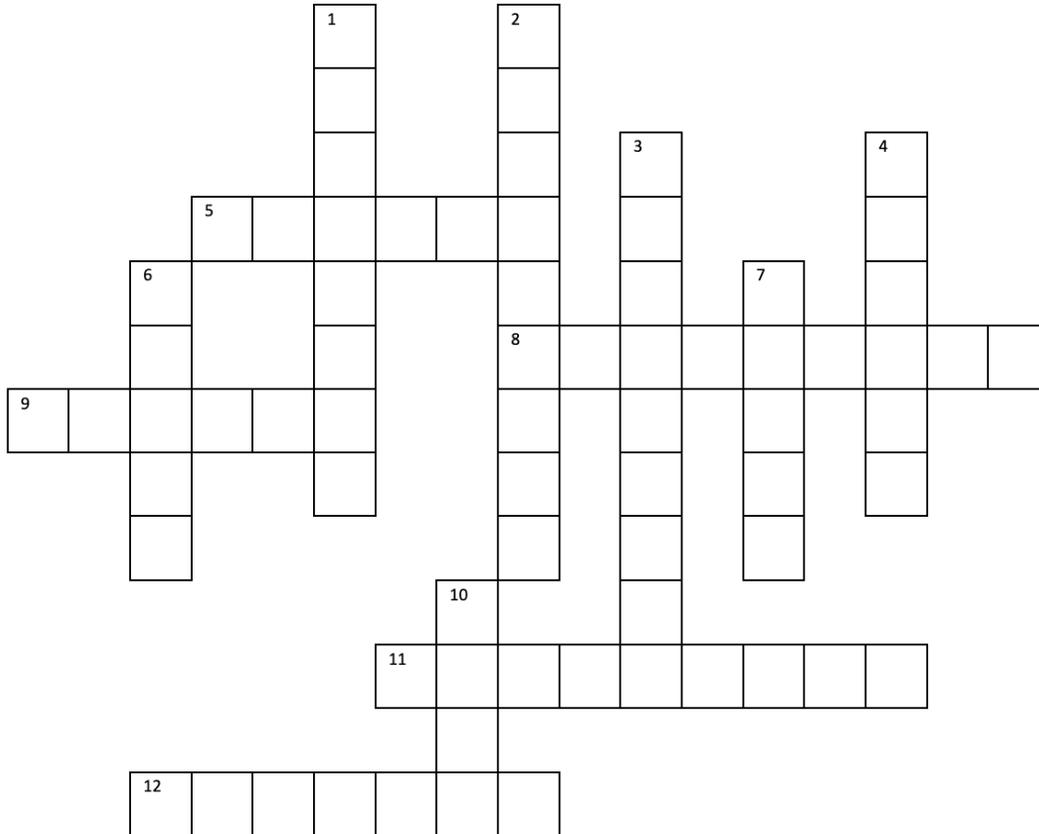
As a result, some of the matches we've seen so far are unpredictable, in which Manchester United conceded six goals for just the second time since the 1930s and Liverpool became the first reigning champions to concede seven goals in a game since Arsenal in 1953.

This COVID year may build up a greater resilient performer who is not driven by the cheering crowds but by his or her own purpose in life.

"I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure" - Eric Liddell (Chariots of Fire)

WHAT IS THE SEASON?

Here is a simple crossword puzzle for you:

