



# Lively Stones | PETER 2:5

*Holding forth the word of life*

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## HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL CHRISTIAN YOUTH?

**SUCCESS** – not in the way the world defines it, but in the way God defines it. Christians assess their lives from God's perspective. Westminster Confession of Faith Shorter Catechism Q 1: What is the Chief end of man? "... is to glorify God & enjoy Him forever." That is the yardstick of success. And when we achieve closest to that objective, we are most happy, and achieve spiritual success, prosperity & blessings.

To be a successful Christian youth, it is important to maintain 3 healthy relationships. First and foremost is our relationship with God. Next, our relationship with parents, and thirdly with peers/friends. Once our relationship with God is set on the right footing, our other relationships will be much easier to deal with. Unfortunately, for many of us, I suspect it's the other way round. We typically spend the most time cultivating our relationship with peers, while our relationships with God and parents are usually sorely neglected. Since our relationship with God is most important, we need to spend time to develop it.

### Relationship with God

*"And now, Israel, what doth the LORD require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul. To keep the commandments of the Lord thy God for thy good." Deut 10:12-13*

a) First things first – "what doth the Lord require of thee" – is a recognition that it is with God with whom we have to do. He is our Creator, our Redeemer and Savior. Our destiny begins and ends with God. Each time I go to a funeral, I look into the coffin, and I picture myself there one day. Yes, it's a sobering (albeit, morbid) thought. Yet, that is true. One day I will die, and I will have to face my God. And that day may come sooner than you think. Knowing that we will die one day, we will know how to live. Hence, we need to give God top priority in our lives. Have you ever thought about it: our relationships with others last our earthly life, but our relationship with God lasts through eternity. That's how important it is from the perspective of time. Hence, we need to build strong biblical convictions on this from the beginning. Daniel 1:8 "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself."

He made a decision that he would not do anything that would displease His Lord and Saviour: he would not sin against God or disobey God's commandments. Will you go disco-dancing or pub-crawling or drinking with your friends? What Daniel faced as a young man is similar to what we face today – and we too need to purpose in our hearts that we will not defile ourselves.

- b) Putting God first means that we cannot have our cake and eat it. You cannot be serving God and mammon. Because the world values are diametrically opposite to God's commandments. 1 John 2:15-16 "Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in Him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." You cannot want to be popular in school among non-Christians while still obeying God.
- c) Next, the verse in Deut 10:12 says, we need to fear Him – giving Him due reverence in worship and obedience. Psalm 111:10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments". Never miss worship service, partaking of the Lord's supper. Join prayer meetings, Sunday School, fellowship meetings, for in these spiritual exercises, we grow in our Christian faith and develop a closer relationship with God. These are all profitable for your soul and will help you in your spiritual growth.
- d) It is never easy to do all these; and we can take a leaf from history, we can learn much by studying the lives of godly men in the Bible and the biographies of godly men and women. Their lives can inspire us to attain greater heights of spiritual maturity. For example, Charles Spurgeon – the prince of preachers. He did not receive university education, and yet he became a pastor at 16 years of age, and eventually became an excellent preacher. How was it possible? From his childhood, he embarked on a self-study of theology. In addition to the Bible, he read widely from Christian classics of John Owen, Richard Baxter, and JC Ryle from the large library of his pastor-grandfather. Because of his voracious reading appetite, his spiritual maturity and theological knowledge surpassed those of his peers, and even most Christian adults. In his youth, he was not satisfied with casual reading of the Bible. He always wanted to know the meaning of bible verses and would persist until he got them explained to him.

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He learnt the art of preaching from his godly grandfather. When he was a young boy, he served God by teaching younger children in Sunday school. It therefore came as no surprise that at a young age of 16, he was sent to preach at a rural Teversham Church which had no resident preacher. He was so well received that the congregation invited him to be a regular preacher. The interesting illustrations he used for preaching were drawn from his assiduous study of books, and his widespread interests and knowledge. His powers of description were phenomenal because he was keen in observation, and he had the language at his command to describe them - whether he was talking about nature, science, literature or the Lord. Hence, it is important for youths to work hard on their languages in school, so that they could be effective instruments in communicating God's truth.

