

ASIAN BEACON

YOUR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE

**CELEBRATING
SEX**

**Celebrate
God's Bounty**

Maggie's
MISSION

TALKING ABOUT
Tattoos

**LIFE
& DEBT**

**THE CAKE
MAESTRO**

**TODAY,
WE BECAME
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**I love my
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EDITOR'S NOTE

COME CELEBRATE

Come, let's party. Oops... I mean let's celebrate, since "party" may sound frivolous and worldly to some. Ok then, let's celebrate. But with the gloomy economy and sickening corruption, revolting injustice and many other ills plaguing us, is there anything to celebrate?

I say yes at the risk of sounding 'churchy' but in Christ, we have every reason to celebrate. This Christmas season, we celebrate His coming into the world to redeem us and our blue celestial ball. Through Christ, lights flash, darkness retreats, colours emerge. And work turns from drudgery into pleasure, hobbies become happy pastimes, meaningless sexual pursuits become a satisfying union of two wedded lovers. Even death becomes a homecoming celebration.

There's too much to celebrate and in this issue, we only have enough pages to cover a few – life, death, gifts, skills and sex.

Firstly, the glorious cake on the front cover is the masterpiece of Khoo Li Ying, a pharmacist who celebrates her gift by producing stunning cakes. Thanks Li Ying for letting your kebaya cake adorn our cover. Read about her passion on pages 6-7.

Will you lie in a coffin to experience what death is like? Apparently, this is a trend in South Korea, where people can attend their own 'living funerals' to get a better perspective of life. Pastor Victor Wong recently held his 'living funeral' but not because he needed a deeper perspective of life. Find out why he did it and whether he lay in his coffin. Shiverrrrsss...

We often talk about *being* before *doing* – what we do is an outflow of who we are. This also applies to sex, according to psychologist Dr Hera Lukman. Turn to pages 12-13 to "get into her mind".

Remember Maggie Loo? Baby boomers and Gen-Xers should. She was the 1973 Miss Malaysia Universe and has groomed more than 20 beauty queens since then. Along the way, she came to faith in Christ and turned into a different kind of royalty – from beauty queen, she's now princess of the Most High King!

Oh, we've got so many wonderful reads within that will inspire and challenge you to a deeper faith in Christ, our Lord and Saviour. So, read and be blessed.

As you celebrate the coming of our Lord Jesus this Christmas season, we at *Asian Beacon* wish you all the love and joy and peace. ✨

Just

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CONTENTS

October – December 2017 Vol. 49 No.3



4 Editor's Note

COVER STORY

6 The Cake Maestro

8 Funeral First, Die Later

10 The 8-Day Miracle

12 Celebrating sex

14 Playing her strings in Sweden

MY STORY

16 I Love My Gay Son

18 Dear Writer of "To My Ex-Church"

20 To My Current Church

FEATURE

22 Maggie's Mission

24 Life and Debt

26 Spirited After Spirit Encounter

28 Today, We Became Celebrities

30 Talking about Tattoos

32 Here Come The Food Trucks

REGULAR

34 Thanksgiving As A Spiritual Weapon

36 Fan Into Flame The Gift Of God

38 Celebrate God's Bounty

40 Dear Goldie

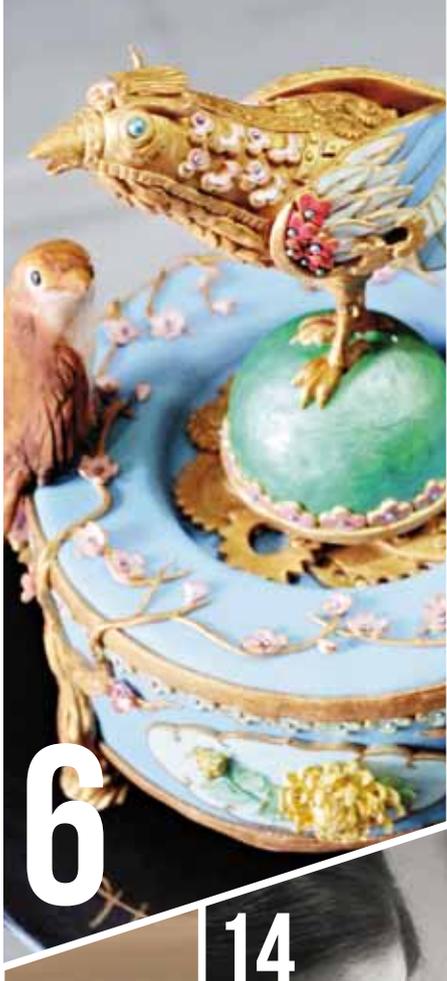
42 Songs Steeped In Malaysian Flavour



28



6



14



8



10



30



THE CAKE Maestra

By Debbie Loh

Of all the Sunday School lessons she remembers best, the building of the Tabernacle in Exodus is the one that has stuck with Khoo Li Ying till today, even as an adult and mother of three. The detailed instructions to construct the temple of God's dwelling among the Israelites; the intricate embellishments on the Ark of the Covenant, lampstand and the altar of burnt offerings; the call to Israel's finest artisans and craftsmen – all these fascinated her more than any other story in the Bible.

Li Ying has always loved arts and craft, and being a stickler for details, it is no surprise that the trained pharmacist is now an award-winning cake artist, and much sought after for celebration and special-occasion cakes.

Her creation, "The Emperor's Nightingale", sang its way to the judges' hearts at the Cake Challenge Malaysia 2014, sweeping the Best Theme Cake award in the fairytale category. She also picked up the silver medal in the Kualu Cake Decorating Challenge 2012 in the sports category with a cake bearing the Olympic torch and mascots to commemorate the Games in London that year.

But of all her many stunning creations, "Nightingale" and "Peranakan" (front cover) are two of her proudest works, and entailed the most detailed processes that express the storyline.

"Nightingale", based on the Hans Christian Andersen fairytale, was inspired by Chinese antiques and steampunk-inspired art.

"The intricacy of this art genre reminded me of how God gave the design for the Tabernacle and all its implements. The details of the art and design are just fascinating," said Li Ying. "I'm also fascinated by how the Israelites gave their time and energy to the artwork. It's such an act of devotion."

She poured in the same devotion into "Peranakan", a four-tiered beauty of pastel

colours embellished with intricate, delicate batik and embroidery patterns. "Peranakan was a tribute to my grandma's Penang nyonya heritage and was based on the pastel colours, batik and embroidered kebaya that she used to wear."

ALL IN THE DETAILS

For every cake, Li Ying does rigorous research into the story behind the theme assigned by the client and looks up pictures on the Internet. She then sketches draft designs, plots the dimensions of the cake and calculates ratios for ingredients to know how much cake is needed in order to create the design in mind.

