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A JOURNEY IN LIFE



PART 2: DEVELOPING IN LIFE

VOLUME 1: The process of Life

Lim Liong

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Front Cover Photograph: This White-bellied sea-eagle makes its morning flight in search of food that will perish, as its existence is temporal. Are we following the same path or will we be spiritual eagles who will seek for the spiritual food that will bring us eternal life with value for eternity? The eagle needs food to grow and be strong in flight. Do we seek for food that will help us to develop true moral and spiritual strength for our spiritual flight in this world and beyond?

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A JOURNEY IN LIFE

Dear reader,

This volume is not for sale. It is made available as a gift to all who want to read it. If it helps to bring long-lasting meaning to your life, it has fulfilled its purpose. It is written for those who are seeking for meaning and quality in life and who are willing to spend time and effort to find out and live accordingly.

This volume is part of the book, A Journey in Life, which is written in three parts.

In **Part 1**, we look at how we can find moral and spiritual life and begin the journey of discovery and growth. It is written in simpler English so that children too may join in this journey. This part is written in the form of a series of **booklets**.

In **Part 2**, we consider the struggles, difficulties, pains and disappointments as well as the sense of fulfilment in the process of growing up morally and spiritually. This part is presented in several **volumes**.

In **Part 3**, we ponder over the infinite potential of moral and spiritual excellence when the heart is pure and we see God in His transcendent glory and we transcend the petty self-considerations and the vanity of this world. This part is transmitted through various **compositions**.

A JOURNEY IN LIFE

PART 2: DEVELOPING IN LIFE

In Part 2, we consider the struggles, difficulties, pain and disappointments as well as the sense of fulfilment in the process of growing up morally and spiritually. The issues considered include overcoming the temptations of this world, the attacks of the evil one and the wrongful desires of the self-centred life, as well as the development of moral and spiritual substance in our being.

As we make progress in our lives, we become more conscious of moral and spiritual principles that we need to abide by in order to grow well and to be kept safe from the wiles of the evil one. As we seek to develop true quality in our moral and spiritual being and deep oneness with God, a healthy spirit of humility and eagerness to learn and live by “every word that proceeds forth from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4: 4) are essential for continued healthy growth to maturity and stability.

The contents of these volumes are presented in a straightforward and direct manner and should be received with an equally straightforward and honest response of the heart. Do read prayerfully, and focus on how we can effectively develop long-term moral and spiritual quality in our being.

VOLUME 1: The process of Life

Chapter 1: Growing pains

After I responded to the Lord and found His forgiveness and life (this was shared in Booklet 2), I experienced a sense of peace and joy in my heart. However, in the next few years, my faith in God did not grow much. I remained immature and weak in my personal knowledge of God.

One day in school, one of my friends asked me, “I notice that Christians are eager to witness to other people, to share with non-Christians what they believe in. Why is it that I do not see you doing that?” I replied, “I think I would do more harm than good if I were to do that.” Although I had responded to God’s grace and received His forgiveness, I was at that time unsure and unstable in my walk with Him. I had known His peace in my heart, but I felt rather lost in this new phase in my life. I could not honestly say that my life was filled with ‘peace and joy’.

I could carry on with my daily responsibilities, relate with friends and concentrate on my studies in school. I found daily activities enjoyable but something was missing within my heart. Although I believed in God, He was not deeply real and personal in my daily life. I had not yet known the liberating

richness of the meaning and purpose in life that He intends for us. I seemed to be merely existing day by day in this world without a clear and strong direction in life. I knew that unless my faith in the Lord became deeply meaningful and stable, I could not share with others the message of the gospel with depth of conviction and reality. I would be transmitting words without significant spiritual substance and life.

I was not distressed by any major difficulty or problem in my life. However, my heart was heavy as I knew that there was much more meaning in life that was not yet real within my heart. I did not spend much time in prayer or reading of the Scriptures as I did not know how to do so meaningfully, but I clearly remember that I prayed to God regularly, possibly every day. It was a specific and short prayer that I prayed over and over again as it expressed the deepest longing of my heart. Usually, before I slept, I would pray, "O God, please give me a meaningful life." There was nothing specific that I wanted, but I knew that I wanted true and deep meaning in life. I did not know what that would mean, but I asked God to bring it about in my life.

I am deeply grateful to God for granting my simple and earnest request. The meaningfulness of life that He has brought into my heart has surpassed my greatest hopes and longings. He helped me to

appreciate that a life of purity of heart and deep oneness with the morally perfect God is the most meaningful and fulfilling life that a moral being can ever wish for and develop. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (**Matthew 5: 8**) has become increasingly meaningful. It is a life of the deepest peace and the highest level of freedom in the heart in all situations of this life and beyond. God has offered this quality of life to all who honestly count the cost and decisively give up all to follow Him. As I seek to continue to learn from the Lord, I will also seek, by His enabling, to share what I have benefited.

In the midst of seeking to grow in the Lord, many a Christian discovers that the initial phase of peace and joy in the Lord does not continue. Often, problems and pain destroy his peace and dampen his joy in the Lord, bringing dismay and discouragement, while exciting things in the world bring a substitute and superficial peace and joy, often accompanied by guilt and loss of meaning in life.

The following are some developments that may take place in some form or other in his life.

When a situation of pain and danger arises, fear and self-preservation lead to faltering in his faith in the Lord and compromise in his loyalty to Him. In the midst of the storm, his peace is shattered and his

confidence is shaken, bringing searching questions on the quality of his commitment. He finds himself unable to cope with the pressures and uncertainties of this world, and feels insecure and sorrowful.

The contentment of knowing the Lord and the joy of walking with Him are also challenged by alluring temptations from this world. Enjoyable experiences and exciting events, the power of wealth and the approval and praise of men draw him away from abiding in the Lord and His righteousness. In the midst of laughter and enjoyment, a sense of guilt and failure grows in his heart. He goes through times of depression as he feels overwhelmed by this world and laments his helplessness and poor testimony.

As he struggles to improve his spiritual state, he seeks to take his stand for the Lord, and finds himself ridiculed and isolated and jeered. In his efforts to be kind and helpful, he realizes that others do not respond in like manner but malign and mock him in his faith. They view him as a person 'without a backbone' who needs the crutch of believing in a God whom they declare does not exist, since 'scientific evidence shows that there is no God'. He feels lonely and tormented and cries out to God for help, but the problems do not go away.

In the midst of his struggles, God seems far

away and at times he questions whether his faith in God is well-founded. Is he living on the basis of an illusion? Does God really exist, or is this just wishful thinking? Is there ultimate reality and final justice? Why not join the crowd and enjoy the 'freedom' others have, without constantly restraining and restricting himself, and depriving himself of the enjoyment of this world? Is it worthwhile to pursue this path of holiness?

From time to time he receives encouragement from the Lord, as He helps him in his difficulties and answers his prayers in time of need. However, this is soon forgotten in the midst of suffering and pain that seem to be increasing in frequency and intensity. He wonders if God truly cares for him. At times he grumbles and complains that God is not fair to him in allowing him to go through so much suffering.

In his distress, he looks around him and perceives that other Christians do not seem to be suffering as much as he is. Many seem so happy in their faith and appreciated by others. It seems that God favours them while he is neglected. This view increases his sense of frustration and he wallows in self-pity, lamenting his miserable circumstances.

The situations described above are some manifestations of 'growing pains' in our spiritual

development, rather similar to what often happens in the natural realm, when pleasant memories of carefree childhood are replaced by traumatic experiences of less sheltered youth as we face realities of life in shouldering greater personal responsibilities in the process of development towards adulthood.

