

40.day 2019

on this rock

Morning Prayer

Daily including Public Holidays

6.30am to 8.30am

Kum Yan Methodist Church

City@Prayer

Mondays to Fridays

July 1 to August 8

12.30pm to 1.30pm

St Andrew's Cathedral

Day of His Power!

Thursday | August 8

7.30pm to 10.30pm

Suntec Convention Centre

Level 6 Auditorium

on this rock

Singapore is built on rock.

A deep granite base underlies a third of the island. It runs from Tuas to Changi and from Sembawang to Bukit Merah. Socially, politically, and economically too, Singapore is built on a firm foundation. Two hundred years on from Raffles' landing, our fundamentals are sound. But what about the Church? Are we building on solid rock? Or shifting sand? Are we building with gold, silver, and precious stone? Or wood, hay, and straw?

On This Rock is the theme of 40.Day 2019. It brings us back to the basics of the Church Jesus builds as seen through the life and legacy of his first disciple. Simon Peter is the unsung hero of biblical scholarship and popular preaching. He has been called the underestimated apostle and the exegetical stepchild. He has been caricatured as impulsive, vacillating, dim-witted, and doubting. But now is the time to rediscover the real Simon Peter of the Gospel.

The three main characters of the New Testament are Jesus, Paul, and Peter. Jesus is a hard act to follow. And Paul seems too perfect for most of us. But all of us can identify with Peter. Somehow, discipleship seems a little more down to earth and doable in his footprints. He begins as a reluctant disciple—he tells Jesus to go away. He struggles with doubt and fear—not to mention ego. He falters and fails when the going gets tough—he denies Christ. But Peter never gives up. He has rightly been called the *patron saint of second-chance discipleship*. He tries and tries again until he finally gets it right.

What a friend we have in Peter. His is a life that is well worth contemplating and imitating. Follow him these next 40 days and beyond—until Christ is formed in you.

JOHN 1:40-42 | One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah".... He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter).

Andrew brought Simon. Every time we meet Andrew in John's Gospel, he's connecting someone to Jesus (JOHN 1:42; 6:8-9; 12:22).

The first person he brought was his brother, Simon. It's impossible to calculate how many have come to Christ through Peter's ministry. All because Andrew did what seemed natural and right. He brought his brother to Jesus.

Jesus didn't hastily commit himself to anyone. Nor did he judge from outward appearance. He knew what was inside man (JOHN 2:25). He took one look at Simon and saw him, not for what he was, but for what he was to become.

According to the Greek text, this was not a passing glance, but a penetrating gaze. Jesus apparently saw something in Simon that reminded him of rock: *You are Simon. You shall be called Cephas, or Petros in Greek, Peter in English.*

In the Bible, a name-change signals a change of character and destiny. *Abram* becomes *Abraham*, father of nations. *Jacob* becomes *Israel*, the God wrestler. *Simon* becomes

Cephas, which means *Rock* in Aramaic, the mother tongue of Jesus. This word was almost never used as a personal name before.

That makes it doubly significant. With a gaze of grace, Jesus saw something in Simon that no one else saw: Solid Rock. Andrew may have curled his lip. He knew his brother well. But Jesus knew him better.

The new name didn't turn Simon into solid rock overnight. Look at his early track record. He doesn't seem quite solid. He doubts. He sinks in the sea. He acts before he thinks. And when he thinks, he thinks too loud. He falls asleep at prayer. He denies Jesus.

But here at the very beginning, Jesus takes one good look at him and sees something he can build on. He commits himself to bring out that Rock buried deep within Peter.

What does Jesus see in you? Your true life is hidden with him in God (COLOSSIANS 3:3). Only Jesus can bring out that hidden you. If you follow him long enough and close enough, the real you will eventually surface, even if you sink from time to time along the way.

We live in a crazy world ruled by first impressions. We size up people in less than a minute and label them for the rest of their lives—for better or for worse.

- Turn the page. Never mind how others laud or label you. Never believe the prop-ups or the put-downs. Never deceive or despise yourself. Instead, turn to Jesus with all your heart. He sees you differently—what you are and what you can become in him. He longs to bring out the best in you. It's a new day. Make up your mind to walk closely with him. Surrender your life anew to your Maker and Master forever. Make this your constant plea: O Lord, change me from the inside out. Fulfill your purpose in my life—for your glory!
- Turn the page. Ask God to forgive you for writing off others at first glance or first impression: The awkward intern at work with below zero social skills. The funky seeker in your cell who's too brash for comfort. The new believer with a shady past who plays hide-and-seek and is always late for church. And whoever else you've judged, under-estimated, called names, gave up on, and excluded from your circle. Pray: Lord, make me like you. Deliver me from the tyranny of first impressions which are often unreliable, unfair, and sometimes dead wrong! Grant me the grace to look beyond the outward and see others, not for who they are, but for who they can become in you. Let me see their inestimable worth as humans created in your image. Their potential as a divine work in progress. Their radical makeover by your redeeming love. Their special part in your big plan. From this day on, with eyes of faith and a heart of love, I choose to speak a new language of hope and dreams over each one: Arise, shine as solid disciples of Jesu, exceeding all expectations—for his glory!
- Turn the page. Be a new generation captured by divine love, characterized by divine grace. Be an *Andrew*. Help someone make a new start. Take the initiative. Introduce a sibling or a friend to Jesus. Who knows? This new friendship with Christ could be earth-shaking. He or she might become a key influencer who plays a pivotal role in salvation history, as Peter did.
- Turn the page. Identity and belonging are human felt needs. Take a 40.Day Challenge. Pledge that you will never measure others by their past or pedigree. Pledge to follow the example of Jesus. See their potential. Discern their calling. Start with your inner circle. Family. Leadership team. Staff. Cell. Colleagues. Classmates. New believers. Don't forget the Silver Generation. There's no age limit with God. He has wired us with a capacity to excel and shine for him at any age. Take a good look at each one. What is Jesus showing you? Daily pray for them by name—their life-long journey of transformation: the trials, tears, and most of all, the triumphs of his grace.

LUKE 5:10-11 | And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Peter was a born fisherman. He came from a humble village called Bethsaida, which means *place of fishing* (JOHN 1:44). At some point he moved to Capernaum where he lived with his wife and mother-in-law. He and his brother Andrew were partners in a fishing business with James and John and their father Zebedee. Peter owned one of the boats. They worked the north end of the Sea of Galilee, which normally teemed with all kinds of fish.

Early one morning, Jesus boarded Peter’s boat. They had fished all night and caught nothing. Now they were cleaning the nets. After teaching the crowds that had gathered on the shore, Jesus said to Peter: *Let’s go fishing.*

Peter was vintage Galilean: simple, transparent, blunt. Talk first, think later. *Master, we toiled all night and caught nothing!* In other words, if you’ve fished all night and caught nothing, why try again in the heat of the day? But Peter knows there’s more to Jesus than carving wood. He has spoken his mind. Now he surrenders his will: *At your word I will let down the nets.*

They catch enough fish to sink a ship. Peter is out of his depth. He falls on his knees: *Leave me, Lord. I’m a sinful man* (LUKE 5:8). But Jesus says: *Fear not. From now on you’ll be catching men.*

What does this mean? Jesus isn’t inviting Peter for a holiday on the lake with a hook and a line. Peter practised net fishing for a living. That’s hard work. On a good night you might net a fortune. On a bad night, you lose.

The fishing metaphor also alludes to a prophecy of the great end-time gathering of God’s people: *Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the Lord, and they shall catch them* (JEREMIAH 16:16).

Therefore, the call to follow Jesus and fish for people signals the dawn of the age to come. Peter’s career has just changed from fishing to end-time evangelism. He abandons his boat and all the fish he has just caught. He follows the Master to share in his mission to seek and save the lost. Soon he will catch men and women by the thousands from *every nation under heaven* (ACTS 5:5, 41). Peter was born to fish. And so are we.

- Are we fishers of men or keepers of aquariums? What is the state of the local church in Singapore? Are we busy fishing for people as true disciples should? Or are we lost in our own world of vain ambitions—*fishing for applause, recognition, rank, compliments, and legacy?* (CHRIS CHIA)
- Are you a fisher of men where you work? Jesus called Peter and his partners to drop their nets, go for broke, and follow him full time on the road—homeless, empty-handed, and bare-footed. But most people are not called to follow Jesus in that way. Most of us are called to follow Jesus, seek the kingdom, and fish for men in the context of our career. Catch his heartbeat, regardless of your profession or personality. Hear the Lord say: *Stop working for personal gain. Be a fisher of men. I will cause you to be other-oriented. I will bestow favour. I will open doors. You will bring the power of my Gospel for salvation to bless your world. Be my artiste, banker, chef, doctor, engineer, florist, grab driver, hairdresser, lawyer, school teacher. Fish for men right where you are. I will sharpen your instincts and use your unique position, gifts, and skillsets to seek and save the lost.*
- Are you a fisher of men where you live? Ninety percent of us live in high rise dwellings. To the pragmatic urban planner, this is an efficient housing solution in our land-scarce citystate. But those with godly imagination see this as an ingenious plan inspired from above. God has organized our housing in such a way that it is easy for us to love our neighbours and serve our communities. Each housing block is a mega zone of humanity with all kinds of needs. Be a good neighbour. Befriend. Care. Pray. Love God—by loving neighbour!
- Do you love your community? You’ve toiled long and hard. You’ve been prayerwalking and profiling your neighbourhood. You’ve tried many ways and means of outreach. But still, little or no results. Don’t give up. *Love never fails* (1 CORINTHIANS 13:8). Try again. The *Celebration of Hope* initiative continues. In this Year of Proclamation, hear and obey the word of the Lord: *Put out into deep water. Let down your net for a catch.* Ask God to astound you and all of us with a miraculous haul: massive conversions among all ethnic groups, across all ages, and class divides. In Jesus’ name, claim entire families and whole sociological groups for his kingdom and for his glory:
 - Heartland Families
 - Elderly Poor
 - Crazy Rich Asians
 - Movers and Shakers
 - Irreligious Yuppies
 - Religious Devotees
 - Hardcore Liberals
 - Millennials
 - Little Children
 - Scholars
 - Students
 - Foreign Talent
 - Foreign Domestic Helpers
 - Migrant Workers
 - New Immigrants
 - People with Special Needs
 - Prodigal Sons | Daughters
 - Social Media Influencers

MARK 1:35-38 | And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out."

Peter left home to follow Jesus.

But now Jesus leaves the synagogue in Capernaum and co-opts Peter's home as a new ministry base. The first house church (MARK 2:1).

Peter must have been delighted. He's reunited with his wife. He's enjoying his mother-in-law's cooking again (MARK 1:31). His brother Andrew and his old fishing buddies James and John are there with him too.

Peter is a family man with a big heart. He opens his home for the ministry of Jesus. Later, in his letter, he urges his readers to show hospitality *without grumbling* (1 PETER 4:9). He practised this before preaching it. But it was not without challenges.

There was little or no privacy. Jesus had disciples who needed foot-washing, feeding, and bedding. The sick and demon possessed were crashing the gates for healing and deliverance. There was no room left even outside the door. Most likely it was Peter's house that had the roof torn open to let a paralytic down for Jesus to heal him (MARK 2:1-5).

So much for domestic routine! The unexpected and unpredictable were the new norm. If Peter got used to anything, it was soon disrupted. One morning he wakes up and finds Jesus gone. His management instinct kicks in. He tracks the Lord down and finds him praying in some desolate place.

Everyone is looking for you, he says, with a hint of impatience. Peter means well. Jesus is a popular teacher and a charismatic healer.

He draws overflow crowds. But Jesus will not conform to the role of a domestic personal saviour or a townhouse preacher. The Church he builds is a going community: *Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out* (MARK 1:35-39).

Peter is a born leader. A natural organizer. A man of ideas and initiative. For example, on the Mount of Transfiguration, he proposes three tabernacles. After Easter he initiates the replacing of Judas. His qualities will serve well in the Church Jesus builds. But for the moment, he doesn't seem to get it. Do we?

- Following Jesus can be inconvenient. There is a cost. True discipleship calls us out of our comfort zone: our natural inclination for the predictable. The rhythm and routine of daily life. The ease of the familiar. The safe and secure. In an age of consumer-Christianity, many of us want the blessing and benefit of following Jesus without the inconvenience. But great things never emerge from comfort zones. Turn to God. Ask him to deliver us from our twin idols of comfort and convenience—the biggest threat to Christianity in affluent nations like Singapore! In our bicentennial, the best gift we can give ourselves and future generations is an exceptional Church that follows Jesus radically—whatever it takes! Pray.
- Fathers, will you take the lead? Peter was a family man. He opened his heart and home to the ministry of Jesus at the cost of great inconvenience. Will you model what it means to be a disciple-making family with Jesus at the centre? Why not host an evangelistic cell in your home? Ask God for grace to break out of your introvert mold and practise hospitality without grumbling. Pray also for your pastors, elders, cell leaders, missionaries, and others you know who are in Peter's shoes in one way or another. For them, disruptions are the norm. Often a day off or a quiet evening at home with spouse and children has to be sacrificed to minister to others in need. Ask God to enable them and all of us to serve the Lord selflessly—with true love and radiant smiles.
- Pastors, will you take heed? Peter was a natural leader. But in spiritual matters, he sometimes got it wrong before he got it right. The Singapore Church is blessed with many strong leaders. In the spiritual realm, however, our natural strengths can become our greatest liabilities. Ask God to help us get it right the first time, or at least the second time. Pray: Lord Jesus, your ways and thoughts are higher than ours (ISAIAH 55:8-9). Show us where we have relied more on secular principles and skillsets than on the guidance and gifts of your Spirit. Convict us where we have tried to micro-manage and domesticate you to suit our own systems, structures, and schedules, Singapore-style! Forgive us our pride and presumption. Help us to see your kingdom vision and pursue it with all our hearts. Anoint us to reorder everything to align with your perfect plan for Church, nation, and world.
- Sons and Daughters of Singapore, will you take the next step? The Church Jesus builds is a going community: *Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out*. Think about the pioneer missionaries who came out of their comfort zones to sow the seed of the Gospel in Singapore. Shall we mark our bicentennial by pledging to *go and do likewise*? Tell Jesus: Where you lead, I will follow.

MATTHEW 10:1-2 | And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter....

Peter is the Prince of Apostles. He is the first disciple called (MATTHEW 4:18-20; 10:2; MARK 1:16-17; LUKE 5:10). He is first in every list of the Twelve, while Judas is always last (MATTHEW 10:2-4; MARK 13:16-19; LUKE 6:14-16). Among the inner circle (Peter, James, and John), Peter is always named first (MARK 5:35-41; 9:2-8; 14:33, 43-50).

Jesus converses more personally and directly with Peter than anyone else in the Gospel. In Luke 5:10, the assurance that he *will be catching men* is addressed only to him. And he alone is promised the keys of the kingdom (MATTHEW 16:19).

The angel at the empty tomb singles Peter out when messaging the disciples (MARK 16:7). The Risen Lord appears first to Peter among the apostles (LUKE 24:34; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:4-5). And Peter is uniquely commissioned to shepherd the Flock for which Jesus died (JOHN 21:15-17).

So what are we to make of this preference for Peter? Does Jesus play favourites? No. It's a matter of calling. All four Gospels present Peter as the leader and spokesman of the Twelve. God gave him a unique role to play in building up and leading the Church. So, what does this mean, practically?

Jesus said to call no one Father or Teacher because we are all brothers and sisters (MATTHEW 23:8-10). But when it comes to spiritual leadership, there is always a first among equals. Think of Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and the Judges of Israel.

The plurality of elders and leadership by consensus are biblical and beautiful. But after hearing everyone and every side of an issue, someone has to make the call.

For example, James in the Jerusalem Council. The views expressed there were polls apart. But at the end of the discussion James could say: *Brothers, listen to me. ...I have reached a decision.... And ...it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us....* (ACTS 15:13,19, 28).

So there must be a balance. Jesus said that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. But *it shall not be so among you* (MARK 10:42-43). Peter struck that balance. As a leader, he humbled himself under the mighty hand of God. The more God exalted him, the more he humbled himself.

The Prince of Apostles was the first among equals. But never a dictator (1 PETER 5:3).

- *Everything rises and falls on leadership* (JOHN MAXWELL). No wonder the world is obsessed with *The Leadership Challenge*: what works, what doesn't, what's new, what's next, what's better. Some even blog about leadership conferences that should be on your radar. Save your energy, time, and money. Stay put and stick with the Word of God. He has already given us a clear template for leadership. The pattern: plurality of elders. The principle: first among equals. Pause and pray. Thank God for his divine blueprint that is at once simple and strategic, effective and empowering.
- Though called by God, leaders are not perfect. All are mortals with clay feet, including the first among equals. Indeed, these prominent figures who are outstandingly gifted to lead need a greater measure of God's grace. Because of their calling, stature, and visibility, they face relentless warfare. They need our prayers more than anyone else. Who is the first among equals in your denomination or local church or mission agency or organization? Pray for this person by name, that he or she may:
 - Lead boldly, with a deep sense of calling in the fear of the Lord.
 - Lead humbly, recognizing his or her own vulnerabilities and deficiencies.
 - Lead graciously, honouring the gifts of others and welcoming their input.
 - Lead prayerfully, seeking God for discernment and direction.
 - Lead wisely, making the right call in the right way at the right time.
 - Lead visibly, by example, not domineering, but serving.
- In *The Power of Team Leadership*, George Barna says that most leaders today are not ready for team leadership. Nor will they be in the foreseeable future. Some actually think they are the only ones who can get the job done. Others feel they can do a far better job leading solo, without the encumbrance of others. Some prefer to dictate rather than rely on the wealth of experience and gifts resident in the church. Others have a deep-seated need to be needed, so they fight to maintain control. In this time of generational transition, pray that Singapore's emerging church leaders will prove Barna wrong by choosing the biblical template of team leadership: Plurality of elders. First among equals.
- Peter didn't ask to be the first among equals. It was a matter of calling. A *person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven* (JOHN 3:27). Competing for position in the Church, therefore, is both foolish and futile. There is no reason to envy, no ground to gripe. Be humble. We are one Church, many congregations. When God raises up apostolic leaders for national initiatives, may we not dishonour him by rejecting his sovereign choice. Pray for humility and maturity to flow with his new move. Come alongside his chosen leaders—no matter how you feel or what you think of them.

MATTHEW 14:28-29 | Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.

First a storm. Now a ghost! Legend had it that the Sea of Galilee was haunted by demons. The disciples half believed it when they saw a lone figure walking out to them on a stormy sea (MATTHEW 14:26). But out of the dark, a familiar voice spoke: *Take courage. It is I. Do not fear.*

Peter was the most daring apostle. But he was not as impetuous as popular preachers make him out to be. His first impulse was to walk on the water to Jesus. But he would not step out of his boat without first testing the spirits: *Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.* And the voice says: *Come.*

Peter weighs the evidence. That voice gave him his new name, *Rock* (JOHN 1:42). That voice told him to let down his net for a miraculous catch of fish (LUKE 5:4). That voice called him to fish for people. That voice called a dead girl back to life before his very eyes (LUKE 8:54). And now, that same familiar voice says: *Come.*

Peter knows that voice. But will he stake his life on it? If so, he must confront his three greatest fears in that moment of truth: his native

Israelite fear of the sea, his fear of ghosts, and his fear of drowning.

When Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon he said: *That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.* But when Peter set foot on the sea, that was a far greater leap for all humanity. No human being except Jesus had ever walked on water before.

Armstrong's moon-walk was made possible by science. Peter's sea-walk was made possible by faith alone in the One who says: *Come.* He abandons the boat, his only security, and puts total trust in Jesus. He walks by faith and not by sight. In this way, he becomes a paradigm of faith for all disciples.

Faith is not the absence of fear, but the defiance of fear. In spite of our fears, we surrender our lives into the hands of the One who commands wind and sea. It worked for Peter. It will work for you. But only when you step out of whatever else you are trusting in for security.

Whoever comes to God must believe that he is and that he rewards those who diligently seek him (HEBREWS 11:6). *Come.*

Storms are a fact of life. It's not the size of your storm but the state of your faith that matters. Survival is not to the fittest but to the faithful. We need Jesus.