A peek into her sketchbook is like looking at one of Leonardo Da Vinci's notebooks filled with mathematical formulas, physics calculations and 3D architectural drawings.

"I love the research and development process. It involves so many interesting subjects – history, science, art, anatomy.

"For example, in the Nightingale project, because the story had an oriental element to it, I wanted the emperor's music box to reflect

Chinese imperial art. So I researched to get inspiration and ideas. I want my projects to be factually based. If I'm given a theme on 'Beauty and the Beast', I'd read up on French art and study pictures of it.

"For designs where part of the cake is suspended, a lot of planning goes into the internal structural support," she said, referring to her



Gravity defying chopsticks digging into a bowl of longevity noodles, with scallops, prawns, abalone, egg and mushrooms for a 70th birthday celebration.



Cake maestro Li Ying with Hedwig the Owl.



Winner of the Best Theme Cake award under the fairytale category – “The Emperor’s Nightingale” sang its way to judges’ hearts at Cake Challenge Malaysia 2014.

upside-down hanging Spiderman cake done for one of her daughters’ birthdays, and other designs that involved a suspended beer can and a suspended coffee pot – with coffee poured out, to boot!

One of her other amazing feats is Hedwig the Owl, Harry Potter’s pet in the JK Rowling fantasy series. To re-create Hedwig’s wings, Li Ying studied anatomical drawings of a Snowy owl to create a replica of the actual wings, down to each feather.

Flowers are also a favourite theme and for cakes with floral elements, Li Ying will turn to nature to replicate the exact designs and measurements.

“You won’t believe the amount of trivia and facts I’ve learnt from all my cake projects,” she laughed.

It’s this learning while doing that keeps her interested in cake decoration. Where hobbies are often quickly discarded in adulthood due to time constraints, Li Ying said cake decorating keeps her curious about life and the world.

“There is always one aspect that is new in every project that pushes the boundaries in design. I also only take on projects that excite me. I won’t do repeat orders of the same design. I also don’t like it when someone gives me a photo

and asks me to do exactly as the photo shows. It has to be challenging and something different, or it’s not worth it,” said the mother of three girls aged 9 to 17.

INSPIRED BY THE CREATOR

Li Ying started out in 2008 with simple designs made from fondant at the encouragement of a friend.

“It was just like playing with kid’s Play-Doh,” she said. Her first designs were figurines of three little girls that went atop a birthday cake for her two elder daughters whose birthdates are days apart.

She experimented more with other birthday cakes for family members and found it both fun and more economical

to make and decorate her own cakes rather than buying them.

As she posted photos of her creations on her Facebook account, friends started asking if she could bake and decorate cakes for birthday parties and weddings. Li Ying relished the challenge and began taking orders, telling friends to pay “whatever they wanted”.

She only went “commercial” on a limited scale three years ago when she started Cakes with Ying, a Facebook page filled with jaw-dropping photos of her work. Li Ying doesn’t pay to advertise or boost her page and is content with letting the page be shared by others on social media.

“Whatever profits I make go to buying better tools and materials, or for classes, books and tutorials so that I can improve my techniques. I don’t get to pay myself much but I think it’s more important to have a self-financing hobby that you enjoy.”

ADDING JOY TO CELEBRATIONS

Her creations span a wide range of designs, from ever-popular Star Wars characters and other movie-based themes to custom-made requests.

The satisfaction comes when clients give her feedback on how well the cake



Youngest daughter Yi-Lyn having a chat with little upside-down Spidey.

Continue on pg 10...

FUNERAL FIRST, DIE LATER



By Chew Sue Lee

It isn't every day that one gets to attend a funeral of someone who is still alive. So, when Pastor Victor Wong invited people to his living funeral, many must have gone out of curiosity. Over 400 people attended the living funeral at Every Nation Church on Nov. 5 and left the service touched and inspired.

As a pastor, Victor is all too familiar with funerals. However, he feels that funerals aren't always what they are meant to be. "Having done so many, no matter how beautiful and how good the funeral is, I realised that it's always a stressful time for family members when it's really supposed to be the most meaningful time," he said.

"Family members are always attending to people and making sure things are done, so there are a lot of wasted moments. However, there are some funerals where the first day is just for families and these 'in-house' ones are the most meaningful."

And thus, Victor and his wife Kelly discussed the topic at length and agreed that when the time comes, they would like their funerals to be a private affair, a day spent with loved ones rather than a few hurried hours at a usual wake service.

Victor relayed his desire to his godchildren and nephew, who objected vehemently that they would not have the privilege of honouring his life at a public funeral. Victor reasoned with them, "But I'll be dead and I can't hear.

And I don't think my wife wants to sit there and hear eulogy after eulogy. If you want, you can honour me one year later at a memorial service."

After confirming with his lawyer that it is legal to leave one's death unannounced, Victor thought, "While I'm still alive, why don't I hold a living funeral?" Soon, he was making preparations for his own funeral.

AT HIS OWN FUNERAL

Sponsored by big names such as Reapfield, Leaderonomics, Nirvana and Community at Heart (the social arm of Every Nation Church), Victor's funeral was attended by young and old, and people of all religions. As it would be his one and only public funeral, Victor's godchildren specially flew in from China, Singapore and Hong Kong to attend the service.

The living funeral, which had a more lively crowd than one would find at an ordinary funeral, was divided into two parts. The first part, which was notably more light and fun, had Victor dressing in a pastoral robe and presiding over the service together with his goddaughter, Joanne. Victor's eldest nephew and two of his godchildren gave heartfelt eulogies that provided a glimpse into the fun yet significant father figure role he has played in their young lives. Eddy Quay from SIBKL presented the song "Words" from Victor's favourite band,

Bee Gees, and a touching song entitled "And I Thank You Lord".

During the last part of the service, Victor returned on stage with his specially made "the best of me is yet to come" t-shirt, to appreciate those who have impacted his life greatly – his parents, Peter and Lucy; and his three siblings, Vino, Vincent and Lisa.

"People think that this funeral is about me. But it's not. It's about me appreciating them while they are still alive," he pointed out. Short videos featuring Victor talking about his parents were screened, to his parents' surprise and delight.

Aside from the obvious differences between a living and a typical funeral, one of the unique differences of the living funeral was the offering collection, which went to Community at Heart's outreach programme to the Enggang people in Puchong and to Clarence, a friend of Victor's who has leukaemia. Following the service, attendees adjourned to an outdoor tent for refreshments sponsored by Nirvana, much like a regular wake service.

SOBER REFLECTION

Losing a loved one suddenly can leave us with many regrets. Though we know our life on earth is only temporary, death still takes us by surprise. What remains for those left behind are words we wished we had spoken, feelings we had not dared reveal, or conflicts we were perhaps too proud to resolve.



