

A WORD FROM THE DEAN

“Bind up this Testimony... and Seal up God’s Instruction”

“Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured.”
Bind up this testimony of warning and seal up God’s instruction among my disciples. (Is 8:15–16)

The recent disclosure by the Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM) that its late founder and namesake had—over the course of many years—engaged in acts of sexual misconduct and abuse must come as a wakeup call for many of us who claim to be Christ’s disciples. That in recent times several high-profile Christian leaders had also been implicated in moral wrongdoing offers little to reduce our anguish.

The Zacharias scandal has, as expected, kindled a wide variety of reactions. These have ranged from expressions of disappointment, betrayal, hurt, and anger, to kindly attempts at identifying with and extending empathy to the man. Not a few respondents have urged grace, or even proffered forgiveness. Reading the reactions and the discussions generated has been instructive in demonstrating how moral failure on the part of Christian leaders is regarded from different angles.

Although I have cited Ravi Zacharias by name, my purpose is not to focus on him as I neither knew him nor was a fan. Furthest from the mind is any wish to cast the accusing stone. Rather, my interest is to raise a point concerning the training of Christian discipleship, one that is not much discussed with regard to the scandal.

In my own reflection I was aided by the passage of scripture from Isaiah 8:15–16 (see above). It seems that on being told that many of God’s disciples would stumble or

fall, the unfazed prophet implores, “Bind up this testimony of warning and seal up God’s instruction among my disciples.” (16). These words may be interpreted as a counsel to those who are witnesses to the fall of other disciples, to “tie together” God’s instruction so that they themselves do not become separated from it, and to lay it up “well secured and well preserved, as if by band and seal, in the hearts of those who received the prophet’s words with believing obedience.” (Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, Vol 1, 238).

Isaiah’s directive is not unlike that which Jesus was to later issue: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples.” (John 8:31). William MacDonald’s commentary on this verse is worth recalling for making the Lord’s point explicit: “For real discipleship there must be *continuance*. It is easy enough to start well, to burst forth in a blaze of glory. But the real test is endurance to the end. Any man who looks back after putting his hand to the plough is not for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62). Spasmodic obedience to the Scriptures will not do.” (*True Discipleship*, 7–8; emphasis added).

The approach we are accustomed to doing discipleship training has been to emphasise the mastering of the content of the Bible and the acquisition of ministry skills—alongside participation in communal spiritual practice. While in no way decrying the importance of these aspects of discipleship training, such a curriculum is in my view too uncritically premised on the assumption that right religious beliefs or conformity to religious mores ensures righteous living. It seems to me that the prevalence of moral failure among seasoned Christian people has cast serious doubt on the validity of that assumption. If so, we would want to instil in ourselves and our students the life-long discipline of binding and sealing up God’s instruction.



Dr Lim K Tham
Dean



Photo: Sam Goh

Pressing On In Hope

About 45 DTC alumni came together for an online retreat on March 12 led by Revd. Howard Peskett (DTC's dean from 1976 to 1986). Here is an edited excerpt of his message:

I give thanks that some of us have already been pressing on in hope for many years, and some of us are just beginning. My fervent prayer is that all of us may be like John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress* who wrote:

My aim is...not to run a little now and then, by fits and starts, or halfway or almost thither; but to run for my whole life, to run through all difficulties, and to continue to the end of the race, which must be to the end of my life.

THE UMBRELLA TEXT: PSALM 44:3

...not by their own sword did they win the land,
nor did their own arm save them,
but your right hand and your arm,
and the light of your face,
for you delighted in them.

Just a couple of days ago I read an article in *The Atlantic* magazine by Tim Keller, "Growing my faith in the face of death." Recently he wrote a book entitled *On Death*; and just a short while afterwards, he discovered that he had pancreatic cancer! The sub-title of his article was, "I spent a lifetime counselling others before my diagnosis. Will I be able to take my own advice?" Now is the time when Keller will discover in his own feelings, his heart, his own body, whether he feels what he has taught others for so long.