- Take an honest look at the state of your faith. Is it in Christ alone, the One who commands wind and sea? *Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ* (ROMANS 10:17). Are you hearing him? Listen. He has not lost his voice. He speaks loud and clear primarily through his written Word. That voice through Scripture is accessible 24|7. Print copy. Digital version. Countless Apps at a swipe on the screen of our devices. We have no excuse. We should be the generation that's most familiar with the voice of God in the Word, the source of true faith. Yet we are not. We neglect his Word. We ignore the voice that matters most. We're more interested in the soundbites from worldly sources that muddle our minds, soil our hearts, and sap our faith. Shame on us. Today, make a stand. Change. Determine to treat yourself to his voice daily. Return to the good old-fashioned habit of time alone with Christ in his Word to grow your faith. Read the Word for breadth. Study the Word for depth. Meditate on the Word. Bask in God's Truth—so that faith will take root in your heart and awaken childlike wonder in your soul.
- Listen to the Word: *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me* (JOHN 10:27). *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God* (MATTHEW 4:4). *The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes... the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold... in keeping them there is great reward* (PSALM 19:7-11).
- Faith pleases God. Singapore needs a Church that is robust in faith. Pray for a revival marked by a strong culture of faith anchored in the Word. Start with yourself today. Pray for ministers of the Word to preach and teach in ways that build our faith and whet our appetites, making us hungry for more!
- The world today is headed for a titanic shipwreck without Jesus. We know the litany of storms. Trade wars. Nationalism. Protectionism. Brexit spillover. Cyber attacks. Terrorism. Climate change. Sexual revolution. Strange pandemics. The Mahathir effect. And what else? Singapore, a tiny sampan, is vulnerable. Amid the fierce storms beyond our control, may we the Church have our eyes trained on Jesus and our ears tuned in to his voice. May we rightly represent Jesus as people of faith with words of truth to calm nerves, spark courage, inspire hope, and turn all eyes on him. This bicentennial, let Singapore call upon the Lord and be saved.

MATTHEW 14:30-31 | But when [Peter] saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Peter lives up to his new name. He sinks like a stone. The moment he turns his eyes from the Christ to the crisis, his faith fails. His fear prevails.

When Peter first responded to the call of Jesus, he left his boat behind. That was just practice for this. Then it was a matter of bread and butter. Now, leaving his boat is a matter of life and death.

This is not virtual reality. Following Jesus involves great risk. Peter is in real danger of drowning at sea. But salvation is just a prayer away.

Some of the shortest prayers in the Bible have the greatest effect because they are prayers of simple faith. The tax-collector: *God, be merciful to me a sinner.* The blind beggar: *Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.* The crucified thief: *Lord, remember me when you enter your kingdom.*

And now, out of the depths, Peter cries: *Lord, save me.* This echoes the prayer of the Psalmist in his peril: *Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. ... I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me* (PSALM 69:1-2).

Though mixed with doubt, Peter's faith prevails. Jesus draws him up with a firm grip and a gentle rebuke: *O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*

In the Greek text, Jesus literally addresses Peter as *Small-Faith*. Unflattering. But not so bad. Small faith is better than no faith. If small faith can walk on water, what will great faith do? That's what Peter is training for. Great faith. Great works. He has the best Coach and Trainer.

Peter is a rock in formation. Each trial of faith prepares him for the next. Jesus is committed to bringing out the deep rock within him, even if it means bringing up the sponge first. One day Satan will sift Peter like wheat. Will his faith hold out? Jesus prays that it will. And it does.

Following Jesus is no easy road. His footprints lead to the Cross. The farther you go, the greater the challenge. When faith fails, life unravels. *If you don't stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all* (ISAIAH 7:9).

Are you treading deep waters today? Have no fear. Jesus is near. Salvation is just a prayer away: *Lord, save me.*

Faith is not what rescues you. Faith is what guides you (RALPH WINTER). Walking by faith in a storm-tossed world entails great risk, like skating on thin ice. But the risk of faith is worth taking. Not just for our personal salvation, but for countless others in peril at sea.

- There is a first time for everything—like walking on water! What new thing has Jesus planted in your heart to pursue? You're scared. The mission is way too risky and way too big. Unlike anything you've ever done. You hesitate. Your faith is small. But take courage. Jesus doesn't come to sink your sampan. He comes to free you from its limitations. He wants to grow your latent potential, unleash your creative powers, and call you beyond boundaries, real or imagined. Below is a story about a giant of faith. As you read it, allow the Lord to speak and inspire you to step out of your boat:

Hudson Taylor knew that God was calling him to raise up new missionaries to penetrate China's interior. This was uncharted waters in the history of world missions. What if the new workers failed and put the blame on him? Could he bear the responsibility? His soul was in turmoil. He wrestled with the challenge of taking that leap of faith. One Sunday morning in June 1865, on Brighton beach, the Lord conquered his unbelief. Then and there, Taylor surrendered himself to God for this new mission. This one act of surrender led to the founding of the China Inland Mission (now OMF) which sent thousands of new workers to break new ground in China's unreached interior.

- Perhaps you have already taken the risk of faith and stepped out of your boat. And now you are sinking in a storm of doubt and fear. Cling to your faith like a life vest. Don't let panic rob you of the abundant life and the adventure of faith. Turn your eyes from the crisis to the Christ. Prayer is not a fine art but a desperate cry. Like Peter, shout for help: *Lord, save me!*
- Focus on Christ: Emmanuel, God with us. Let this beautiful song arise within you as your anthem of faith in the face of every storm:

*Hide me now under your wings
Cover me within your mighty hand
When the oceans rise and thunders roar
I will soar with you above the storm
Father you are king over the flood
I will be still and know you are God
Find rest my soul in Christ alone
Know his power in quietness and trust*
(HILLSONG)

JOHN 6:66-69 | After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

Peter stands at the crossroad. Jesus had just preached on the Bread of Life in Peter's hometown synagogue. The sermon expressed the deeper meanings of the miracle of the loaves and fish. But many of the disciples choked on the part about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus. A massive walk-out occurred. Then, surprisingly, Jesus says to his own Twelve Apostles: *Do you want to leave too?*

The door to eternal life is narrow. But the way out is easy. There is no compulsion in discipleship. If you want to leave, the exit is clearly marked and the door is wide open. If you want to stay, you are welcome. But there are conditions: Deny yourself. Take up your cross. Follow Jesus.

Peter must choose. He's so close to home he can almost smell the bread baking in the oven. Here's a chance to go back to normal life. Support his family again. The boat is near. The fish are multiplying.

But wait. Peter has other options. For example, why not seek out a theologically trained rabbi? One

with a hundred or more disciples and a few things from the system that Jesus doesn't have: credibility, respect, the long flowing robe. Not to mention money. And titles too!

Or better yet, why not round up all those disgruntled disciples who have just walked out on Jesus and start a movement of his own? *Simon Peter Ministries. Peter Rocks!* He's got the training, the skillsets, and the teaching of Jesus under his belt. He's even walked on water! And to top all that, he's a born leader—Prince of Apostles. Imagine: *The Right Reverend Rabbi Rock.*

Words come so cheap and easy nowadays. Everyone has a word. Everyone is an expert, a journalist, a superstar. With all the posting, tweeting, blogging, and videoing, there's no end of words. But who has the words of eternal life?

Without a moment's hesitation, Peter settles it once and for all. His heart is fixed: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*

Will you settle it today? Embrace Peter's conviction. Choose Jesus. Choose life. Eternal life.

- Are you choking on the hard sayings of Jesus? Is your pastor's preaching getting too tough to digest? Examine yourself. What is it that you cannot stomach? Write it down. Tell it to Jesus. Pray: Lord Jesus, please give me grace to enthusiastically take your Truth to heart, even if my head can't grasp it yet. Help me, in simple childlike faith, to obey the things I do understand and not to spew out things that are hard to swallow.
- Are you eyeing the exit? Fed up with the call and cost of discipleship? Shopping for a church with a feel good gospel of self-esteem, comfort and convenience? Jesus addresses the question to every single Christian who reads or hears the Gospel: *Do you also want to go away?* What is your answer? Don't just say Yes or No. Don't just cut-and-paste Peter's answer. Ponder and pray. Write your own response below:

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- Are you vacillating? Peter had things to go back to. What about you? What is vying for your affection and allegiance? What is drawing you away from fellowship with Jesus and his Church? Try to put your finger on it. Talk with Jesus. Even though he knows it all, he will listen. He will understand. He will help you. Write your prayer of confession below:

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- Will you settle it today? Who has the words of eternal life? We all know the answer. But are we living the answer? Are we abiding in the words of eternal life? Determine to match your walk with your talk: *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God. Confess: Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you* (PSALM 73:25). Sing: *Christ is enough for me... Everything I need is in you. Everything I need. I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back.*
 - Will you share this Good News with others? Words of eternal life are too good to keep to ourselves. How can we hold back? We're not done with the *Celebration of Hope*. This is the Year of Proclamation. The rallies are over, but personal evangelism continues. *I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes* (ROMANS 1:16). Pray!

MATTHEW 16:15-17 | He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

Who is Jesus? It depends on who you ask. When it comes to knowing Jesus, don't trust social media. Both John the Baptist and Simon Peter knew Jesus by revelation. But neither had the full picture. John nearly stumbled when Jesus didn't break him out of jail as Isaiah had prophesied (ISAIAH 61:1). And Peter tried to squeeze Jesus into the mould of popular expectations.

But the Prince of Apostles got one thing right: *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.* Well done, Peter. You didn't pluck that from Google. When it comes to knowing Jesus, we need more than hearsay and human reason. Wisdom from above is, of course, open to reason (JAMES 3:17). But without revelation, the greatest powers of reason can lead us astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 CORINTHIANS 11:3).

Peter lacks formal education. But don't be fooled. Education is not the same as learning. Peter is both a practical man and a profound thinker. He follows Jesus like a shadow even in the dark. But when all the math is done and all the dots are joined, it's

still not enough. Only the Father can reveal Jesus to him and to us.

We say we want revival. But do we really? Every revival brings a fresh revelation of Jesus. Not a new revelation. But a return to the Original Jesus who is often forgotten and cannot be known by human reasoning alone.

For example, the Azusa Street Revival started when forty Bible School students rediscovered Jesus as the Baptiser in the Holy Spirit. The Healing Revival that produced the Charismatic Renewal started when a handful of evangelists rediscovered Jesus as the Healer. And the Welsh Revival started when a youth leader ask the group: *Who is Jesus to you?* A teen by the name of Florrie Evans answered: *I love Jesus with all my heart. He died for me.* The presence of God overwhelmed the place. And so began the Welsh revival.

We need revival. We claim revelation. But do we want the Original Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and forever? Or do we prefer *another Jesus?*

(HEBREWS 13:8; 2 CORINTHIANS 11:4)

Knowledge is good. Revelation is best. Knowledge is human. Revelation is divine. *Knowledge makes you think. Revelation makes you see. Knowledge teaches your mind. Revelation changes your heart. Knowledge is informational. Revelation is experiential* (ZACH BURANDT).

- Revival brings a fresh revelation of Christ that places him front and centre and above all else. Otherwise, church life remains business as usual. We perpetuate a church culture that breeds nominal Christians with little passion for Christ and his cause. Relationship with Jesus becomes a ritual. Quiet time in the Word becomes a chore. Worship becomes a show. Prayer becomes an option. Ministry becomes a lifeless routine. Evangelism becomes an event. Preaching becomes a motivational talk, pleasing and teasing, full of humour, but without the revelation of the Gospel of Christ. Ask God for the gift of desperation, a deep and holy discontent. Cry out to him for a historic revival in our city that reveals Jesus, fuels faith, and fires up zeal for his name and his fame. There's no better time for this than now—our bicentennial.
- *Celebration of Hope* continues: *personal evangelism on a mass scale.* Every believer has a part in reaching the 80% unsaved in our city. Revelation makes a world of difference in how we share our faith. Pray that Peter's first-hand revelation of Jesus will become a reality for us: *Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.* Pray that Paul's stunning revelation of the Gospel will arrest us today: *The gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ* (GALATIANS 1:11-12).
- We are the most religiously-diverse society in the world (PEW RESEARCH 2016). In March 2019, the Institute of Policy Studies released its findings on *Religion in Singapore: The Private and Public Spheres*. 86% agreed that *religion is as relevant to life today as in the past. About three in four Singaporeans said they followed a religion. The majority of respondents were likely to believe in religious concepts such as heaven, hell, life after death and religious miracles. Even among those who professed no religion, there were substantial numbers who believed in some religious concepts or supernatural powers.* Rejoice! God has placed eternity in their hearts (ECCLESIASTES 3:11). Pray for a divine visitation, revealing Christ as *the Son of the Living God.* Not just another god among a pantheon of gods. Not just another messenger. Not just another prophet. Declare: Jesus says to you, Singapore, *I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* Come, Lord Jesus! Unveil the minds of pre-believers. Let them *see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God* (2 CORINTHIANS 4:4).

MATTHEW 16:18-19 | And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Who is *this Rock*? Some Protestants bend over backwards trying to prove that it's not Peter. Why? Because admitting that Peter is the Rock feels like a concession to Catholic claims about the Pope. Such theological insecurity is unnecessary. It cannot be denied that Peter is, in some sense, a rock on which Jesus builds. And not Peter alone. All Twelve Apostles are part of the Church's one foundation. All are in perfect alignment with Jesus the Chief Cornerstone (EPHESIANS 2:20; REVELATION 21:14). And among the Twelve, Peter is primary.

Jesus gave Peter the keys of the kingdom. Keys represent authority. In Isaiah 22, Eliakim was summoned to high office in the kingdom of Judah: *I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open* (:22).

Just as Eliakim became a steward of the house of David, Peter will become a steward of God's kingdom: *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven*. Just as Eliakim replaced Shebna, who had abused

power, the apostles will replace the leaders of Judaism who also abused their office (MATTHEW 21:43; LUKE 11:52).

Therefore, what happens in Matthew 16 is a transfer of authority—kingdom authority. *Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (MATTHEW 16:19; 18:18).

This is not about binding devils and loosing angels. Senior rabbis had near absolute authority to make decrees on earth that were binding on all Judaism. Likewise, the Apostles of Jesus and their successors have kingdom authority to make decisions, resolve disputes, restore peace, and establish divine order in the Church. Their decisions, when made by revelation and not just reason, are ratified in heaven.

How does Peter use the keys? Exquisitely. He opens the kingdom of heaven to Jews in Acts 2 and to Gentiles in Acts 10. In both cases, it was through prayer and proclamation. In both cases, it was by revelation from heaven. This is what defines leadership in the Church Jesus builds.

- Are we trapped in materialism and ruled by the five senses? If so, kingdom authority will remain a riddle to us. Instead of serving and leading by wisdom from above, we will constantly be driven by human ideas and trends, programmes and activities. Pause. Ponder. Pray.
- Revival always brings a fresh revelation of Jesus. Not another Jesus. But the One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (HEBREWS 13:8). Pray: Our Father in heaven, come visit Singapore. Reveal Jesus afresh to this generation. The Word made flesh. The Good Shepherd. The Light of the world. The Alpha and the Omega. The Righteous Judge. The Coming King. Enlighten our minds. Transcend our human thinking. Let our work be an act of worship flowing out of our constant communion with you in Word and in prayer (ACTS 6:4). Manifest this life-changing revelation of Jesus among the unsaved in our city—especially those who are disillusioned with false securities and empty belief systems. Come, Lord Jesus, build your Church!
- Peter's body lies buried in Rome. But not his keys. The keys of the kingdom have been given to the entire Church. But not to every Tom, Dick and Harry or Johnny-come-yesterday. The keys are given to God-ordained leaders who are under apostolic authority and who walk in Peter's faith and virtues (ORIGEN). Pray: Dear Lord Jesus, let kingdom authority flow from your throne into the Singapore Church. Manifest your power through your appointed leaders who bear your mantle, share your suffering, unite your Body, and serve your mission. Anoint each one so that they may:
 - lead by revelation and establish divine order in the Church
 - resolve controversies, settle disputes, reconcile enemies
 - expose pretenders, silence deceivers, correct heresies
 - pioneer new kingdom initiatives that rattle the gates of hell
 - stand together against evil and promote truth, justice and righteousness
 - turn Singapore Godward through Gospel proclamation and united prayer
 - make new disciples among unreached peoples in Asia and beyond
 Come Lord Jesus, build your Church!
- Binding and loosing is a metaphor for exercising kingdom authority, especially in situations of conflict in the Church. In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus extends this awesome authority, not only to apostles, but to ordinary disciples who are rightly related to the Body and submitted to its leadership. Pray: Lord Jesus, let your kingdom authority flow through me to build and to bless: Where there is conflict, let me bring peace. Where there is confusion, let me bring clarity. Where there is division, let me bring unity. Come Lord Jesus, build your Church!

MATTHEW 16:21-22 | From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."

Peter is surfing the anointing. He is on the crest of the wave. He is promised the keys of the kingdom. Jesus will redeem and rebuild Israel around him. He will dispense the decrees of heaven on earth like a new Moses. This sets him on a path to power and glory, whether he wants it or not.

But the next moment, Peter is talking sheer nonsense. God's Messiah is to be rejected and put to death? No way! Back in Peter's day, it was virtually impossible to speak or even think of a suffering Messiah. The tortured servant of Isaiah 53 was not seen as a messianic figure by any school of Judaism.

Before and after Jesus, fake messiahs arose and fell by the handful. But, according to theological consensus and popular expectation, when the Real Messiah came, he would not suffer and could not fail. At any moment now, the superhuman Son of Man of Daniel 7 would show up. He would topple Rome, destroy sinners, restore the golden age of Israel, and rule on David's throne. That's what Peter and his contemporaries were expecting.

Peter was a child of his time. He simply did what we would have done and in fact still do: Rebrand Jesus for the market. Tweak him to fit popular expectations. Make him relevant to our community. Tailor him to suit our culture.

In this way, every generation recreates Jesus in its own image. Every nation accommodates the Gospel to its own culture. For example, the German state church in Hitler's time made Jesus so German they forgot he was a Jew. And this played into the hand of the antichrist and his *Final Solution*.

Warning! Jesus Christ does not change to suit our culture. We must conform our culture to his image. When we use Jesus to build our own kingdom, ministry, or career, we play into the hand of the antichrist. Any attempt to conform Jesus to the so-called felt needs of our church and culture—in the name of relevance—will draw the same stern rebuke that Peter got at Caesarea Philippi:

Get behind me Satan. You are minding the things of men (MATTHEW 16:23).

- **Sober Up.** In Singapore, church growth has stagnated. Congregations are ageing. What is our response? Are we resorting to worldly means to make our churches more attractive and 'relevant'? Have we re-branded Jesus for the Singapore market? Have we traded the historical Jesus for Jesus the CEO? Jesus the Business Consultant? Jesus the Brand Wizard? Jesus the Prosperity Guru? Are we preaching a free-and-easy gospel of self-esteem and ticket-to-heaven theology? *Come as you are and remain as you are. No life-change required. Be yourself. Be happy, healthy, wealthy and wise, and go to heaven when you die.* Have we exchanged worship in spirit and truth for entertainment to dazzle the crowds? Have we traded God's presence for stage presence? Let us examine ourselves. Confess our carnality and confusion. Seek the Lord's forgiveness and cleansing. Ask God for a Back-to-Jesus movement in our city. Return to the fundamentals of the one, holy catholic (universal) and apostolic Church that Jesus builds.

- **Wise Up.** In our anxiety to grow the Church and attract the next generation, have we misread the young? Ponder and pray these eye-opening research findings published in *Growing Young* by the Fuller Youth Institute:

To attract the younger generation, you *do not need an off-the-charts cool quotient. Granted, several of the congregations and leaders bubbling to the top of our research have a certain hip factor. But those were in the minority. For young people today, relational warmth is the new cool.*

To attract the younger generation, you *do not need a 'contemporary' worship service. While many young people are drawn to 'casual and contemporary' worship, others are drawn to 'smells and bells' high-church liturgy and everything in between.*

To attract the younger generation, you *do not need a watered-down teaching style. It's often assumed that we have to whitewash the teachings of Scripture and make them seem less radical in order to appeal to teenagers and young adults. That's not what we found. For today's young people, growing young doesn't mean we talk about Jesus or the cost of following him any less.*

To attract the younger generation, you *do not need a hyper-entertaining ministry programme. The entertainment options available to young people in our culture are endless. We don't have to compete. If we try, we will almost certainly lose. Our research highlighted that faith communities offer something different. Slick is no guarantee of success.*

- **Rise Up:** The Church Jesus builds impacts culture, not the other way around. Pledge to be totally Christ-centred, Word-based, Spirit-led—for God's glory!

