

# church

## times

THE CHURCH IN SINGAPORE

NO. 1 DERBYSHIRE ROAD

SINGAPORE 309457

TEL: 256 5176 FAX: 256 5977

WEBSITE: WWW.CHURCH.ORG.SG

MITA (P) NO: 330/09/2000

2001 ISSUE NO. 2

## The Song of Songs

# Stages of the Bride's Spiritual Growth

**M**any things are recorded in the Bible, but the central and most beautiful is the Creator's relationship with His people. God sees His people as His bride: "your Maker is your husband" (Is 54:5). At the beginning of the Bible, we see Adam and Eve, who are a type of Christ and the church; at the end, we see the Lamb and His wife, Christ and the New Jerusalem (Rev 19:7, 21:2).

The Song of Songs is a book unparalleled in its portrayal of the love between Christ and His bride, the church. Through the love between King Solomon and the Shulamite, it shows how Christ adorns His bride and how the church is perfected in love. Besides, we can also learn the stages of spiritual growth of an individual believer and of the corporate church. As we briefly highlight the progress of the beloved in the book, let us consider its application in our Christian life and church life.

## Longing for the Lord's love

"Let him kiss me" (1:2) - this opening verse expresses the beloved's longing for the king. Due to her longing, the king brings her into his chambers (1:4), where she realises that she is dark like the tents of Kedar, but lovely like the curtains of Solomon (1:5).

A kiss is not a teaching, but a subjective experience in an intimate relationship. Love is the most crucial factor in our spiritual growth. Corporately, the church must love Christ with such a first love. Otherwise, she is fallen (Rev 2:4-5).

Just like the beloved, when we enter into the inner chamber, our spirit, to have fellowship with the Lord, our natural and fallen life is exposed in His light. However, we also see how wonderful it is to

have Christ in us. We realise we are dark, but with Christ within us, we are lovely in God's eyes.

## Seeking to know the Lord

Besides seeing that she is dark, the beloved also experiences being oppressed by those around her. "My

*(Continued on page 2)*



*Many of us, at some point, may have asked ourselves, "Am I growing spiritually? Have I become more transformed than before? What is the stage of maturity? How then can I be considered matured?" In our deepest most, we do desire to grow and become matured.*

*Thank the Lord for the wonderful book of Song of Songs. Through the love between King Solomon and the Shulamite, we see the love between God and His people. Not only that, the book also describes incisively the growth of the bride of Christ, the church.*

*The Lord's word is so timely: in the previous issue we saw that the church must be perfected in love; in this issue, from the highlights of the Spring Conference held in Stuttgart, we see the stages of her spiritual growth portrayed in the Song of Songs. Let us be enlightened of our spiritual conditions, arise and move on with the Lord!*

*(Continued on next column)*

*The editors*

mother's sons were angry with me; They made me the keeper of the vineyards, But my vineyard I have not kept" (1:6). In spite of this, she refuses to be veiled (be without vision). She seeks to know the king's desire and asks him where he feeds his flock and makes it rest at noon (1:7). The king does not tell her directly what to do but instructs her to "follow in the footsteps of the flock, And feed your little goats Beside the shepherds' tents" (1:8).

The flock refers to the church, and its footsteps, the way of the church. The church began more than 2,000 years ago when the Lord was still on the earth. The apostles and many saints of the past have walked this way. Today, we need to do nothing novel, except to simply follow the footsteps of the flock.

### Knowing our natural condition

At this stage, although the beloved is fair (1:8), she is not yet perfect. The king compares her to "my filly among Pharaoh's chariots" (1:9), meaning she still retains her natural strength. Although the king does not condemn this, he says that she is among Pharaoh's chariots and not Solomon's chariots. The king continues to describe the beloved's "cheeks are lovely with ornaments, Your neck with chains of gold. We will make you ornaments of gold With studs of silver" (1:10-11).

Just like the beloved, in the initial stage of our spiritual life, our natural strength is often dominant in our service, and our beauty is attributed to the outward ornaments. When the apostle Paul tried to serve God in his natural strength, he persecuted the church. Until on the road to Damascus, when the great light shone upon him, did he meet the Lord and realise his mistakes.



God does not want us to serve Him with our natural strength. Neither should we try to please God or accomplish His will by our outward good works and good behaviour. Although we should do good, God desires much more to work His nature into us. We must submit to our skilled Craftsman and allow Him to do His fine work on us.