In spiritual development, we see three stages mentioned in **1 John 2: 12-14**: the “little children”, the “fathers” and the “young men”. In this passage, the spiritual associations imply that these terms refer to their spiritual stature. The “little children” have come to know God as their Father, having found forgiveness and life - they have been born again spiritually. They have the potential to become “fathers”, who have developed a deep personal knowledge of the eternal sovereign God and oneness with Him. This process of growth passes through the stage of “young men”, who are strong and are able to overcome the evil one. The path involves difficulties and opposition, which often bring pain and suffering. They equip us to stand firm in the storms of life, as we develop deep convictions of our own and grow strong in the Lord. Some aspects of these ‘growing pains’ are an integral part of our process of learning and growth towards maturity, such as difficult environment and spiritual opposition. Other aspects are the result of failure to respond well in this process and are commonly present in the process of learning and growth. In the

spiritual realm, such 'growing pains' can continue to be experienced even after many years as a Christian.

The varied situations of life that we experience, including pain and difficulties, are very valuable not only for developing quality of character but also in bringing forth another aspect of deep meaningfulness and great beauty: the depth and richness of the uniqueness of each one of us. We see the beauty of character in Daniel and Paul. In addition, we can also appreciate the meaningfulness of their lives as unique persons. I was deeply impressed by the beauty of our uniqueness when I took a train journey from Adelaide to Perth during a university vacation, travelling for about two days across arid land for a distance of more than a thousand kilometres. Whenever I looked out of the window, I saw vast stretches of eucalyptus trees. Occasionally, a hare or a wallaby darted across the scene, but it was what could have been perceived as monotonous, unvarying and boring scenery. However, prior to that journey, I had entered into a deeper and more meaningful relationship with God, and when I looked out of the window, I marvelled at the beauty of God's creation. What impressed me most strikingly was the observation and realization that each eucalyptus tree was different from the others around it. Some trees were tall; others were short. There were those with many leaves and others with few leaves. Some were bent in a certain direction

while others were bent in other directions. There were many other features, which showed the vast range of patterns and specific variations. Each tree was unique and had its own beauty. When I returned home, this was also clearly and beautifully evident in the many different kinds of trees that I could see around me.

Each tree, whether eucalyptus or coconut tree, is unique and has its own beauty



I pondered over the uniqueness of each tree in the physical realm and was filled with wonder and joy as I thought of the uniqueness of each one of us in the moral and spiritual realm. God has created each one of us as distinct individuals, with the power to make

our own moral choices and with vast potential for great good, but also capable of grave evil. In His grace and wisdom, He watches over us and seeks to test us and train us through varied situations of life. Our distinctiveness as unique individuals grows as we make our choices in the different situations that we go through. Although each tree is unique, we recognize that they are all trees. So too, while each one of us is unique, we are all moral human beings. In the midst of our distinctiveness, if we respond well, each in our own context, we become morally and spiritually beautiful people, with the character of the Lord Jesus manifested in each one of us.

God knows each one of us personally. The Lord Jesus tells us that the sheep know the voice of the true shepherd and he “calls his own sheep by name and leads them forth”. He then referred to Himself as the good shepherd who not only knows His sheep deeply and personally but who also lays down His life for the sheep because of His love for them (**John 10: 1-18**). In His care for us, God leads us through or allows us to go through many varied situations of life, including painful times as well as pleasant times. If we respond well through such times, we grow in the quality of our being and the rich uniqueness of our personal lives. We should be careful not to compete with others or compare the circumstances of our lives and question how God has dealt with each one of us. Instead, we

should be grateful to God for seeking to help every one of us to develop our potential to the highest level in our contexts. When the Lord Jesus told the apostle Peter to follow Him, instead of concentrating on a deep personal response to the Lord, Peter asked the Lord what would happen to the apostle John. The Lord Jesus replied, "If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me" (**John 21: 15-23**). How God decides to deal with different ones is not easy for us to appreciate when we do not know in depth the contexts of their lives. We should carefully and prayerfully concentrate on what is relevant to us and not be distracted and negatively affected by unhealthy curiosity or comparisons with others. We can then meaningfully look forward to whatever the Lord desires us to learn in all situations.

Is this your experience?

In your spiritual journey, did you go through (are you still going through) the phase of 'growing pains'? What was (is) your response?

Do you think that we can skip this phase and enter into a life of strength and stability immediately after we are born again? What is the reason?

If you only want peace but not pain,

You have to learn again and again!

Chapter 2: Why so much pain?

Why has God placed us in a world where there is so much pain and suffering, disappointments and frustrations as well as such powerful temptations?

Sometimes, we may wish that we could be spiritual without pain and difficulties. Could we not ask God to help us to be morally good and beautiful without having to go through the painful process of growth? As we prayerfully ponder over what is good and meaningful in life, we may realize that it is unlikely for us to develop deep, strong and lasting moral quality if we experience only easy situations. Can we develop such moral quality if we do not want the painful process of denying ourselves (**Luke 9: 23**)? If we do not go through difficulties in life, we may still appear good and strong and beautiful, but it is likely to be only an appearance, an outward form, with little valuable moral and spiritual substance in our being.

One day, while walking, my attention was drawn towards a surprising sight of beautiful oranges on a tree. I had not expected to see oranges in that context. Walking nearer, the difference between the tree and the 'oranges' became obvious. The tree was beautifully alive, with green leaves and crimson flowers, but the 'oranges' were lifeless pieces of plastic tied to branches of the tree by pieces of metal wire.

Beautiful oranges



Beauty without life



If we want a quick process to develop well, to appear beautiful without going through much pain and problems, we may become like these artificial oranges. They look like beautiful oranges but in substance they are plastic material produced in a factory that can manufacture thousands of such 'oranges' within a very short time, compared with the whole process of growing an orange tree. A factory production line does not require the effort of planting the tree, adding fertilizer, dealing with pests, ensuring enough water and harvesting at the right time. The 'oranges' may appear beautiful but of what value are they for our physical well-being? Who would buy such an 'orange' if he wants to eat a nutritious fruit?

Likewise, who would value and trust a person who appears attractive in outward form but on close examination, lacks or has very little moral and spiritual life and quality in the heart? In **Matthew 23: 27, 28**, the Lord Jesus likened the hypocritical Pharisees to graves that had been whitewashed. They appeared beautiful outwardly but within them, they were filled with the bones of dead men and all uncleanness. The Pharisees wanted the approval and praise of men and they wanted to appear beautiful morally. They were willing to spend many hours reading the Scriptures but they were not willing to go through the painful process of submission to God's

teaching and discipline. As such they could not be transformed in their character to become truly beautiful in their heart. Likewise, many of the rulers believed in the Lord Jesus but they were not prepared to be identified with Him because of fear of the Pharisees. They preferred the easier path and they valued the approval of men more than the approval of God (**John 12: 42, 43**). Many Christians today may also profess deep love for God and appear sincere and spiritual, and while their testimonies and efforts may transmit 'technically correct' words and expressions, there may be very little spiritual life and vitality. In times of stress and pain, when the self is hurt, the free flow of words of praise for God may turn into streams of complaint, grumbling and bitterness, transmitting spiritual negativeness and death.

If you want enduring quality in a house that can withstand fierce storms, would you build a grass hut? Would you not ensure that you lay a deep and stable foundation and build with solid and strong material? In the spiritual realm this is also true. The Lord Jesus tells us that if we want to withstand the storms of life, we must dig deep and lay a good foundation, building our house upon the rock (**Luke 6: 47, 48**). In spiritual reality, it means the preparedness to live by what God has revealed to us, regardless of what it costs us, however difficult the path may be, and whatever pain and problems this would bring to our lives.