MATTHEW 16:23 | [Jesus] turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

No disciple ever received a harsher rebuke.

In an instant, Peter drops from top student to 'Satan'. From building block to stumbling block.

The Greek word for *hindrance* in Matthew 16:22 is *scandalon*. This is the origin of the English word *scandal* or *scandalize*. But this hardly conveys Jesus' meaning.

A *scandalon* is literally a *trap stick*. That is, a device that triggers a trap. This word is used as a metaphor for whatever causes a person to trip and fall into sin.

For example, Satan set traps for Jesus in the desert at the start of his public ministry. He tempted Jesus to take power by the wrong path.

It's no surprise, then, that Satan should return and reset the trap for Jesus (LUKE 4:13). But what is most shocking about this time, is that Peter becomes the trigger! Of all people, Peter the Rock. The first disciple. The Senior Apostle. The right hand man of Jesus tries to get him to evade his Cross. In so doing, Peter sides, not only with men, but also with the antichrist: *Get behind me Satan*.

Jesus didn't say: *Peter, you annoy me*. Or *you irritate me*. But, *you are a stumbling block to me*. Disciples, beware: It is a grave offense to try and talk a person out of his or her cross. It would be better to have a millstone tied around your neck and dropped into the South China Sea.

So, who is this Peter? Is he Simon? Cephas? Satan? Or Scandal? Is he a rock or a roadblock? A help or a hindrance? It seems incredible that a man can be a mouthpiece of heaven one minute, and a mouthpiece of hell the next. But this should not surprise us. It happens more often than you know.

So the question we need to ask ourselves today is not *Who is Peter* but *Who am I? What am I?* Your destiny is not where you are going. It's what you are becoming along the way.

The things of men are always at odds with the things of God. Peter's misunderstanding plagues us all. It's a fundamentally flawed idea about greatness, about how God accomplishes his purpose in our life and world. Are you minding the things of God or the things of men?

- Stop and think. Are you minding the things of God or the things of men? The mind set on the things of men is hostile towards God (ROMANS 8:7). It will trip you up sooner or later. Imagine Jesus buying into Peter's thinking: *Maybe you're right, Peter. Why should I suffer and die for guilty sinners? There might be another way. Perhaps my moral example, more teaching, and bigger miracles would be enough to change the world, reform the human race, and point them back to God. Let's look further into this*. But thank God, Jesus did not fall for Satan's trap set through Peter. Cry out to the Lord: Save me! I do not want to become a stumbling block, causing others to miss your purpose for their lives. Spare me from Satan's traps. Secure me in your victory. *I raise a hallelujah, in the presence of my enemies. I raise a hallelujah, louder than the unbelief... I raise a hallelujah with everything inside of me* (BETHEL MUSIC).
- Scan your mind. Think you know better how to live the kingdom life? Do you have a skewed vision of what it means to follow Jesus? Are you after the crown but not the cross? Renounce all pride, presumption, and preconceived ideas that distort your image of Jesus and his ways. Resist the temptation to sort spiritual things into logical categories so that they make sense to your finite mind. For your own good and for the sake of God's name in Singapore, determine to be a disciple who is rooted in his Word and taught by his Spirit. Pray likewise for fellow believers. May we return to the Word, renew our minds, and discern what is the *good, pleasing, and perfect will of God* (ROMANS 12:2). May we rightly represent Christ in thought, word, and deed—in private and in public, online and offline. Always. Amen!
- Search your heart. Your intentions may be good, but have you become a mouthpiece of Satan? Dear Parent, have you ever talked your children out of the Cross and the will of God (eg: pioneer missions) for selfish reasons and unfounded fears? Dear Mentor, have you dissuaded a disciple from pursuing a God-given dream (eg: school-planting in a war zone) because it sounded ridiculous or reckless to you? Dear Marketplace Leader, have you incited your peers to seek retribution even though Jesus strictly prohibits retaliation? May we all commit to change our ways. Ask God to convict and chastise us whenever we contradict his Word, ignore his will, and evade our cross.
- Scrutinize your walk. You may be a church founder or a lead pastor or a sought-after Bible teacher. Whatever your calling, God forbid that you should become so full of self that you lose sight of the things of God. Your cool ideas may well be a trick of Satan. Have you cheapened something sacred in the name of relevance? Repent. Ask God to deliver you from deception. May you never play into the enemy's hand and oppose God's purpose in Singapore.

1 PETER 2:9-10 | But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

What did Peter think of the Church?

Jesus only mentioned it twice, and he didn't say much. But, just as Peter received revelation concerning the identity of Jesus, he also received revelation concerning the Church Jesus builds.

In his first letter, Peter boldly applies the signature attributes of ancient Israel to the Church: *You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own possession* (1 PETER 2:9, EXODUS 19:5-6). The Church, therefore, is not a replacement of Israel, but a restoration of Israel according to God's original plan.

No priesthood exists for itself. As God's royal priesthood, we offer up spiritual sacrifices of prayer and proclamation. That's what Peter and the other apostles did in Acts. As God's intercessors, we stand in the gap between him and his world. As God's witnesses, we proclaim the excellencies of him who called us *out of darkness into his marvelous light*.

The Greek word for *proclaim* in 1 Peter 2:9 means to *publicly* proclaim. Prayer and preaching may well begin

in Christian gatherings within church walls. But it must go beyond that into all spheres of society and to the ends of the earth. For the rest of this letter, Peter is preoccupied with the Church's witness to society, not just in words, but also and especially in character and conduct. This makes us the most *peculiar people* on earth. Not weird but distinguished. Holy as God is holy.

The Gentiles were once excluded from God's holy nation. But now they are included by faith (1 PETER 2:10). Since the turn of the millennium, the Church of Jesus Christ has taken root in every nation on earth. But in most nations, many peoples remain unreached and unblessed because they have not yet heard the Good News (GALATIANS 3:14). As the *Israel of God*, we not only inherit the blessings of Abraham, along with all the promises of the Old Testament. We also inherit the global mission of Israel to share this blessing with all the peoples of the earth (GENESIS 12:3; EXODUS 19:6).

In other words, the world is our parish (JOHN WESLEY).

- Be holy. What does holiness look like? Faithful church attendance? Yes. But do we also live godly lives among pre-believers so that they may see our good deeds and glorify God? Worship with *arms high and hearts abandoned*? Sure. But do we also flee youthful lusts? What is holiness? Weeping at the altar? Yes. But do we look the part more than live the part? Prophetic and punchy intercession? Go for it! But do we also respect and submit to those in authority? Scripted sermons and well-rehearsed liturgy? Absolutely. But do we also speak well of others and practise what we preach? What is holiness? Reverence and respect for holy things? Always. But Husband, do you also keep the sacred vows of your holy matrimony and honour your wife with tender understanding? What is holiness? Dressing modestly? You bet. But Wife, do you also win over your Husband with inward beauty rather than outward adornment? In all of the above, holiness is not either/or, but both/and. Are we holy yet? Practise holiness. Confess and commit to change.
- Proclaim. Is the world our parish? Holy huddling within the church walls is inconsistent with the Church Jesus builds. The Church *is a missionary movement, spreading the gospel not only for conversion of hearts, but also for the healing of the nation* (WWW.METHODIST.ORG.SG). *A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him* (DIETRICH BONHOEFFER). We should ask ourselves: What right do we have to hear the gospel twice, while millions of others have not heard it even once? *How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?* (ROMANS 10:14). Confess and commit to change.
- Pray. Are we too busy and burnt out to pray? The priesthood of all believers is a distinctive of the Church Jesus builds. Prayer is our vocation. Chronic busyness crowds out the business of prayer. Is God nudging you to simplify your life? Downshift. Downsize. Downgrade. Do something different. Hit the pause button. Take stock. Take a sabbatical. Relinquish control. Surrender to God. Reset your heart. Confess and commit to change.
- Sing this classic hymn to affirm the Communion of the Saints:
*The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
 She is his new creation by water and the Word;
 From heav'n he came and sought her to be his holy Bride;
 With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.
 Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth,
 Her charter of salvation, One Lord, one faith, one birth;
 One holy Name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
 And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.*

1 PETER 2:13-15 | Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. *Please read Matthew 17:24-27 in your Bible.*

Go fish. One day Peter was asked if Jesus paid the annual temple tax. Talking before thinking, it seems, Peter said yes. This tax was controversial in Israel. Some paid it. Others opposed it, even though it was only about two days' wages a year.

Later on Jesus privately expressed his disapproval of the temple tax to Peter. In so many words, he asks: What father would tax his children for the upkeep of the family home?

But then, Jesus gave Peter an unusual assignment: Go fishing! Peter must have been delighted. He would find a shekel in the mouth of the first fish he caught—enough to cover the tax for both Jesus and himself (MATTHEW 17:24-27).

Peter never forgot the lesson. The Church Jesus builds is a nation within the nation, a holy people within the secular state. This makes us dual citizens. We are free citizens of the kingdom of heaven which transcends all human authority. But, at the same time, we are all citizens of our respective nations—Singapore, Malaysia, The Philippines, Myanmar,

wherever. We are to exert a redeeming influence in our nation, not only as intercessors and witnesses, but also as responsible and productive members of society.

You may disagree with certain policies. Never mind. As long as they don't violate the clear teaching of Scripture, submit. Even Jesus, although he opposed the temple tax, humbled himself and paid it. He also recognized and respected the authority of Caesar and Pilate (MARK 12:17; JOHN 19:11).

Therefore, says Peter, submit. *Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.* This includes institutions of government, marriage, employment, education, and in Peter's day, even slavery (1 PETER 2:18, 1 PETER 3:7).

The motive for submission is not to win praise or avoid punishment. It's *for the Lord's sake.* Therefore, humbly submit to the Government of Singapore *for the Lord's sake*, whether you fully agree with their policies or not.

Let us *silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good* (1 PETER 2:15).

Shalom Singapore. We are God's holy people living in a secular state with a multi-religious society. We see the invisible hand of God and the visible hand of an exceptional Government ordained by God since 1965. Because the laws are righteous and the fundamentals are right, we can honour our rulers and submit to their authority without compromising our Christian convictions. This is huge. This is exceptional. Never take this blessing for granted.

■ **Pray:** Lord, we repent of our ingratitude and cynicism. We are ashamed of all our ridiculous ranting and raving against the Singapore Government. They have been doing an outstanding job. They have sought the welfare of our city during these fifty plus years of nation-building. Forgive us for failing to speak positive words of blessing to counter the negative words of blaming (PROVERBS 11:11). We acknowledge your guiding hand on those in authority. We give you thanks for our strong, stable, and successful Government:

- For pro-family policies that uphold the social norm of the married heterosexual family unit.
 - For wise, prudent, and far-sighted leaders who serve with passion and a deep sense of purpose to keep Singapore vibrant, *A Home with Hope and Heart.*
 - For a first-class Public Service, centred on right values: integrity, service, excellence.
 - For a strong and trusted judiciary and effective rule of law respected around the world.
 - For a culture of zero tolerance for corruption and drug abuse.
 - For a policy of religious freedom which guarantees every person the right to profess, practise, and propagate his or her faith.
 - For a policy of racial and religious harmony which ensures that race and religion will not be used to incite conflict and disharmony.
 - For a policy of social justice that helps the needy in their efforts to live well and make ends meet.
 - For an extraordinary healthcare system that has become a marvel to other nations.
 - For an excellent education system ranked as one of the world's best.
 - For sound economic strategies that keep our economy robust and future-ready.
 - For a strong and vigilant defence force that exercises the power of deterrence and diplomacy.
 - For a strong police force dedicated to making Singapore the safest place in the world.
 - For a world-class infrastructure of air, maritime, and land transport.
 - For excellent strategies that ensure good housing, clean drinking water, reliable power, wireless access, clean and green cityscape.
- And who can argue with this?

Mark 9:5-8 | Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

Peter is petrified. And yet practical and proactive as ever. Standing before Moses, Elijah, and Jesus All Glorious, he says: *It’s good to be here. Let’s make three tents.*

What was Peter thinking? A few guesses are worth considering. One, he wants to show hospitality. Two, he wants to hold a Feast of Tabernacles. Three, he wants to institutionalize this awesome visitation of Moses and Elijah. Good ideas. But are they God-ideas?

We love to paint Peter as impetuous, impulsive, impatient, and impossible. Any other *imps*? Yes. Impressive!

He’s on a sharp learning curve. He is spiritually perceptive. He can recognize Moses and Elijah without checking Instagram. He shares his ideas even when he’s not sure. He’s a man of action, effort, and initiative. He doesn’t bury his talent. Of the Twelve Apostles, he is the greatest risk-taker—a diamond in the rough, a rock in formation.

Peter’s errors are few. And if he errs more than others, it’s because he

tries harder. His first big mistake was to try and talk Jesus out of the Cross. And now, his Three-Tent Plan on the mountain top represents a fundamental error in theology. He wants to put Jesus on the same level with Moses and Elijah. The voice from the cloud settles it for Peter and for all: *This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.*

Moses stands for the Law. Elijah stands for the Prophets. Jesus stands for the kingdom (LUKE 16:16). But now, both Moses and Elijah vanish into thin mountain air. Jesus stands alone. Unique. Forever. All Glorious.

Today’s Church needs to rediscover the absolute and final authority of Jesus Christ and his teaching. He’s not just another messenger. He’s the *Message*, the *Logos*, the *Alpha*, the *Omega*, the *Word made flesh*. He’s not equal to Moses or Elijah or any other man. He’s equal to God alone. *Jesus Christ is the one Word of God whom we have to hear, trust and obey in life and in death* (KARL BARTH). Listen to him. Peter listens to Jesus. Will you?

- It’s time for the Church to rediscover who Christ is and celebrate what we believe. With so many false teachers on the loose, to-ing and fro-ing, we need to confess the Creeds, especially when God’s people gather for worship. Some might dismiss this as old school. Uncool. Human tradition. Think again. There’s power in confessing the Truth. There’s power in pledging ourselves to a set of biblical convictions. There’s power in professing our common faith, majoring on the essentials that unite us. Today, confess the Nicene Creed, the most famous and influential creed in Church history:

WE BELIEVE in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. WE BELIEVE in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. WE BELIEVE in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

- Peter had a high regard for Moses and Elijah. So should we. These were faithful and fearless servants of God. Emulate them. Don’t idolize them. Christ has surpassed them (HEBREWS 1:1-2, 3:3-6). Exalt Christ, the All Glorious One, whose Name is above every name. Big name prophets and teachers visit our city often, some not as sound as Moses and Elijah. Are we building camps around them? Putting them on pedestals? If so, repent. Novelty and sensationalism are on the increase. Discern what is of God, what is not. Don’t chase after ‘words’ and manifestations. Pray for greater vigilance. Centre on Christ. Cultivate intimacy with him in the Word and prayer. Ask him to awaken your ear to listen as a disciple, as one being taught (ISAIAH 50:4).
- Do you often feel compelled to take charge, say something, do something, even when you’re not sure what’s going on? Does inactivity frighten you? Are you trigger happy with your ideas? Slow down. Be still. Listen deeply to God for his ideas. Pray for your pastors and leaders. Ask God to stop us in our tracks when we err, and redeem our mistakes for his glory!

2 PETER 1:16-19 | We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. *Please read the entire passage in your Bible.*

The Transfiguration is the trailer. The Second Coming is the movie. Peter sees the Second Coming before it happens. He interprets the Transfiguration of Jesus as a prophecy, a promise, and a preview of his glorious Return. In his second letter, Peter responds to arguments by scoffers and skeptics who question his teaching and deny the Second Coming of Christ (1:16; 3:4).

Peter's eschatology is not based on *cleverly devised myths*, but on what he himself has seen and heard: *We were eyewitness of his majesty. We heard the voice from heaven. We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed* (1:16, 18-19).

The Greek word for *confirmed* here is a legal term. It means *verified, guaranteed, proven true*. The hope of Christ's Return is not a myth. It's a *lamp shining in a dark place*. You can count on it.

Years ago, Paul Dye, a missionary pilot, was hijacked by FARC rebels of Columbia. They forced him to land his small plane on a remote jungle airstrip. They hid the plane in the

woods and held Paul captive in their camp. One night he escaped, found his plane, and pulled it out of the forest. He sat in the cockpit and looked out. It was so dark and foggy that he couldn't see anything that looked like a runway. He prayed and heard a voice say GO. He started the engine, opened it to full throttle, and entrusted himself to God.

Soon he was airborne. Free at last! But not yet safe. Before daylight his fuel ran out. He had to land his plane in the dark. When the day dawned, he saw that he had stopped right next to a fence with a herd of cattle on the other side. There was no other place where the plane could have landed.

Truly, there is a light that shines in darkness, when all other lights fail. The Transfiguration is a manifestation of that uncreated light. It shines in all the dark and scary places of our journey until the day dawns and the Morning Star arises in our hearts.

Thank you, Peter, for enlightening us. *Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.*

- Thank God for Truth. Christianity is not based on *cleverly devised myths*, but on eyewitness accounts of historical events. People who shun religion paint the story of Jesus as myth. They argue that the Gospels are fabricated, a type of legendary fiction. Today, reject these lies. Make up your mind to totally trust God and rely on his Word. Take courage and inspiration from these words of Truth: *So many others have tried their hand at putting together a narrative of the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used reports handed down by the original eyewitnesses who served this Word with their very lives. Since I have investigated all the reports in close detail, starting from the story's beginning, I decided to write it all out for you... so that you may know beyond the shadow of a doubt the reliability of what you were taught* (LUKE 1:1-4 THE MESSAGE | ADAPTED).
- Thank God for Light: Jesus said, *I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life* (JOHN 8:12). *I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness* (JOHN 12:46). *For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ* (2 CORINTHIANS 4:6).
- Thank God for religious freedom in Singapore. Thank God that this makes it possible for Christians not only to profess and practise our faith, but also to propagate our faith, proclaiming Jesus, the Light of the world! Thank God for *Celebration of Hope*, for the treasure trove of testimony videos locally-produced to shine the Light of the Gospel. Thank God that each video is a powerful story of the reality of Jesus and the difference he makes. Pray that Christians will use these excellent resources over and over again for personal evangelism—to keep shining the Light of Christ into every dark and scary situation. Pray that these life-witness accounts will go viral, filling Singapore, Asia, and the whole earth with *the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea* (HABAKKUK 2:14).
- Thank God for Pioneer Generation Christians, many of whom have seen the Light and experienced his life-giving, life-changing power. But we worry about second and third generation Christians, many of whom are culture-Christians. Pray for those who go through the motions of attending church but are not born-again believers. They do not have a personal relationship with Christ. Pray for others who don't even believe in Jesus as the one and only Name by which we must be saved. We need a great awakening. Cry out to God for a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, for many to personally encounter Jesus, the Light of the world. Believe for a great homecoming!

MATTHEW 18:21-22 | Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Jesus often taught by Q&A. Being a good learner, Peter makes the most of this. He’s always asking questions. Some very important lessons and parables of Jesus would be missing from the Bible were it not for Peter’s inquisitiveness.

His questions are not academic. They are as practical and existential as Søren Kierkegaard. For example, *How often shall I forgive my brother?*

The relational issues addressed by Jesus in Matthew 18 are as real today as they were back then. Envy and anger. Ill-will and contempt. Comparing and competing. Fault-finding and finger-pointing. Unkind words in unguarded moments. Invasion of personal space. Protection of ministry turf. Giving and taking offense over little things.

The disciples of Jesus were prone to quarrel. Homeless and jobless, they travelled and lived together in close quarters. They argued about which of them was the greatest. They vied for privilege and position in the coming kingdom (MATTHEW 18:1; MATTHEW 20:21; MARK 9:34; 10:37). Who knows? Peter and Judas may have even quarrelled over the budget. So Peter wants to

know: *How often shall I forgive my brother? Seven times?*

The rabbis suggested three times. But Peter, who’s just getting the hang of Jesus’ teaching, increases the quota to seven, the number of perfection. Good try. But Jesus wasn’t impressed: *I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.* Or 7x70 in some translations.