### Enjoying the Lord's riches leads to consecration

The beloved progresses in her experience: "While the king is at his table, My spikenard sends forth its fragrance" (1:12). Having enjoyed the king's presence and riches (cf Solomon's rich provision in 1 Kings 4:22-23), she willingly gives herself fully to him.

Consecration is of great significance in our experience with the Lord. Previously, we treasured ourselves and thought highly of what we are and do. However, after sitting with our Lord at His table and enjoying His riches, the Holy Spirit works on us and leads us to realise we are nothing and can do nothing. Willingly

we surrender our natural man to be broken and consecrate ourselves to Him; just like Mary who broke her alabaster vase of spikenard for Jesus and the fragrance filled the house (Mark 14:3; John 12:3). Such a consecration is genuine, issuing from love and the spirit and diffusing a fragrance.

### Sweetness of His death

The beloved views the king as "a bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, That lies all night between my breasts" (1:13), and as "a cluster of henna blooms In the vineyard of En Gedi" (1:14). To her, the king is the unique one for in fact, En Gedi is a wilderness and henna blooms are usually not found in vineyards.

The fragrance of the spikenard and myrrh are references to the cross. The Hebrew word for henna blooms also means propitiation or ransom. The Lord became poor for our sake and paid dearly to redeem us, so that we can be saved, be reconciled with God and become His bride. Who else could pay such a price for us? When we touch the depths of His love and taste the sweetness of His death, we cannot help but consecrate ourselves to Him.

The subsequent transformation in the beloved has significant meaning for our spiritual growth. To obtain spiritual sight (dove's eyes; 1:15) for beholding the beauty of the Lord, we need to lead a consecrated life. All spiritual experiences begin with spiritual seeing. As we move on, we will experience Christ as our rest and nourishment (bed; 1:16).

The building up of the church requires the humanity of Jesus (1:17). Our Lord is full of mercy and gentleness. We, however, by nature cannot endure sufferings and often encounter conflicts with others. Only the Lord's

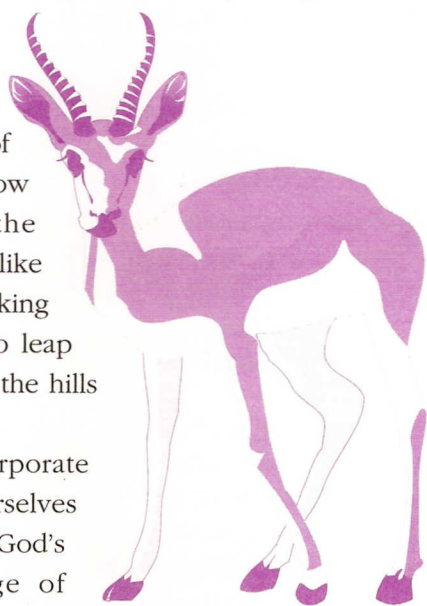
humanity can build up the church. He has overcome the enemy and all temptations (worldly glory, riches and status). Besides appreciating the Lord's humanity, we also ought to take Him as our humanity. The understanding of Christ's transcendent humanity causes us to realise we have nothing to boast of. We are like "the rose of Sharon, And the lily of the valleys" (2:1), fully dependent on the Lord. As we respond to His love, we enjoy His love and His supply in the Spirit.

### Power of His resurrection

In 2:3-6 the beloved is sitting in the shade, feasting in the banqueting house, and enjoying the king's riches. She seems satisfied, secure and somewhat complacent. Then we see a wall between the king and her (2:9). She thinks this wall is to protect her, but the king is outside, looking in through the window and calling her to rise up and go with him (2:10), for he has prepared even more for her.

Earlier, the beloved has experienced the king as a bundle of myrrh, now she must continue to know him as one who leaps upon the mountains and skips upon the hills, like a gazelle or a young stag (2:8-9). The king calls out to her for he wants her to leap upon the mountains and skip upon the hills with him.

Both in our individual and corporate experience, we often surround ourselves with a wall. For hundreds of years, God's people often arrived at a stage of



‘ How fair is your love,  
My sister, my spouse!  
How much better than  
wine is your love, And the  
scent of your perfumes Than  
all spices! ’

Song of Songs 4:10

complacency, thinking that we have seen all and gained everything. We hide ourselves within the walls and stop moving on with the Lord. Sometimes, we are even afraid of stepping out beyond the walls.

We need more revelation and our spiritual life must go on, for our Lord is ever moving on and His calling never stops. In fact, our Lord is like the one who leaps upon the mountains and skips upon the hills. He is the resurrected Lord and is full of the power of resurrection. He has overcome His enemy and death and He is able to overcome all hindrances and difficulties. He does not wish that we remain stagnant in our experience of Him; we should respond to His calling and go on with Him.