Paying their 'last respects' to the deceased.



The 'deceased' standing beside his coffin.

“PEOPLE THINK THAT THIS FUNERAL IS ABOUT ME. BUT IT’S NOT. IT’S ABOUT ME APPRECIATING THEM WHILE THEY ARE STILL ALIVE.”



Victor Wong's parents (in white) watching a video tribute to them.

Ecclesiastes 7:2 says, “It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.” There is nothing like a funeral that forces us to take stock of our lives and that of our loved ones, and to consider what our passing might mean to others and vice versa.

While many who heard of the living funeral initially thought the idea bizarre, Victor found that they slowly warmed up to it. Many of the attendees invited their aged parents or their children as they thought that since the living funeral dealt with death in a meaningful, yet light manner, it would create a platform for family members to talk about death openly.

For Chinese families, talking about someone’s death while they are still alive can be a taboo and an uncomfortable topic, even if the said person is lying on his deathbed. It was certainly true for Victor. Even as a pastor, he was at a loss for words when his good friend, Winson Ang, lay on his hospital bed cancer-stricken more than seven

years ago.

“There were things I wanted to say but didn’t know how to. I was afraid that it would be too late to say them once he had passed away, but it would also be taboo to say while he was still alive. And if I believed in healing, I shouldn’t be talking about death.”

Knowing it was important to express his feelings, Victor took three days to write *Unspoken Words*, a personal eulogy of sorts to Winson and presented it to him while he was still alive. Little did he know that the book would be a saving grace for Winson’s wife and children as they mourned his passing soon after.

When he turned 50 last October, Victor drew up a list of 50 things he wanted to do before he turned 51. Updating and revising *Unspoken Words* was number 49 on the list, and conducting the living funeral was number 50. Appropriately, the second edition of *Unspoken Words* was given out as a door gift to attendees of the living funeral.

One might be curious to know if

Victor was laid in the coffin when it was time to say the final goodbye. While the idea of his living funeral is novel and interesting, it was not set out to be morbid. Hence, there was a coffin, but Victor was not in it. Instead, “mourners” looked into the coffin to read this verse from Ecclesiastes 7:2b, “...for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.” As shocking as that may be, it definitely caused them to consider: When I am gone one day, how would I want my loved ones to be taken care of? Or what would I have wished to say to my loved ones?

Recalling a quote from the book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, by Mitch Albom, “Once you learn how to die, you learn how to live,” Victor said. “After my living funeral, I am a very free man. I have said all my ‘thank yous’ and I will happily live the rest of my life. Hopefully I can live another 30 years. But if I do die a sudden death, I don’t think I will have any regrets.” 🙏

... from pg 7

was received at their parties.

“When someone says, ‘I can’t believe that’s cake!’, that’s really satisfying to hear. And just seeing their smiles and knowing that I contributed something to make their celebration happier makes my day.

“I will still see faults in my own work, though. I am my harshest critic,” she said.

It’s a trait she attributes to her late father, Francis.

“When I was a child, Dad would always ask me if I had done my best. And if I said yes, he would say, ‘I think you can still do better.’”

Her love for art and design has also given her a space to grow

in her spiritual journey. You won’t find Li Ying on stage in church rallying the congregation, but you will find her using her skills behind the scenes to decorate for church events, or at cupcake decorating sessions where people connect and have fellowship.

“Sometimes we forget that art has been so involved in worship,” she said, bringing to mind the great Renaissance works of Michelangelo.

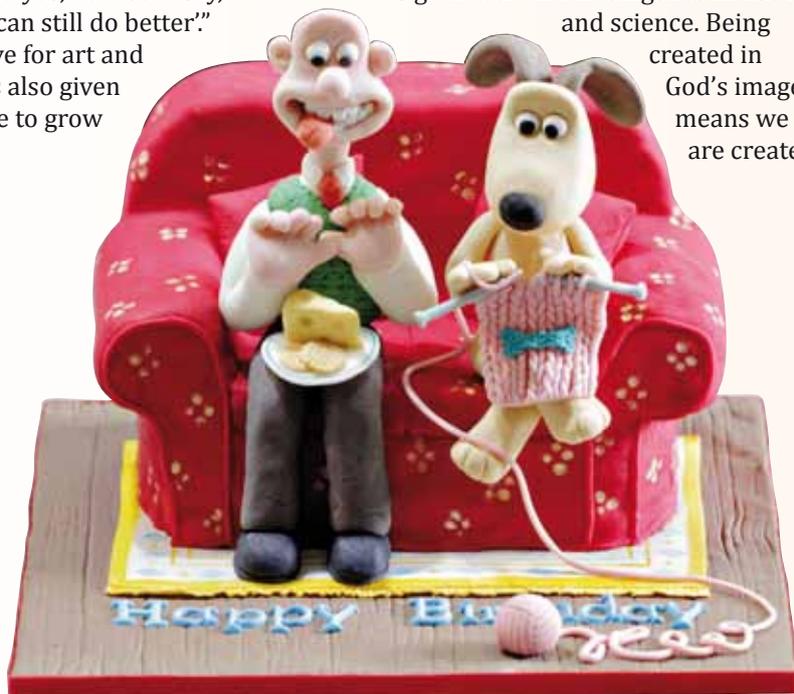
“Art also has a role in enhancing church life in a community. It can remind us of the Ultimate Creator and His grandeur and intelligence in nature

and science. Being created in God’s image means we are created

to enjoy beauty and also to create.”

Li Ying said some people have suggested she do sculptures instead because her cakes will get eaten.

“It’s okay. People order a cake to celebrate a person or an occasion. And beautiful things in nature, like a rose or a sunset, don’t last anyway. It’s about the moment of celebration.” 🎂



Stunning details – Li Ying created this Wallace and Gromit cake for her hubby's birthday.



Wonder Woman and her crazy minions thrilled a birthday party.

Li

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THE 8-DAY MIRACLE

After four years of courtship, Chriselle Koh and Calvin Leong were finally going to walk down the aisle. The wedding was set on July 16, 2016, but five days to the big day, Chriselle was wheeled down the aisle of the ICU instead, her life slipping away.

By Anna Teoh, Goh Chee Beng & Ong Juat Heng

"Your kidneys and other organs don't look good. You need 24-hour nursing care," the doctor said. "But my wedding is a few days away," Chriselle protested. "Your life is more important. You may have to cancel your wedding."

The doctor's words stung. Could this really be happening? Am I about to die? In shock and a lot of pain, Chriselle could not grasp the gravity of her situation. More tests followed. The gastroenterologist and general surgeon diagnosed her with acute kidney failure, with creatinine (toxins in the kidney) levels above 400 (a creatinine level of 200 would require dialysis). Her kidneys had stopped functioning, her pancreas was infected, her intestine walls were blocked and there were stones in her gall bladder.