In olden days, strong castles were very important for defence from enemies. They were difficult to build and difficult to attack and subdue. However, there are other kinds of 'castles' that can be built rapidly and appear beautiful but can also be destroyed rapidly.

This beautiful castle of sand was built rapidly but was also demolished rapidly



This is similar to the plants that sprout rapidly but wither and dry up just as rapidly in the heat of the sun because they have not grown deep roots in the rocky ground due to a lack of soil (**Matthew 13: 5, 6**,

20, 21). A superficial and emotional response in our commitment to God does not equip us to endure in times when there is a cost to our expression of faith.

In **1 Corinthians 3: 11-15**, the apostle Paul tells us that after we have become Christians, we must be careful how we build - whether we build with “gold, silver and precious stones” or with “wood, grass and stubble”. This refers to the moral and spiritual quality of what we have done in our lives. We can easily obtain “wood, grass and stubble”, but great effort and perseverance and focus are needed in order to build with “gold, silver and precious stones” in the spiritual realm. The level of purity of gold is often related to the degree of fire and refining that has taken place. If we want to produce quality in what we do, we must first learn to develop quality in what we are, and this is related to the degree of spiritual refining that we have undergone, in the midst of pain and fire.

A major principle in life is that to be strong and stable, we must learn to withstand opposition. If what we believe is never challenged, if what we seek for can be easily obtained, we may not know what it means to develop deep convictions and values that we are ‘willing to die for’ (**Revelation 12: 11**).

In His infinite wisdom and sovereign greatness, God has allowed the evil one and the powers of

darkness to remain in this world so that our choices will be challenged and tested. In order to overcome the evil one and his wiles, we must stand firm in our commitment to God and develop deep moral quality in our being. We must also learn to be alert and prayerful and walk in the light of God's ways.

When it is dark, we may not see clearly



The evil one operates most effectively in the darkness and his dominion, or realm of authority, is described as the “dominion of darkness” (**Colossians 1: 13**). The evil one can inflict damage to our moral character if we allow him, in situations that may not be so obviously dangerous to us. This can easily occur

when we walk in the darkness because we are afraid of the light of God (**John 3: 19-21**). However, when we “walk in the light” (**1 John 1: 7**) and are prayerful and vigilant, we will be able to detect his presence and activity more readily and overcome him with the Lord’s enabling.

Light exposes what is in the dark



Walking in the light involves living by the light of the revelation and ways of God and this leads to a life of moral and spiritual light and life in our being. It requires an honest heart that is prepared to come to the light of God in order to be taught and corrected rather than hide in the darkness of dishonesty and

self-justification. The evil one is cunning and deceptive and unless we are alert and keep close to God at all times, we may not realize that he is at work in the darkness and we may draw near to him and follow his ways without recognizing it in our hearts.

We may wonder why it is so easy to go our own way even when we sincerely desire what is good and we appreciate God in His moral perfection. The primary reason is the way we make our choices. What forms the basis for our decisions? If our choices are made solely on the basis of what is morally good and pleasing to God, we will not go our own way but we will be steadfast in following God and His ways. However, to a very large extent, we often make our choices on the basis of what we like rather than what is right. We often choose what is tastier rather than what is healthier. We often choose on the basis of feeling rather than meaning, passing pleasures rather than eternal spiritual treasures. In minor issues this may not be seriously amiss morally, but if this way is characteristic of our way of life, it will set the moral direction of our hearts, with serious consequences.

If following God always means comfort and enjoyment in this world, we would readily choose to follow God, but if we do so, would we develop deep quality in our character? The Jews were keen to follow the Lord Jesus when they saw Him feeding the

five thousand. Instead of being deeply pleased, the Lord Jesus said to them, “Truly truly I say to you, you seek Me not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were satisfied. Do not labour for the food that is perishing, but for the food that endures to everlasting life, which the Son of man will give you...” (**John 6: 26, 27**). The Jews were enthusiastic in following the Lord Jesus because of material benefits that they wanted to receive from Him and not because they recognized Him to be God’s Anointed One whom they should submit to and follow. This approach is not uncommon among believers who long for pleasant and enjoyable circumstances in this world and look to God to provide such circumstances for them according to His almighty power. They may even view material prosperity as an indication of their spirituality, a sign of God’s blessing on a life of faithfulness. As God owns “the cattle on a thousand hills” (**Psalms 50: 10**), so these “cattle” should also belong to His children, so they reason. While at times God may bless us with material things when He is pleased with us, it is improper and dangerous to view material prosperity as implying spiritual blessedness.

The Lord Jesus reminds us that a slave is not greater than his master and if we are His slaves, we should be prepared to follow Him wherever this may lead us. He tells us “foxes have holes and birds of the

sky have nests but the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head" (**Luke 9: 58**). Do we still want to follow Him? He also says "if they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also" (**John 15: 20**). Would we recoil, and withdraw from being associated with Him if it means persecution and pain? On the other hand, it does not mean that painful situations are always the most helpful for our lives. The apostle Paul went through times of ease as well as times of pain, times of appreciation by men as well as times of persecution, misrepresentation and false accusations. Through all these, he loved God and remained faithful to Him, bringing life to his exhortation: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (**Philippians 4: 4**).

We must decide what we want: the temporal or the eternal, the self-centred or the God-centred, the self-seeking or the self-giving, the pleasures of sin or the treasures of heaven, to feel good or to be good? What kind of faith portrays your life?

Faith - is this? (Song)

*When the sun shone very gently,
And the sea breeze blew tenderly,
Business flourishing, friends approving,
His heart was glad, freely rejoicing.
"Thank You, Lord!" he said, looking above,
"Truly You are such a God of love!"*

*The storm arose; the fierce winds blew.
Business collapsed; his friends grew few.
He gave up his Bible and time of prayer,
For "These," he said, "bring me no favour!"
"How very bitter is life to me,
How unkind is God I can now see!"*

*O my friend, is your faith like that?
Is your life based on what you can get?
Have you not the Lord truly met?
How deeply He loves you, and yet!
His holiness will always abide,
Whatever men's selfish appetite!*

*Though the fig tree should not blossom,
And your suffering you cannot fathom,
Seek His kingdom first and His righteousness,
And trust His love and faithfulness!
Loving God each day, in pain and ease,
Faith is alive, with such joy and peace!*

(The Lord willing, this song will be available in audio form on the web site:
<http://www.ajourneyinlife.org>)

In **Matthew 6: 25-33**, the Lord Jesus tells us if we were to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, God will take care of our basic material

needs in this world. In **Luke 18: 22**, He told the rich man that if he were to follow His instruction to sell all he had and give to the poor, he would have treasure in heaven. If we genuinely give up our lives to live for God, we can confidently trust Him that in His love and faithfulness He will always take care of us: not only our basic temporal needs, but more importantly, our eternal well-being.

What do we value in life? Do we want the Lord and His kingdom and His holiness or would we yield to the deceptive and tempting offer of the world that the evil one brings to us? Our choice will decide our eternal destiny: where we will be and what we will be.

Is it worthwhile?

Do you think that pain and problems are a meaningful context for development of quality of character? Have you benefited from such times?

Are times of ease and pleasure helpful for your development or are they a danger? In what ways?

What is the main reason for our going our own way? How can we correct this problem? Does this issue make a difference to the temptations that we face?

If for what we believe we do not stand to fight,

What we are will not radiate pure and divine light!