Jesus’ answer dismisses all petty notions about people taking advantage of us and walking all over us. Nor does he mean that we can stop forgiving after counting off 77 or 490 times.

Love keeps no record of wrongs (1 CORINTHIANS 13:5). If you count and calculate, you haven’t forgiven. It’s not about *quantity*. Jesus expects a certain *quality* of forgiveness from us that is radical, infinite, divine. Forgive as God has forgiven you (EPHESIANS 4:32).

Peter will soon need this divine forgiveness, when he denies Jesus three times. And at the end of his journey, he will need to extend unconditional forgiveness to those who crucify him. Will you also forgive? And keep on forgiving?

Community is not possible without the willingness to forgive one another seventy-seven times. Forgiveness is the cement of community life. Forgiveness holds us together through good and bad times, and it allows us to grow in mutual love (HENRI NOUWEN).

■ Wake up! Satan is all out to destroy the Jesus community from within—one unforgiving relationship at a time. Heed this warning from a city watchman: *I was praying for senior church leaders. God had given me 61 names. I was led to use Isaiah 61 as a standard script to bless each one. As I came to the eleventh name, I heard myself praying something radically different for this man. It was all about relational conflicts and wounds. Then in a vision, I saw the man in a barren landscape. He was covered with festering wounds from head to toe. I spotted two vultures circling the sky above him. I immediately understood what the Lord was saying. Vultures, of course, feed on dead flesh. They were waiting for the right moment to swoop down for the feast. The Lord said: Forgive. Heal the wounds of relational conflict—or else be devoured!*

Dear Shepherds of Singapore, Satan’s chief tactic is to incite anger, wreck relationships, breed unforgiveness, split the Church, destroy community, and thus, diminish our witness. Submit to Jesus. Obey his call to forgive radically and infinitely. Overthrow Satan’s evil ploy by choosing to forgive as Christ has forgiven you. Resist the temptation to feed on malicious words and deeds. Move on—for your own good, for the sake of the Church, for God’s glory!

■ *The Celebration of Hope rallies have ended; but the glorious work has only just begun* (BISHOP RENNIS PONNIAH). Relational evangelism continues every day in every sphere across Singapore. But have we, through wrong attitudes and actions, spoiled our witness and strained our relationships with pre-believing family, friends, and neighbours? Where there are old hurts or new conflicts, we all need to forgive and be forgiven every day. Honour Jesus. Be his ally. Make the first move. End the cold war. Thaw the ice. Bring down the walls. Rebuild the bridges. Look again at your bleeding Messiah and the example he set: *Forgive them for they know not what they do* (LUKE 23:34). Let your forgiveness be so real, so radical, so refreshing, that the unsaved around you might be deeply moved to follow Jesus. *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God* (MATTHEW 5:9).

■ The Singapore Kindness Movement launched in 1997 urges everyone to practise courtesy, kindness, and consideration. May the Church lead the way with grace towards all—regardless of race, language, or religion. Be a good neighbour. *Good neighbourliness is next to godliness. Practise the Golden Rule: Do to others as you would have others do to you* (GOOD NEIGHBOUR DAY 2019).

MATTHEW 19:23-30 | “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.” Peter said, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Please read Matthew 19:16-30 in your Bible.

Can rich people be saved? Very hard. Once there was a rich man. He was young. He enjoyed the good life. He never had to do the math when buying food or clothes. He would enter his PIN without checking the amount or his bank balance. But deep inside, he felt a certain emptiness. He couldn't put his finger on it. So he confided in Jesus: *What do I still lack?* (MATTHEW 19:20)

He wasn't ready for the answer of Jesus, which challenges all of us: *If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me* (MATTHEW 19:21).

The Greek word for *perfect* doesn't mean flawless. It means fulfilled. To be perfect means to achieve one's God-given purpose in life.

This is precisely what the rich young man lacked. He claimed to have kept all the Commandments that pertain to loving neighbour. But he didn't have that kingdom generosity which deposits money in heaven by giving to the poor. Worldly wealth was more important to him than heavenly treasure. He walked away from Jesus—sadly (MATTHEW 19:22).

It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, said Jesus, than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God (MATTHEW 19:24).

This got Peter thinking. He and his friends had left home, family, and career to follow Jesus. So Peter asked: *What will we get?* Sounds a bit kiasu, doesn't it? What's in it for me? But Jesus didn't scold Peter for his question. Instead, he responded with a magnanimous promise.

What will you get? Everything! Whatever you leave behind in this world, you'll get a hundred times more in the next. On top of that, eternal life (MATTHEW 19:28-29). Not a bad trade-off for a fishing boat and a season of separation from home and loved ones.

The story invites us to evaluate our own responses to Jesus and his call to discipleship. Whose example are we following? Peter's? Or the rich young man's? It's not a sin to be wealthy. But those who hoard wealth and refuse to share it with the poor are serving Mammon, not God.

So where is your treasure? In heaven or in the bank? That's where your heart is.

- God doesn't need your money. He wants your heart. We cannot serve God and money. *Mammon is a power that seeks to dominate us... a rival god that seeks allegiance* (RICHARD FOSTER). Today, surrender your life, your all to Jesus, your Master. Resist the devil. Reject his worldly mantra that money is everything. Draw the line. Take your stand: *Money can buy medicine, but not health. Money can buy a house, but not a home. Money can buy companionship, but not friends. Money can buy entertainment, but not happiness. Money can buy food, but not an appetite. Money can buy a bed, but not sleep... Money can buy the good life, but not eternal life* (CHARLES SWINDOLL). Money can rebuild Notre Dame Cathedral, but not the church itself. Pray by name for those who are serving Mammon. Ask God to set them free.
- Singapore is home to 183,737 millionaires. Wealth per adult has increased more than 146% since the year 2000. Globally, we rank number nine in terms of highest average wealth per adult (THE STRAITS TIMES, 18 OCTOBER 2018). The power to create wealth is a gift from God (DEUTERONOMY 8:18). For this we give thanks! Singaporean Christians are well represented in the arena of wealth creation and business enterprise. Pray for a great awakening. *Business is never just business. The business profession has a moral role in society, bringing goods and services for the betterment of all* (RICHARD FOSTER). Ask God to raise up a critical mass of God-fearing disciples in the business world to steward his wealth in his way, for his purposes, and always for his glory!
- While some are getting richer, others are getting poorer. The number of Singaporean families depending on long-term financial aid has increased (THE STRAITS TIMES, 4 OCTOBER 2018). *To whom much is given, much is required* (LUKE 12:48). With greater wealth comes greater social responsibility. How have you stewarded God's money? Are you hoarding wealth for fear of lack? Are you self-indulgent, flaunting your wealth or success? Today, make radical shifts. Deposit treasure in heaven. Seek God for his investment strategy and concrete steps to reduce income inequality in your community. Do it as a family, a cell, a church, a constituency. Work with your MP to roll out the plan.
- How does the global church spend its money? 87% is spent on the church, 12% on ministry among the reached, and just 1% on unreached peoples, among whom are the poorest of the poor (GLOBAL STATISTICS). Today, some 250 million people have no access to any Scripture in their heart language (WYCLIFFE GLOBAL ALLIANCE). This is a huge injustice. Are we avoiding such conversations in order to silence our conscience? We have held back our wealth from those who need it most. Pray for the fruit of repentance: a re-distribution of wealth from Antioch of Asia to God's mission to the unreached.

JOHN 13:5-8 | Then [Jesus] poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet? You shall never wash my feet." *Please read John 13:1-17 in your Bible.*

Did Peter forget something? It's Passover. Israel's most sacred meal. In keeping with custom, Jesus and his disciples recline on cushions around a low table. Their feet are stretched out behind them. None could have failed to notice that his feet were unwashed.

In that day and age, most people travelled on foot. Some wore sandals. Many went barefooted. A Jewish host was expected to provide a slave to wash the weary, soiled feet of a guest. Or at least a basin of water and a towel for the guest to wash himself.

Foot washing was not a luxury, but a necessity. Omitting this service was a serious breach of hospitality (GENESIS 18:4; JUDGES 19:21; LUKE 7:44). Jesus had sent Peter ahead to prepare the Passover (LUKE 22:8-13).

Had Peter forgotten something?

For three years, Jesus had been teaching and modelling humility and servanthood. Perhaps now he waited to see if any of his disciples would grab the basin and do the necessary. Why not Peter, his right hand man?

Surely, that would earn him another *Blessed art thou Simon Bar Jonah!*

However awkward they must have felt, not one of the disciples lifted a finger. And why should they? Foot washing was the menial task of a Gentile slave. No adult male Jew was expected to do it. Not even a Jewish slave.

What happens next is utterly astonishing and unprecedented. Jesus takes the towel and basin. He humbles himself like a lowly slave. He washes and dries his disciples' smelly, grimy feet. It was a striking reversal of roles. A devastating blow to the disciples' paralyzing pride. But still, not one of them volunteered to help or to wash the Lord's feet.

Peter protested. But Jesus insisted: *If I don't wash you, you have no part with me.* The foot washing foreshadows the Cross where sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus. The point was made and should never be forgotten: *If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet* (JOHN 13:14).

Have we forgotten something?

After a meal with his students, Dietrich Bonhoeffer asked for volunteers to help in the kitchen. No one moved. Dietrich went to the sink and started washing the dishes. Only then did others come to help. But it was too late. Now it was out of guilt instead of goodwill. And besides, Dietrich had locked the door. His point was well made and never forgotten. A leader's authority is only as great as his or her humility. Have we forgotten something?

- Jesus said: *Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave* (MATTHEW 20:26-27). True disciples are servants. *Servants do every task with equal dedication. The size of the task is irrelevant. The only issue is, does it need to be done? You will never arrive at the state in life where you're too important to help with menial tasks. God will never exempt you from the mundane. It's a vital part of your character curriculum* (RICK WARREN). Examine yourself. Pray: Dear Lord, forgive my arrogance. I can no longer hide nor evade the issue. I confess my sin of self-importance. I'm guilty of playing the power game and pulling rank. I've relied on my position and authority to whip others into shape instead of leading by example in doing the menial stuff. I've failed to model what it means to be a servant. Crush my ego. Crucify my flesh. Free me from self-deception. Break the strongholds of false identity derived from titles, rights, and privileges. Give me the mind of Christ who, being in the form of God, took on the form of a slave, and washed his disciples' feet. Lord, whether it's stacking chairs, clearing trash, washing dishes, cleaning toilets, or pushing wheelchairs, help me to do it with all my heart (COLOSSIANS 3:23).
- Peter wrote: *Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God* (1 PETER 5:6). The Greek text actually reads: *Be humbled under the mighty hand of God.* In other words, you don't have to crawl under a doormat. God humbles us when we simply and willingly cooperate. Every day, God gives us countless opportunities to be humbled under his mighty but gentle hand. Someone cuts the queue. Someone jostles you off the path. Someone fails to return your greeting. Someone dismisses your idea. Someone takes your favourite seat in a cool corner of the church. Pray: Lord Jesus, give us the presence of mind to recognize the many occasions you arranged for us to become last of all and servant of all. Let us not miss a single opportunity, but make the most of each one. May we always take the lowest place, grab the most humiliating task, and do it with grace and gladness under your mighty hand.
- Ponder and pray: *If serving is beneath you, leading is beyond you* (TOBY MAC). *Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all* (MARK 10:43-44).

LUKE 22:31-32 | Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [all], that he might sift you [all] like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

Peter is in the dock. As in the case of Job, Satan is both the accuser and the prosecutor. In this case, he demands permission to sift Peter like wheat. And not just Peter. The pronoun *you* in verse 31 is plural in Greek. That very night, all Twelve Apostles will be shaken in the sieve of Satan—with God’s permission!

This is not virtual reality. Satan will test each disciple at his weakest point. All will stumble and fall (MATTHEW 26:31; MARK 14:27). All could break faith and be separated from the Lord as chaff is separated from wheat. One will end his life at the end of a rope.

But hold on a minute. The Court is still in session. After Satan makes his claim, Jesus the Advocate approaches the Bar of Divine Justice. He enters a plea especially and exclusively for Peter. The pronouns *you* and *your* are singular in verse 32: *I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not suffer a total eclipse.*

The test is predetermined. But the outcome is not. Will the apostles survive? Jesus literally stakes everything on Peter. Will he live up to his name and calling? Will he

become a solid rock, or a rolling stone? Will he go the way of faith, or the way of Judas?

This is the trial of Peter. He thinks he is ready. He feels his own strength (:33). But in a little while, he will discover his utter weakness. Before the cock crows, he will deny Christ three times (:34). That’s when the sifting of Satan will begin in earnest. When darkness falls, when Peter is reduced to ground zero, he will have to choose between faith and despair.

Remarkably, Jesus believes in Peter, just as God believed in Job (JOB 1:8; 2:3). Jesus has no doubt that Peter will receive all the divine help he needs to keep the faith and survive the ordeal: *When you, Peter, have turned again, strengthen your brothers* (LUKE 22:32).

Strength is made perfect in weakness (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9). Until a man knows his own weakness, he knows neither himself nor the strength of Christ. Peter will know himself better in the morning, when the cock crows. *Simon, Simon.* So much depends on you. But all depends on Christ. *All other ground is sinking sand* (EDWARD MOTE).

Jesus didn’t tell Peter the reason for the coming attack of Satan, only the certainty of it. Nor did Jesus bind the devil. His response was not to ward off the attack, but to pray for Peter and to warn him before the trial began.

- All spiritual leaders are vulnerable. Dear Shepherd, Jesus is interceding for you right now (ROMANS 8:34, HEBREWS 7:25). Are you interceding for the leaders on your team? Ask God for discernment and foresight to see the traps that Satan is setting for them. Forewarn them when you can. Cover them with your prayers: Lord Jesus, I thank you for each leader on my team and the flock under our care. Much is at stake. Bind us together as one: Battle-ready. Discerning. Watching each other’s backs. Withstanding the wiles of Satan. Outwitting his designs. Hacking his devices. Exposing his lies. Quenching his fiery darts. Resisting his temptations. In the authority of your name, we nullify all demonic plots to confuse us. *We overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony* (REVELATION 12:11).
- Leaders on the frontline are the most vulnerable. *Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered* (ZECHARIAH 13:7). Bishops, Senior Pastors, Pastors-in-charge, Elders, Moderators, or whatever they are called, are the prime targets of the enemy. And sometimes for reasons veiled to us, God allows Satan to give them a severe thrashing. They need our prayers more than our well-meaning advice. Pray: Lord Jesus, you are the Chief Shepherd. We are the sheep of your pasture. Thank you for giving us shepherds after your own heart. Forgive us for making life difficult for them. We’ve criticized them more than we’ve prayed for them. Sometimes we join Satan in weighing them down with our unrealistic expectations. We wear them out with our incessant complaints. We’re sorry. We repent. Prompt us, burden us, to stand with you in the gap, interceding for them. Whatever severe testings you allow to come their way, we pray that their faith will not fail (1 JOHN 5:4-5). Strengthen them so that they in turn may strengthen others who are in the throes of battle.
- Dear Leader, forewarned is forearmed. *In God’s sacred school of brokenness, the curriculum goes on all the time. Sometimes God crushes his servants, cuts us down to size so that in a spirit of genuine weakness, brokenness, and humility, we are able to minister to others* (CHARLES SWINDOLL, ADAPTED). Leadership crucibles come in many shapes and sizes. Prepare to be crushed and tested. Peter thought he was ready, but he wasn’t. Are you ready for the sifting of Satan? He is crafty. He will test you at your weakest point. Get ready. Fast. Watch. Pray together with confidants. Acknowledge your vulnerability. Keep your eyes on Jesus, *being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion* (PHILIPPIANS 1:6).

MATTHEW 26:31-35 | Jesus said, “You will all fall away because of me this night...” Peter answered, “Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away.” Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” Peter said, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” And all the disciples said the same.

It must be close to midnight. After all their long, heart-to-heart talks, Jesus and his disciples leave the upper room. They walk 20 minutes down the Kidron Valley and up the Mount of Olives. The conversation continues. Jesus warns them. This very night they will all stumble and scatter from him like startled sheep. They all deny it.

Peter normally speaks for the Twelve. Now he speaks for himself: *Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away* (MATTHEW 26:33). Peter insists that he will be the exception. A cut above the rest. But except for Judas, he will fall the hardest: *Truly, I tell you, this very night... you will deny me three times.*

Peter would have done better to hold his tongue. But instead, he crows the loudest: *If I must die with you, I will not deny you* (MARK 14:31). He does not yet know himself. Nor the prowess of Satan, the roaring lion (1 PETER 5:8). Nor the saving work of Christ, the Lion of Judah.

Peter’s first mistake was to reject the idea of a suffering Messiah (MATTHEW 16:22). His next mistake is worse.

He rates himself above his fellow disciples and trusts in his own ability to endure suffering and death for Christ.

Peter is no fool. Although he thinks out loud and often too loudly, his love and affection for Jesus are genuine. But at this juncture, he and his fellow disciples lack humility. While Jesus speaks of his rejection, suffering, and shameful death, they go on about their greatness (LUKE 22:24-27). Hubris is not too strong a word. Inflated self-confidence!

Galileans were known to be independent and headstrong. But it is both foolish and perilous to over-estimate one’s strength before the trial begins. Self-assertion and self-deception go hand in hand. *Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall* (PROVERBS 16:18).

Jesus forgives Peter before he falls. And, although Peter doesn’t seem to hear it, Jesus promises a reunion in Galilee after his resurrection (MATTHEW 26:32; MARK 14:28; 16:7). Restoration and renewal will follow. All will be given a second chance. All but Judas, sadly. He left too soon.

- Sober up. Think back on your life. In school, at work, or in church ministry, sometimes our track record of success can be our downfall. We start believing our own press. We think we are God’s special gift to humanity. We become addicted to words of approval and affirmation. The Bible exhorts us to think soberly of ourselves (ROMANS 12:3). On that fateful night, Peter did the opposite. Ultimately, it is not our self-assessment, nor the opinions of others, but the Lord’s perfect judgment that stands.

Meditate on these words from the Apostle Paul: *I do not even judge myself... It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God* (1 CORINTHIANS 4:3-5).

Pray: Lord, search me. I submit myself to your judgment. You know me from the inside out. If I’ve grown and flourished in any way at all, it is because of your grace. I give you thanks. Show me areas in my life that need your stern rebuke and discipline. I want to make things right. I confess, if my flesh had its way, I would be worse than Peter! Loud. Over-confident. Obnoxious. Egoistic. Full of hot air. Low on substance. Left to my fallen self, I like to boast, exaggerate, embellish. Sometimes, even lie. I’m ashamed. I confess your Truth: Your Spirit gives life. The flesh is worthless (JOHN 6:63). You oppose the proud. You favour the humble (JAMES 4:6). I repent. *Take all my will, my passion, self and pride. I now surrender, Lord, in me abide* (J. EDWIN ORR).

- *It was through pride that the devil became the devil* (C.S. LEWIS). Confront the ‘devil’ in you. Confide in a trusted friend. Make yourself accountable. Pause. Ponder. Pray: *Father, give us the humility which realizes its ignorance, admits its mistakes, recognizes its need, welcomes advice, accepts rebuke. Help us always to praise rather than to criticize, to sympathize rather than to condemn, to encourage rather than to discourage, to build rather than to destroy. And to think of people at their best rather than at their worst. This we ask for thy name’s sake* (WILLIAM BARCLAY).
- Are you a slow listener and a fast talker? Like some world politicians and their cringe-worthy lines? Like some of us on social media? Examine yourself and your speech. For the rest of this day, reflect on these words and pray: *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned* (MATTHEW 12:36-37). *Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips* (PSALM 141:3). *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight* (PSALM 19:14).

MATTHEW 26:40-41 | Jesus came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

My sorrow is killing me. The night before he dies, Jesus undergoes deep sadness and anguish. He who had lived his whole life in complete solidarity with all humanity now feels terribly alone and isolated. The One who never leaves us or forsakes us longs for human companionship in the dark night of his soul.