Just in time... Calvin and Chriselle on their big day.

COUNTDOWN TO THE WEDDING

8 DAYS

Chriselle was running around, doing last-minute preparations for the wedding when she suddenly started vomiting violently.

6 DAYS

Her condition worsened, so she was checked into the hospital's Accident & Emergency unit.

5 DAYS

Chriselle's condition deteriorated and she was rushed to the ICU.

4 DAYS

Calvin and Chriselle had an honest talk. She was so weak she had to be propped up on the chair with a seat belt around her. They held hands and prayed for healing, surrendering the outcome to God. "I choose to trust in God," Calvin said. "But what if we don't make it to the wedding?" she asked. "It's fine! We can still get a blessing right here in the ICU." Calvin's words lifted her spirits to trust God for healing.

3 DAYS

Their church pastors visited her in the ICU. The wedding rehearsal had been scheduled for the next day and they decided to rehearse in the ICU. They also discussed the real possibility of having to conduct the blessing in the hospital room. "Your job is just to trust God, and let the doctors do what they know best," Stella, one of the pastor's wives, encouraged Chriselle. The church happened to be undertaking a three-day fast and prayer that week, so Chriselle was prayed through.

2 DAYS

A MIRACLE! Chriselle's creatinine levels dropped from 400 to 92 (normal range); urea (another form of kidney toxins) levels dropped from 28 to 17 (normal range: 3-8); amylase (enzymes released by the pancreas) levels dropped from 300 to 150 (normal range: 20-98). Her kidneys kicked in. With medication, the pancreas infection cleared, and her intestines began to unblock themselves and work again. In the evening, the surgeon told her, "Girl, I did not think you would make it when you got admitted, with so many organs in critical condition. Now, you are recovering." Hallelujah!!!

1 DAY

It's the eve of the wedding. At 4 p.m., the head nurse, who had now become Chriselle's good friend, announced, "All levels cleared! Doctor says you can go home."

THE WEDDING DAY

As Stella veiled and prayed over Chriselle, Chriselle burst in gratitude, "All that I have been through, God knows, God sees, God heals. And this is all for His glory. He is powerful, He cares, He is real today. His miraculous healing touch is not just for the past, but it's for this day and age."

Finally, Chriselle walked down the aisle towards Calvin at the front. Calvin leaned over to Pastor Gilbert, who was conducting the wedding, and asked, "Is this really happening?"

"Yes, Calvin, it is." 🙌

Celebrating **SEX**

IN OUR OVER-SEXUALISED WORLD

DR HERA LUKMAN muses on sex and thinks the Christian narrative on it should be “more celebrative”! But what exactly should be celebrated? Here, she shares her observations and thoughts on the question from the perspective of a Christian psychologist working with young people.

In most English dictionaries, the noun “sex” usually depicts a person’s biological sex, i.e. a genetic male has XY sex chromosomes whereas a genetic female has XX sex chromosomes. “Sex” could also refer to an activity that one does with another involving the sex organs. I don’t think that Christians have difficulty talking about sex but I haven’t come across many Christians who explicitly talk about sex as something to “celebrate” – the word we use to express praise, admiration or approval for something or someone.

The lack of celebrative dialogues on sex among Christians may have contributed to the common public perception that sex is considered a rather taboo subject among Christians in general. When Christians talk about sex, our narratives usually involve a list of do’s and don’ts regarding sexual practices and the potential negative consequences of sexual immorality, from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases to breakdown in relationships and ultimately, God’s disapproval.

While Christian sexual ethics is essential for any serious believer to grasp, I can’t help but wonder if such instructive action-consequence form of narratives create dialogue opportunities with our young people or serve

more like a repellent of such encounters.

Even if we manage to connect with our young people, would they find such narratives sufficient in helping them navigate the highly sexualised world we live in? How would they respond to the increasingly metamodernist culture where there is a movement away from a “binary-system” of understanding our reality in favour of “simultaneity”, “assimilation” and “inclusion of diversity”?

Quite often, I find myself listening to young people’s lamentations on how much they struggle with the Biblical sexual ethics. I am relieved that most young people I meet love God and associate godly living with sexual purity despite the tremendous pressure to conform to the current sexual climate. What disturbed me is the severe lack of platform in Christian communities where they can safely wrestle with sexual issues without feeling condemned.

Many young people I know struggle to live up to sexual purity. Shame and poor self-worth are commonly experienced. Their deep disappointment in themselves can drive them into despair, isolation and hopelessness. Their journey is a lonely journey because they fear repercussions of sharing their load with another in their Christian communities. Consequently, some cope by changing their belief system while others live a double life.

It seems that the Christian narrative on sex is not as effective in addressing the struggles our young ones face. How can the Church help them to develop a robust worldview of sex in a socio-cultural climate where sex is reduced to a mere physical act of self-gratification?

We desperately need a more positive and valid narrative about sex if we want to have a sustained and impactful connection with our young

people. Our narrative on sex needs to focus more on redemption, hope and restoration. What would such a narrative entail? Other than informing about Christian sexual ethics, I would like to appeal to us to focus more on the following when we



“Our Christian narrative on sex needs to highlight more on the being and less on the doing.”

dialogue with another about sex.

DOING vs BEING

In his book, *Sex for Christians*, Lewis Smedes noted that sex is much more than a physical act, i.e. what we do. Sex is an important part of our personhood, i.e. what we are. Our Christian narrative on sex needs to highlight more on the being and less on the doing.

It is not so much of what we do that



“It is indeed liberating to claim that we don’t have to do sex to celebrate sex.”

physical needs although some may claim that that’s what sex is all about.

A more holistic view considers sex as integral to sexuality. Sexuality encompasses the diverse combination of ways in which human beings relate to themselves, fellow human beings and the divine. In the context of sexuality, sex is a way human beings express and obtain intimacy, sense of belonging and even completion in another.

Therefore, many who treat sex as merely a physical need fail to find fulfilment in sex per se. This is evident in studies investigating hook-up culture and other casual-sex encounters. Apparently, there are more expectations from sex than the mere exchange of bodily fluids.

SEX HAS A DIVINE PURPOSE

As a Christian, I believe God created human beings with an innate need for affiliation not just because we are made in His image and that God is relational but more importantly, this need for affiliation will drive us to seek our Creator and find ultimate fulfilment in Him. In the Bible, the union between husband and wife is often used to symbolise the relationship between God and His people or Christ and His bride, the Church. References to this relationship can be found in Ezekiel, Hosea, Ephesians and Revelations, just to name a few.

Sex therefore has a divine purpose.