Chapter 3: The path of freedom

How can we grow well and find true freedom in our hearts in the midst of difficulties, suffering and pain, including spiritual opposition, afflictions and temptations in this world?

The overriding principle for our lives

The life of the apostle Paul helps us to see how we can find a life of meaning and freedom in the midst of suffering, pain and temptations. When he said, “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (**Philippians 1: 21**), he shared from his heart what he had given his life for. This spiritual reality in his heart led to his praying “without ceasing”, enabled him to overcome the evil one and caused him to rejoice at all times, while developing deep quality in his character and his fellowship with God. As we learn to live in like manner, we too will find the path of freedom and meaning in the Lord. Let us ponder over the various issues that we face in this world as we seek to grow.

The problems we face

The crushing weight of the stresses of life and the powerful temptations in this world can easily distress us and overwhelm us. Though we desire to be faithful to God and want to be holy, it is very easy to follow the spirit of the world. We should therefore

seek to understand what is so dangerously present in this world that even Demas, a co-worker of the apostle Paul, “loving this current age”, deserted Paul in the midst of spiritual ministry (**2 Timothy 4: 10**).

The apostle John tells us what is in the world that we must reject: “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life” (**1 John 2: 16**). This describes the way of life that man chooses in this world when he is not submitted to God. If we follow the world, we become enemies of God (**James 4: 4**).

When we begin our life in this world as moral beings, we may be bewildered by the unfamiliar, the unknown and the complex issues of life. At the same time, there may arise within us a growing excitement as we discover the enjoyment that this world offers us. From an early age, many children eagerly seek for things that they like rather than what is good and this approach to life often continues until old age. This involves urges of bodily appetites (“the lust of the flesh”) such as eating and other sensual inclinations; desires aroused by what they can see with their eyes and imagine with their thoughts (“the lust of the eyes”) such as covetousness; and seeking greatness in earthly abilities and achievements (“the vainglory of life”) such as worldly wisdom and glory. These areas correspond with Eve’s experience when she was tempted in the Garden of Eden. She saw the fruit

from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as “good for food”, “a delight to the eyes” and “desirable to make one wise” and she ate it (**Genesis 3: 6**).

The effectiveness of these areas of temptation can be seen in the contrast between the feeble efforts we make to be morally good and the eagerness with which we seek for the things of this world. Many are spiritually weak and frail because they do not hunger and thirst after righteousness, but they may hunger and thirst after delicious food and drink to satisfy “the lust of the flesh”. Many explain that they “have no time” to read the Scriptures because of busyness at work, while many hours may be squandered away indulging in exciting activities in this world that promote “the lust of the eyes”, including absorbing computer games, novels, films, sight-seeing travels and addictive programmes from the television set. (Some of these activities may be meaningful at times, but they can also draw us away from God when we are weak in self-discipline.) Many are lethargic and half-hearted in seeking to please God, but they go to great lengths to please themselves, striving after “the vainglory of life” as they pursue personal ambitions, seeking for greatness and recognition in this world.

The evil one is actively and powerfully at work in the temptations we face in this world. He exploits the self-seeking desires in our hearts by intensifying

the lure of the things in the world as well as by inflicting pain and suffering if we choose the path of righteousness. He works extensively in the realm of emotions and thoughts, including dreams and visions, to draw us towards fleshly enjoyment while providing excuses for us to justify our self-centred way of life. In the midst of his cunning deceptiveness, deep roots of the self-life can grow slowly in our hearts without our clear consciousness of the corruption taking place. This occurs in obvious forms of a worldly life as well as in apparently spiritual activities where self-seeking continues in less obvious ways and in mixed motives.

God's provisions to help us

God in His grace has made every provision for our well-being such that we may know not only the power to overcome temptations, but even more importantly, the power to develop moral and spiritual beauty in our being, in oneness with Him. The apostle Peter tells us we can become partakers of the divine nature because of what God has provided for us (**2 Peter 1: 1-8**). We can develop quality of moral and spiritual character as we receive His life. We can know the law of the Spirit of life that sets us free from the law of sin and of death (**Romans 8: 2**). These expressions are very attractive to us and we may dwell on the potential of such a life. However, we may not realize that God's provision of His life and

power will not help us unless we live by what He has declared through the Lord Jesus in **Luke 9: 23**: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and let him follow Me”. If we cling on to our lives, to live according to our own desires and ideas and abilities instead of learning from God and submitting to Him and depending on Him, we will be walking according to the flesh. We will then ultimately lose our lives in terms of the true meaning and worth of our being. The apostle Paul explains in **Romans 8: 13**, “For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the practices of the body, you shall live”. God has provided the Holy Spirit for us, not for personal enjoyment of power, but to help us to know Him personally and deeply, in a life of holiness.

In the initial years after my response to the Lord, I was troubled by uncertainty in my personal knowledge of God. I did not know how to live by His power in my daily life. During a message preached at a Christian meeting, the Lord helped me to recognize my need to know the power of the Holy Spirit in my life. The Lord impressed upon me that if I wanted to know Him deeply, I must present myself fully to Him, to live for Him and to trust Him to enable me to live according to His ways through the empowering of the Holy Spirit. If I remained half-hearted in my response to Him, I would never be able to know Him deeply in

my life. As I offered my life completely to Him, and called upon Him to empower me, I entered into a different realm of spiritual experience and reality. The consciousness of God and the reality of His presence and His power brought life and meaning and freedom that I did not know was possible. I was spiritually brought into a different realm of living. It was a new way of life that I had to nurture daily henceforth.

I learnt that our experience of the power of God and His presence will not bring about long-term meaning and substance in our moral being unless there is deep and abiding moral change within our hearts arising from our settled commitment to Him and to what is morally good and right. Likewise, the power of the world is effective and devastating not merely because of the power of the evil one but primarily because of the wrong treasure in our hearts. The persons we become and our quality of life are the result of what we treasure and what we give our lives for. From the beginning of our moral existence up to the present time, we have already made many choices that have intensified the wrong treasure in our hearts. The roots of the self-life have grown very deep over the years and it requires determined, painstaking and honest response to change the whole direction and character of our hearts. The path of spiritual transformation involves the process of renewal of our hearts, as we decisively and consistently reject and

discard our old way of life and nurture the new way of life in the Lord Jesus (**Ephesians 4: 22-24**).

We must diligently exercise ourselves to nurture an honest and good heart and hold fast what God has taught us (**Luke 8: 15**). As we abide in the Lord Jesus and He abides in us, spiritual fruit will be developed in our lives (**John 15: 5**). When we identify with Him in our hearts, we absorb the life of God into our being and develop the character of the Lord Jesus in our hearts, expressed as the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5: 22, 23**). When the apostle Paul tells us to put on the full armour of God in our battle against the powers of darkness, he shows us that the primary issues involve the development of moral and spiritual quality in our being. Whether it is girding ourselves with truth, putting on the breastplate of righteousness or taking up the shield of faith, the issue is not special powers or spiritual gifts, but the quality of heart that we develop and the relationship that we establish with God (**Ephesians 6: 13-20**). When we truly lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven (**Matthew 6: 20, 21**), the attractiveness of what the evil one offers us from the world loses its power, as our hearts have become absorbed in God and His kingdom and the path of moral and spiritual goodness. While this principle is not difficult to recognize, there are different depths of appreciation of this reality and the path of full development is long and difficult, painful and costly.

The process of growth

Over many years, in my striving to understand the realities of the spiritual realm, it has gradually dawned on me that the issue of doubt and wavering in our relationship with God is a very major aspect of the struggles in the Christian life. God is absolute reality and His presence and His involvement in this world are current certainties, yet the problem of doubt and wavering affects the vast majority of Christians throughout their lives, bringing misery and bondage in their hearts. This afflicts superficial Christians as well as those who are serious in their faith and are sincere and eager to follow the Lord.

