



EVERYDAY SPIRITUALITY!

Join me in thinking about this question, 'What are the times you feel most Christian about yourself?' Just pause here for a moment (No cheating :p).

Is it when you are engrossed in singing and worshipping God? Or when you pray with fellow Christians or show extraordinary kindness to others? Is it while you are serving in Church/CF or battling to share the gospel? Is God most real on Sunday or nearest when you spend time alone with Him?

Ok now, could you identify with the above? Were you able to say 'Yes, this is the moment' or did you have a lot of difficulty answering? Did you wonder, 'Why bother asking this question? Aren't we Christian all day? Aren't we Christian in or out of Church? We are Christian whether ill or healthy.' Yes, most assuredly. We are Christian all the time. Certainly. My concern is whether in actual life, we see the congruency displayed and faith truly weaving into our daily living.

LIFE 'UNDER THE SUN'

I sense that many of us feel torn apart in living out the Christian life. Very often we feel it is easy to practise our faith among fellow believers but when we are with non-believers it's a different story. We find ourselves doing it so naturally when our course-mates request a favor to sign on their behalf when they 'ponteng' class. At other times, we find it so difficult to uphold the truth before our friends and course mates when faced with situations that conflict with our faith. We call video and music sharing 'genius'. We join others in despising those who rob us of our equal rights. We are 'at peace' with all these.

Why is it that more often than not the reality of the living God is left behind with the Sunday worship/CF meeting? How can we translate the 'high' feeling we felt there into living faith for ourselves and our charges? Christ was real and powerful to Peter and Paul. How is Christ real to me and those around? Or does He go no further than getting me to heaven? Do you see Him as a needy Master who demands your time, money & talents?

Can I really not go through a day without Him? I certainly can. Somehow I'm so good at putting Him away. I mean do we really need Him to get us to the lecture hall every morning or while having our meals? Do we really need Him in every exam, quiz or presentation? Or to be honest only for the killer lecturer we pray extra hard for God's favor? Is God's presence really so significant day in and day out in my life?

What about your inner life? Do you ever sense the chilly loneliness and the unnamed fears engulfing you on a rainy day, as if the world has deserted and forgotten you? Or the experience of extreme boredom chewing you up on a hot afternoon when no one is around except a fierce swinging fan? This is my experience at times! Sometimes when I open my eyes in the morning, the only desire that I have is the desire not to get out of bed. I will be like a slimy worm wriggling about in bed wondering what this day is for. Facing procrastinated chores or people who I do not feel like facing? What's so exciting about being alive? Where is the abundant life that Christ promised? Oh my, isn't the purpose of life the most unique candy promised by the Christian faith? What has gone wrong?

THE LIFE OF FAITH & JOY

Whenever I come to my senses, I feel it has been weeks of *ignoring* the goodness and presence of God in my daily living; When I look back at the less than edifying choices that I made or words that I said, I realize my God was pushed aside and I *have not consulted* Him nor wanted to hear from Him. **I did not seek the Holy Spirit and was rewarded with powerlessness in my service unto Him.**

Back to inner life. What could turn around the mood of the day for me? Hmmm it can be relatively simple. Sometimes it is the fresh air that I breathe early morning or a peep at a cute animal. It could be a song or rainbow. It could be the liveliness at the playground or a chat with friend. Oh there are many. When I stumble on to these things in *consciousness*, I thank God for life, for His glorious wisdom in His creation. He has bestowed so many resources for us to tap into, to feast on and to celebrate.

How can He not make sense or be real in my life if he is really part of it? Being the good and loving God, He makes sense in His challenge to our views on BGR, at the problematic housemate or the failed parent. God speaks to us and at times through the counsel of man. He intercepts the way we make choices. He purges our die-hard principles "That's-my-money", "I-like-ah" etc. He is lord over every aspect of our life. **Ultimately He is the only one who approves of us. Yes daily, Christ makes most sense when we involve Him in the things we do, the choices we make and the hopes we have.**

'Selah' an isolated word found in certain psalms (e.g. Ps 3, 4, 62 etc) and Hab 3 has uncertain meaning. Most likely though, it is a liturgical notation that calls for a brief musical interlude or for a brief liturgical response by congregation. Therefore 'selah' may mean "stop and listen".