He takes Peter, James, and John aside and confides in them: *I'm dying of sorrow*. On the way to Jerusalem, James and John had agreed to share his cup of suffering (MATTHEW 20:17-22). And during the Passover meal, Peter had insisted that he was ready to die with him. So Jesus isn't asking too much of his three closest friends when he assigns them night duty: *Watch with me* (MATTHEW 26:38).

There is a glaring contrast between the way Jesus prepares for the coming ordeal and how his disciples utterly fail to do so. Jesus remains awake and watchful through the night. He pours out sweat like *great drops of blood*. He agonizes over the will of God (LUKE 22:41-44). He prays with *loud cries and tears*. The Father hears him (HEBREWS 5:7). Now he is ready for whatever the day will bring.

Peter, James, and John, however, succumb to a deep and stifling sleep. Three times Jesus checks on them. Three times they're caught napping. Jesus is especially disappointed with Peter. Satan is about to sift them all like wheat. Jesus is counting on Peter in particular to weather the storm, keep the faith, and restore the others (LUKE 22:31-32).

Peter had insisted that he was ready for it. But now, even before the sifting starts, he's a spent force! Alas. A walk in the garden wearies him. How will he fare in pitch battle with *the prince of darkness grim*? He will soon learn the hard way: Spiritual warfare without spiritual discipline is spiritual disaster.

No human strength can match the wiles and weapons of Satan. If the Son of God had to watch and pray at the onset of his trial, how much more his disciples!

Regardless how sincere and willing we are, human nature soon crumbles in the face of evil and complies with it. God alone can give us the victory. Our part is to watch and pray. Stay awake!

- In *Why Revival Tarries*, Leonard Ravenhill gives a wake-up call: *Solemnly and slowly, with his index finger extended, Napoleon Bonaparte outlined a great stretch of country on a map of the world. 'There,' he growled, 'is a sleeping giant. Let him sleep! If he wakes, he will shake the world.'* That sleeping giant was China. Today, Bonaparte's prophecy of some 150 years ago makes sense. Today, Lucifer is probably surveying the Church just as Bonaparte did China. One can almost behold the fear in his eyes as he thinks of the Church's unmeasured potential and growls: *'Let the Church sleep! If she wakes, she will shake the world.'* Is not the Church the sleeping giant of today? Wake up, Antioch of Asia! Discern the times. War against slumber.
- Our enemy never sleeps. Are we awake, alert, and on guard? Or napping? Watchfulness is the most neglected spiritual discipline in the Singapore Church today. We desperately need it on every front. Parents, are you watching over your children? Pastors, are you watching over your flock? Soldiers of Christ, are you watching over your soul? Our enemy is cunning. Our flesh is weak. Our world is seductive. We will be tempted day in and day out. Only God can keep us from falling (JUDE 24). Pray and live the Word: *Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man* (LUKE 21:34-36).
- *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving* (COLOSSIANS 4:2). *A pastor's greatest personal leadership tool is a healthy soul* (PAUL CHAPPELL). Sadly, the preoccupation with skills and strategies has depleted many a soul. A Barna research shows that many pastors can hardly find time for their own soul care. Pray for your pastors. May they *first keep watch over themselves*, so that they will be able to keep watch over their flock (ACTS 20:28). Ask God to give them an inner circle of confidants (or at least one person) with whom they can open up and pray concerning their deepest struggles and darkest secrets.
- Be vigilant. Harvest season is wartime. The full impact of *Celebration of Hope* will not be known until years later. Watch and pray so *that Satan might not outwit us* (2 CORINTHIANS 2:11). Pray that the seed sown will not be snatched away but will yield a bountiful crop (MATTHEW 13:18-23). That prayer-evangelism will continue unabated. Pray for prophetic insight to increase. For strategic intercession to intensify. For a spirit of urgency and desperation. Declare: *He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him* (PSALM 126:6). Come Lord Jesus, build your Church!

JOHN 18:3, 10-11 | Judas...procured a band of soldiers and some officers.... [They] went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear.... So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Why do fishermen bear arms?

That's a long story. Jesus was born into the bloodiest century of ancient Israel's history. Violent resistance movements pushed Rome to the limits time and time again. Messianic figures arose and led revolts, hoping and praying that God would intervene and restore Israel as a sovereign state.

One of Rome's most effective deterrents to revolution was the cross. When Jesus was a toddler, 2,000 Jewish rebels were crucified in Judea. And during the siege of Jerusalem in AD70, the Roman governor Varus crucified 500 a day, limited only by the supply of crossbeams and space in the city.

Peter and his fellow disciples shared the national dream of a free Israel (ACTS 1:6). Jesus persistently taught them that he was not that kind of messiah. But illusions die hard.

To make matters worse, on the night of his arrest, Jesus told his disciples to sell their shirts and buy weapons. They immediately produced two swords without losing a shirt. Jesus

said that would do. This was strictly for symbolic value, to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that he would be *numbered with the transgressors* (LUKE 22:35-38). But Jesus didn't explain that. And Peter didn't get it.

So when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew his sword and lopped off an ear. If he meant to kill, he missed. He had a better aim with fishhooks. Jesus told him to put away his sword. There would be no fighting tonight. No miraculous intervention. And no State of Israel. Not yet.

This marked the death of a dream for Peter and the other apostles. That dream died because it was too small. The kingdom of Jesus is a revolution, yes, but not against Rome.

Peter couldn't see that yet. He was willing to fight for Jesus and die for the national cause. But he was not in the least prepared to share the shame and fate of a failed messiah. When he saw that Jesus would surrender rather than *bring in the kingdom*—either with two swords or twelve legions of angels—Peter blended in with the shadows.

Illusions die hard. Those who dream the wrong dream end up fighting the wrong fight with the wrong weapons. While Jesus heads for the Cross, Peter reaches for the sword. His miscalculation plagues us all. He thinks he can bring in the kingdom with two swords. We think we can bring in the kingdom with hype, hashtags, and hotshots. But the kingdom of God comes without your help or mine. The question is, whose kingdom are we seeking?

- **Declare:** Lord Jesus, your kingdom is not of this world. But it is a revolution, nonetheless. Not against Herod. Nor against Caesar. Nor against the PAP. But against the rule of Satan. *For this purpose was the Son of God manifest, that he might destroy the works of the devil* (1 JOHN 3:8).
- **Recalibrate.** Are you dreaming the wrong dream? Fighting the wrong fight? Seeking the kingdom by self-branding, image-crafting, niche-positioning? What weapons are you wielding? How many ears have you sliced off to secure your place in the pecking order? Lay down your carnal weapons. Take up your cross. Follow Jesus. Pause and pray: Lord Jesus, forgive me for seeking to build my own kingdom in your name. Deliver me from pride, selfish ambition, and die-hard illusions. Give me a pure and holy ambition, not to be served but to serve. Not to be great but to make others great. Not to make a name for myself, but to magnify your name by giving and losing my life for you, for your Gospel, and for others (MARK 8:35).
- **Abide.** 1 John 2:5-6 says that whoever abides in Christ must also walk in the same way he walked. In other words, *we cannot claim to live in him unless we behave like him* (JOHN STOTT). A fundamental flaw in Christian living today is that we identify with the Risen Christ but fail to identify with the rejected Christ. This is the essence of triumphalism. We want the crown without the cross. Pray: Lord Jesus, have mercy on us. Forgive our human folly. Forgive our reluctance to suffer with you. We renounce the spirit of triumphalism. Open our hearts and minds to the folly of the Cross. The power of weakness. The path of downward mobility, which is the only way up in your kingdom. The privilege of being ridiculed and despised for doing what is right and pleasing to our Father in heaven. We embrace this as our only model of discipleship, ministry, and mission in this present evil age.
- **Pray the Word:** *You have chosen the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, the lowly and despised to reduce to nothing the things that are. May no one boast in your presence* (1 CORINTHIANS 1:27-29). *That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death* (PHILIPPIANS 3:10).

MARK 14:53-54 | And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire.

Peter follows from afar. This is new. Peter was Jesus' first disciple. He is first in every list of the Twelve. He is first in every mention of the inner circle, Peter, James, and John. He is frequently singled out for direct and personal interaction with Jesus. But now, when confessing Christ could cost him his life, he follows at a distance.

It's great to follow Jesus when all things go your way. When water turns to wine. When fish flood the nets. When bread multiplies in your hands. When demons flee and blind men see. When the lame walk and the dead are raised. But where are we when confessing Christ costs more than a tithe? When telling the truth and living the truth could get us demoted or fired? Where are we?

So what about Peter? Has he exchanged direct discipleship for distance learning? No. Church Fathers and historians understand Peter better than we do. They don't make him out to be the clown and coward that popular preaching often does. John Chrysostom commends his zeal: he did not flee as others did.

The Venerable Bede defends his honour: he stood his ground despite his fear. And Thomas Aquinas commends Peter for his fervour, although it was mixed with fear.

Few if any ever followed Jesus more closely than Peter did. He alone walked with him on the stormy sea. He alone defended Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. And now Peter remains as close to Jesus as he can under the circumstances. And besides, Jesus had warned him: *Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward* (JOHN 13:36).

So far, therefore, Peter has remained true to his Master. His conduct is honourable. His love and loyalty are incontestable. He puts himself in harm's way. He exposes himself to the trial of his life, which Jesus said would happen that night.

Peter follows from afar. But at least he follows. His fellow disciples play safe and run. They will all need Peter's strength and courage to restore them when the dust settles. Meanwhile, Peter draws what cold comfort he can from the campfire of the enemy. Don't we all?

■ Are we following Jesus at a distance?

For Peter, it was a physical distance that couldn't be helped in that moment. For us it's a heart distance that we often allow. It can happen to anyone, from the humble homemaker to the eloquent theologian. Pause in silence and self-examination: Have we lost our nerve in the heat of opposition? Are we ashamed of the Gospel of Christ? Have we let other things—good, bad, or neutral—come between us and our Lord? Social media? Online games? Spotify? Netflix? Hungry Go Where? School? Career? Shopping? Entertainment? Recreation? Sports? Beauty care? Dating? Idleness? What is it for you? Confess your wanderings. Confront them now. Close the gap between your heart and Jesus. Draw near to him, and he will draw near to you (JAMES 4:8). Sing and pray the lyrics of this contemporary song:

*Lord, I come to You, let my heart be changed, renewed
Flowing from the grace that I've found in you
Lord, I've come to know the weaknesses I see in me
Will be stripped away by the power of your love
Hold me close, let your love surround me
Bring me near, draw me to your side
And as I wait, I'll rise up like the eagle
And I will soar with you, your Spirit leads me on
In the power of your love*

■ Are we drawing cold comfort from worldly fires?

There is nothing morally wrong with Peter warming himself at that fire. But under the circumstances, he ties himself up into a tedious knot. His hands and feet are strangely warmed. But his heart is not. He has to blend in with non-disciples in order to protect himself. For the first time in three years, he has to be a disciple incognito. Do you know the feeling? Ever find yourself in cozy situations where it is not convenient to be known as a Christian or a pastor? And yet you can't resist the warmth? That's the time to cut and run. Better freeze to death than expose yourself to compromise. Don't overestimate your ability to resist. If Peter denied Christ, so can we.

Pray: Lord Jesus, have mercy on me. Sometimes I play cat-and-mouse with the devil. I foolishly walk the edge of the precipice. I consciously expose myself to temptations to lie, cheat, lust, or compromise in a thousand ways. I knowingly let the flame of my devotion go out (LEVITICUS 6:12). No wonder, I seek consolation from worldly fires. Lord, forgive me. I return to you with all my heart, mind, and soul. Ignite in me a fiery passion for you. Revive me again!

MATTHEW 26:69-74 | Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean.” And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” And again he denied it with an oath: “I do not know the man.” After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you.” Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.”

Peter howls with the hounds to save his hide (B. GERHARDSSON). His denials progress from bad to worse. The first is more like an evasion and not so public: *I do not know what you mean*. The second is more direct and public and accompanied by an oath. The third denial is the most public and punctuated with cursing and swearing. *I do not know the man*.

Peter didn't have to deny Christ. Neither God nor Satan made him do it. Divine foreknowledge does not override human free will. The test was predetermined, but the outcome was not. Peter's own choices led to his dismal failure and downfall.

What choices? First, he overestimated his ability to meet the test. Second, he flatly contradicted the clear warnings and predictions of Jesus. Third, he rated himself more able than his fellow disciples to endure suffering. Finally and fatally, he failed to watch and pray in the shadow of temptation (MATTHEW 26:31-46).

Alas! Peter lost the battle before it began. His resistance was worn down by degrees. If you walk into an epidemic without immunity, you can only expect the worst. The best time to fight temptation is not when you're immersed in it, but before you encounter it (ALAN COLE).

This is a hard lesson to learn. We don't fall into sin. We walk into it, one step at a time. The slope grows steeper and slicker with every step! To a certain extent, Peter tripped on his own two feet.

In the next room, meanwhile and in stark contrast, Jesus boldly confesses his identity as the Son of Man before his enemies (MATTHEW 26:64-66).

It's a tale of two trials. Jesus passes. Peter fails. It's a saga of confession and denial. Jesus confesses the truth and pays with his life. Peter denies his Lord to preserve his life. And with the crowing of the rooster, the sifting of Satan begins.

- Have we been howling with the hounds? Most of us would not deny Christ as Peter did. But do we deny him in other ways? By telling or listening to indecent jokes? By lying for the boss or lying to cover our tracks? By falsifying our CVs or exaggerating our credentials. Do we cheat on our taxes? Do we turn a blind eye to abuse or corruption? Do we keep silent when liberals push for laws to redefine marriage, even though their ideologies contradict the Word of God? Even though their agenda violates Singapore's core values and will destroy us? Search your heart. *Would you be free from your burden of sin?* Come to Christ just as you are with all your guilt and shame. Confess your failure. Receive forgiveness and cleansing. *There's wonderful power in the blood of the Lamb!*
- The best time to fight temptation is not when you are immersed in it, but before you encounter it (ALAN COLE). Billy Graham fought temptation before it came. Right from the start of his ministry in 1948, he and his team rolled out the *Modesto Manifesto*—a set of rules to keep themselves above reproach and, therefore, above scandal as they spread the Gospel around the world. For example, rule number two: *Never be alone with a woman who is not your wife*. Billy Graham kept this rule for the rest of his life. We quote his grandson, Will Graham: *When my grandfather would check into a hotel, a man would go inside the room and look under the bed and in the closets. What they were afraid of was that someone had snuck into the room, like a naked lady with a photographer, and she'd jump into his arms and he'd take a picture, and they'd frame my granddaddy*. Pause and pray. For the sake of the Lord's great name, resolve to uphold the highest standard of biblical morality for yourself and those you are discipling. Together, seek the Lord and write a manifesto. Pledge to hold each other accountable.
- Avoid meltdown! Remember, your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You are not your own (1 CORINTHIANS 6:19). Resolve that you will never deny Christ by defiling your body with sensual lust. Reject the over-sexualized culture of our fallen world. Deny yourself, not Christ. Declare: *I surrender my body, holy and pleasing to God. I pledge to love the Lord my God with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my mind. I give my heart wholly to the Lord as his sanctuary where I will hide his Word so that I might not sin against him. I yield my soul to the Lord as his channel to express the purity of his emotions and the power of true love. I submit my mind to the Lord as his sacred space reserved for his thoughts and imagination. I covenant with my eyes that I will not look lustfully at another person. I pledge to shut out anything on screen or in print that stimulates youthful lusts. For I am more than a conqueror through Christ who loved me* (ADAPTED FROM UNVEIL 2019 BREAKING FREE).

LUKE 22:60 | Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed.

Meet the rooster that made history, just by crowing. His feathered forefathers came from India. They travelled to Persia and Greece and eventually reached Palestine.

According to Jewish tradition, roosters were unwelcome immigrants to Jerusalem because their constant scratching might unearth unclean things. Legend also has it that one rooster was stoned to death in Jerusalem for pecking out a child’s brains.

The Passion Narrative would not be complete without the rooster. He makes salvation history just by crowing. He plays a central role in all four Gospels. His Good Friday crow signals the worst moment in Peter’s life—his ground zero.

Just as Peter was cursing and swearing out his third denial of Christ, the cock crowed right on cue, as Jesus had predicted. For the rooster, it was just another day, another crow. But for Peter, it was a cruel awakening to the horror and hell of his sin.

Universally, the cockcrow is a wake-up call. Every housing estate in Singapore should have a rooster that crows every time we commit sin.

When we betray a sacred trust, may the cock crow.

When we boast in our own strength and standing, may the cock crow.

When we esteem ourselves better than others, may the cock crow.

When we fall asleep in the hour of prayer, let the cock crow.

When we slice ears and wound hearts with our two-edged tongues, may the cock crow.

When we deny Christ in word and deed, may the cock crow.

When we fail to confess Christ, despite clear and compelling opportunities to do so, may the cock crow loud and clear!

Short of a rooster in every block, we all have a conscience. By way of application, it is not far-fetched to take the cockcrow as a metaphor of conscience. Peter’s failures are recorded in the Bible, not that we might excuse ourselves, but that we might examine ourselves. His fall *brilliantly mirrors our own infirmity* (JOHN CALVIN). *Let those who have never been faint-hearted and who have always demonstrated their civil courage cast the first stone* (F. BOVON).

Ask not for whom the cock crows. It crows for thee.

Conscience is the compass. Scripture is the map. Martin Luther famously pointed out the relationship between the Word and the conscience: ‘My conscience is captive to the Word of God, I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand...’ Righteousness and godly character are the results of allowing the conscience to do its God-given work in us. The Christian conscience fears God and loves him enough to do away with even the faintest suggestions of sin. It sets the alarm going whenever the will of the person strays from God’s will (BISHOP EMERITUS ROBERT SOLOMON, ADAPTED).

- Conscience speaks. Determine to cultivate a Word-shaped conscience. Be a person of *clear conscience, desiring to act honourably in all things* (HEBREWS 13:18). Examine yourself. Confess and repent: Have you ever...
 - Doubted God, envied others, felt ungrateful for his blessings?
 - Loved anyone or anything more than you love God?
 - Brushed aside the Spirit’s promptings and conviction of sin?
 - Used the Lord’s name in vain to manipulate others and get your way?
 - Pretended to be more spiritual than you really are?
 - Resented correction by your parents or leaders?
 - Boasted about yourself and exaggerated your own abilities?
 - Minimized your mistakes and magnified those of others?
 - Deliberately lied to save face?
 - Cheated your employer of an honest day’s work?
 - Defrauded your employees of wages or bonuses or rewards?
 - Deliberately said or did things behind others to tarnish their reputation?
 - Lost self-control, got angry with others, and called them names?
 - Neglected your aging or ailing parents?
 - Bullied your spouse and humiliated him or her in private or in public?
 - Ignored your children’s craving for your presence and attention?
 - Caused tensions and fights at home?
 - Disobeyed your parents and broke their hearts?
 - Walked away from someone in need?
 - Harboured unkind thoughts about others?
 - Secretly took pleasure in someone’s mishap?
 - Divulged confidential information and betrayed trust?
 - Refused to forgive others or apologize for your mistakes?
 - Advised someone to have an abortion?
 - Looked lustfully at another person?
 - Dressed immodestly to attract attention and entice others?
 - Engaged in impure acts with yourself or another?
 - Viewed pornography?

LUKE 22:60-61 | While [Peter] was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.

The guards await the day. To amuse themselves, they slap Jesus around and spit in his face. But the moment the cock crows, Jesus forgets his pain and remembers Peter. Jesus had predicted his fall and repentance: *When you have turned again, strengthen your brothers* (LUKE 22:32).

As always, the Lord makes the first move. While Peter is making the worst mistake of his life—for the third time—Jesus turns his sullied face toward his fallen disciple. The next move is up to Peter. Will he turn to the Lord? Or will he turn away in despair?

The story invites us to visualise the look on Jesus' face in that appalling moment of human failure. Close your eyes and do that now. What do you see? Reproach? Disgust? A black face? A glaring *I told you so?*

The Gospel doesn't say. But it offers a hint. On their first meeting, Jesus *looked intently* at Simon and named him *Rock* (JOHN 1:42). Now, Jesus *looks* at him again in that same piercing way (LUKE 22:61). Both of these verses use the same Greek word for *look*, which means *to gaze with penetrating insight*.