When you read the words of Psalm 44:3, "...the light of your face, for you delighted in them.....", can you feel God's smile and delight as he looks down on you today wherever you are? Believing that honey is sweet because your friends tell you so is good. But tasting the honey's sweetness brings a fuller knowledge of sweetness than any words can bring.

Do everything you do in this short retreat under God's smile and his delight. When a child brings his scribbles or her dreadful drawing to the parent, the parent says, "Oh thank you! That's lovely!" When we bring our efforts to God, successful or not, broken or not, we can be sure of a greater welcome.

BOLD & COURAGEOUS FAITH

Psalm 44 gives us a vivid picture of what a brave, bold and persevering faith looks like. Verses 1–8 talk about Israel's glorious past. O God! Your wonderful deeds in days of old. (v.1). Your right hand and your mighty arm brought us out of Egypt. (v.3). You drove out nations and established us in the Promised Land. (v.2). You are our King, ordaining salvation for Jacob. (v.4). You have



Revd. Howard Peskett and his wife Roz Photo: Revd. Howard Peskett

saved us from our enemies. (v.7). It was not our sword, our bow, our mighty arm. It was you. So v.8, "In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever."

But—it is a big but!—you have cast us off, abased us, refused to go out with us. (v.9). The result? "Rout, spoil, slaughter, suffering and slavery" (Kidner). "You have made us like sheep for the slaughter." (v.11). You have sold your people for nothing. (v.12). We are suffering taunts, derision, shaking heads, scornful laughter. You have made us a laughingstock. (v.14). You have done all this. But we have not been false to your covenant. (v.17). It is not because we have turned back or turned aside. (v.18). It is for your sake we are killed all day long. "We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." (v.22).

We have to take these verses seriously. There are passages in the Old Testament where it is clear that God's punishments follow Israel's unfaithfulness. But this is not one of them.

"For your sake" means that sometimes our sufferings, defeats, adversities may be because there is a wider war. When believers are killed "because of you/for your sake", we call this a martyrdom—but we regard it as a victory—a fatal victory in the wider war.

Paul quotes v.22 in Romans 8 and what does he say? "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long, we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Romans 8:35–37).

We are not SHRINK-BACKERS but KEEP-FAITHERS.

- Revd. Howard Peskett, on Hebrews 10:39

How does the psalmist finish his psalm? Brave, perhaps desperate prayer. (verses 23–26). Awake! Rouse yourself! Rise up! Help us! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love! The last word of the psalm is this very precious word, *chesed*, steadfast love. When it is invisible, we continue to trust in it, in Jesus who was its embodiment.



Reflect on the times when your faith has been somewhat desperate; when the reasons for not trusting seem overwhelming; when God seems to be absent, remote or inactive; when it has required courage to go on believing; when there is a person or a situation to confront, but you do not feel strong enough to deal with them/it.

PATIENCE & SELF CONTROL

I was looking back into my journal for October 2001, 20 years ago. It was a difficult time for me. The attack on the Twin Towers in New York had just happened. I was in Singapore. How can I forget? We had difficulties in our family. My wife's widowed mother was not coping well and needed to be moved. Also, it was a difficult time in the college of which I was vice-principal because the principal was falling into depression after the death of his wife and was unable to give the leadership required.

In these difficult days, I was reading the Epistle to the Hebrews. Have you ever read this "short word of exhortation" thoroughly? I can see and feel as I read again what I wrote in those days, the joy and the strength that I received through this reading.

How Jesus is God's final revelation. (1:1–3). How he is greater than the angels as seven OT passages attest. (ch. 1). He is such a great Saviour. (ch. 2). He is greater than Moses and Joshua, Israel's greatest leaders. (chs. 3, 4). He is greater than the Aaronic/Levitical priesthood (chs. 5–7)—so don't give up your hope and trust—"And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end." (6:11). He is the High Priest of a superior covenant. (ch. 8). He is the High Priest of a better sanctuary. (ch. 9). He offered a better sacrifice. (ch. 10).