When the Lord brought deep meaning to my life, a burden and longing grew in my heart to share with others the meaningfulness of such a life. I was very glad when I met Christians expressing their love for God and commitment to live for Him. However, as I knew them more personally, in various instances I was puzzled by major discrepancies between their expressions of faith and the way they lived each day. Many pursued the things of the world the way their non-Christian friends did and were also easily unsettled and distressed by common events and encounters. In these situations, it was as if God did not exist or did not matter much in their lives. “For to me to live is Christ” did not characterize their lives.

In my concern and perplexity, I asked the Lord again and again why this was so. I began to recognize that lack of quality in commitment was a major reason for such a state. We must come to a point in our lives when we make a total commitment to God, to live for Him and walk in His ways. I therefore encouraged others to reach such a commitment in their lives and was glad to see positive effects when they responded.

However, it soon became clear that the changes were often not lasting and many found their lives spiritually dry even though they desired to live for the Lord. As I asked the Lord to help me understand the reason for this difficulty, I became more aware of the need for Christians to know the power of the Holy Spirit in greater measure in the context of seeking to honour God in their lives. As I shared with others the importance of such a development, I was deeply joyful when they shared the significant changes in them as they experienced the power of the Holy Spirit. God became more personal and real to them, there was joy and meaning and freedom in their hearts and they looked forward to each day to live for God, in fellowship with Him.

As the years passed by, I was saddened to know that for many Christians, even such experiences and developments did not endure as they often regressed and reverted to their former ways after some years. In

some instances, their lives became engrossed and entangled with the pursuits of temporal goals in this world. While others continued in Christian activity and service, it was also evident that there was often a lack of spiritual freshness, vitality and quality, with varying degrees of dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

Why is the problem of doubt and wavering so prevalent and so difficult to resolve? Why is it that we do not consistently and steadfastly rest in God and His greatness and glory and know His reality and presence in our lives at all times and in all situations? Why are we so easily affected by the material and temporal things of life? Why is our focus and priority so readily shifted from the moral and spiritual to issues of little or no eternal consequence? How can we know God so deeply that our commitment to Him remains strong and vibrant with passing years and changing circumstances and we no longer doubt and waver? The answers to these questions have become clearer with a growing understanding of the way that God has created us and how we develop quality in our moral and spiritual being.

The issues above are deeply interrelated and they all arise from what has taken place in our hearts. God has created each one of us in His image. This refers to the abilities and potential of our spirit. In our spirit, all human beings know God in the sense that

we recognize His greatness and power as our Creator as well as His holiness and His authority as the Judge of the whole world (**Romans 1: 18-20** and **Romans 2: 14, 15**). In our spirit we have the potential to develop moral and spiritual qualities to be like God in moral and spiritual goodness if we identify with Him and receive His life (**Ephesians 5: 1; 1 Corinthians 6: 17; 2 Peter 1: 4; Galatians 4: 19**). At the heart of this great potential is our ability and responsibility to make our own moral choices: what treasure we pursue, what we give our lives for. These choices decide our destiny: where we will be and what we will become in our moral being (**Galatians 6: 7, 8**). Our recognition of God and our consciousness of Him are affected by the way we respond to His commands and His values, and any departure from His ways will diminish our consciousness of Him (**Romans 1: 21, 22**).

There are different kinds and degrees of quality of knowing God. We may know Him at a distance as the Creator, or we may know Him speaking to us personally in our hearts, but the most meaningful kind of knowing God occurs when His life becomes part of our moral and spiritual being, when the moral character of the Lord Jesus has been formed in us.

It is only when the life of God has become very deeply part of our moral and spiritual being that we become stable in our knowledge of God. When we

know God at a distance, He may at times seem so real to us while at other times He may seem so far away, because we experience Him in different degrees of reality. In such a state, doubt in our lives can easily arise in times of difficulty and in times when our values and focus in life have shifted from the spiritual and eternal. This is because in such experiences, the reality of God is external to us to a large extent and therefore dependent on external factors. On the other hand, when we have partaken of the life and nature of God to a very deep degree and His life has deeply transformed our being, we will know Him all the time in all circumstances because He is always with us in every aspect of our lives. This is a state that is very difficult to attain, but it is the most meaningful state that we should all strive for. Let us consider the process by which such a state may be reached.

All mankind know God at a distance when created and all of us are responsible before God for the way we choose to live our lives. Living in this world where temptations and pressures are great, we easily choose to go our own way, following the ways of the world (**Isaiah 53: 6, Romans 3: 23**). God in His grace speaks to us in our hearts to help us to turn away from our self-centred ways and to come to Him for forgiveness and a new life. The Holy Spirit helps us to recognize our need and reveals to us God's provisions to help us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the light of God shines on us and we genuinely turn to Him for help, choosing to turn away from the self-centred way of life and to submit to God and His ways, we benefit from what the Lord Jesus has done on our behalf at the Cross. As we turn to God in repentance and faith, the Holy Spirit brings about the new birth, bringing spiritual life to our spirit. We receive life from God in our spirit and we become His children - we are "born of God" (**John 1: 12, John 3: 1-8**). The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts to teach us the ways of God personally and to reveal the Lord Jesus to us in our hearts (**John 16: 12-15**). The Holy Spirit impresses on our spirits that we now belong to God as His children (**Romans 8: 16**).

This begins the path of transformation of our moral and spiritual being, with great potential before us. The life of God that is now part of our moral being begins in small measure. Much of the character and direction of our heart is still inclined towards self-seeking desires and we are still easily affected by the things around us. We still live very much on the basis of the direction that the wind is blowing - the opinions of men, the practices of the majority, and the passing pleasures that come our way in this world.

On one occasion, when I was waiting to take photographs of eagles in flight, the wind current was much stronger than usual. As I watched some birds in

flight, I noticed that the smaller birds were flying in the same direction as the wind current. Some attempted to fly in the opposite direction for a brief moment but quite quickly changed direction to fly with the wind movement. I was deeply impressed by a scene that then unfolded before me: a White-bellied sea-eagle was flying in front of me, flapping its powerful wings and flying steadily against the strong current of the wind, moving where it wanted to go, undeterred by the pressure of the wind. It was such a beautiful sight! I pondered over the spiritual parallel in our lives: how much we need to be like the eagle in flight in the moral realm in the positive direction, effectively living as we ought and not following the current of the world!

When our spiritual lives are weak, we are like the little birds that were easily affected by the environment. When the surroundings were calm, the birds could fly freely wherever they intended to go. So too, when there are no major pressures in our lives, we may quite readily choose whichever path we consider suitable for our lives. When the wind began to blow, the little birds changed direction to follow the wind current. So too, many Christians are afraid to live by what they believe when the pressure increases and they move with the current of public opinion or prevailing practices and attractions. The spiritual muscles of personal conviction are weak and they find

it very stressful to face opposition and conflicts in the path of discipleship and faithfulness to the Lord. (This situation is different from the exercise of wisdom in living a life that avoids unnecessary conflicts and offence towards others, while being prepared to stand for what we truly believe.)