By repeating that gaze, Jesus apparently means to remind Peter, not of his wretched sin and failure, but of his high calling and destiny. *Thou art Rock*.

Church authorities support this view: The Lord looked mercifully on Peter, says Augustine, leading him to repentance. The *gaze of Truth* entered Peter's heart, says Leo the Great, inviting him to return to Jesus, trust in him, and follow him through suffering into victory. And according to John Calvin, when Jesus turns his eyes on Peter, the power of the Spirit and the radiance of grace pierce his heart—his repentance begins when the Lord looks at him.

The spiritual life is a series of humble turnings to Christ. Turnings that diminish the ego and call forth the new self that is hidden with Christ in God (COLOSSIANS 3:10). If the Lord didn't turn to us first, we would never be able to turn to him. But as often as we fail, the Lord turns to us.

The gaze of God's amazing grace invites us all to turn to him again and again. Will you return as Peter did? Or will you turn away like Judas? Your move.

- Discipleship can be messy. It's a long and narrow road paved with many trials and testings. Maybe someone has failed you big time and broken your heart. Perhaps it's your spouse or your son or your daughter. The ones you love so deeply. Perhaps it's your right hand man or woman. The one you hand-picked. The one you're grooming for succession. Perhaps it's a new leader you're discipling. Your hopes are high for this young one. How will you respond to his or her epic failure? Your emotions are raw. You're unable to shake off the initial shock and pain of that severe disappointment. Will you choose to forgive and look upon this person through Jesus' eyes of grace? Remember, you have tasted his extravagant grace in your own failures. Will you give this person a second chance? Turn to the Lord. Journal your prayer. Let it be full of grace and truth. Welcome this person back to Jesus. *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him'* (LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24).
- *Imperfection is the prerequisite for grace. Light only gets in through the cracks* (PHILIP YANCEY). Perhaps you are the one who has failed the Lord. He's looking at you now. Visualize his countenance. Can you see his gaze of grace? *Grace means there is nothing I can do to make God love me more, and nothing I can do to make God love me less. It means that I, even I who deserve the opposite, am invited to take my place at the table in God's family* (PHILIP YANCEY). Pray: *Lord, turn to me and be gracious to me* (PSALM 25:16). Lift up your countenance upon me and give me peace (NUMBERS 6:26). As I look full in your wonderful face, let me see, not only your towering might and uncompromising justice, but also your unchanging goodness, gentleness, and tender mercy.
- Research shows over and over again an unfortunate reality: *Everyone remembers negative things more strongly and in more detail. We tend to ruminate more about unpleasant events—and use stronger words to describe them—than happy ones* (ALINA TUGEND). Take for example the City Harvest saga. As unpleasant as it was, God's Family—a community saved by grace through faith—must rise above all the toxic chatter. Pray: *Lord, deliver us from evil. Your goodness and forbearance lead us to repentance* (ROMANS 2:4). Forgive us our spite and scorn. We forgive City Harvest. We choose to move on. We choose to draw City Harvest closer to our hearts. We pray for City Harvest to emerge stronger and shine brighter than ever before. We believe all things are possible because of who you are: *The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made* (PSALM 145:8-9).

LUKE 22:61-62 | Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. MARK 14:72 | And he broke down and wept.

Morning has broken, and so has Peter. Normally, the cock crows two or three times between midnight and dawn. So it’s probably still dark when Peter goes out to cry. His destiny hangs in the balance, along with that of all the other apostles. They have all sinned. Satan will sift out as many as he can before the storm blows over (LUKE 22:31). Who will stand? Who will fall?

Somewhere in the shadows, each disciple faces his own demons. Judas meets the Giant Despair. Thomas enters Doubting Castle. Peter hears the incriminating cockcrow. Each enters the crucible of his own testing that reveals what sort of person he really is. Each one must choose between faith and despair.

The difference between Judas and Peter has been the subject of many a sermon. Judas deserts. Peter denies. Judas betrays. Peter follows. Judas regrets. Peter repents. Judas despairs. Peter remembers the word of the Lord (LUKE 22:61). Judas goes out and hangs himself. Peter goes out and weeps bitterly. For the one, *worldly grief produces death*. For the other, *godly grief produces*

repentance that leads to salvation (2 CORINTHIANS 7:10).

For Peter and all who mourn, *tears are a language God understands*. Through ages past, holy men and women of God have prayed often and earnestly for the gift that few people want—the gift of tears. It has been called *the second baptism*. Bitter tears sweeten the soul and soften the heart. *A crushed and contrite heart, God will not despise* (PSALM 51:17).

The opposite of despair is faith (SØREN KIERKEGAARD). Peter survived the sifting of Satan by faith (LUKE 22:32). He remembered the word of the Lord. He softened his heart with tears. He clung to hope as to *a lamp shining in a dark place* (2 PETER 1:19). Judas, on the other hand, gave into despair. And so the choice that each of us faces today is between faith and despair. Not only in times of trial, but every moment of every day.

As long as choice remains, there is hope. *It is not so much sin that plunges us into disaster, as rather despair* (JOHN CHRYSOSTOM).

This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith (1 JOHN 5:4).

- Turn inspiration into intercession. Reflect on the following quotes and pray, not only for yourself, but also for others you know who are going through a dark night in their soul: *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted* (JESUS). *Tears are liquid prayer* (CHARLES SPURGEON). *What soap is for the body, tears are for the soul* (JEWISH PROVERB). *Tears are God’s gift to us. Our holy water. They heal us as they flow* (RITA SCHIANO). *Crying is not the hurt, but the process of becoming unhurt* (DEBORAH MACNAMARA). *Repentance is a light that shines in the soul of man and guides him to the pool of the second baptism, where the eyes are cleansed from spiritual cataracts* (NAFAKTOS HIEROTHEOS).
- Search your soul. When was the last time you wept? What kind of tears were they? Not all tears are good for us. Tears of rage, regret, remorse, self-pity, and despair may do us more harm than good. Not to mention crocodile tears, which may fool your spouse or parents, but not God. On the other hand, tears of joy, wonder, gratitude, holy longing, compassion, desperation, travail, and repentance do us great good. *Weeping may last for a night. But joy comes in the morning* (PSALM 30:5). Pray for the second baptism, the gift of tears: Lord Jesus, baptize me with holy tears that soften my heart, wash away my bitterness, and heal my shame. Grant me tears of godly sorrow. Lead me to sincere and deep repentance for all my past and present sins.... | From here, continue in your own words. Allow the Holy Spirit to prick your conscience and pinpoint your sins one by one. Then journal your prayer of repentance. Be honest. Be thorough. Linger in God’s presence. Wait for the tears.
- No one is beyond restoration. No matter how deep or dark or tragic the failure, there is hope. Is there someone in your circle who has failed terribly and is spiralling down into despair? Beware! Despair is one of Satan’s most subtle and lethal weapons. Suicide usually happens at the peak of despair. Pray. Reach out to anyone you know who is in despair. Meet with this person one-on-one. Minister healing. Lead him or her in this prayer: Lord Jesus, I confess my utter failure. I have sinned. I am ashamed. In your great mercy, forgive me. I turn my eyes upon you. I open my life to your grace, which is greater than all their sin and shame. Like Peter, I remember your Word. I cling to your Word. I know you’re praying for me as you prayed for Peter (HEBREWS 7:25). Therefore, I refuse to go the way of Judas. I refuse to retreat into myself. I rest in the power of your love. *I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me* (GALATIANS 2:20). In Jesus’ name, amen.
- A Business Insider article reported that *suicide is the main cause of death for millennials in Singapore—and most of them are men*. Ask for a broken heart of compassion and the gift of tears to reach and restore youth-at-risk.

JOHN 21:1-14 | After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. *Please continue reading verses 4-14 in your Bible.*

Peter goes fishing. What else can he do? Jesus had promised a rendezvous in Galilee. But so far no show. Peter's got half the apostles with him for a crew, including his former partners, James and John. So why not launch out into the deep for a catch?

Is Peter backsliding into his old career as a fisherman? Perhaps not. But the temptation can't be ruled out. Jesus has forgiven him. But has Peter forgiven himself?

Forgiveness is one thing. Recovery is another. A night with the nets might do Peter good in the way of recreational therapy. But no such luck. They fished all night and caught nothing. It seems they have been here before. But this is only the first step of a walk down memory lane.

At the break of day, a familiar voice hails from the shore: *Any fish, boys? No! Try the other side.* Success! Enough fish to sink a boat. Peter joins the dots. He throws himself overboard and swims 90 metres to meet the Lord on the shore. The first thing he sees is a charcoal fire, like

the one at the scene of his denial of Christ (JOHN 18:18). But this one has bread and fish on it. Breakfast on the beach.

Why all these flashbacks? The futile fishing trip. The retry at the Lord's word. The miraculous catch. Peter's leap from the boat. The charcoal fire. The bread and fish.

Is Peter having déjà vu? No. All these props evoke the ups and downs of his career as a disciple—from his call in Galilee to his fall on Good Friday. The stage is being set for his rehabilitation. The only thing missing is the rooster. That would be overkill.

Peter is a broken man. Can he bounce back from failure? Does he have what it takes to restore his fellow disciples? He can take them fishing. But can he take them forward in the Church Jesus builds? Is he Rock yet?

Jesus does all things well. First things first: *Come and have breakfast.* Feed him before you fix him. A spoonful of kindness helps the medicine go down.

- What do you do when Jesus doesn't show up? He promised to meet you there. But here you are waiting. Learn from Peter's experience. When Jesus turns a page in your life, don't go back to your old securities. Success or failure in the Church or in personal life depends on where Jesus stands in the picture. Without his presence and prompting, our efforts are futile—no matter how professional our skillsets, methods, and machinery may be. Pray: Lord Jesus, we turn from our self-reliant ways. We recognize that sometimes frustration and futility are signs from you that we are doing our own thing or running ahead of you. May we respond rightly to divine disappointments. Teach us to wait on you. Treat us to breakfast again.
- The church is not a showcase of saints, but a healing place for sinners. Our world needs such a place where the guilty and the broken can receive emergency care and bounce back from failure. Are our churches safe havens for inner healing and recovery? Ponder and pray. A safe church is where:
 - The entire community is a warm and welcoming family.
 - Relationships are more important than programmes.
 - Relational health is the catalyst for church growth.
 - No one pretends that they have it all together.
 - Leaders set the example in creating a safe environment.
 - Leaders are aware of their own vulnerabilities and are accountable.
 - Leaders are not defensive or evasive, but repent when they are wrong.
 - Leaders don't wear masks and don't allow people to idolize them.
 - Leaders value brokenness and see failure as a stepping stone for growth.
 - Leaders preach truth without compromise and speak the truth in love.
 - People make time for face-to-face conversations on sensitive issues.
 - Everyone feels free and safe to share their struggles and shame.
 - The broken are not stigmatized but receive ministry towards recovery.
 - Everyone respects confidentiality and avoids gossip. (RODNEY GASKINS | ADAPTED)
- Restore the fallen. *A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench* (ISAIAH 42:3). Look around. Is there a person in your circle who needs restoration, like Peter? The one who over-promised and under-delivered. The one whose confidence is shattered. The one who is wondering: Can Jesus ever again use a person like me? Pray for him as Jesus prayed for Peter. Feed him before you fix him. Host a breakfast. One-on-one. *Mercy gave the prodigal son a second chance. Grace gave him a feast* (MAX LUCADO). Restore him in a spirit of gentleness (GALATIANS 6:1). Give him Jesus' medicine: God loves you. God builds on your brokenness. God's grace is sufficient for you. God's power is made perfect in your weakness (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9). God will send you out to heal the brokenhearted.

JOHN 21:15-17 | When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” *Please read verses 16-17 in your Bible.*

The stage is set. The drama of Peter’s restoration begins with a heart-piercing question: *Simon, do you love me more than these?*

More than what? It’s not clear what Jesus means by *these*. But did you know that half of what we say is in body language? Perhaps Jesus points to the boat, fish, and nets as if to say: *Do you love me more than your old career and gear?* Maybe he points to the other disciples as if to say: *Do you love me more than your old fishing buddies?* Or maybe he means: *Do you still claim to love me more than they do?*

All of these meanings are possible. But none are certain. Perhaps the best way to read the question today is like this: *Do YOU love Jesus more than anything?*

In the Greek text, the verbs *love* and *like* are interchanged. Jesus says: *Simon, do you ‘love’ me?* Peter answers: *Lord, I ‘like’ you.* This is repeated. But the third time, Jesus says: *Simon, do you ‘like’ me?* And Peter was deeply hurt. Perhaps not so much because Jesus switched the verbs. But because he asked him three times—one for each denial.

Jesus is not shaming Peter. He’s training him. He’s giving him a chance to make amends by confessing him three times before witnesses, just as he had denied him three times before witnesses—and that, beside a charcoal fire.

This is not condemnation. It’s loving correction. *Those whom I love, I convict and discipline, says Jesus. Therefore, be zealous and repent* (REVELATION 3:19).

Peter is not only reinstated as a fisher of men, as merciful as that is. But he is also newly commissioned as shepherd of the Flock. The Chief Shepherd has laid down his life for his sheep. He now entrusts the care of his blood-bought Church into the hands of the one who denied him three times.

Astonishing grace! Trust is fully restored without merit. When Jesus reinstates a fallen disciple, he raises him higher than the point from which he fell. In spite of all his flaws and failures, Peter is appointed Founding Pastor of the Church Jesus builds: *Feed my lambs. Shepherd my sheep. Feed my sheep.* Peter leaves his boat behind. For the last time.

Christ comes to the world as the example, constantly enjoining: Imitate me. We humans prefer to adore him instead (SØREN KIERKEGAARD).

- Discipleship is always. No leave. No sabbatical. No retirement. No 13-month bonus. Have you taken a vacation from discipleship? Beware! *No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God* (LUKE 9:62). Pray: Lord Jesus, I confess, I’ve not taken discipleship seriously. I’ve treated it as a thing to do in my spare time, or when I feel like it, or when I think I’m ready. Forgive me. Unworthy as I am, please give me a second chance. Overcome my apathy. Silence the noisy chatter in my mind and disarm all my excuses for playing truant.
- Discipleship is allegiance. Do you love Jesus more than anything? Most of us *like* Jesus. Few really *love* him. To like someone is to experience attraction and affection for that person. Even adoration. But to love someone is to give that person your total allegiance. Pray: Dear Lord Jesus, I confess that I like you more than I love you. I adore you more than I obey you. But I want to love you above all else. I’m tired of hiding behind holy clichés. I open my heart to your gentle conviction and loving correction, whether directly or through those who disciple me. Transform my human affection for you into an undivided allegiance that not only adores you but also imitates you. *Take my heart, it is thine own. It shall be thy royal throne* (FRANCES RIDLEY HAVERGAL).
- Discipleship is abiding. But how do we know that we are abiding in him? The Bible answers: *Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked* (1 JOHN 2:5-6). To abide in Christ, therefore, is to imitate him. To walk as he walked in this world. Make this your prayer: *Lord Jesus, you did not come into the world to be admired. You never asked to be worshipped. Only to be obeyed. You are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. You require followers, not fans. Please forgive us. We have drifted into this infatuation of worship without sacrifice, adoration without allegiance. Wake us up. Deliver us from the error of romancing you without imitating you, and admiring you without obeying you* (SØREN KIERKEGAARD, ADAPTED).
- Discipleship is assignment. After affirming his love for Jesus three times, Peter proved his love by completing the work he was given to do. Will we do the same? *Celebration of Hope* is a divine assignment to turn Singapore Godward. Thank God for the first fruits. Pray for divine zeal to stay focused and fervent: Press in for the full harvest. Follow up new believers diligently and joyfully. Fan the flame of revival prayer. Foster deeper unity. Major on personal and small-group discipleship. Engage and nurture the younger generation. Participate robustly in the public square (BISHOP RENNIS PONNIAH).

JOHN 21:18-19 | Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go. (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.)

How will you die? You probably don't want to know. But Peter is told whether he likes it or not. In a prophetic parable, Jesus predicts his martyrdom by crucifixion (JOHN 21:18-19).

Young Peter was his own master. Free and independent. Self-made and self-determined. He dressed himself and went wherever he pleased. Imagine, if you will, the modern adolescent scooting around in torn jeans, nose rings, and purple hair. Old Peter, however, will lose control of his wardrobe and itinerary. He will stretch out his hands and be fastened to a cross.

In the literature of the day, *stretch out your hands* was a metaphor for crucifixion, the most cruel and inhumane punishment known to the ancient world. The victim's arms were stretched out and bound to the short beam of the cross that was detached from the long beam. He was then made to carry that weight to the last place he wanted to go, the execution site. There the vertical beam of the cross stood waiting for its counterpart, victim attached. This is *the kind of death* by which Peter would glorify God.

Peter's journey from Galilee to Golgotha presents us with a compelling pattern of discipleship. At first it's all adventure and discovery, miracles and manifestations, weddings, banquets, and beach picnics. But along the way things get scary. The message of the kingdom threatens the powers that be. Opposition arises. Screws are tightened. Conditions are imposed. There is a gradual transition from 'adolescent' discipleship, with all its ego and emo, to complete and undivided allegiance to Jesus.

Thus the demands of discipleship increase with every step, through thick and thin, fear and failure, mission and martyrdom.

There are many crossroads in discipleship. But they all lead to one place, the last place you want to go: the Cross. You may not die a martyr's death. But you are called to live a martyr's life: deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Jesus until you are totally dead to self.

When Christ calls a man, he bids him, 'Come and die' (DIETRICH BONHOEFFER).

How will you die?

Discipleship is a lifelong journey of obedience to Christ which transforms a person's values and behaviour, and results in ministry in one's home, church, and the world (BARRY SNEED).

- Are you in the adventure stage of discipleship? Enjoy it while it lasts. Blessed are you, provided you keep going and read the signs so that you'll know when it's time to go deeper. Pray: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for choosing me and calling me to be your disciple. I take up your easy yoke and light burden. I walk with you on the hard road that leads to life. By your grace, I'm ready to put away childish things. I'm eager to grow up as a mature, cross-bearing disciple of yours, following the example of your servant Peter.
- Are you in the advanced stage of discipleship? Are you dead yet? Don't be so sure. Paul said: *I die every day* (1 CORINTHIANS 15:31). Physical martyrdom is once and for all. Dying to self is a living martyrdom—day by day, moment by moment. It's not only about crucifying the flesh. It's not only about dying to sin and selfishness. It also requires giving up some pure and priceless things to follow Jesus. Like the woman with the alabaster jar of ointment (MATTHEW 26:6-13). Besides giving up your sins, don't you have something precious that you can offer to Jesus? Your surplus? Your time? What about idiosyncrasies and personal preferences that need to be sacrificed for the common good? Or intellectual property that others steal from you and post or publish as their own. Or anything else taken from you unjustly and you have to bear the loss in silent pain for love's sake. Dear Disciple of Jesus, will you simply let go? Surrender everything to him today: *Shattered dreams, wounded hearts, and broken toys. Give them all, give them all, give them all to Jesus. And he will turn your sorrows into joy* (JOHNSON AND BENSON).
- Are you growing weary in discipleship? Brace yourself. The road is longer than you think. It would be some 30 years before Peter stretched out his hands to take up his cross and literally die for Jesus. In the meantime, he had to live for Jesus. There was much work to be done. Yes, sometimes we do grow weary in well doing. There are seasons when it would seem so easy just to retreat, resign, or retire. Throw in the towel. Game over! Like Elijah sulking under the broom tree, wishing to die (1 KINGS 19:4). Perhaps you are there today. Don't give up. Catch your breath and re-orient. Your race is not over yet. Get your bearings. Pace yourself. Prepare for the next lap. The question is not just: *How will you die?* But *How will you live?* Pray now. In your own words, commit yourself to follow Peter as he followed Jesus—all the way. May God be glorified by your life and by your death. Breathe a prayer for others as names and faces come to mind.

JOHN 21:20-22 | Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them.... When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!"