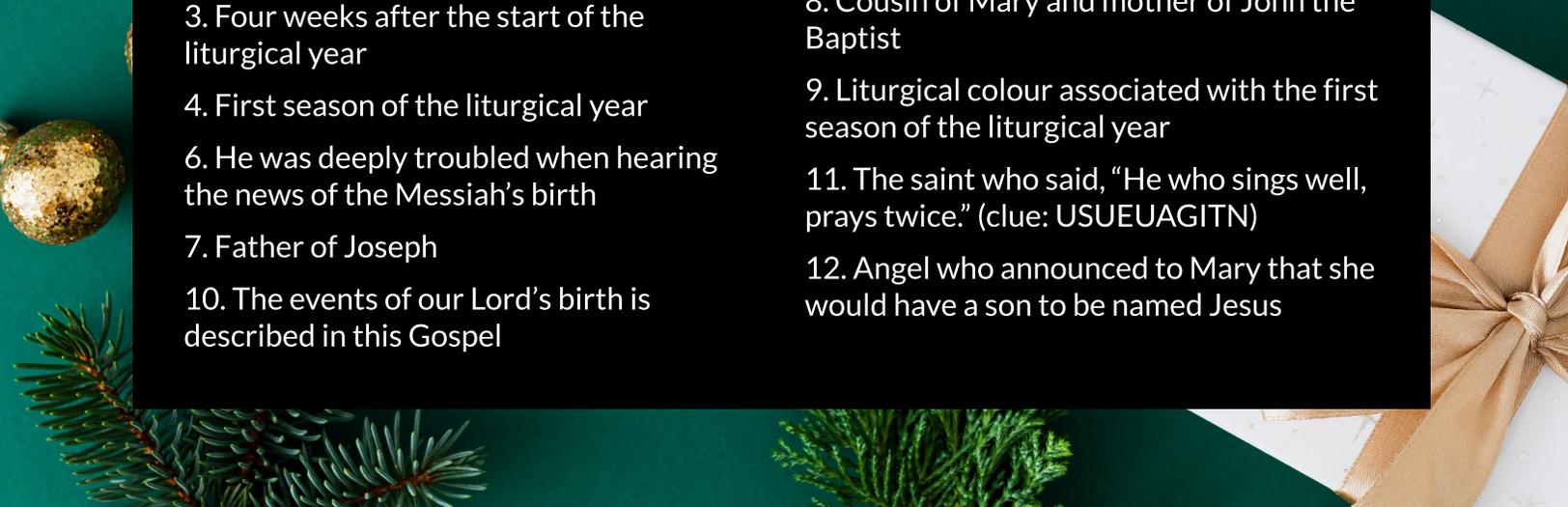


Down:

1. God with us!
2. Town where Jesus was born
3. Four weeks after the start of the liturgical year
4. First season of the liturgical year
6. He was deeply troubled when hearing the news of the Messiah's birth
7. Father of Joseph
10. The events of our Lord's birth is described in this Gospel

Across:

5. OT prophet who predicted the coming of the Saviour
8. Cousin of Mary and mother of John the Baptist
9. Liturgical colour associated with the first season of the liturgical year
11. The saint who said, "He who sings well, prays twice." (clue: USUEUAGITN)
12. Angel who announced to Mary that she would have a son to be named Jesus





PROPHETS IN DIFFERENT TIMES

By John Lee

OT prophets: Jeremiah vs Hananiah

Who was the true prophet?

Jeremiah had been telling the people of Judah that God would punish them for their unfaithfulness. Even a prophet can encounter difficulties. People like to hear good news but shut themselves off from dreadful prophecies.

Hence, lying prophets came onto the scene, with their optimistic declarations. “Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.” (Jer 6:14b)

Among the lying prophets was Hananiah. Note what Jeremiah told Hananiah:

“From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true.”

Jer 28:8-9

“Listen, Hananiah! The Lord has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore this is what the Lord says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the Lord.’”

Jer 28:15-16

Indeed, truth would prevail and Hananiah would pay a personal price for lying, as Jeremiah also prophesied.

In line with Jeremiah’s prophecy of doom, it came to pass that Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians and the populace in Jerusalem (including the humiliated leaders) was taken into exile. The so-called Babylonian exile lasted 70 years.

Not only that, “In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died.” (Jer 28:17)

Continued on page 17

OT Prophet vs NT Prophet

Old Testament:

From Exodus to Malachi, there are more than 400 occurrences of “Thus saith the Lord” in prophecies.

Here are three examples:

“Thus saith the Lord, In this thou shalt know that I am the Lord: behold, I will smite with the rod that is in mine hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood.”

Ex 7:17

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast ...”

Jer 7:20

“Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the Lord of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever.”

Mal 1:4

In the above quotations from KJV, I have underlined some words – to indicate that, apart from the standard introductory words “Thus saith the Lord” when prophets in the OT declared a prophecy, the prophecy proper was typically couched in the first person, presenting the notion that it was in God’s own words.

Herein lies a vivid distinctiveness of OT prophets/ prophecies because prophets and prophecies in the NT do not have this attribute.

New Testament:

In the NT, John the Baptist was already destined to be “a prophet of the Most High” when he was in his mother’s womb. (Lk 1:76; see also Mt 11:7-9) Still, his

prophetic messages in Lk 3:7-9 and Lk 3:15-18 were not couched in “God’s own words” as OT prophets.