While we love the Lord and enjoy His life, we must also deal with the little problems in our daily life and church life. Just as the beloved needs to "catch... The little foxes that spoil the vines" (2:15) or the vines cannot bear fruits.

### Transformation issues in building

"By night on my bed I sought the one I love; ... but I did not find him" (3:1). Immediately, the beloved rises to seek him in the city, the streets and squares, even asking the watchmen (3:2-3). Eventually, the king appears to her.

Despite having enjoyed the Lord, we may still feel the presence of night in our lives. This is the time to exercise faith and be persistent in seeking, just as in the beloved's case. For instance, in the night we may think the sun is not present for we cannot see it and we feel cold, but the sun in fact still exists. Although sometimes we cannot touch the Lord in the meetings or in our personal prayers or trials, we should not give up. Continue to seek the Lord and He will appear to us.

“Who is this coming out of the wilderness Like pillars of smoke, Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense” (3:6)? Here we see the beloved has become like a pillar of smoke, firm and unperturbed. The transformation into a pillar of smoke is for building. When we are willing to pay the price, deny our Self, experience the Lord’s death and resurrection, we will become filled with the power of the Holy Spirit for the Lord’s building. When He was on earth, the Lord Jesus was like a pillar of smoke to sinners - full of compassion toward them, but firm in His judgement of sin. We should learn from our Lord, gentle yet unwavering.

“Behold, it is Solomon’s couch, With sixty valiant men around it, Of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, Being expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh Because of fear in the night” (3:7-8). The beloved experiences the king’s victory, so now she can rest. The king has likened her to his couch, palanquin made of the wood of Lebanon, his crown (3:7-11) and his enjoyment (4:11-15).

The Lord has conquered the power of darkness. The church should be fully trusting in the Lord and enjoy His rest. She also becomes the Lord’s rest (couch), His testimony on earth (palanquin), His glory (crown) and His enjoyment.

### Partaking of the Lord’s suffering

In 5:2 the king’s head is covered with dew when he comes and knocks on the beloved’s door. While the beloved hesitates to open the door, the king puts his hand by the latch of the door (5:4), and at once, the beloved yearns for him and rises to open the door (5:5), but to find him gone. She calls out but he does not answer. The watchmen strike her and even take away her veil (5:7). She continues to seek him and testifies for him among the daughters of Jerusalem (5:9-6:1).

Having been transformed through experiencing the Lord’s death and resurrection, the church still needs a deeper spiritual experience of suffering with Him. Our Lord came on earth and served like a slave (Mark 10:45). He wants the bride to be prepared to suffer with Him. The Lord has saved us from the world so that we may labour

*Some of the local saints who attended the Spring Conference with Bro George So (extreme right).*



with Him, serve and suffer as He did in preaching the gospel, building the church and accomplishing God’s will.

Personally, we must not stop following the Lord, but by His nail-pierced hands, we should hold fast. When we meet trials in our lives, do not forsake the Lord, but continue to seek Him and testify for Him in the church.

### Perfected through suffering thus hastening His return

In chapter 6, the beloved becomes the king’s unique love and glory. “O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, Lovely as Jerusalem, Awesome as an army with banners! ... Your teeth are like a flock of sheep Which have come up from the washing; Every one bears twins, And none is barren among them. Like a piece of pomegranate Are your temples behind your veil. ... My dove, my perfect one, Is the only one, The only one of her mother, The favourite of the one who bore her. The daughters ... saw her And call her blessed, The queens and the concubines, And they praised her” (6:4-9).

The beloved is now matured and overcomes the enemy. She has teeth to take the heavenly food (the hidden manna), and she is able to discern between what is of the spirit and what is of the flesh, having her senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb 5:14).

Finally, the beloved is called “Shulamite” (6:13), which is the feminine form of “Solomon”, meaning peace. The Shulamite and Solomon are perfect counterparts; she becomes his perfect spouse. She is prepared for his service (7:1-9); she labours with him (7:11-13), keeps his vineyard (8:11-12) and takes care of the little sister (8:8). In the end, the beloved urges the king to come quickly, “Make haste, my beloved” (8:14).

*Abstracted from the Spring Conference 2001 in Stuttgart, Germany*

# Knowing About Tongues

## What is tongue-speaking?

In Greek, the word “glossa” means the tongue or a language. In the Bible, the term “speaking in tongues” comes from this word. Hence, “tongues” refers to languages, not strange sounds made by the tongue or repetition of a phrase.