- e) From the life of Spurgeon, we learnt that a successful youth is one who serves God. That's the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of verse 12:

**If you want most joy in your Christian life, you need to love God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.**

There is nothing more important, more noble, nothing gives you more joy in this world than to love and serve God with all your heart i.e. with a single-minded focus. When was the last time you had sweet communion with God, when did you last read a complete book of the bible? When was the last time you cast all your cares on Jesus and He gave you comfort and assurance? A vibrant Christian life needs constant renewal of our relationship with a loving God. If you love God, feed His sheep, do God's work, and fulfill the great commission to tell others about Jesus. You are never too young to serve: prophet Samuel was called at a very young age, as young as a toddler, or possibly as a youth. Nevertheless, it was clear that he served when he was young. Serving God is a great joy; and those who expended their energies to serve God with all their hearts, strength, and might will never regret because God gives back double the blessings. God will give you understanding in His word, peace in your soul, and sweet fellowship that money cannot buy. God is no debtor; but He "*will supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*" Phil 4:19. Each time I visit someone who is sick, or at old folks home, or attend a vigil service, I am encouraged by something I learnt. Each time I prepare to teach Sunday school or messages, I am invigorated by the study of God's word and the reading of Christian books. I thank God upon every remembrance of Sunday school teachers who had made sacrifices and for their labour of love. The Lord will richly reward all His faithful servants, if not in this life, certainly in the next.

- f) When should we serve? There is no better time than now. Rev Philip Heng once shared about this young

lady in his Church. When she was in secondary 4, she was approached to help teach Sunday School. She said, "Oh, not this year, because I'm taking my 'O' levels." The following year, she was approached again, and she said, "Oh this year cannot, because this is my first year in JC, I'm adjusting to the new environment, new curriculum, too busy." The following year, "Oh this year I'm taking my 'A' levels. No time to serve." The following year in university: Oh cannot, I'm first year in university, I need to adjust to new environment. Very busy lah." Do you seriously think she will ever serve God? It was never her priority. To her, God will say the same words He said to the rich fool "Thou fool, tonight your soul is required of thee, what will you do with all your 10 A1s or 6 distinctions and 3 S-paper distinctions? What good is all these if you do not love and serve God?" Tonight if your soul is required of you; if you are saved, what excuses are you going to give God – I have no time to serve you? Getting top grades is more important than serving God? Let us search our hearts.

- g) Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying you should not study hard or do your best. Just the opposite. You should be the best student you can ever be, but strike a balance in your life. Remember what James said in James chapter 4 "What is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little while, and vanisheth away." What counts is what you have done for Jesus every day. Live with eternity's values in view, as the hymn writer exhorts.

**While we study, while we work, while we retire, whether we're ill or in good health, we are to serve God at every stage of our life. That is the way to live a meaningful Christian life. We know how to live when we know how to die.**

If we are going to die in a month's time, we should not live any differently from now: we should still go to school to study and interact with our peers, share the gospel, pray for others, contribute in Sunday school, bible study and fellowship groups. Visit the widows, the sick, and encourage those who are ill or depressed.

- h) After studying God's Word, we learn to obey and walk in all His ways. The 4<sup>th</sup> commandment says we are to worship the Lord and keep the Sabbath. We are of all men most blessed because we have the word of God to guide us. When God made men, He also made an instruction manual so that men would know how to live their lives in accordance to His will. That is the main objective of the Bible – it is not a list of rules that make our lives miserable. It is not a killjoy to smother every smile from our faces. It is really God's love in showing us how to avoid the pitfalls, how to avoid Satan's traps to ensnare us. Today, when you go to Cambodia or Afghanistan killing fields, they are still clearing out the anti-personal landmines that were laid during the war years. When I was in the army, I used to be in charge of the ammunition store and I have seen these

