



## A WORD FROM THE DEAN

# Disciples Pursue Holiness

The call to be a disciple of Christ is essentially a call to holiness. This is clear from Jesus' instruction to his disciples: they are to be perfect (read, 'holy') as their heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:48). It is also clear from the claim that Jesus suffered in order "to make the people *holy* through his own blood." (Heb 13:12). Yet the connection between discipleship and holiness is often missed. The reason, I suspect, is an emphasis on "knowing" and "doing" over "being". With the focus on what a disciple must know (e.g., terms and cost of discipleship) and what he or she must do (e.g., Bible study, prayer, evangelism), the pursuit of holiness is left to take its own course.

To the apostles, discipleship and holiness go vitally together. St Paul, for instance, held that God has chosen us in Christ to be *holy* even before the world was created. (Eph 1:4). To those whom he had discipled, his prayer was that they may "be blameless and *holy* . . ." (1 Thes 3:13).

By "holiness", two connotations of the word are distinguished. In the first and highest sense, holiness belongs to God. It is a divine attribute—one that pervades all that God is. A W Tozer explains, "Because he is holy, all his attributes are holy; that is, whatever we think of as belonging to God must be thought of as holy." (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, 113). A very succinct self-declaration of God's holiness in scripture comes to mind, "I am God, and not a man—the Holy One among you." (Hos 11:9). Applied to humans, holiness implies the habit (or state) of being of one mind with God. (J C Ryle, *Holiness*, 34). For Christians, holiness entails a separation from the common or profane, and their being "set apart" for divine use.

Throughout the biblical witness, holiness is called for from God's people. The basis for that is a simple one—they are to be holy, because God is holy. (cf. 1 Pet 1:14-15). In other words, holiness is that which God holds us to; God's nature demands it. Holy disciples respond by refraining from sin, and endeavouring to live their lives in conformity to the image of the Son of God. (Rom 8:29). That goal, no less than the love of God to us, is our motivation for holiness.

Speaking of motivation, we must counter a misconception that puts a damper on the pursuit of holiness. It is the thinking that the call to a holy life is for only a select few, namely, pastors, priests, and preachers. Not only does scripture insist on the necessity of personal holiness for every Christian, it exempts no one. The teaching by the writer of Hebrews cannot be clearer: "Make every effort . . . to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." (Heb 12:14).

What if a disciple admits to having no yearning in his or her heart to pursue holiness? That person should seriously question whether his or her faith in Christ is genuine. Jerry Bridges (*The Pursuit of Holiness*, 43) poses further questions for that person and for everyone who professes to be a Christian to ask himself or herself: "Is there evidence of practical holiness in my life? Do I desire and strive after holiness? Do I grieve over my lack of it and earnestly seek the help of God to be holy?"



Dr Lim K Tham  
Dean

# The (Ab)use of Power: A Reflection on Judges 16

Dr Vincent Ooi

When pestered repeatedly by Delilah to reveal where his "great strength lies" (Jdg 16:6 ESV), Samson eventually yielded and said, "A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man." (v. 17 ESV).

Delilah believed Samson. The lords of the Philistines believed Delilah. And most of us believe as they did because after Samson's hair was shaved it is said that "his strength left him" (v. 19 ESV) and the Philistines successfully overpowered, blinded, and imprisoned him (v. 21).

But what if Samson were wrong about the association of his hair and his great strength? What if Delilah, the lords of the Philistines and most of us also were wrong for believing Samson? What if Samson's strength has nothing to do with his hair?

I raise these questions for three reasons. First, the narrative of Samson points out again and again that the source of Samson's strength was God himself (13:25; 14:6, 19 and 15:14). Second, before the Philistines subdued Samson in 16:21, we read in v. 20 that "the LORD had left him" (ESV). Samson's great strength was gone not because his hair was gone but because God was gone. Third, Samson was not able to liberate himself from his incarceration even though "the hair of his head began to grow again after it had been shaved" (v. 22 ESV). Some may argue that at that point he had not regained his full head of hair. However, in v. 28, Samson, with or without a full head of hair, had to ask God for strength. Samson lost his strength not because he lost his hair but because he lost God, and he only realised that at the end of his life. And that was a tragic thing.