It is a refreshing sight to witness the steadfast commitment and direction of life of a person who is deeply one with God, who is undeterred by changing circumstances and the opinions of men and who perseveres in the path of what is good and right because he has developed the spiritual muscles in his heart. He is like the eagle that ascends with wings (**Isaiah 40: 31**) and flies wherever it ought to go, in the midst of wind and rain, storm and pain. Another unforgettable sight that I witnessed took place when it began to rain heavily in the midst of strong winds blowing. There were no birds in sight as they had found shelter in the trees. I was suddenly presented with an imposing and spectacular sight: a large White-bellied sea-eagle was flying in the heavy rain very close by, flapping its beautiful spread-out wings with powerful regulated strokes a short distance above the surface of the water of the reservoir. Suddenly it swooped rapidly downwards, stretched out its legs, and its strong talons caught a large fish swimming in the water. It then flew upwards and moved to the trees to enjoy its meal. The eagle was able to obtain its

prized possession because it could continue to function effectively in the midst of wind and rain. How about us? Do we resolutely keep to the path of the treasured goal and reach out for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus (**Philippians 3: 14**) in the midst of the storms of life? Or would we hide in the comfort of the shelter of 'peace and quiet' for fear of the problems and pressures that come when we walk with God? Would we turn away from remaining faithful and loyal to the Lord and His calling because we are afraid of the path of problems and pain?

How can we develop such strength and steadfastness in our hearts? As moral and spiritual beings, there is a spiritual reality and substance in our being that is an expression of our true quality and character. The Lord Jesus tells us in **Luke 6: 45**, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth that which is good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth that which is evil; for out of the overflowing abundance of his heart his mouth speaks". In this context, the Lord Jesus is referring to the moral meaning and substance of our heart being shown by the words we speak. This is also true of what we do and how we live each moment and each day of our lives. This refers to the true meaning of what we say or do and not merely the outward form. For example, we may outwardly be polite and courteous and seem kind in our actions, but within

our hearts, we may be insincere, calculative, self-centred and scheming against others. In such a situation, our words and actions still reveal what is in our hearts because the spirit of insincerity, self-centredness and negative moral direction in our hearts will come forth with our words and actions. Many of the scribes and Pharisees outwardly appeared to love God and teach what was good, but in their hearts they were self-seeking and morally corrupt. The Lord Jesus detected this wrong spirit and He rebuked them in strong words (**Matthew 23: 13-33, Matthew 15: 7-9**).

The moral and spiritual substance

Ultimately the most important reality that we must develop in our lives is the quality of moral and spiritual substance in our being, which can be fully developed and nurtured through time only by giving all that we have to pursue it and depending on God for His enabling in all aspects of our lives. Unless there is a very deep positive change in the moral state of our inner man, we may come to a point in our lives when we decide to totally commit ourselves to live for God and yet subsequently still walk in the ways of the world. This is because our previous choices have led to the development of the current state of our moral and spiritual being and this state can only be changed by the process of renewal in our inner man. Although we may want to change for the better, it may remain

as a desire and a longing without substantial change in our moral and spiritual being. At times, there may be some degree of change but the deep roots of the self-centred being are not yet thoroughly dealt with.

When **Isaiah 53: 6** tells us that all of us have gone astray like sheep, the primary issue is that we have all gone our own way - the path of our own self-centred desires rather than the path of God's ways of moral goodness and beauty. This is still the primary issue for Christians who want to become stable and strong in their spiritual lives - to what extent are we still going our own way rather than following God's ways? To what degree have we been renewed such that the character of the Lord Jesus has become deeply formed in us and the fruit of the Spirit has grown in all its moral and spiritual richness?

In the midst of our struggles to be good and pure and pleasing to God, we may grow weary and worn out in our spirit. It may seem impossible to attain our aspiration. In our failures and frustration, we may also question why God does not help us in our great need and desperation.

In such moments, it is very refreshing and encouraging to read the majestic words of the Lord Jesus in **Matthew 6: 26**: "Look at the birds of the sky, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into

barns, and your heavenly Father feeds them; are you not of much greater worth than they?" In **Matthew 10: 31**, He tells His disciples, "Therefore do not fear, for you are of more value than many sparrows".

Are you worth more than sparrows?



Again He says, "Behold the lilies of the field..." Even king Solomon in all his earthly glory did not clothe himself with such beauty as these lilies. If God brings forth beautiful lilies that clothe the grass, which is alive for a while and is soon burnt (**Matthew 6: 28-30**), how much more will God, who watches over His children, clothe us, care for us and help us in our need - we who are eternally valuable to Him!

Are you cared for more than lilies?



It is in this context of His assurances of God's care for us that the Lord Jesus instructs us, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you" (**Matthew 6: 33**). God does not command us to live for Him without providing for our well-being. If He cares for our basic temporal needs (though He may at times allow us to suffer material deprivation for our testing, learning and training), how much more will He provide for our eternal well-being! In **2 Peter 1: 3, 4**, we see that God has, in His divine power, graciously given us all things relating to life and godliness so that we can effectively grow into His likeness as we come

to Him in faith, in submission to His will, to partake of His divine nature. The apostle Paul shows us what depth of love God has towards us when he says, “He who indeed spared not His own Son but delivered Him up on behalf of all of us, how will He not with Him also graciously give to us all things?” (**Romans 8: 32**).

If we sufficiently appreciate how much God cares for our well-being and how He has suffered for us, would we still doubt Him? Would we still be distraught and distressed in the midst of the temporal stresses of life? Would we not instead love Him with all our heart and make it our ambition to honour Him and please Him in every aspect of our life and being? Would we not joyfully learn from Him however He may lead us, and whatever the difficulty or pain we may encounter? Would we not be peacefully confident that His grace is always sufficient for us and that His strength would manifest its glory in our helplessness as we humbly affirm, “I can do all things in Him who empowers me” (**Philippians 4: 13**)?

Whenever we think that God does not care enough for us, we should immediately review the situation and recognize that in reality it is the reverse: we do not care enough about what is important to God and we do not adequately appreciate the grief and pain we bring to Him when we live self-centred

lives. The Lord Jesus was deeply pained in His heart when He said in **Matthew 23: 37**, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one killing the prophets and stoning those sent to her, how often I wanted to gather your children as a hen gathers the brood under her wings, and you did not want it". This verse reveals the deep love that God has for each one of us and His longing to help us in spite of our wayward ways. The Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem when He saw them absorbed in their own desires, unappreciative of what God was seeking to do for them and unaware of the judgment that would befall them and their city (**Luke 19: 41-44**). We may think that we are unlike those Israelites. We may think that we truly love God and yet God neglects us. In reality, we are often going our own way and grieving His heart in spite of all He has done for us in His love. We often do not appreciate God's care for us because He does so according to what is truly good and righteous and not according to our ideas and wishes. He will not cater to our whims and fancies. He will not contribute to our indulgence in our self-seeking ways. Where necessary, He will discipline and chasten us so that we may become partakers of His holiness (**Hebrews 12: 1-13**).

If we are prepared to follow God all the way and trust Him and His enabling in all situations of life, we can have the full assurance that He will always be with us, to guide us and enable us. This path is very

difficult indeed. It requires perseverance, but we can be confident that the outcome will be truly meaningful now and in eternity. When we respond well, we will find that even in the midst of adversity and stresses of life, we can know His divine love flowing forth from our heart in self-giving, His joy permeating our inner man in deep fellowship with Him, and His peace reigning in our hearts as we entrust ourselves to our “faithful Creator in doing what is right” (1 Peter 4: 19).