Because Jesus is such a great Saviour, better than the angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Levi. He offers eternal redemption, by the power of his indestructible life. (7:16). He offers a better hope (7:19), a better covenant (7:22). He is an immortal priest who lives for ever. (7:24). He exercises a more excellent ministry based on better promises. (8:6). He has made a once-for-all eternal redemption for ever (9:12), a unique, unrepeatable sacrifice, offering us entrance, unlimited access into the holiest place.

Because of all this, let us draw near. Let us hold fast. Let us not neglect to meet together in full assurance of faith. Let us persevere in obedient, hopeful trust. Let us not turn back to the old Jewish system. Let us not throw away our confidence (10:35). For Jesus is coming back. "We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls." (10:39). We are not SHRINK-BACKERS but KEEPFAITHERS.

I see as I read through these words again how they were strengthening me: when a faculty member told me he was fed up and wanted to resign; when I received a report which I thought meant my wife needed major surgery.

I read on in Hebrews 11 about the heroes of faith in old times—some of them did amazing things and some of them were tortured, mocked, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, sawn in two. All of these were looking to a better life (11:35), for something better. (11:40). They were stretching out towards something they did not yet see.

So the author of Hebrews says, since this is the arena in which we also run, let us lay aside every weight and sin. Let us run with perseverance the race before us. Let us not look back or slide back into Judaism. But with eyes fixed on Jesus, Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, seated on the throne, our example in the life of trustful, persevering obedience, let us not grow weary or fainthearted. (12:3). Let us not let our hands drop or our knees wobble. (12:12). Let us not lose courage when trials come (12:5) because we have received an unshakeable kingdom: "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." (12:28–29).

The events I have mentioned from my journal happened 20 years ago. Twenty years later I can see that some of the things I hoped for then are working out well, and some are not. So I have to go on trusting.



Reflect on your experience in "patient trusting". Some situations cannot be dealt with quickly. Some trials continue for a long time and some situations cannot be avoided. For these, we require steadiness, patience, perseverance. Some people we have to live with. These situations require a different sort of courage. You may even need to be angry with a quiet, persevering anger that will not give up until something is put right.

Learning & Listening Together

The first quarter of 2021 saw DTC hosting two courses for the public and a Quiet Day retreat for a church. About 60 people signed up for a mentoring masterclass by author and retreat leader Tony Horsfall in February and March. Formerly with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship planting churches in East Malaysia and now based in England, Tony led the participants through his book *Mentoring Conversations* over six sessions on Zoom. The masterclass was co-organised by DTC and Charis Training. Separately, DTC alumna Jeannie Koh (2007–2009) taught an introductory course in Biblical Greek for 12 students at DTC over six Saturday afternoons in March and April. During the Easter weekend on April 3, DTC hosted 12 ladies from Barker Road Methodist Church for a personal silent retreat.



(Above)
An introductory course in Biblical Greek taught by DTC alumna, Jeannie Koh

(Far-left)
One of the six Zoom sessions led by Tony Horsfall

(Left)
Quiet Day retreat with DTC dean Lim K Tham

Photos: Jenise Lim

Introducing DTC's Board of Reference

DTC is honoured that the following persons have agreed to serve on its Board of Reference:

- Dr Ernest Chew
- Rev Dr Choong Chee Pang
- Emeritus Professor Dr Lee Soo Ann
- Emeritus Bishop Dr Robert Solomon
- Dr William Wan

Applications to study at DTC welcome

DTC's residential programmes include the Graduate Diploma in Intercultural Studies (one year), Master of Christian Ministry (two years) and Master of Christian Studies (by dissertation only). All three programmes are accredited by the Asia Theological Association. We also offer a Sabbatical Studies Programme (one or two semesters, or six to nine months) for those who wish to review, reflect and refresh by attending courses, writing, or guided personal reflection or self-study. For more details, go to www.dtc.org.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.

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