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harmless-looking anti-personal mines. They are just this small round metal can -like nivea cream. They are often buried just a few centimeters under the surface of the soil or sand, so you can't see it especially after the rain. It gets covered in time by grass or even flowers on the surface. It's deceptively innocuous-looking. But when you step on it, you may die. Those who are fortunate may lose one leg. Millions of people have been maimed and killed by these deadly mines. In fact, possibly more people are killed and maimed by these humble contraptions than by the state-of-the-art missiles or artillery fire from bombs, sniper rifles or machine guns. Every now and then, an innocent child playing in the fields will step on one of these and be seriously injured or killed. Today, volunteer aid agencies help these countries to clear out the landmines. They use this metal detector that detects the buried mines that the naked eye cannot see. The bible is like this metal detector; it keeps you from danger. It warns you of the dangerous places and wicked people to avoid. With the word of God, you can detect the landmine or booby traps laid by Satan to trap those who are not vigilant. You learn to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Studying God's word helps you to smell a rat from afar and warns you from danger. Flee from the devil, flee from the seductive women, flee from temptation, resist the devil, flee from those "get rich quick schemes which are invariably scams". I'm amazed that until today, we still hear of people falling for these scams after it has been widely reported for years in the papers and TV. People never learn from others' mistakes. Why? Maybe they are ignorant, don't read news or don't watch TV. It's the same with us; the bible has recorded all these warning signs for us, so that we may learn to avoid them. Because the world out there is dangerous – and you have watched on TV, or read in the papers how many teenagers have shipwrecked their young lives due to an abortion, due to unwanted pregnancy and subsequent murder of their unwanted baby. How many young peoples' lives have been ruined by internet sex, violent computer games, pornography, drugs, alcohol, glue-sniffing, etc. How many are living in regret because of that moment of weakness, succumbing to temptation, that failure to heed biblical warnings. Even godly men like David, Solomon were not spared. Why? Because they did not heed God's word. Disobedience to God's commandments always leads to trouble and miseries.

- i) We can learn much from examples of godly men and women. Hence, it's good to read biographies of godly men. Don't waste time reading sensational magazines or reports of Singapore idol contestants or the movie stars – who's going out with who, who has split with who, etc. I pray you will not model your life upon Madonna, or Britney Spears, or F4, Elizabeth Taylor, or Baey Yong Jun, etc. Because if you scrutinise the lives of most of these famous movie & pop stars, you will find most are not Christians. Just because they wear a cross pendant does not make them a Christian. Because most of them are living in sin and have messed up lives with drugs and committed adultery. That reflects the glamorous

lifestyle of Hollywood – but behind the glamour, there is no substance or happiness. That is why you see them committing suicide, getting married and divorced umpteen times, getting addicted to drugs, and still unable to find true happiness. Because they have found it all the wrong places. They have modeled their lives after worldly values.

## Relationship with Parents

- a) Rather than asking what are our duties to parents, I would rather ask "How can we cultivate a happy rewarding and lifelong relationship with our parents?"
- b) Again, we look to God's Word as the instruction manual for our lives. What is the biblical pattern to model our relationship with parents?
- c) Filial piety is a very important and constant theme that

### **The 5<sup>th</sup> commandment - Honour Thy Father and Thy Mother that thy days may be prolonged.**

runs throughout the bible. There is a very good reason for its emphasis. God is our Abba Father – so **our relationship with our natural father and mother, mirrors our relationship with God the Heavenly Father.** When we are young, we do not understand who God is, so we have to depend on our earthly parents who give us life to guide us. Thus parental authority represents God's authority to us. When we are older, we understand who God is, yet, we still need to honour and obey our parent's authority because God says so.