Having understood the importance of giving our lives to God completely and depending fully on His power and His life, we may still encounter significant failure in reaching the level of quality that we are striving towards. In all our strenuous exertions and in seeking to exercise faith in the Lord, we may often not be so conscious of a critical deficiency in our lives: the lack of a deeply humble and contrite spirit. We may say that we are fully prepared to follow the Lord, yet in reality it is often only in contexts where we will in some way or other be appreciated or recognized. We often resist any development that may embarrass us and lead to ‘loss of face’. We may so eagerly long for purity in our lives and yet not be prepared to deeply repent when we have gone astray in one form or another. In many instances, we want to develop great quality in our being with ‘dignity’ and ‘respectability’, without the ‘shame’ of acknowledging our failure with humility and contriteness. The Lord Jesus warns us

that he who wants to “save his life” will in reality lose his life, while he who “loses his life” for His sake will indeed save his life (**Luke 9: 24**). If we are more concerned about ‘saving face’ rather than being righteous and good, then we may ultimately lose our lives - forfeit our souls (**Mark 8: 36**). On the other hand, we may at times be willing to acknowledge our failures but become immersed in self-pity, discouragement and lamentation (instead of determination to change our ways to become what we ought to be in spite of the difficult path ahead).

God has made it clear that while He is the high and holy and majestic One, He dwells with the one who is humble and contrite in spirit (**Isaiah 57: 15**). God is opposed to the proud but He grants grace to those who are humble in heart (**James 4: 6**). The quality of purity of heart for each one of us can only be attained when there is deep and sustained nurturing of the humble and contrite spirit. Any failure in this aspect of our hearts will inevitably lead to degeneration and destruction of our moral and spiritual life, whatever progress we may have made.

The Scriptures record for us the example of king Uzziah, who was generally positive for many years of his life. In his earlier years, he sought the help of God and depended on Him and was grateful for His grace. However, when he grew strong and became more and

more capable, a spirit of pride developed within him. This degeneration led to his serious wrongdoing. In his pride and self-confidence, he went into the temple to burn incense on the altar of incense, against God's clear instructions. When he was rebuked by the priests, instead of humbling himself, he became angry. This led to God's judgment on him. He was afflicted with leprosy and remained a leper till his death. This event is described in **2 Chronicles 26: 3-5, 16-21**.

In contrast, king David nurtured a humble and contrite spirit. When he was rebuked by the prophet Nathan for his sins, he humbly acknowledged his sins and was forgiven. He did not seek to justify himself. Neither did he assert his authority as king, but he repented deeply and sought God's forgiveness. These issues are recorded in **2 Samuel 12: 1-14** and **Psalms 51**. Although there were consequences for his sins, he came back to the Lord and continued to worship Him and was accepted by God and is still regarded highly in the Scriptures as a man after God's own heart.

The apostle Peter was rather impulsive in his earlier years and often responded on the basis of natural emotions and natural thinking. However, when he failed, he was deeply repentant, humble and contrite and continued to make significant progress. Whether he was rebuked by the Lord Jesus directly or through the apostle Paul, he was not angry or reactive.

He was willing to be taught and corrected (**John 13: 1-10, Galatians 2: 11-16, 2 Peter 3: 14-16**). This led to growing quality in his heart. The epistles of Peter reveal the quality of moral and spiritual substance he developed through many years of humble learning.

It is possible to learn meaningfully and grow well for some time and then gradually return to our former state. It is easier to be humble and contrite in our earlier stages of spiritual development, but as we grow, the tendency towards self-confidence may also increase, and the spirit of humility may not be sustained if we are not vigilant. The moral state of our inner man is dynamic and is directly dependent on the quality of our moral choices. It requires prolonged perseverance and sustained positive choices to build the moral and spiritual substance of our inner man. A strong and stable tree with deep roots takes time to grow to such a stature. This is also true in the spiritual realm. If we become self-confident or complacent in the midst of some progress in our spiritual lives, we will degenerate in our hearts.

In our development towards maturity, we may benefit from the help of various people who influence our lives positively. We must ensure that we develop deep personal convictions of our own, stand firmly by what we believe, and shoulder full responsibility for our choices. If not, we may be swayed by negative

influences when the positive influence is no longer so available to us. We see an example of this in king Joash. He walked in the path of righteousness when the priest Jehoiada was present to help him but when Jehoiada died, Joash was adversely influenced by others with ulterior motives. His life degenerated rapidly. This is found in **2 Chronicles 24: 1-2, 15-25**.

In order to sustain our positive development towards maturity, it is vital that we learn to “pray without ceasing” (**1 Thessalonians 5: 17**) as well as maintain a spirit of humility, where our hearts are constantly in fellowship with God and our choices and responses flow forth from deep identification with Him at all times. The Lord Jesus cautions us to “watch and pray” so that we will not fall in the midst of temptations (**Matthew 26: 40, 41**) but we will instead abide in Him and bear fruit with perseverance. If we remain faithful, the fruit of the Spirit will grow in our hearts and the character of the Lord Jesus will be formed deeply in us. It is only when this is developed to a very high degree that our manner of life will be spontaneously positive and meaningful before God consistently and steadily. At the same time, the problem of doubt and wavering will no longer trouble us. We will find ourselves living on earth as if in Heaven, where the reality of God in our lives and our fellowship with Him do not fluctuate with changing circumstances.

A bird's eye view

We conclude this volume with a bird's eye view of the primary issues that confront us as we seek to develop quality in our character and in our walk with God, tracing the path that is often taken in the process of development to maturity in the Lord.

Each of us comes into this world as a moral being with very great potential, having been created in the image of God. This potential resides in our spirit, our inner man, and not in this earthly body, our outer man. God is spirit and if we want to know Him deeply, worship Him, have deep fellowship with Him and be one in our being with Him, we must develop the quality of our spirit, where our moral and spiritual character is developed. We dwell in a natural earthly body that can easily draw us into being preoccupied with the visible, the physical and the temporal attractions and concerns in this world. The moral character in our spirit is the result of all the moral choices that we have made in our hearts and develops with passing years of our lives, becoming more set and settled in direction morally and spiritually.

When we choose the path of going our own way, our spirits become less sensitive to God, His will and His ways as we grow the roots of the self-life in our hearts. This leads to the development of negative

character traits and habits in our lives that affect subsequent choices we make. Our understanding of God and His ways becomes diminished and distorted by our own inclinations and preferences and our preoccupation with the things of this world.

God in His grace seeks to help us, speak to us and point us to the right path. When we recognize our need to change our way of life and come to Him for His forgiveness and His help, we find a new direction and meaning in our lives. However, as we face the situations of daily life, we soon find that our old ways persist even though we seek to follow the Lord and His ways. We bring our self-centred inclinations and ways into our relationship with God and seek to know Him and serve Him according to the ways of the world and in a manner that we are comfortable with. We use terms and expressions that are 'spiritual', but the spirit and direction remain to a large extent similar to our former manner of life. We offer our intelligence and worldly knowledge to serve God, and depend on our worldly experience, abilities and status to contribute to the kingdom of God.

At times we may be happy with our 'progress', but in moments of honest reflection, we recognize that there is something significantly amiss in our lives. We want to be absorbed in the things of the kingdom of God but our hearts are so readily inclined to the

pleasures of the world. We want to be humble but find ourselves enjoying the praises of men and seeking for more by the way we conduct ourselves. As we struggle to deal with pride in our hearts, it seems an impossible task and we cry out in despair to God for help. The urgent need to be renewed becomes more obvious to us when we find that our faith does not bring the life and meaning that we ought to have in the kingdom of God.