Although sex is a powerful mean to satisfy our relational needs, it is neither the supreme way nor the only way. In fact, sex per se cannot completely fulfill our needs as sexual beings, even in marriage, because the purpose of our sexual desire is ultimately an indication of our need for God.

As CS Lewis skillfully described in *Mere Christianity*:

“Creatures are not born with desires

unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably, earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo or mirage.”

CONCLUSION REGARDING CELEBRATING SEX

There is so much we could praise, admire and approve about sex within the Biblical narrative. Not only can we rejoice in the ecstasy sex brings within marriage relationships, all of us can celebrate our essence as sexual beings infinitely loved and valued by the One in Whom we find our ultimate intimacy, belonging and completion.

It is indeed liberating to claim that we don’t have to do sex to celebrate sex. 🙏



Dr Hera Lukman is the Head of Psychology and Learning Centre at Methodist College Kuala Lumpur.

... makes us who we are – “I have achieved sexual purity and therefore I am a Christian”. It is who we are by the grace of God that compels us to live in a certain way – “I am a Christian and this identity drives me to live in sexual purity”. This inside-out transformation is consistently advocated throughout the Bible. Jesus himself denounced and warned against mere doing when it comes to faith.

Christianity is not a religion. Our internal state supersedes our external condition. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

SEX IS INTEGRAL TO SEXUALITY

A narrative of sex isolated from sexuality would be a simplistic view of sex. People have sex not just to gratify

Playing Her Strings In Sweden

By Charmain Sim

Professional violinist Bernice Ooi has performed in major festivals and graced many a famous stage across the world. Since January 2017, she has been playing second violin in the Royal Swedish Opera Orchestra. This is a milestone in her illustrious journey as she doesn't consider herself a naturally gifted musician or one who works hard enough at it. Instead, the humble young violinist views the whole trajectory of her life as one that's been charted by God.

Bernice started violin and piano lessons when she was six. When she was 13, her piano teacher organised a trip to the UK for her to visit and audition at several specialist music schools. Bernice was accepted into Wells Cathedral School, which surprised her because all she knew then were basic techniques.

"I'm sure that was the hand of God," she says. "There was nothing that I think was favourable in my playing. To be a good musician, you need to have good rhythm, good sound and good intonation. These are objective. The subjective part covers interpretation and musicality. I was bad in all the three objective elements. Maybe they saw that I just loved music and had some potential."

Bernice worked hard to improve her skills. During summer breaks, she would participate in festivals or music programmes. From Wells, she went to the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music and graduated with a Bachelor of Science majoring in violin and mathematics, a Master of Music, and a Performer Diploma. After so many years of learning, she was ready to play to the world.

Landing a full-time job, however, was not easy.

"After leaving school, I was involved in several training orchestras, like the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and Hyogo Performing Arts Centre Orchestra. Training orchestras act as stepping stones to a real job. So the whole time I was in training orches-

If God wants me to be in Sweden to play music that I question, and be here to impact people like my Albanian friend Lola, then I'll stay on.

Living out God's purpose for her life in Sweden.

(Photo by David Lim of Essence photography)

tras, I was still auditioning for full-time jobs. And always, I was failing."

Nevertheless, Bernice continued to audition wherever she could, including the US, Japan, New Zealand, Denmark and France. Sometimes she would make it to the second or third round, but failed at the last. Twice she was offered to work aboard cruise ships, but she declined as she wasn't sure how life on cruise ship would affect her faith.

"I didn't want to be in situations where I would compromise my faith. Not to say that I'm not strong enough but to be at sea for six months in cramped living quarters with strangers and a high chance of a party culture on board is rather tempting."

Halfway Across the Globe

Eventually, Bernice returned to Malaysia in 2014. She auditioned for the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra but again didn't get a full-time position.

Instead she became a regular substitute. It was a blessing in disguise because she was then able to freelance as a violinist and teach at UCSI University. She also co-founded the Ensemble Virana, a group that plays chamber music and organises workshops and projects for the local educational institutions.

During the summer of 2016, while performing for the Weimar Bach Cantata Academy in Germany, Bernice decided to visit her sister in the UK. There, she came across an audition for the Royal Swedish Opera Orchestra.

"When I got their repertoire, I didn't want to do it because it was all opera stuff. I've played opera, but I've never played opera excerpts in an audition situation, which is very stressful. If you don't advance, that's it. To go all the way to Sweden to play for only five minutes is not worth it, right?"

But she went anyway, thanks to her sister's persuasion and free flight tickets from her. Thank God for her sister because Bernice was one of the two who got hired out of the 20 who auditioned!

"I was just very shocked because I was so used to failing. I was so happy that I said yes right away."

After the initial euphoria had died down, Bernice had to consider the implications of her job. It wasn't just the fact that Sweden is liberal where issues like homosexuality and abortions are embraced and parental discipline frowned upon. She was also concerned about the kind of music she would be playing.

"This is opera, where every day someone dies for it. It's super dramatic. In their love for opera, they

would do whatever – backstab, even kill," she explains.

Hence, Bernice was unsure if she should be part of something so 'dark'. She continued to pray and asked others to pray alongside her. As time went on, Bernice was further assured of God's will.

"The whole journey of getting that job was miraculous. I didn't really want to go but my sister bought the flight tickets for me. It really felt like God's gift." She recalls an analogy she once heard in a sermon, "Suppose you receive a gift but the packaging is so nice that you don't want to open it. To actually enjoy the gift, you have to open it. So, I felt that God had given me a gift and if I didn't go, I wasn't opening it. I wouldn't experience what He had for me."

On Jan. 2, 2017, she flew to Stockholm, still unsure and yet assured it was God's calling.

Living Out Faith

It's been months since she started playing in the Royal Swedish Opera Orchestra. Although she still struggles, she is starting to understand her purpose there as a Christ-follower. She is unashamed of her faith and church (Calvary Chapel Stockholm), and that has stirred curiosity.

"One of the five finalists at the audition was an Albanian girl, and we've become really good friends. Once she came to stay with me and became really interested that

I read my Bible every day. I brought her to church and I feel like I've been able to touch her life. There have been others who've asked me about my faith.

"Sweden is a very secular country, but people actually haven't been that hostile."

To further confirm her current season in life, Bernice was recently granted tenure five months earlier than scheduled.

"Tenure means they can't fire you! Again, this is God's favour!"

So, Bernice can now play for the Royal Swedish Opera Orchestra for as long as she likes, even until retirement. But whether she chooses to live in Sweden for the rest of her life – with summers in Malaysia – is yet to be decided. All Bernice knows and wants is to remain faithful to God and to whatever God has called her to.

"If God wants me to be in Sweden to play music that I question, and be here to impact people like my Albanian friend Lola, then I'll stay on. I've been very blessed. These past few months, I've seen God's favour on me and I'm very glad that I'm here in Sweden. I know this is God's gift."