'Selah' is chosen as the title of this newsletter based on this understanding. Here we would like to call for a time of pause and consider on what is said here regarding our spirituality, our life as Christian.

Source: NIV Study Bible: Psalms: Authorship & Title. Zondervan.

Ever read Ecclesiastes? What's your first impression? Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless... so blue! Exactly! Have you felt that this book is at odds with the teaching of the bible? I felt that way until I came across the meaning of 'under the sun' in it.

Apparently it means a place where God is not present. Michael Eaton says, 'Ecclesiastes is an exploration of the barrenness of life without a practical faith in God. Intermingled with its pessimism are invitations to a different outlook altogether, in which joy and purpose are found when God is seen to be 'there' and to be characterized supremely by generosity'.

Indeed, it is a choice of ours to live 'under the sun' or 'above it' where God is actively present.

Everyday spirituality starts with acknowledging the presence and goodness of God. It continues on with answering the question how much He has a say in my doing, living, being... We may not feel Christ fill our mind every waking minute but if we consciously acknowledge His presence and Lordship, we will not lose Him on life's fast lane.

Winston Churchill said, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened." I pray that if this reflection has any truth for you, you would take a 'selah' moment to look at it and re-orientate your life as it so warrants.

At a very early age, Annie Sherwood Hawks (1835-1918) displayed a gift for writing verse and by the age of 14, was contributing poetry regularly to various newspapers. She left the following account regarding the writing of her one immortal hymn, 'I Need Thee Every Hour':



One day as a young wife and mother of 37 years of age, I was busy with my regular household tasks during a bright June morning, in 1872. Suddenly, I became filled with the sense of nearness to the Master, and I began to wonder how anyone could ever live without Him, either in joy or pain. Then, the words were ushered into my mind and these thoughts took full possession of me - "I need Thee every hour..."

16 years after writing her hymn text, Mrs. Hawks experienced the death of her husband, which, she has written, "cast a shadow of great loss over my life". She has left this account regarding the spiritual help she received from her own hymn during this very difficult period of her life: I did not understand at first why this hymn had touched the great throbbing heart of humanity. It was not until long years after, when the shadow fell over my way, the shadow of a great loss, that I understood something of the comforting power in the words, which I had been permitted to give out to others in my hour of sweet serenity and peace."



"Men invent means and methods of coming at God's love, they learn rules and set up devices to remind them of that love, and it seems like a world of trouble to bring oneself into the consciousness of God's presence. Yet it might be so simple. Is it not quicker and easier just to do our common business wholly for the love of him?"

Brother Lawrence (1611-1691) began life as Nicholas Herman, born to peasant parents in Lorraine, France. As a young man, his poverty forced him into joining the army, and thus he was guaranteed meals and a small stipend. Sometime later, an injury forced his retirement from the army, and after a stint as a footman, he entered the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Paris as Brother Lawrence. He was assigned to the monastery kitchen where, amidst the tedious chores of cooking and cleaning at the constant bidding of his superiors, he developed his rule of spirituality and work. For Brother Lawrence, "common business," no matter how mundane or routine, was the medium of God's love. The issue was not the sacredness or worldly status of the task but the motivation behind it.

"Nor is it needful that we should have great things to do. . . We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God."

*I need thee every hour, most gracious Lord;
no tender voice like thine can peace afford.
I need thee every hour; stay thou nearby;
temptations lose their power when thou art nigh.
I need thee every hour, in joy or pain;
come quickly and abide, or life is vain.
I need thee every hour; teach me thy will;
and thy rich promises in me fulfill.
I need thee every hour, most Holy One;
O make me thine indeed, thou blessed Son.
I need thee, O I need thee; every hour I need thee;
O bless me now, my Savior, I come to thee.*

- Annie Hawks -

Questions for Reflection

1. What has constituted my everyday spirituality? Try to pay attention to the significance of God in your life in the following weeks.
2. Am I the life 'under the sun'? If yes, what do I need to do to reverse the situation?

Books to Read:

1. Nouwen, Henry. *Letters to Marc about Jesus*, Harper Collins.
2. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Spire Books
3. Gire, Ken. *Windows of the Soul*, Zondervan
4. Devotion on the book of Ecclesiastes, page 289-313, in *Asian Reflections Year Three*, Scripture Union Malaysia.