- d) We are to respect their position and authority. Leviticus 19:3 "Ye shall fear every man his mother and his father". The word "**fear**" means **giving due respect and reverence.** It means always greeting them and acknowledging them. Do not ignore them or take them for granted. Be considerate to their needs, show them you love them by doing things for them, for example helping with household chores. Making a special handmade card, or baking a cake or cookies for their birthdays. Writing a card telling them you appreciate their love and care for you, and that you love them too.
- e) Do not speak evil of them for none of us are perfect. Our parents are also sinners who make mistakes, and have weaknesses. It is sinful to speak of their sins to our friends in a despising manner, or comparing our parents with our friends' parents. Honour them in what you say to others.
- f) Do not humiliate them in old age. If you have an aged parent, you may find it difficult to take care of them when they develop some chronic illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease or dementia. We used to have an old cleaner at my block who developed dementia and was retrenched by the firm. But because of her memory loss, she kept returning to our block and asked to be allowed in to do her work. Of course the security guard wouldn't let her in, and contacted her

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daughter to bring her home. First time it happened, her daughter came and scolded her and brought her home. The second time it happened, her daughter actually slapped her mother and chided her loudly in public, and dragged her back home. When I heard that, I was shocked! Yes, she may have been stubborn, and uncooperative; but it was a mental illness. How terrible! Nothing justifies this kind of violent abusive behaviour towards her mother.

- g) When we honour our parents, God has a promise of long life for the children. Conversely, those who disgrace their parents bring shame and reproach to themselves. Proverbs 19:26 *"He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach."* In 1 Timothy 5:8, the apostle Paul wrote concerning providing for widowed parents or grandparents : But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

## Relationship with Peers

- a) Provoke not one another to anger with your flippant words, but *"provoke one another unto love and good works"* (Heb 10:24).
- b) Matthew Poole commented "Iron cutting tools are made bright, and sharp, and fit for use by rubbing

***"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Prov 27:17.***

them against the file, or some other iron. So a man, being alone, is sad, and dull, and inactive, by the company and conversation of his friend is greatly refreshed, his very wits sharpened, and his spirit revived, and he is both fitted for and provoked to action. The countenance is .... the mind or spirit, whose temper or disposition is commonly visible in men's countenances (faces)." Be accountable to one another. Be your brother's keeper; look out for the weaker brethren; help one another with your school work. Do good to those of the household of faith (Gal 6:10). Related to this is to beware of the company you keep. Are your best friends Christians? If you keep company with worldly people (even worldly Church friends), you will soon become like them. 1 Corinthians 15:33 *"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners."*

- c) Strive to be holy; Flee from and fight the attractions of the world. 2 Timothy 2:22 *"Flee youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."* Proverbs 4: 18-19 *"The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto that perfect day. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble."* That's a warning to young people: don't stay out late or frequent places that you know are not safe. Don't say I want to try out, I want to test God whether He will protect me from danger. That is sheer

foolishness that will be severely punished by God. God has already told you in His word so clearly don't go there, and you still want to go, what do you expect God to do? Give you a candy? Satan will dangle a candy to entice you, but if you take that bait, you will get caned, not candy. God will surely punish you and make you learn a lesson you'll never forget.

- d) So strive to enter in at the strait gate; broad is the way that leads to destruction and many in the world will take the easy way, but narrow is the gate that leads to life, and few there be that finds it. Christians will always be the minority in this world. And it will always be difficult to fight peer pressures. Don't think it is unique to teenagers or youths. Working adults face the same pressures. There is that pressure to conform to the world. When you start working, you earn your pay packet – you want to dress like that actor or actress or your boss. You want to spend on that new house with designer décor and furniture, state-of-the-art home entertainment system, you want to buy that dream car or sports car. When you get promoted, when you see everyone in the office buying bigger and more expensive cars to denote their higher status, are you tempted to do the same? After all everyone is doing it. Hence we need to purpose in our hearts like Daniel to follow God.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, you have a bright future before you. You have the opportunity: yes it is challenging times. Your studies & CCAs are more demanding than ever, crowding out whatever spare time you have. Whatever you do, at whatever stage of life you may be in, whether young or old,

## REMEMBER:

### Deacon Lee Hock Chin

***"what doth the LORD require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul."***

## Announcements

### Teachers' Day Lunch Fellowship

**Date: 4 Sept (Sunday after Worship Service)**

**Time: 1-3pm**

**Venue: Teochew Garden Restaurant, The Concourse, Beach Road**

### Editorial Team:

**Mrs Julia Koh, Mrs Selina Lee**