With that, Bernice encourages all young aspiring musicians to pray always and trust God to lead.

"God takes you to places you will never imagine. Firstly, you have to work really hard. You have to practise a lot and know your basics. And then have faith that God has the best plan for you." 🙏

(Interviewed by Goh Chee Beng)



Started playing the violin at six.



Celebrating her work as a gift from God.
(Photo by David Lim of Essence photography)

I love my Gay son

By Christian Mom



Even if he doesn't change, I will not stop loving him. From the initial shock of his confession to the months of grieving and mourning and the many more months of questioning my parenting, my mistakes, my views on homosexuality, my theology and everything, I have not stopped loving him.

I can no more dig out my heart than not love my son, gay or not. And no matter where his road of seeking leads him to in the end – whether he eventually agrees with my conviction that practising homosexuality is against God or he goes the other way – I will still love him and pray for him without ceasing.

THE BOMBSHELL

Let me share my story. One regular, humdrum Tuesday night, my son walked into the house and headed straight to where my husband and I were sitting in the living room. He plonked himself beside me as I got up to retire to my room. "Mom, wait. I've got something to tell you." I paused, looked down on him and said in jest, "Don't tell me you are gay." He craned his neck at me, nodded his head and replied, "You said it."

Oh, his eyes – they were sad, pleading.

I could see them, even through his

glasses. Numbed, I steadied my feet and sat down.

Did my heart skip a beat? Would it have been easier if he had announced, "Mom, I have stage four bone cancer and I'll be dead in six months"? Yes and yes.

Growing up on a diet of preaching that denounced homosexuality as the great evil that sent fire to devour Sodom and Gomorrah, I dare say now that I was close to homophobic. I could not understand how a man could have amorous feelings for another man. And why would a woman want the embrace of another woman when she can be safe and secure in the strong, protective arms of a man? I remember now how my well-travelled friends would humour themselves by telling me stories of seeing men kissing men (full on the lips!) in public, just to catch the disgust on my face.

One of my deadliest fears is that my sons will turn gay. As I watched each one falling in (and out of) love with girls, I was greatly relieved. Phew... safe... they are normal, straight.

So, when my handsome, strapping boy broke the news, he broke my heart. I've raised him on the pages of the Bible and the loving embrace of our church; even before he was born, he had been prayed for and triumphantly claimed for Christ. How can he be gay?! How can

he mock everything that he's been taught?!!

In the days, weeks and months to come, my emotions swung from stabbing grief to self-blame to grief, and all over again. God, what have I done wrong? God, what have I not done right? God, please rescue my son. No wait, he's Your son, please rescue Your son.

As I wrestled with my son's problem, I came to realise that perhaps I was the one who needs "rescuing".

As I spoke to people involved in counselling homosexuals and reading the other side of the story, I began to realise there was so much more to know about Christians battling same-sex attraction. Have I been so merciless and uncompassionate to their struggles? I wondered.

I had always dismissed homosexuals as hedonistic seekers of sinful pleasures. I wasn't alone. In his book, *Amazing Grace*, Philip Yancey talks about his shock after his friend, Mel, finally confessed to being gay. Mel – a kind, generous, Christ-loving man who had taught at Fuller Seminary, served as church pastor and wrote best-selling books for Christians.

Yancey writes, "I learned from Mel that homosexuality is not the casual lifestyle choice I had blithely assumed it



AS I WRESTLED WITH MY SON'S PROBLEM, I CAME TO REALISE THAT PERHAPS I WAS THE ONE WHO NEEDS "RESCUING".

to be." Mel had fought "homosexual longings from adolescence, tried hard to repress those longings, and as an adult fervently sought a 'cure'. He fasted, prayed and was anointed with oil for healing. He went through exorcism rites led by Protestants and also by Catholics. He signed up for aversion therapy, which jolted his body with electricity every time he was stimulated by photos of men... Above all else, Mel wanted desperately *not* to be gay."

Nothing worked and Mel attempted suicide several times. On the brink of insanity, he finally decided to embrace his gay self, left his wife and children and now has a gay partner.

I FEEL AND I FEAR FOR MY SON.

Did Mel's story confirm what I had read – that it is rather difficult to change a person's sexual orientation? Will my son have to struggle all his life against same-sex attraction? Worse, will he stop struggling and give in? Will he walk away from his relationship with Christ or will he join the growing band of "homosexual Christians"? What an oxymoron! How can one be a Christian and a practising homosexual?

Oh, I have so many questions but much as I sympathise with Mel, his story has not softened my stance that practising homosexuality is a sin.

However, I had come to realise that I could have magnified the sin of homosexuality to the exclusion of other sins.

A re-reading of Paul's letter to the Corinthians glaringly lump the greedy, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers together with homosexuals as those who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

We are all doomed if we do not turn to Christ – homosexuals and liars and gluttons alike.

At a Veritas Forum for university students in America, renowned American pastor Tim Keller was asked whether homosexuals were going to hell. He replied to great laughter from the audience: "Heterosexuality is not going to get you to heaven." Asked what was needed to make the cut for heaven, he said, "...getting a relationship with Christ because you realise you're a sinner...".

I pray that my son will always realise his need for the Saviour and turn to Him, who is full of grace and mercy.

PRAYER SHIFT

I've changed too in the way I pray. My initial frantic pleadings with the Lord went something like this: "Lord, please straighten him. You can do the impossible. You can change him, make him heterosexual."

Make him heterosexual – that was the ultimate aim. Then I read an article by Rachel Gilson in *Christianity Today* entitled, "I Never Became Straight. Perhaps That Was Never God's Goal."

Gilson, who has struggled all her life with same-sex attraction, writes, "Heterosexuality is not the end goal; **faithfulness to God, and the joy that comes from a relationship with him, is what we run for** (emphasis mine)... That's why this is not the story of my becoming straight, which has never truly happened and is beside the point. It is the story of my becoming whole, which is happening every day."

Daily now, I pray my son will find joy and fulfilment that spring from a relationship with Christ. And I know Christ intercedes fervently for my son too, for He is the Great High Priest who truly understands.

Gilson continues to struggle with same-sex attraction even though she's now married to a committed Christian man who adores her. For the record, she and Keller take the position that practising homosexuality is wrong. As to the raging nature vs nurture debate about same-sex attraction, I don't know too much. What I am keenly aware of now is that Jesus calls me to love my neighbour, someone who is far different from me. My gay son is my neighbour. And I love him. 🙏

Dear writer of **TO MY EX-CHURCH**

Everyone goes on a unique journey related to his or her faith and spirituality, and every story matters. Your story matters and I thank you for sharing it with us.