Agabus was one of a group of Christian prophets who came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. He predicted a severe famine, and it happened. (Ac 11:27-28)

However, when Paul wanted to go to Jerusalem, Agabus dissuaded him with a demonstration of how he (Paul) would face danger, being bound by the Jewish leaders there and handed over to the Gentiles. (Ac 21:11) Paul was not deterred, and he proceeded on his journey. While, indeed, Paul was seized by a crowd in Jerusalem and was arrested by the commander of the Roman troops, he was finally released.

Two things to note:

- Firstly, the prophecy of Agabus was communicated without the same imposing force as God’s exact words as in OT prophecies.
- Secondly, the substance of the message as God’s revelation or inspiration to Agabus was communicated with the prophet’s restatement by his human initiative of adding an action to demonstrate. As a result, a lack of completeness or precision in the details was plainly human and understandable.

Noting the contrasting natures of OT prophecies and NT prophecies, Agabus would not suffer the same death sentence as Hananiah for the loss of detail in the transmission.

In the NT era, the gift of prophecy still existed during the time of the apostles, but by my reading of 1 Cor 12:10 this gift of prophecy was given to some and not to all. Nevertheless, Apostle Paul also mentioned about the greater significance of love over tongues and prophecies, as he wrote:

“Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.”

1 Cor 13:8-10

Prophets Today

The debate is still alive on whether spiritual gifts of tongues and prophecies in the NT era have ceased or whether the cessation mentioned in Paul's letter is still in the future.

In this article, my focus is on prophecy. Those who say they have received the spiritual gift of prophecy stand firmly on the position of no-cessation-yet, while those who are seeking the gift but are disappointed may nurture uncertainties that negatively impact their faith.

In my view, this is an unhealthy state of affairs; after all LOVE is the foremost important thing in Paul's opinion and LOVE is also in the first two greatest commandments of God. Therefore, having or not having the prophetic gift is not a critical matter to a Christian.

If we are indeed gifted with the gift of prophecy, we will know how to honour God with the apposite exercise of it; otherwise, we should not strain ourselves with imaginations or coveting of prophetic callings that are not.

Regardless of whether we have prophetic callings, it is essential for us to appreciate the different characteristics between the OT prophets and the NT prophets.

Watch Out!

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”

Mt 7:15

False prophets existed during the OT era. They existed during the time of the apostles. They still exist today. Jesus warned that in the end times, “... many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.” (Mt 24:11)

We can easily google a long list of false prophecies about the end of the world. Interestingly, even a hen can be made use of as a “prophet”:

“In 1806, a domesticated hen in Leeds, England, appeared to lay eggs inscribed with the message “Christ is coming.” Great numbers of people reportedly visited the hen and began to despair of the coming Judgment Day. It was soon discovered, however, that the eggs were not in fact prophetic messages but the work of their owner, who had been writing on the eggs in corrosive ink and reinserting them into the poor hen's body.” – Britannica Encyclopaedia

“Prophecies” that are “good for laughs” may not have lasting harm.

However, insidious would be con artists with glib tongues supported by a mesmerizing sound-and-light show lulling the unwary into spiritual traps with teasing promises of worldly prosperity, new zest of life, grandiose hopes, etc. — all of course with a caveat that you must do various things which an alert Christian would know contradict scriptural teachings.

It is not always easy to tell apart a true prophet and a false prophet. Sometimes, a false prophet may boast more impressive scholastic credentials and speak more eloquently than a true prophet. Sometimes, a claim of prophecy may actually be a foreknown or foreseeable fact unbeknownst to the listener. Sometimes, falsehoods are like bones embedded in delicious meat (truths). They are then swallowed by the unwary without feeling the prickly effect.

In the prophetic hen incident above, did the “great numbers of people” allow themselves to be led by curiosity and forget to bring along their common sense? It is useful:

- to be familiar with what the scripture teaches,
- to stick with a single church (not to be a church hopper) for consistent teaching and community support,
- to focus on God's Word – not on charisma, popularity, eloquence, showbiz quality, entertainment and such,
- to avoid the jumping-on-the-bandwagon habit and
- to have a cooling-off period to reflect (with prayer and the guidance of the Bible) on any claim that you are unsure of.

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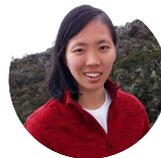


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