When God created man, He formed the tongue with the purpose that man should speak clearly. Without a tongue or if the tongue is deformed, man cannot speak clearly. Mark 7:32-35 record: “They brought to Him one who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. And He ... put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue ... and said to him ... ‘Be opened.’ Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly”. Thus, tongue always refers to speaking, eg “And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness” (Ps 35:28); “For there is not a word on my tongue, But ... You know it altogether” (Ps 139:4).

‘...tongues refers to languages, not strange sounds made by the tongue or repetition of a phrase.’

## The purpose of tongue-speaking

Some people claim that tongue-speaking can heal and cast out demons. However, the Bible does not record so. Rather, they are accomplished by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf Acts 3:2-7; 9:36-42; 10:38; 14:3, 8-10; 16:16-18).

The purpose of tongue-speaking is to magnify God (Acts 10:46), speak mysteries in the spirit (1 Cor 14:2), tell of God’s acts and for a sign to unbelievers (1 Cor 14:22). In Acts 1:8 the Lord promised: “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem ...”. This was

fulfilled in Acts 2:3-4: “There appeared to them divided tongues ... and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”.

The Holy Spirit’s gift of tongue-speaking is for the disciples to testify for Him, and their speaking in other languages means speaking in tongues. The devout Jews who came from all over the world to Jerusalem for the feast spoke different native languages that the disciples did not know. God gave the disciples the gift of tongue-speaking so that those Jews might know His salvation, repent and receive the Lord. On that day, about 3,000 were saved.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul also shows the principle that all spiritual gifts are for the edification of the church. “If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church” (1 Cor 14:27-28). For “unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance” (1 Cor 14:9-10). Therefore, the gift of tongue-speaking by the Holy Spirit surely has its definite purposes.

*(Reference: A Thorough Study of the Charismatic Movement, Voice Books Ltd, The Confusion of the Charismatic Movement, John F MacArthur, Jr.)*

## Who changed my life?

**“But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life”**

*(John 4:14)*

**W**hen I was studying at a private school four years ago, I was a happy-go-lucky youth. I had lots of free time and under the influence of my “best” friends, I started to indulge in an active nightlife. Clubbing, drinking and smoking were some of my favourite pastimes.

I was never home on weekends. My Mom could not control me, as my social activities did not affect my grades. Whatever she said never really got into me.

When I entered the university, I tried to quit smoking as it was giving me some health problems. So I became a “social” smoker. I was still clubbing in my first year, though less often than before. I never knew how empty and wasted my life was until I met Jesus Christ. It was through a Christian friend’s “unconscious” testimony that I became curious about Christ.

During school term, Friday used to be the most tiring day of the week, having slogged through countless lectures and tutorials. Puzzling though, this friend would return to the hostel from his weekly Christian meetings feeling refreshed. As his engineering course had more than double my weekly hours of lessons, I expected him to dread going to the meetings or to come back feeling drained, but it was the opposite.

One Friday, I decided to join him at the meeting. I was curious to know the power of this Jesus and what it is like in a Christian meeting. At the initial few occasions, I felt strange and awkward, as I had never attended such meetings before. There were lots of hymn-singing and Bible-reading. However, I continued going. Unknowingly, my visits to pubs and my drinking reduced, although smoking still clung on.

At a gospel meeting some months later, the vision of Jesus dying on the cross touched me deeply, and realising what He had done for me, I wept. I decided to accept the Lord Jesus Christ into my life and be baptised. From that moment, Jesus Christ took over my life and I began to change.

I saw that although I led a so-called “exciting” nightlife, I always came home feeling empty and sad. I was constantly searching for something to fill up the void in my heart, but no matter how much I partied or drank, the void just seemed to grow. I was still searching blindly until Christ, the life-giving Spirit, filled my emptiness from deep within. Indeed, only He can truly satisfy me. By His mercy and grace, I soon kicked the smoking habit.



Jesus has promised never to leave me, and He never does. He has promised to take care of me, and this He really does. With each new experience with Him, I learn to trust Him more. He has become the Lord of my life and I can do nothing without Him. Although I often stumble, He never fails to pick me up and rest me in His bosom. Oh, how sweet and precious is this Christ to me! Hallelujah!

*Sis Angi Ang*



### Announcements & Prayer Items

#### Wedding Thanksgiving Meeting Bro James Lim & Sis Alice Phua

Date : Sunday, 23 September 2001  
Venue : Hall 1  
Time : 4pm

#### Church Conference

Date : 4 - 7 December 2001  
Venue : To be determined