

Follow Jesus, Call on Him, Serve with Him



By Pastor Ivan Leung

As we welcome the New Year, we are reminded of Paul's words "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:13b - 14) Dear brothers and sisters, by the grace of our Lord, let us forget our past hurts, failures, and successes; let us move towards deepening our relationship with Christ; and live exuberantly for His glory.

Our church theme for 2012 is "Follow Jesus, Call on Him, Serve with Him". According to the Elders Board, the emphasis of the theme is to continue to carry out the goal of building up people: caring for the unsaved, nurturing new believers, training up disciples, building up leaders, etc. Building up people is one of the core values of our church, but more importantly, it is close to Jesus' heart.

Follow Jesus

In the eyes of God, people are more valuable than ministries. Today's churches keep on seeking better methods, but God is seeking better people. One of Jesus' missions on earth was to train up people. He wanted to mentor a group of committed and faithful followers. Moreover, these followers were willing to carry out His great commission and trained up others to become followers of Christ. Therefore, it was Jesus' desire to build up the followers' spiritual lives, so that their lives could impact others' spiritual growth.

Before Jesus' ascension, He poured out His heart in a command to us: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matt 28:19) The Lord Jesus has given us the core message of The Great Commission - "make disciples of all nations".

In the past, Jesus modeled Himself in granting The Great Commission. First He trained up His disciples, then He charged the 12 disciples to "make disciples of all nations". Today, let us imitate our Lord's example to carry out The Great Commission - to be His followers, and at the same time lead others to become followers of Christ.

Willow Creek Community Church is one of the most influential churches in the United States. They have a congregation of over 20,000. At the 2007 Leaders' Conference, Rev. Bill Hybels shared about their church's self-evaluation report named REVEAL. This report was completed through a survey questionnaire to reflect on how the church's past resources were utilized to achieve the mission of the church: to lead a non-believer to become a follower of Christ.

One of the questions in the survey was "How effective is the church in ministering to the people at 'different stages'?" The 'different stages' were described as "seekers", "new converts", "growing Christians" and "faithful followers of Christ". The survey results indicated that many of the different church meetings were helpful to "seekers" and "new converts". But the "faithful followers of Christ" were not getting much help from the meetings. The responses from these committed Christians indicated that they were in much need of

spiritual discipline/challenge and 'solid food'.

After 30 years of pastoral ministry, Rev. Hybels finally realized that the most effective way to help the believers to grow spiritually is not to spend thousands of dollars and resources on 'entertaining' programs, but to teach the believers to practise the basic spiritual disciplines. He stressed that - "We should remind the new believers and growing Christians that they are responsible to be spiritual 'self-feeders'. We should also teach them how to study the Bible daily and actively practise our spiritual disciplines." If a believer learns how to be drawn close to God, study the Bible, pray fervently and share the gospel, his spiritual life will surely blossom.

Call On Him

Prayer connects the entire life of Jesus on earth. He started His ministry with prayers (Luke 3:21, 4:1-15) and He finished His ministry with a prayer (Luke 23:46). In His busy life, He did not forget to pray. On the contrary, when Jesus was most busy, He made special efforts to find time to quiet down and pray (Matt 14:23). This is a good reminder for us: when we are busy with meetings, we decide not to attend prayer meetings, thus neglect to pray! Jesus admonishes us: the busier we are, the more we need to pray, so that we will not be troubled and unsettled because of our busyness. Conversely, we should remind ourselves the reason behind the busyness and renew our strength. Have a goal, have a sense of direction in serving our Lord.

Brothers and sisters, God's son, Jesus valued prayer in His life on earth. Today, as followers of

Christ, shouldn't we follow His example and learn to pray about everything? The core value of the Christian and Missionary Alliance is "we do nothing until we pray". As we face the New Year, let us commit to God the future direction of VCAC as well as the needs of our brothers and sisters. Let us be united, pray earnestly; starting from our own personal prayer life, and extend it to participate in small group, fellowship and church prayer meetings.

Serve With Him

Jesus' earthly ministry was more than training and building up His disciples' lives. He also cared about His neighbours' needs (Matt 9:35-36). The Lord Jesus "shared the gospel with the poor" (Luke 4:18). He "set the people free, helped the blind to see, and released those who are oppressed. He said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

Jesus is the Lord who cares holistically. His gospel message is holistic. May our attitude be the same as that of Christ Jesus and imitate His examples - to care for the people around us holistically - our neighbours, friends, colleague, schoolmates, relatives etc. May His love dwell in us and mould our lives. With the outpouring of this love, we are motivated to live for Christ, to serve others and share the message of peace to this troubled generation.

God has given our church a vision - to be a worshipping, loving and growing community that reflects the beauty of Jesus Christ to transform our community and the world. What does this vision mean to you? This vision belongs not

only to our pastoral staff and elders, it is given by God to every member of our church. In the coming year, may we continue to seek after the fulfilment of this vision in becoming a worshipping, growing and loving community of Christ.

We do not know what the future holds, but we surely know that God holds tomorrow. Brothers and sisters, no matter how smooth or bumpy our future days may be, let us pray that God will grant us a heart of serenity. May the following prayer express our total trust in God.

The Serenity Prayer

Reinhold Niebuhr, 1892-1971

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway
to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;

Trusting that He will make all
things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in
this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.