When I first read the letter, I can't help but draw a similarity with my own situation. You see, I left my former church too after worshipping there for more than 20 years. Although the circumstances surrounding my departure are totally different from yours, it's not less personal to me.

"Plenty of other millennials have left you behind for reasons that count far beyond mine, also wondering if you had noticed." You are absolutely right. The "dropout" phenomenon (of the younger generation from church) is not a new one. Some never return, while others stay forever at the margins of the faith community, attempting to define their own spirituality. I want to take care not to lump you with an entire generation, because every story of disconnection requires a personal and tailor-made response. And I'm responding to yours today.

You were everything that every pastor/leader could ever ask for. You were an active churchgoer. You served the Lord wholeheartedly with passion and without reservation. You served beyond your own capacity because you believed that it was your responsibility to do so ("to fill in the gap"). You've been trained and aspired to lead your peers, and mentor those after you, and in your zeal, you could have taken on more than you could handle.

On top of that, you were drowning with plenty of new transitions (long hours at work and relationship challenges). As a result, whether you knew or acknowledged it, you were experiencing a burnt-out. Just as cars can't run without fuel, neither can we, especially leaders. We need spiritual

PASTOR ALEXA HO LOVINGLY RESPONDS TO A MILLENNIAL'S HEART-RENDING LETTER TO HER EX-CHURCH.

Published in the July-Sept. 2017 issue of *Asian Beacon*.
Read it at http://www.asianbeacon.org/mt-content/uploads/2017/10/ab49-2_web_spreads.pdf (pg 38).



and emotional fuel and often need refuelling. You were running on empty and were looking for 'refuel' and support from your church, hoping they would save you from drowning, but there were no hands, or rather when they reached out to you, all you received were simplistic responses that did not meet your needs.

SO YOU CALLED IT QUITS.

Under such circumstance, leaving your ex-church could be one of the mechanisms for you to cope with the burnt-out. As you have been serving there for as long as you can remember and a passionate servant-leader at that, it's natural to think that getting out from the church means getting out from a situation that is suffocating you. Over time, you became more suspicious of the church institution and what it really

stands for. This whole event (which was a long process accumulated from being a passionate teen to an MIA 20-something) has left you dry, disillusioned, resentful, cynical and somewhat fearful of ever being involved in church life ever again.

NO JUDGEMENT THERE. I COULD HAVE DONE AND FELT THE SAME.

But the fact that you have not left the faith altogether tells me that your real problem has nothing to do with Jesus nor was theological in nature. Some issues are interconnected, but I sense that you are struggling less with your faith in Christ than with your experience of church. Your allegiance is still in Christ. That might explain why you're currently churching, albeit aloof over your relationship with her. And unless you tackle what I believe is one of the causes of your departure, i.e. the burnt-out, it might be hard to move on and have your spiritual vitality re-boost without this episode return and haunt you in the future.

NOW, THE THING ABOUT BURNT-OUT IS THAT THERE'S NO INSTANT CURE.

I believe God can heal and restore you to be the self that you were made and aspire to be, but there's no short cut and often times, it's a long battle. What you're doing now, and maybe need to be more intentional about, is to **care for your body and soul.**

Look, you're tired and worn out physically, emotionally and spiritually. Our intimacy with God (and with others) is sometimes sacrificed on the altar of over-involvement. Take a break and build back that relationship with the God you love. Rest to enjoy Him. I just took a five-month sabbatical and it was one of the best rests I've ever had for a long time. I came back refreshed and ready to serve the church again.

no instant cure
call it quits
Burnt-out
Take a break
messed up
No judgement here
forgive us



And guess what? The church is still standing, and I'm a pastor, so that says a lot about our indispensability! (Yah, it's kinda true that others will step up when you won't.)

SO TAKE A BREAK.

Go out smell some grass. (Did you know they smell better than flowers?)

Do some reflections on life and God.

Catch up with friends (on that note, yes, true friendships are possible with people that are markedly different from us, even those of different faiths as you're currently experiencing).

Perhaps do something that you've not done before to help you gain some new perspectives on God's kingdom, such as joining a community to feed the poor.

I'm sorry that the church sometimes can be cold and not life-giving. I'm sorry that we have failed to love you at your vulnerable moments. And I'm sorry that we sometimes take longer than the departure of one person to make us realise our mistake.

FORGIVE US, FOR WE ARE INDEED FLAWED BEINGS.

But despite the hurt and your cynicism about the church of God, I must plead with you to learn to trust again. There are many trustworthy Christians and often than not, they are the community of God that aids us in our pursuit of God and His vision for our life. Consider also your calling and the gifting God has bestowed upon you - what a waste and poorer the church/world would be if each, having been disappointed, chooses to stop giving. My dear... an earlier disappointment might not necessarily seal future disappointments, and what we choose to do when disappointments visit us will define us. I ask that you choose wisely.

Moving forward, you, like many of us, will still struggle at times with the disconnect between what you believe about church and the reality of your experience. You will still ask questions. There will still be doubts (which are not signs of weakness and we all have them; it's what we choose to do with them that matters), and this church

you're worshipping now might even be your ex in the future!

But the truth remains that Christ has called us to follow Him wholeheartedly and the church is the vehicle through which we can do so more effectively. I hope that you give God's community another chance to be the conduit of God's grace for you, and you, for others.

May you find the healing from His hands, and may we find you following Christ with courage and boldness as you journey onwards. 🙏



Alexa Ho is a pastor at Petaling Jaya Evangelical Church (PJEFC). Her role is overseeing the community transformation ministry, and looking hot at all times.

A LETTER TO MY NEW CHURCH

IN THE LAST ISSUE OF *ASIAN BEACON*, THE WRITER OF “TO MY EX-CHURCH” TELLS HER FORMER CHURCH WHY SHE LEFT. HERE, SHE WRITES TO HER NEW CHURCH AND PONDERES ABOUT WHAT SHE, AND MILLENNIALS, ARE LOOKING FOR IN “CHURCH”.

I packed my bags (or rather, my baggage) and left the church I'd called home for 20 years of my life. After bouncing around churches for some months, I met you and something just clicked.

You said you wanted me to feel like I was home.

So I visited once, then three times, then decided I might as well stay for a while.

But I'll be honest. Although I've been attending your services for almost two years, I wouldn't call you home.

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT, REALLY.

You smile at me when I shuffle in half an hour late every week, and sometimes give me snacks after the service, which makes me want to stay a little bit longer. Your preachers are not so offensive that I believe you're waltzing down the path of heresy, and not so inoffensive that I'm lulled into deep spiritual slumber. That's a nice (and rare) balance.

However, I haven't spoken to any of your members beyond, "Hi, my name is..." I haven't stood up for any altar calls, volunteered for any menial task or even given my contact details for a follow-up call.