As we seek to change our heart, we realize that it is a very difficult task because we have already developed such strong desires for the things of this world and we have already pursued these things so intensely that our efforts to change seem in vain. We want to change the treasure that we are pursuing as we come to appreciate that changing our treasure can lead to changing our hearts. We want to know the Lord, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings and to be conformed to His death (**Philippians 3: 7-14**). At times, we seem to know what we ought to do and we are temporarily glad that we seem to be going the right way, but soon we discover that what we thought was the right way is in fact still going our own way to a large extent. While Paul could say, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (**Philippians 1: 21**), we realize that we are not truly living for the Lord, not deeply dependent on Him and not walking in close fellowship with Him.

God in His grace may then help us understand that our wrong understanding of what is the right path has arisen because of wrong attitudes that we have already cultivated as a result of the wrong treasure in our hearts. Our knowledge and abilities have led to a spirit of self-confidence that has rendered us unreceptive to what the Lord has to say to us. We may think we know when in reality we do not know as we ought to know. We may have accumulated years of knowledge without the corresponding spiritual life and reality in our hearts. The Christians in Laodicea thought that they had developed well, that they were spiritually rich and that they had need of nothing. However, the Lord Jesus saw the spiritual reality in their hearts and pronounced them lukewarm in their faith, spiritually poor and blind and in a pitiful state (**Revelation 3: 14-17**). Their self-confidence had affected their perception of their own state. It could be that they had previously developed positive qualities but they had now become complacent and self-confident.

As we decide to change our attitude and choose to be humble in spirit and to listen carefully to what the Lord has to say to us, we begin to appreciate the need to completely forsake the wrong treasure that has gripped our hearts all these years. We realize that we have been half-hearted in giving up ourselves to the Lord even while we profess to live fully for Him.

We have been willing to give up part of our worldly treasure but not completely, as we still desire the security, pleasure and approval of the world even while we seek to follow the Lord. We have still kept our own treasure even as we seek to possess the pearl of great preciousness. We have sought to be spiritual without the preparedness for the cost of such a path.

In response to the Lord's revelation, we may decide to repent and to give ourselves fully to the Lord and forsake the treasures of this world. We may then discover the painful struggle described by the apostle Paul in **Romans 7: 14-24** as we find ourselves failing to overcome the power of sin in spite of great efforts to do so. In the midst of our struggles, the Lord may impress on us our need to depend on Him fully, in accordance with His provision of the Holy Spirit to help us, so that we may know the reality of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus setting us free from the law of sin and of death (**Romans 7: 24 to 8: 4**).

As we come to God for His empowering, we may find ourselves lifted to a higher plane of living, rejoicing in the path of life and freedom in the power of God. We find ourselves able to overcome the many temptations that we have been struggling with over the years and our time in prayer and reading of the Scriptures suddenly becomes full of life and excitement. It seems that we have attained what we

have longed for all these years.

However, the period of freedom and joy may not last and we are again struggling with the temptations of the world and the wrong desires in our hearts. It is as if all our efforts have been in vain and what we have experienced of the life of victory remains only as a memory.

If we continue to persevere in a spirit of humility, the Lord may then reveal to us that while we have chosen the right path and we have experienced His life and power, the primary issue that we need to focus on now is the development of moral and spiritual substance of long-lasting quality in our heart, our inner man. Our experience of God's power and presence has given us a foretaste of what can be, but has not left a major lasting change in our moral and spiritual being. The years of self-life have already resulted in moral and spiritual substance in our spirit contrary to the ways of God and we need to be drastically transformed in the direction of moral and spiritual purity in our hearts. This requires the path of purification - a painful and difficult process of refining, where the commitment that we have made must be tested in practical situations of life and our moral being transformed in the direction of steadfast and unwavering oneness with God under all circumstances. The Lord Jesus told the Christians in

Laodicea: "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire, that you may become rich..." (**Revelation 3: 18**). The Lord Jesus knew that for the Laodicean Christians to change and become spiritually rich in the quality of their hearts, they had to go through the difficult and painful process of refining by fire under His supervision and discipline.

The path of refining requires humility, honesty and determination to persevere and change as we discover the presence of areas of our hearts that belong to our former manner of life. A proud man who humbles himself to walk in God's ways will not immediately become a humble man in the substance of his moral being. A self-centred person who decides to give his life to live for God will not immediately find that the fruit of the Spirit has suddenly developed in richness and abundance. One who has pursued the path of pleasure and enjoyment in this world but now decides to become morally good and righteous will not suddenly attain a high quality of purity of heart. If we want Christ to be formed in us, we need to learn to identify with what is in His heart in every aspect of our being. Whatever we discover to be contrary to His will and His ways must be completely discarded and abandoned. Whatever we know to be pleasing to Him we must diligently nurture such that it becomes our whole way of life. If we want to be pure in heart we have to continuously deepen in giving our lives

totally for the purpose of what is morally good in the sight of God, taking practical steps wherever needed. With God's gracious supervision, every situation of our daily lives can help us develop quality in our being. If we value that more than temporal comfort, we can prayerfully welcome unexpected or difficult circumstances, in a joyful spirit of learning, in full submission to God and humble dependence on Him.

It is also in the context of our daily lives that we can evaluate the quality of our hearts. What is it that brings joy, excitement and meaning to our lives? Is it the presence of a pleasant environment, the reception of the praise of men, the development of ability and power and status in this world? Or is it the growing identification with the heart of God in the midst of pain as well as times of ease, with a deepening and reliable love for God in all circumstances of life? Have we developed a stable spirit of thankfulness and gratitude to God, in continuous communion with Him, praying without ceasing, in the midst of varied situations that we go through each day? Do we love others because of what we may receive in return or do we love them because we truly care for their eternal well-being and will continue to care even if we are ignored, misunderstood or even maligned?

It is only as we count the cost, then deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, that we will be able

to truly follow the Lord and be transformed into His image from glory to glory, according to His power that is at work in us. As we partake of God's divine nature in a spirit of worship and faith, we can then develop a deep fellowship with God, as our hearts are transformed. As we become pure in heart, we will know God personally and deeply, as His life becomes increasingly part of our moral and spiritual being. We will then be truly free to be what we ought to be and what God desires us to be. It is then that we will be able to develop the highest quality of relationship with God, when He could meaningfully call us His friends with whom He could share the deep concerns of His heart. We can then heartily say with Paul, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

How to be free

How do you deal with the pulls and pressures of the world, and the wiles of the evil one and his temptations in your life? Have you been effective?

What would you concentrate on in seeking for true freedom and meaning in the Lord? Why is this so critical for now and for eternity? What does this mean in your daily life? Are there practical steps that will help you?

If you want your heart to be truly free,

Christ your living treasure must always be!

P.S.

In seeking to develop your spiritual life, it is important to read the Bible and to pray to God regularly. It is also helpful for you to learn from other Christians with good character, who love God deeply. You could also take some time, prayerfully, to look for a suitable Christian congregation that is faithful to God, where the Bible is carefully taught and applied to daily life. Look for one where you can be helped to know the Lord Jesus more personally each day, relate meaningfully with others and grow in the quality of your character.

If you want to read other portions of the book, *A Journey in Life*, but have difficulty getting information on their availability, you could enquire by writing to the following address:

Ghim Moh Estate Post Office
P.O. Box 348
Singapore 912742

Please write your postal address (and contact number if you wish).

You could also have access to the book and other spiritual content from the web site:

<http://www.ajourneyinlife.org>

Developing in Life (Song)

**As you see the day growing bright,
And behold your need and plight,
Do you choose to walk in the light,
Learning to do what is good and right?**

**As you face the forces of night,
And you take your stand to fight,
Do you trust God and His might,
Walking by faith and not by sight?**



**As I see God's glory so bright,
And I give Him all my right,
I will always walk by His light,
Living is Christ my true delight!**