Jesus takes Peter for a walk. This must have been hard for John. He and Peter were the best of friends. They were business partners in the past. They are frequently paired in the Gospels and Acts. For example, they prepared the last Passover for Jesus. And on Easter morning, they raced each other to the empty tomb.

Poor John. He had always been with Peter and James in the inner circle of Jesus. But now he sees Jesus and Peter walking together on the beach without him. He can't help tagging behind. And Peter, ever the manager, tries to draw him in.

Jesus had just told Peter how he would die. Now Peter wants to know about John: *Lord, what about him?* Jesus' answer is striking and compelling. *What is that to you? You follow me.* In other words: *Mind your own business.*

Jesus almost always addresses the disciples as a community. But here in John 21:22, the Greek pronoun for *you* is emphatically addressed to Peter alone: *YOU follow me!* This is extraordinary.

What does it mean?

On the one hand, discipleship is a communal affair. We worship, work, and walk together in the footsteps of Jesus. We hold each other accountable. We are disciples-in-community. Okay, we get that.

But what many of us don't get is that discipleship is also an intensely individual and personal affair. Ultimately you walk alone with Jesus. Sometimes into dark and scary places where you don't want to go. You stretch out your hands. You take up your cross and bear it alone. Jesus bore your sins, not your cross.

How many of us have learned to walk alone as a single, solitary, individual disciple of Jesus? Few. Most of us jostle with the crowd. We push and pull for human praise. We posture and pose for validation and limelight. We crave and clamour for likes on social media. We follow the herd instead of the Shepherd.

Lord, what about him? What about her? None of your business! The Lord says: *YOU follow me!*

However, *if you want to be loathsome to God, just run with the herd* (SØREN KIERKEGAARD).

- Raw and real. For God's glory, be the distinct disciple Jesus calls you to be. Reflect on this good read extracted and adapted from a blog by John Piper.

Jesus' words to Peter may be paraphrased as, 'None of your business, you follow me!' Blunt words. But sweet to my ears. They set me free from the depressing bondage of fatal comparing. Sometimes when I scan the ads in Christianity Today, I get discouraged. I find this avalanche of ministry suggestions quite oppressing.

Book after book, conference after conference, dvd after dvd—telling me how to succeed in ministry. And all of them quietly hinting that I am not making it. Worship could be better. Preaching could be better. Evangelism could be better. Pastoral care could be better. Youth ministry could be better. Missions could be better. And here is what works. Buy this. Go here. Go there. Do it this way. So I was refreshed by Jesus' blunt word to me (and you): What is that to you? You follow me! Peter had just heard a very hard word. You will die—painfully. His first thought was comparison. What about John? If I have to suffer, will he have to suffer? If my ministry ends like that, will his end like that?

That's the way we sinners are wired. Compare. Compete. Complain. We crave to know how we stack up alongside others. We get a perverted kind of high when we observe that someone else is less effective than we are. Ouch! To this day, I recall the little note posted in Elliot Hall in my senior year at Wheaton: 'To love is to stop comparing.' What is that to you, Piper? Follow me.

What is it to you that David Wells [or Roland Chia] has such a comprehensive grasp of the pervasive effects of post-modernism? You follow me. What is it to you that Voddie Baucham [or Edmund Chan] speaks the Gospel so powerfully without notes? You follow me. What is it to you that Tim Keller [or Chris Chia] sees gospel connections with professional life so clearly? You follow me. What is it to you that Don Carson [or Robert Solomon] reads five hundred books a year and combines pastoral insight with the scholar's depth and comprehensiveness? You follow me.

That word landed on me with great joy. Jesus will not judge me according to my superiority or inferiority to anyone else. No preacher. No church. No ministry. These are not the standard. Jesus has a work for me to do (and a different one for you). It is not what he has given anyone else to do. There is a grace to do it. Will I trust him for that grace and do what he has given me to do? That is the question. What is your answer?

- Journal your prayer response. Let it be a deep conversation between you and Jesus. A spiritual milestone that marks your life forever as his distinct disciple.

ACTS 4:13-14 | Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.

What's come over Peter? He preached one sermon on the Day of Pentecost and 3,000 people got saved (ACTS 2:41). His second sermon drew 5,000 souls into the kingdom (4:4).

Now he and John stand accused before the Sanhedrin, the most powerful authority in Judaism. But Peter is not the same man who denied Jesus three times on the night of his arrest.

There he cringed before a domestic helper who recognized him as a disciple. But now, speaking for all the apostles, he confesses the name of Jesus with a courage and confidence that astounds the Supreme Court of Israel. How do we account for this dramatic change in Peter's life?

The obvious answer is Pentecost. Jesus said: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses* (ACTS 1:8). What a difference the Spirit makes. The same anointing that rested on Jesus from the day of his baptism has transformed Peter from a reed blowing in the wind to a rock that cannot be shaken.

But the Sanhedrin doesn't know about the Holy Spirit. They attribute the boldness of the apostles to the fact that they had been with Jesus. This was not meant as a compliment. Like their teacher, Peter and John had no formal training in rhetoric or theology. They were ordinary fishermen. But bold as lions! Just like Jesus, the carpenter from Galilee. The rulers and elders of Israel had never won a debate with Jesus. Now they've got Jesus multiplied by twelve on their hands. *They had nothing to say in opposition.*

Another source of Peter's boldness has largely been overlooked. Not only had he been with Jesus and filled with the Spirit. He had also been with Satan in the arena. He met his enemy in pitch battle and survived by the prayers and the forgiveness of Jesus (LUKE 22:32).

Peter has gone through fire and come forth as gold (1 PETER 1:7). He's been humbled under the mighty hand of God. Now, God has exalted him (1 PETER 5:6). Fearless he stands before the Supreme Court of Israel—solid as a rock!

- Peter's transformation was not the result of positive thinking, psychological therapy, or intellectual study. Nor was it a gradual upgrade of his personality. Peter was totally and radically transformed from the inside out by the mighty infilling of the Spirit of God on the Day of Pentecost. Singapore is overdue for such a divine visitation. Open heavens. Open hearts. Open homes. Open harvest. On your own and together with others, cry out to God for:
 - Unparalleled outpouring of the Spirit
 - Unstoppable revival-prayer movement
 - Unusual boldness in witness and proclamation
 - Unheard of hunger and openness to the Gospel
 - Unprecedented turning to Christ among pre-believers
 - Unexpected doors for Antioch missions
- Do you want to be transformed? Really? Not all of us do. Confess. Pray: Lord, we know that change comes at a cost. It upsets the status quo. It often strains relationships. We hesitate to let go of what is safe, secure, and predictable. But you have promised great power to those who hear and obey you. You have promised radical transformation to those who yield to your Spirit. You have promised great opportunities to those who are open to change. We believe that Peter's experience is available to every disciple. You have predestined us, not just to become good and likeable people, but to be conformed to your image.
- In this post-modern age, truth telling and right living are ridiculed. The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said: *All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.* Watch and pray. Every generation must fight its own battles to establish truth and then pass it on to the next. What will our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren believe to be self-evident truth? The answer largely depends on our witness and testimony today. Pray that on our watch in these turbulent times, we will be solid as a rock and bold as a lion (PROVERBS 28:1). That we will preach the Truth fearlessly, live righteously, and lead responsibly—so that the next generation will also be rock solid, standing tall as a beacon of light, a pillar of truth, and a torch of justice.
- Sing and pray the lyrics of this classic hymn:

*God of grace and God of glory, on thy people pour thy power!
Crown thy ancient Church's story, bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour (2x)*

*Set our feet on lofty places, gird our lives that they may be,
Armoured with all Christ-like graces, pledged to set all captives free!
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, that we fail not them nor thee (2x)*

ACTS 15:7 | Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.”

Peter hails from the Golan Heights. His hometown Bethsaida was a fishing village east of the Jordan and north of the Sea of Galilee (JOHN 1:44). In Peter’s day, this area was overrun by Gentiles. Jews were a minority. Archaeologists have dug up pork bones in Bethsaida, but no sign of any major Jewish presence in the first century. The un-kosher meats in Peter’s vision in Acts 10 would have reminded him of his hometown wet market.

Andrew and Philip were also from Bethsaida (JOHN 1:44). Their names are Greek. So when a company of Greeks sought an audience with Jesus in Jerusalem, they naturally approached Philip who, along with Andrew, represented them to Jesus (JOHN 12:20-22).

So what difference does it make? It means that Peter grew up in a multi-cultural setting. He probably spoke Greek as a second language. Like Philip and Andrew, his Golanite roots helped prepare him to build bridges between culturally distant peoples: between Judean and diaspora Jews, between Jews and Samaritans, and between Jews and Gentiles.

And so, as it turns out, Peter was not only an apostle to Jews. He was also a cross-cultural communicator of the Gospel from the Day of Pentecost until he finished his course in Rome.

His first sermon in Acts bore witness to Jewish pilgrims from *every nation under heaven* (2:5-11). His vision of the international buffet in Joppa liberated him to visit and eat with Gentiles in Caesarea. There he became the first New Testament missionary to the Gentiles (10:1-45). When taken to task for this by the Church in Jerusalem, he put all the blame on God: *the Spirit told me to go* (ACTS 11:12).

In the Apostolic Council of Acts 15, conservative believers tried to impose circumcision and the Law on the Gentile Christians of Antioch. Peter stood up and defended the divine right of every ethnic group to follow Jesus without converting to Judaism. This enabled the Church to become a community of faith for every people under heaven.

The mission of God had no better friend than Peter. He was a bridge-builder, a unifier, a pastor for all peoples, and ever a fisher of men. He knew how and when to cast his net on the other side. Do we?

- God is the Lord of history. He used seemingly insignificant things in Peter’s background to make him a bridge and a bridge-builder for the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles—from Galilee to Judea, from Antioch to Rome. Pause and give thanks to God for his power and providence in Peter’s life.
- God is the Lord of your history. Think of your lineage, *kampung*, mother tongue, education, profession, talents, hobbies, interests, and so on. Things that seem incidental in your life, God wants to use as stepping stones and bridges for the Gospel. Even the greatest disappointments can become divine appointments. Your retrenchment, your health crisis, your bereavement, your failed romance, your university rejection, whatever. *God works all things together for good for those who love him and live for his purpose* (ROMANS 8:28). But do you resent your background? Are you angry with God for the setbacks in your life? Pause. Ponder. Pray. Ask God for new eyes to see how he can use the details of your story to open hearts and minds to the Gospel. Who are the people he has allowed to cross your path? Who has he prepared for you to reach? Ask him to show you. Make a list. Pray over these names daily. Build bridges. Trust God. Boldly fish for souls.
- God is the Lord of Singapore’s history. What Bethsaida was for Peter and his world, Singapore is for Asia and our world. We are one of the most diverse nations on earth in terms of race, language, and religion. This is no accident. This is Antioch! God has uniquely shaped this Little Red Dot to play a vital part in reaching the unreached peoples of Asia and beyond. Why else do you think we have the most powerful passport in the world? Within a seven-hour flight radius of Singapore, there are still thousands of unreached peoples. These are distinct ethnic groups that do not have enough churches and resources to evangelize their own communities without cross-cultural workers from the outside. They need our help.

Pray: Lord of the Nations, we thank you for Singapore—our geography, history, demographics, political stability, economic success, religious freedom, global influence, and so much more. You are weaving everything together wonderfully for your global mission: *a church for every people, the Gospel for every person*. We were once a small fishing village like Bethsaida. Today, we are a sprawling metropolis. But we are not satisfied. We dream, we yearn, we pray. Make us a deep sea fishing hub for the souls of men! Raise up many more fishers of men—young and old, from all walks of life—to cast our nets deep and wide. Grant us courage to put our lives on the line, with great teamwork, patience, and determination. Favour us with miraculous catches of fish wherever you send us. To God be the glory!

1 PETER 1:3-4 | According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you....

We are born to hope. Peter is writing to believers who have every reason to despair. They are aliens and exiles in a hostile world (1 PETER 1:1, 11). They are grieved by various trials (6). They are treated worse than second-class citizens because of their identification with Christ. And yet they have every reason to hope, because they are *born again*.

The idea of the new birth goes back to Jesus, who said, *You must be born from above* (JOHN 3:7). But the term, *born again*, was first used by Peter, who says we are *born again to a living hope* (3).

Peter is a theologian of hope (1:3, 13, 21; 3:5, 15). But what is hope? Hope is the confident expectation that despite all evidence to the contrary, we will experience the goodness of God in the land of the living (short term) as well as in the age to come (long term).

This hope has nothing to do with rosy optimism and wishful thinking with no basis in reality. The Christian hope is alive and real because it is grounded in the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and linked to our inheritance in the age

to come (1 PETER 1:3-4, 21). This hope will never be disappointed or denied (ROMANS 5:5).

The painful bereavement, the bitter divorce, the terminal illness, or the loss of sight or limb is not a dead end, but a new beginning. The worst thing that happens to a disciple of Jesus can and should be the dawn of a new day, the start of the best years of his or her life.

Outsiders don't know what to make of the Christian hope. And yet Peter urges us to give an answer to anyone who enquires of the reason and basis of our hope (1 PETER 3:15). The new birth produces a new and living hope within us. We are born again to hope. This hope is yours. But it's not passive or automatic. You must choose to hope, especially when you are most tempted to despair.

The first imperative of this letter is Peter's command to hope: *Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ* (13). This is your Father's world. When wrong is strong, when might is 'right', when the good is out of sight, thou shalt not despair. Thou shalt hope!

This bicentennial, we celebrate a great reality: the Singapore Church! We are born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- Singapore, *A Home with Hope and Heart*. Are we there yet? Do we want to be? So much depends on us, the born again heralds of living hope. *Hope is a person. His name is Jesus* (ANDREW GOH). Beneath our first world façade are complex layers of social concerns. Physically, mentally and emotionally, we are not in the pink of health. We are a nation at war with diabetes, depression, and dementia. Sociologically, we are becoming more unequal and fragmented along class divides. Materially, we have the chronic poor who live below the poverty line. Pray for the Church, the herald of Living Hope. Ask God for a bigger heart to work deeper together. Ask for a stronger will to find better ways to spread Living Hope among the vulnerable in our housing estates, workplaces, campuses, and communities. May we be our Government's best ally to secure the shalom of our city.
- Singapore, a City of Hope for the Ageing. Are we there yet? Do we want to be? We are one of the fastest ageing nations in Asia. We top the world in life expectancy at 84.8 years. But years spent in poor health is also up (THE STRAITS TIMES, 20 JUNE 2019). Watch and pray. In January 2019, an online media report carried this headline: *Shocking rise in suicides from an unexpected age group*. While those aged 60 and above make up only 10% of our population, they had the highest suicide rate (37%) across all age groups in 2017. Should we not be concerned? Why are so many of our senior citizens choosing to end their lives? Reasons include: helplessness, hopelessness, meaninglessness, and a deep sense of despair due to social isolation, fear of worsening health, and fear of becoming a burden to family and friends (SOS).

In our culture of filial piety, this is shocking news. We are collectively answerable to God for this sorry state of affairs. We need to repent. We owe the isolated elderly a message of Living Hope. Be a good neighbour. Befriend one or two or more elderly in your block and bring them Living Hope. Pray that every church will start an inter-generational outreach to serve the lonely elderly. That no elderly will be left to languish in isolation. That a great many will encounter Jesus and be born again. Believe for healing miracles. Believe for testimonies of hope that will go viral, herald Hope, and re-script headlines: *No longer sentenced to isolation. No longer trapped in hopelessness. No longer overwhelmed by despair. No longer helpless!* May our senior citizens be strong in body, soul, and spirit in their sunset years. May they be a sign and a wonder in our city. A generation flourishing with hope, declaring: *Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be* (ROBERT BROWNING).

1 PETER 1:23-25 | You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

How can a man be born again? Jesus didn't answer the question directly. But Peter does. We are born again through *the Living Word of God*. Life begets life.

God's Word is alive. There's a vast difference between the Living Word of God and the dead words of those who peddle the precepts of men in the name of the Gospel (MARK 7:7). Peter preached the Living Word on the Day of Pentecost, and 3,000 were born again. Are you born again?

God's Word is powerful. The same Word that created heaven and earth before time began has entered time and space through the life and teaching of Jesus. When sown into a receptive human heart, this Living Word creates a new and unending life. Peter was the first disciple to recognize this: *Lord, you have the words of eternal life* (JOHN 6:68).

God's Word is permanent. Human nature withers like grass. Human glory fades like flowers. But God's Word abides forever. Peter got this from Isaiah. But also from Jesus: *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away* (MARK

13:30). The only thing in this world that will last is the Word of God. You can stake your life on it.

And this Word is the Gospel (:25). Peter was the first to preach this Gospel after Pentecost. He was the first to announce it to the Gentiles. And the Early Church remembers Peter as the one who mentored the man who wrote the Gospel of Mark.

After a brief missionary career with Paul and Barnabas, John Mark became an interpreter for Peter, who affectionately calls him *my son* (1 PETER 5:13). What Mark learned about Jesus from Peter, he turned into a Gospel.

Although Mark appears second in the New Testament, it was the first Gospel ever written. Matthew and Luke copied so much from Mark that you could tear the whole Gospel of Mark right out of your Bible and still have it, except for a few lines.

Without Peter, therefore, our Bible could well be short of three Gospels. The confidence Jesus placed in Peter at their first meeting and at their last was not misplaced:

You shall be called Rock. Feed my sheep.

- Hungry for the Living Word? A city watchman shared this dream: *It's midday. I'm downtown in this little bakery with a cozy cafe. I smell freshly baked bread. I see shelves overflowing with yummys of all shapes and sizes. Impressive. What a wholesome spread! I look around. One lone customer, a young urban professional, sits in the corner. He looks bored. Disinterested. He nibbles at his morsel. I get the feeling that he's there, but he's not there.*

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church: In this city, spiritual manna is available in abundance. Fresh, rich, nourishing. But we've taken this great blessing for granted. We mindlessly nibble. We're big consumers of junk food. We've lost our taste for what we need most—the Living Word of God which has the power to nourish our soul, renew our mind, and sanctify our life. Pray: Lord, forgive me. I'm guilty as charged. Restore my interest in your Word. Revive me with a zeal to discover your Word, a hunger to devour your Word (JEREMIAH 15:16).

- Think Family, the basic building block of society. Think early childhood education. Pray that parents will immerse their children early in the Living Word: *And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates* (DEUTERONOMY 6:6-9). Believe for a mighty spillover into the public square, saturating every space with Truth. Especially Education and School, Communications and Media, Government and Leadership. Pray that every generation will sink roots deeper and deeper into the Eternal Word.
- *No country is too hard, too poor, too filled with crime, too divided by war, or too spiritually dark to be changed. God has given us basic principles that are keys to every problem we face in the 21st century. The answers lie between the covers of one book—the Bible* (LOREN CUNNINGHAM). For Singapore to fulfill her Antioch call, we must present the timeless Word of God to all the peoples of the earth. Only the Word can transform the world. Pray that the Word of God will become the foundation of all that we do. Ask God to open new doors for a new generation of pioneers to sow his Word deep and wide among the unreached peoples of Asia. Pray for effective discipling in the Word. Ask God to send out God-fearing principals and teachers on a school-planting mission that will *mould the future of nations by moulding the people who will determine the future of nations* (MOE SINGAPORE, ADAPTED). Pray for an explosion of Bible schools to raise up indigenous preachers, teachers, scholars, and translators. *To know the Word of God, to live the Word of God, to preach the Word, to teach the Word, is the sum of all wisdom, the heart of all Christian service* (CHARLES E. FULLER).

1 PETER 2:4-6 | As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

We are the House of God. The Church is not a stack of bricks. It's a spiritual community of disciples gathered around Jesus Christ the Living Stone and Chief Cornerstone. As we keep coming to him, says Peter, we are constantly being built up around him as living stones (1 PETER 2:4-5).

The cornerstone is the first stone laid in a building's foundation. It determines the position of all the other stones. To believe in Jesus, therefore, means to come into alignment with him and into right relationships with one another. No stone stands alone. To do so in the name of some grandiose vision is to risk rejection by the Builder. But those who align themselves with Jesus and his Church will share in his life, ministry, and mission to the ends of the earth.