But more tragic than that was that Samson "did not know that the LORD had left him" (16:20 ESV). Samson was so preoccupied with using his great strength to gratify himself that he did not know that the LORD had left him. We often think that Samson messed up because he fell for Delilah. But Samson was messing up his life long before he met Delilah. He was living a life no ordinary Israelite, let alone a Nazirite, should live. His Nazirite vow was broken long before his hair was cut. Of course, God could have left Samson before Samson's hair was cut, but God was patient. Samson, however, continued to live with no regard for the LORD to the point that he did not know that the LORD had left him. Samson fell not because of Delilah. Samson fell because he had no regard for the LORD.

But that was not the most tragic thing about Samson. More tragic is that Samson showed very little sign of change right up to the end of his life. All his life Samson used his strength to get what he wanted and to get back at those who wronged him. That is Samson in Judges 14 and 15. In 15:7, he said to those who wronged him, "I won't stop until I get my revenge on you" (NIV). Indeed, revenge was why he asked God for strength in his final prayer: "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines

for my two eyes" (16:28 ESV). And God gave him what he asked for! Samson's abuse of his strength did not thwart God's purpose to free Israel from the Philistines but it did destroy him.

How is all this relevant to Christians today? I will touch on three things. First, Samson's abuse of God's gift of power is a warning to all human beings who wield some form of power. We may not have Samson's physical strength but we do wield political, financial, military and media powers that could do much more damage than Samson's strength. As individuals, we also have some form of power over others as parents, children, employers, lawyers, teachers, pastors, doctors, politicians, etc. The story of Samson reminds us that the power we wield is a gift from God not for self-gratification but for serving others.

Second, although we do not have Samson's physical strength, we do have a gift of tremendous power. There is no power in the world that could free us from the grip of sin and enable us to live for God but we have the gift of the Son and the Spirit through whom God the Father frees us from sin and empowers us to obey him. So how are we living our lives? Are we saying no to sin and yes to God with his gift of power? Jesus said: "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more" (Lk 12:48 ESV).

Finally, some of us may say: "Is not Samson mentioned among those who lived by faith?" Indeed, Samson was mentioned in Hebrews 11:32, and Samson did display faith in God when he asked God for strength. But Hebrews 11 mentions Samson not to highlight his character but illustrate the nature of faith. It is not asking us to fix our eyes on Samson and imitate him. But it leads us to fix our eyes on another person: Jesus Christ (12:2-3). And what a big contrast between Samson and Jesus! Samson used his strength for self-gratification; Jesus refused to turn stones to bread after fasting for 40 days. Samson treated women as objects of conquest; Jesus treated women as equals of men made in the image of God. Samson prayed to God for strength to avenge those who gouged out his eyes; Jesus prayed to the Father for the forgiveness of his enemies who nailed him on the cross to die. Samson gave up his life to destroy his enemies; Jesus gave up his life to save his enemies and to reconcile us to God.

May the tragedy of Samson remind us to steward our gifts for the good of others and drive us to walk after Jesus who, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, washed his disciples' feet.



*The writer is a full-time Faculty member at DTC. He completed his first PhD in physics at the University of Southampton in 1999, and his second in biblical interpretation and Christian spirituality at Durham University in 2011. In between, he pastored a church in the UK for about eight years. He was a seminary lecturer in Penang, Malaysia, for more than 10 years, before joining DTC in September last year.*

# Mission Trip Reflections

Four students, the Dean and a faculty member visited a South-East Asian country from November 18 to 26, 2022, as part of their field education. The students share their reflections:

## Efrain Balawag

When the locals started talking to each other, I felt handicapped because I didn't understand them. The missionaries, both locals and international, inspired me to learn the language of other people groups.

The situation of the believers is very different and challenging compared to ours. But God is enough; that compels them to be faithful amidst a strong resistance. They don't have huge churches and congregations, but the joy and boldness in sharing the Gospel still burn in their hearts. It is not really about what we can see or have but the Spirit of God, who enables us to be joyful in serving Him regardless of our situation.

I feel alive and find purpose in life to work and support monetarily those in the field. Listening to and helping others in their ministry is what I want for life, no matter how small or big the task and position are. It makes my heart joyful. Every time I am in the mission field with the people who work for God's ministry, there is a sense of life.