The Church is a Holy Priesthood. Every believer has direct access to God through Jesus. But Peter's emphasis here is on the corporate priesthood of all believers. Just as no stone stands alone, no priest stands alone. It is together in unity and in right relationships with God and one

another that we fulfill our collective vocation as God's priests to the world on behalf of all humanity.

What is this priestly vocation? It is to *offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*. Not just in holy places on Sundays, but every day and everywhere.

What are these spiritual sacrifices? They include prayer (PSALM 141:2), thanksgiving (PSALM 50:14, 23), praise (HEBREWS 13:15), a contrite heart (PSALM 51:17), total allegiance to God (ROMANS 12:1), good works, sharing with the poor (HEBREWS 13:16), holy conduct in the world, and proclaiming the saving work of God to the world (1 PETER 2:9, 12). These are our collective duties as God's holy priesthood (J.R. MICHAELS). In Wesleyan terms, *works of piety and works of mercy*.

This is a high and holy vocation. When we fulfill these priestly duties together, we need not fret over our so-called destiny or legacy. We will have our hearts and hands full of spiritual sacrifices. Our individual gifts and callings will flow out of this corporate priesthood. We are the Household of God. Together!

■ Calling all stones. What sort of stone are you? Please tick:

- A stone that the builders rejected
- A stone that rejected the builders
- A stone that rejected the Builder Jesus
- A stone that the Builder Jesus rejected
- A living stone aligned with the Cornerstone
- A living stone submitted to Jesus' chosen builders

It's tempting to blame others, especially leaders, when we feel overlooked, underrated, or slighted in terms of our perceived ministry gifts and calling. Take time to examine yourself. Make sure you're not a loose stone, a rolling stone, or a stumbling stone. Pray: Lord Jesus Christ, I know that you have a perfect place for me in the Church you are building. But have I made things difficult for you? Have I rejected your wise master builders? Have I resisted your shaping hand? Show me what kind of stone I have been. Deal with me until I fully submit to your Master Plan. Chisel off my sharp edges. Grind down my jagged pride. Polish me into a living stone that fits perfectly in place beside my brothers and sisters. Come, Lord Jesus. Build your Church.

- Live the call. Our *works of piety* must be balanced with *works of mercy*. Our *vertical devotions lead to horizontal duties* (BISHOP EMERITUS ROBERT SOLOMON). Our city is awash with poor and needy migrant workers from Asia. Less visible are the harassed and helpless, the homeless, the mentally-ill, youth at-risk, and ex-offenders. Will you open your ears to their cries? Instead of just admiring famous philanthropists in the news, how about becoming one? Philanthropy means *love of humanity*. For the love of God and for the love of humanity, will you volunteer your time, talent, and treasure to help create a better world for those in need? *Our founding fathers envisioned Singapore as a 'democracy of deeds'... an active citizenry engaged in the community, working together for the public good* (MINISTER LAWRENCE WONG). Will you work with your MP to befriend the underprivileged in your community? Lend an ear. Pray with them. Cook them a meal. Clean their house. Be part of God's solution for their shalom and social mobility. Become their 'angel of mercy'. Pray!
- Pray for the Singapore Church. Instead of being famous for our beautiful buildings, impressive events, and celebrity pastors, may we be renown for our brokenness over the broken world in which we live. May we be the talk of the nations because of our deep sense of social responsibility for the poor and the powerless within our borders and beyond. May we be an icon of mercy because of our godly stewardship, generous giving, joyful volunteerism, and practical love for the poor and needy.

1 PETER 2:11-12 | Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Exile was no holiday. It was more like hell. Exiles were banished from their homeland and stripped of all status and rights. They were held in contempt, shunned, and had to fend for themselves. It was illegal to shelter or feed an exile who was not a relative. Exile was one of the worst punishments ancient law could impose.

Peter's readers were not exiles as such. They were natives in their own land. Why then does Peter address them as *aliens and exiles*? Simply this: Their faithfulness to Christ so altered their standing in society that they were treated like exiles. They suffered insult, slander, accusation, and abuse, even by former friends and neighbours (2:12, 18; 3:16; 4:4, 14). Alas. And we Christians seek to carve our niche in society by means of our respectable, culture-Christianity!

So what is Peter's counsel to disciples of Jesus forced to live as exiles in their homeland? Three simple imperatives: First, in all your conduct, be holy as God is holy (1:15). Holiness is consecration to God and separation from the polluting

influences of our culture. Second, as aliens for Jesus, we are to abstain from fleshly desires that war against the soul (2:11). And third, as exiles for Christ, we are to behave honourably among pre-believers so that they may see our good deeds and glorify God (2:12).

Peter does not counsel isolation from society. That makes it more painful. It would be easier to withdraw into a Christian ghetto and escape all the hostility and hatred of the world. But that is not how Jesus lived, nor his disciple Peter. We are in the world, not of the world (JOHN 17:14-18). We are called to witness and win souls with our lives as well as our words. We must constantly resist the temptation to conform to the sinful aspects of our culture for the sake of social acceptance or economic advantage or political capital.

In the movie, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Henry and his son Indiana watch in dismay as the Nazis make a bonfire of books. *My son*, says Henry, *we are pilgrims in an unholy land*.

So are we. We are called to live holy in an unholy world. For God is holy.

- *The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children* (DIETRICH BONHOEFFER). We are the moral conscience of society. We must stand for what is pure, what is true, what is right, what is best for the common good and the long-term good of Singapore. This is our holy calling. This is our sacred responsibility to future generations. Give thanks to God for our leaders who speak out with conviction and lead the Church to make a clear stand on issues of public morality: *The repeal of Section 377A would result in the normalization and promotion of this [homosexual] lifestyle, which in turn would lead to undesirable moral and social consequences, a slippery slope as seen in some countries taking this step* (BISHOP TERRY KEE, NCCS).
- Stand in the gap for future church leaders. In their zeal to win the lost, pray that they will never compromise God's standard of personal purity, public morality, Marriage and Family. War against the temptation to make Christianity more popular and more palatable to an increasingly liberal generation. Pray for a revival of holiness: a fiery passion for our holy God, a prophetic burden to defend Singapore's moral future. Pray for eyes to see LGBT activism for what it really is. A clear and present danger. An attack on humanity. A threat to our nation. A liberal movement that celebrates permissiveness, compromises our core values, damages social cohesion, undermines national sovereignty, threatens the Institution of Marriage and Family, runs roughshod over religious freedom, harms free speech, attacks the freedom of conscience, and endangers public health. *If the Church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority* (MARTIN LUTHER KING JR).
- Are we living holy? Josh McDowell sounds the alarm: *Singapore, we have a porn problem! We might not be looking for porn, but porn is most certainly looking for us. Porn is available, accessible, affordable, anonymous, appealing, aggressive, and addictive. Nobody can grasp how big porn is. There are more than 26 million porn websites now. In a year, over six trillion porn videos are watched worldwide. Cry to God for grace and mercy! We are the second most internet-addicted people in the world* (THE STRAITS TIMES, OCTOBER 2014). A Focus On the Family (Singapore) survey of Christians aged 13 and above found that 69% of 14,000 respondents had viewed porn. Most were introduced to porn in their teens. We need solid discipleship to put our house in order: *Fear of God coupled with friendship with God* (BARNABAS CHONG). Pray!
- Memorize 1 Peter 1:14-16: *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'*

2 PETER 1:13-14 | I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon...

What is your legacy? That question is best left to historians, if history remembers you at all. Most of us will be forgotten. Those who leave the greatest legacies seldom think about such things. Like Peter, they're too busy thinking of others.

From the Sea of Galilee to the See of Rome, Peter was first and foremost a fisher of men (LARRY HELYER). Today more than two billion souls express some degree of allegiance to Jesus. And it all started with a Galilean fisherman who told Jesus to go away (LUKE 5:8). The Master Fisherman would not take no for an answer: *From now on you will be catching men.*

Peter's most lasting legacy is the Church. From Jerusalem to Antioch and finally in Rome, he shepherds the Lord's Flock, not lording over it, but leading by example, humility and servanthood (1 PETER 5:2-5). His life and letters have endowed the Church with a rich and lasting heritage of pastoral care, counsel, and theology. He demonstrates a profound and yet practical concern for the everyday issues of family, work, church, and community. He is a pastor for all peoples, a man for all times.

Peter is Custodian and Steward of the Gospel of the kingdom which he

received from Jesus Christ. Through Mark's Gospel, Peter's speeches in Acts, and his two letters, the Prince of Apostles still speaks the Living Word, feeding the Lord's sheep in every generation to the end of the age.

Peter is the patron saint of second chance discipleship. *Where are you going, Lord?* Peter asked. *Where I am going, you cannot follow now, said Jesus, but you will follow later.* Peter protested: *Why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you* (JOHN 13:36-37). Peter broke that promise. But some 30 years on, he was given another chance.

A second century document offers this account of his death: When he was about to be arrested in Rome, his friends urged him to cut and run. On his way out of the city, he met Jesus going in. He asked: *Where are you going, Lord?* And the Lord answered: *I'm going to be crucified again.*

Convicted, Peter returned to the city. He was arrested by the guards and later sentenced to death on the cross. At his own request, he was crucified upside down, so as not to appear equal to his Master. Let the cock crow at will. Peter has made good on his pledge. Follow him as he followed Christ. You will never have a better legacy than that.

- For centuries, Peter has been the *neglected stepchild* of New Testament scholarship. He has been under-rated and often made fun of in popular preaching. Why do you think this is so? How has your image and appreciation of Peter changed after reading and praying through his journey this 40.Day season?

- Peter has been recognized as the patron saint of second-chance discipleship and a paradigm of transforming grace (MARKUS BOCKMUEHL). Peter also seems more approachable than the Apostle Paul. In what ways have you found Peter easier to relate to and identify with? How has this encouraged you in your journey as a disciple?

- How would you summarize Peter's contribution to the Church Jesus builds and the mission of God in the world? In other words, how has he made a difference? And what difference does this make to you personally?

- Reflect on what you have written above and turn it into prayer. May it be the start of an on-going conversation with God and your fellow disciples.

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-4 | First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Mdm Halimah Yacob
President

Mr Lee Hsien Loong
Prime Minister

Mr Teo Chee Hean
*Senior Minister and
Coordinating Minister for
National Security*

Mr Tharman
Shanmugaratnam
*Senior Minister and
Coordinating Minister for
Social Policies*

Mr Heng Swee Keat
*Deputy Prime Minister
and Minister for Finance*

Mr Khaw Boon Wan
*Coordinating Minister for
Infrastructure and Minister
for Transport*

Dr Ng Eng Hen
Minister for Defence

Dr Vivian Balakrishnan
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Mr K. Shanmugam
*Minister for Home Affairs
and Minister for Law*

Mr Gan Kim Yong
Minister for Health

Mr S. Iswaran
*Minister for Communications
and Information*

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien
*Minister for Culture, Community,
and Youth, Leader of the House*

Mr Chan Chun Sing
Minister for Trade & Industry

Mr Lawrence Wong
*Minister for National
Development and 2nd Minister
for Finance*

Mr Masagos Zulkifli
*Minister for the Environment
& Water Resources*

Mr Ng Chee Meng
Minister, Prime Minister's Office

Mr Ong Ye Kung
Minister for Education

Mrs Josephine Teo
*Minister for Manpower and
2nd Minister for Home Affairs*

Mr Desmond Lee
*Minister for Social and Family
Development and 2nd Minister for
National Development*

Ms Indranee Rajah
*Minister, Prime Minister's Office,
2nd Minister for Finance and 2nd
Minister for Education*

Bless each leader by name. May they *continue to lead decisively with clear-eyed realism* (DPM HENG SWEE KEAT). Speak God's life-giving words and shalom:

■ Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

■ Proverbs 8:14-16

Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have insight, I have power. By me kings reign and rulers issue decrees that are just; by me princes govern, and nobles—all who rule on earth.

■ Proverbs 16:12-13

Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness. Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value the one who speaks what is right.

■ James 3:17

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

■ This National Day, it is good, it is right, and it is pleasing to God that we pray for DPM Heng Swee Keat, the man chosen to lead the Fourth Generation Team as a first among equals. Thank God for preparing Mr Heng so well these many years:

Mr Heng Swee Keat is Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Finance and Member of Parliament for Tampines GRC.

The Ministry of Finance manages the national budget, oversees corporate governance regulations, and supervises the prudent investment and utilization of public funds and government reserves.

Mr Heng co-chaired the Committee on the Future Economy (CFE), which charted the strategies for Singapore's next phase of growth. He chairs the tripartite Future Economy Council, which oversees the implementation of national strategies in areas such as skills and capabilities development, innovation and productivity, and industry transformation.

He is also the Chairman of the National Research Foundation, which sets the direction for Singapore's research, innovation and enterprise strategies.

Before this, Mr Heng served as Minister for Education from 2011 to 2015. He drove programmes for a student-centric, values-driven education system, emphasizing the holistic development of students and multiple educational pathways. While at MOE, Mr Heng also led *Our*

Singapore Conversation, a national consultation exercise that reached out to close to 50,000 Singaporeans on their aspirations for Singapore's future. In 2015, he chaired the Singapore 50 (SG50) Steering Committee leading the celebrations for Singapore's Golden Jubilee.

Prior to entering politics in May 2011, Mr Heng was the Managing Director of the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), where he received the *Central Bank Governor of the Year in Asia-Pacific Award* by the British magazine *The Banker*. He has served in various other public service positions, including appointments in the Singapore Police Force, as the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, as the Chief Executive Officer of the Trade Development Board, and as the Principal Private Secretary to then-Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew from 1997 to 2000. In 2001, Mr Heng was awarded the Gold Medal in Public Administration, and the Meritorious Medal in 2010 for his contribution to the public service in Singapore.

Mr Heng has an MA in Economics from Cambridge University. He also holds a Masters in Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

I remember a few National Days ago, Prime Minister said: ... considering the state of the world today... the most fundamental factor in keeping Singapore exceptional is not good plans or adequate resources; it is whether we remain united.

I agree with Prime Minister's take. There's so much wisdom packed in those few words. I believe one of the simplest and most endearing expressions of national unity is good neighbourliness. By this I mean being kind and gracious, friendly and helpful to people living next door to us. Ninety percent of Singaporeans live in high rise dwellings, in close proximity to each other. Above us, below us, or just down the corridor, are precious families and unique individuals, each one created in the image of God and deeply loved by God.

Good neighbourliness is next to godliness. I believe that in so far as it depends on us, Christians should set the example. Set the pace. Set the tone. Practise the Golden Rule: Do to others as you would have others do to you. Together, we can build the best nation of good neighbours and make Singapore truly *A Home with Hope and Heart*.

We thank God that this vision is a national felt need, a hope, and a dream shared by many. We see growing efforts to achieve this noble goal. For example, the recently-launched national movement called Singapore Cares, *encouraging all Singaporeans to play a part, big and small, to make Singapore a more caring and inclusive home for all*. This is a timely call, an urgent call. Singapore is vulnerable in a world of confusion. More than ever before, we must care, we must value our neighbours and look out for them.

To this end, LoveSingapore is stepping forward to do our part: We are renewing one of our earlier initiatives appropriately named *Good Neighbour Day*. We resonate with the urgent call to unite and strengthen our communities. We stand in full-hearted agreement that there's really no better occasion for Good Neighbour Day than National Day itself. *Count on me, Singapore*.

National Day 2019—a Good Neighbour Day—is, therefore, a fresh call to love Singapore and to seek her shalom. It's a great way to reinforce our Nationhood, our Citizenship, our Religious Harmony, our Social Cohesion, and our Social Defence. It's a strong note for an urgent time of disruptive trends. Good neighbours are every community's first line of defence!

HOW do we celebrate this Good Neighbour Day?

The information on the right explains. This little gesture of good neighbourliness is simple enough for ALL to participate. At heart, Christians care. Christians from all walks of life want to shine for Jesus where they live. Good Neighbour Day 2019 is a good excuse to express it simply yet meaningfully, personally yet nationally—as ONE! Shalom Singapore.

Lawrence Khong
LOVESINGAPORE CHAIRMAN

NATIONAL DAY 2019



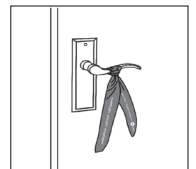
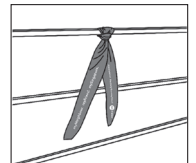
Good Neighbour Day 2019

GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS:

A tie that binds. A bond that builds.

- A ground-up initiative by Singaporeans for Singaporeans to practise and promote good neighbourliness as an expression of national unity.
- Mark your commitment by tying the red door tie to the front gate or door of your home.
- Take it a step further. Acknowledge your next door neighbours. Send greetings over with the special Thank You card: *Happy National Day! Thank You for being our Good Neighbours*. At the back of the card, write a brief note to affirm and appreciate your neighbours.

HOW TO USE THE RED TIE



HOW TO FAST

You are free to fast however the Spirit leads you. Here are some options:

Total Fast

■ Abstain from solid foods and beverages for 24 hours. Take only water.

Partial Fast

■ Abstain from solid foods for an extended part of the day. Take only water. You may fast from sunrise to sundown or from breakfast to afternoon tea.

1-Meal Fast

■ Sacrifice one full meal a day.

Beverage Fast

■ Abstain from solid foods for 24 hours. Take only water and liquid foods such as milk, milo or other health beverages.

Daniel Fast

■ Abstain from meats and other favourite delicacies. Take only small portions of fresh vegetables, fruit and juices. You may practise this as a 40.Day routine. Or as Daniel 1:12 suggests, do a ten-day fast.

Esther Fast

■ Abstain from solid foods for 24 hours for three days (ESTHER 4:16).

HOW TO ENJOY FASTING

■ Set aside time each day to seek God in prayer with fasting. It may be half an hour or one hour or more.

■ Adopt an attitude of prayer as you go about your daily duties at home, at work or at school. Apply what you've learned in tangible actions.

■ Scale down your normal activities. Avoid rigorous exercise such as rock-climbing, cycling or jogging.

■ Be alert. Besides fasting from food, fast from things that distract, such as TV, social media, cybergames, or things that destroy such as coarse jesting or careless words.

■ Break your fast gradually and wisely. For health reasons, you should consume small portions as you break fast, avoiding chilli or acidic foods as much as possible.

HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER GUIDE

■ Each day, first read the Scripture passage. Then, read the devotional. Don't rush. Pause to reflect.

■ Read and study the prayer prompters. Pray fervently. Pray as the Spirit leads. Stop to listen and wait for impressions from the Spirit. Record them in your personal journal. *Whatever he says to you, just do it.*

HOW TO INVOLVE OTHERS

Fasting together as a group is easier than doing it alone.

■ Family

Commit to fast and pray as a family. Decide on the type of fast everyone is comfortable with. Use this 40.Day prayer guide for your family devotion.

■ Neighbours

Find out who are the Christians in your block. Get together as often as possible to pray. Prayerwalk your community.

■ Cell Group

Get more copies of this 40.Day prayer guide for your cell members. As a group, commit to a specific type of fast. Throughout this 40.Day period, yearn for personal transformation and national transformation. Ask God to use your group to be his mouthpiece and his outstretched hands at home, at work, on campus, and in the community.

■ Friends

In this super-wired city, prayer is easier than ever before. Keep a daily prayer appointment with a friend via social media. Send reminders via whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SMS, At the agreed time, connect to pray!

■ Office

Encourage colleagues to fast as a group. Use tea breaks or lunch breaks to pray together. Follow the 40.Day prayer guide. Rally others in your same office block to fast and pray together.

■ Morning Prayer

Daily. 6.30am to 8.30am. Kum Yan Methodist Church. Level 7. Nearest MRT Station: Bras Basah | Take Exit A.

■ City@Prayer

July 1 to August 8: Mondays to Fridays. 12.30pm to 1.30pm. St Andrew's Cathedral.

CREDITS

Scripture quotations are mostly from The English Standard Version.

Verses quoted in italics are often paraphrased from multiple English translations (NRSV, NLT, NIV, NKJV, etc.) in consultation with the Greek text. Key resource: Markus Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, Baker Publishing Group, 2012.

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Please write to LoveSingapore:

fortyday.2019@lovesingapore.org.sg

lovesingapore

fortyday.2019@lovesingapore.org.sg

hotline 91371982