## Jim Leong

Since 2019 when I was diagnosed with sleep apnea, being able to sleep through the night is not something I take for granted. The day of my sharing in the church, I woke up with a headache. I prayed to God to remove the headache but it continued. By noon it became so serious I was on the verge of asking someone to take over. Nevertheless, I took two Panadol tablets and went ahead while praying to God to sustain me. God is faithful and he sustained me to share my testimony.

The best experience was travelling by boat to a village. Ten minutes in the river, the boat had engine issues. Thankfully it was able to restart. On our way back, God provided a beautiful sunset and the calmest waters. I felt a sense of helplessness seeing the children in the village and knowing that many would be strongly attached to their families and the religion they adopted. Will they ever hear the gospel of Jesus? I pray for the workers to continue their faithful outreach to them.

## Pang Wee Heong

From the testimonies of national workers and our interaction with leaders from the student and young adult fellowships, I came to understand their struggles to share the gospel. Despite strong resistance, they were determined and filled with enthusiasm. I am truly encouraged by their perseverance and dedication. I also came to appreciate the importance of community in supporting each other in their faith journey.

I had the opportunity to test my spiritual gifts. When I engage with adults, I find myself restless and impatient, as a discussion can take 3 to 4 hours. When I engage with children, I am alive. Time flies without me noticing it. Having said that, I believe I must learn to be more patient as I might one day be called to work with adults or senior citizens.

## Bann Sambor

The experience that I remember the most is spending time with the people. We can see how much they love God and dedicate themselves to God. I really appreciate them for their devotion (time, family, money) to God. It reminds me that what I have today is by the grace of God, so what can I do for God? What I can give back to God?

I learned a lot from our team, such as humility, cooperation and flexibility. To cope with living in the community, we must have mutual understanding, flexibility and humility.



(From Left) Efrain, Wee Heong, K Tham, Sambor, Sam and Jim.

## RECENT NEWS

### Christian Heritage Trail:

A group of 17 students, faculty and friends of DTC took a guided walk on January 20 to various landmarks in Bras Basah and heard stories about the missionaries who served there. They saw Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church (Benjamin Peach Keasberry), the former sites of St. Margaret's School (Maria Dyer, Sophia Cooke) and Methodist Girls' School (Sophia Blackmore), the former St. Joseph's Institution (French priest Father Jean-Marie Beurel), and the former Anglo Chinese School (William Oldham).



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### Biblical Hebrew for Beginners:

The Hebrew course taught by Dr Vincent Ooi had a good start on January 31 with 20 participants. The first part of the course will run for six weeks.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Vocational Discernment: The ABC of Discovering Your Calling

Join us for discipleship conversations on vocational discernment on two Saturday mornings and over lunch in March. We will reflect on biblical material on calling, with practical guidelines to give greater clarity as to our unique callings. Rev Tan Soo-Inn (Director of Graceworks) will lead the sessions at



**DTC on March 11 and 18, 9am to 1pm, followed by lunch. Fee: \$60 (non-refundable).**

Please sign up via QR code.

**DTC Courses Open to Audit Students:** Courses in Term 4 (21 Mar to 12 May) include OT Prophets, Ezekiel, Revelation, Christian Ethics II and Christian Education II. Audit students are expected to attend all lessons and complete the course (weekly, over eight weeks) but are exempt from assignments. They do not live in but are expected to appreciate DTC's ethos of training in a small, cross-cultural community of students and teachers living together. All classes are held in the morning. The cost is \$100 per course. Apply by **March 15** at <https://bit.ly/dtaudit>

**Applications for July 2023 Admission are Welcome:** Limited scholarship grants are available to help needy persons accepted for study. For details on DTC's programmes and scholarship grants, go to [www.dtc.org.sg](http://www.dtc.org.sg) or contact us by phone **6256-3208** or e-mail [disciple@singnet.com.sg](mailto:disciple@singnet.com.sg).

## Giving to DTC

Donors may issue a cheque made out to Discipleship Training Centre Ltd. and mail it to **33A Chancery Lane, Singapore 309554**; or transfer the funds to DTC's account number **024-901049-4** with DBS Singapore by ATM, Internet banking or telegraphic transfer. Donors may also scan the PayNow QR code. **UEN Number:** 197100578E

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