A real home is where you have to do dirty work, keep things running smoothly, maintain relationships and commit to sticking around for the long term.

So as much as we both want me to call you home, I have to admit I can't give you these things. So you have become my halfway-home.

I CAN'T PLAY CHURCH ANY MORE.

At this point you might be rolling your eyes and thinking – Great, just what we need! Another uncommitted hanger-on jolly along for the ride, refusing to contribute anything.

That's true. But I wasn't always like this.

At a different stage in my life, I would have dropped everything to ensure your needs were met. Boy, you would've loved having me around – I was a model church citizen.

My previous church had all of my time, love and energy lavished on her services, prayer meetings and events. I loved and bled and worried over every minuscule detail.

"Attendance at youth service is dropping. People don't respond during our worship services (and then blame it on the song choices). A kid yawned during a Bible study. Where's the revival we've been praying years for?" And so the long list of worries goes.

Until one day it all became too much. Life was overwhelming, church wasn't helping. A very long story short, I ran away from my home, burnt out and afraid to commit.

I STOPPED PLAYING CHURCH.

In the meantime, I've turned into an unapologetic slacker. While I know it's bad and unsustainable, this is exactly what I'm committed to doing for now. And I'm not unlike many people of my generation – the lazy, entitled, uncommitted Millennials.

WHAT DO MILLENNIALS WANT?

Yeah, I know every church chews fingernails over how to win these lost sheep back. (I did, once, too!) Our indecision and lack of commitment have left many a mother church insecure about her place in our lives.

“WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM CHURCH?”

I've had this question asked of me numerous times, having swung violently between extremes – from a high-contributing church worker to full-time spiritual slacker. Logic follows that I must have a firmer grasp on what it is I'm looking for.

It's a hard question to answer, though. Every one of us who've left has different motivations and revelations. We each have a different story to tell about how a church has burned or given up on them.

Many might say we simply don't care because churches don't affect our lives in any meaningful way. That the institutions which changed history and claimed a place in the Kingdom of God seem to be completely removed from the realities we inhabit from Monday to Saturday. Or that we just don't want to play church anymore, in favour of pursuing a more authentic (if less religious) lifestyle.

Once, my mother, who still attends the old church, lectured me on the importance of young people staying and growing our home church.

When I asked her what the big deal was, she replied, "To keep our heritage! We want to pass the torch from one generation to the next!"



Hey, I get it. Every organisation has its existential anxiety – without its people, it would simply grow old and slowly fade.

But why should a church simply be a torch passed inside an old building?

It's when we are more concerned about building the "brand" of the church and retaining its numbers that we become caught up in things like the furnishings, or how "relevant" we are to young people.

And strangely enough, it's the obsession with these petty things that is a repellent for people like me (ahem, a young person) who are in search of a genuine, earth-shaking, personal faith.

I can't speak for everyone who has trodden my path, but I can attest that many of us are hungry for something real. We're desperately looking for God in the nooks and crannies of everyday life, beyond what we find in the four safe walls of the church building.

We want to see how He makes sense in our work, daily dilemmas and burdens. Our real burdens – not the kind of burdens that lead us to arguments about how loud the music should be, or what colour carpets best represent Him to "outsiders". Not the frills and furnishings of an archaic institution.

We are the outsiders looking in, and many of us are discovering God to be much more real out here than in many religious centres.

SO WHAT'S NEXT?

So back to you, my dear current church. No, you are not my home, simply because I'm not doing enough house-keeping for you. And someday, I know I'm going to have to get off my butt and start investing in a home – which may or may not be you.

But I'm so grateful that you've given me a safe space to be who I need to be right now, to search for answers and

look deeply at my life – my whole life, not just the part I play on Sundays – and decide what's worth keeping.

I'm glad that you are comfortable with who you are to not put on a show in a bid to keep me around. That's real enough for me to stay quietly in your presence. No pressure or guilt. No playing church.

In being that, you've opened a door for me to discover and build a home in the smallest, yet most important way – inside my heart. 🙏

**“WE’RE DESPERATELY
LOOKING FOR GOD IN THE
NOOKS AND CRANNIES
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BEYOND WHAT WE FIND
IN THE FOUR SAFE
WALLS OF THE CHURCH
BUILDING.”**

DEAR LEADERS/PASTORS

If you're a leader/pastor and this story sounds familiar and common to what's happening in your local church, it's time to re-think the way we do church life. Let's recognise together our collective calling to love accept, and partner with this next generation.

Maybe we have messed up. Maybe we have not paid attention when we should have. Maybe we have missed the many divine moments of reaching out, and in our failures, we 'drove' them away. But we don't have to miss the next one.

We must purpose in our heart and show them in real action that we love and embrace them for who they are and not only for what they could offer us (i.e. service). We must find ways to make disciples among their number. And you know what's the worst we could do? Write them off. If we do that, thinking they are the ones who choose to go astray, then my friends, we might very well be complicit in the loss of the next generation. – Alexa Ho 🙏

maggie's ^{MISSION}

When beauty queen meets the King of kings

Most Malaysians know Maggie Loo as the "catwalk queen" for her flamboyant catwalk twirls. Many may not know about her deep Christian faith and burning passion for Jesus that have taken off from the glamorous runway.

By Joanna Lee

Maggie became a household name after winning the Miss Malaysia Universe crown in 1973, just four years after beginning her modeling career. Her flamboyant catwalk moves, diligence and self-discipline earned her a solid reputation that made her a much sought-after model. "After coming up top in a beauty contest, I became a top model. Being a beauty queen, you get chosen more often, so I took the challenge. I worked hard as I wanted to earn more," Maggie said.

At the height of her career, she had groomed and produced more than 20 beauty queens – including Datuk Yasmin Yusuff and Datuk Nancie Foo – and trailblazed the Malaysian modeling scene with her modeling and grooming courses, creatively choreographed luncheon and tea fashion shows, and secured the franchise for the Super Model of the World pageant for Malaysia.

However, she felt empty.

"I thank God that He's given me a lot of opportunities. I was popular. I've always worked hard and emerged as the best. I had fame. I had money. But I didn't have a family yet. I wanted to have babies," she shared.

THE TURNING POINT

"I come from a close-knit family. My parents were Taoists. We were also strong in Kuan Yin worship because of my mom.

"My beloved sister Maxine Loo became a Christian and she tried to get everybody 'saved'. So whenever she came, everyone would run for cover," Maggie burst into laughter. However, Maggie saw something different in Maxine. "I saw God in her. She was such a transformed person."

Her desire to fill that emptiness compelled her to follow Maxine to church. The year was 1995.

ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD

"God really touched me there. I was brought to the altar. I saw God already, through images. I fell when they prayed for me. And I saw His shadow lying on a rock. God was telling me that He was my rock," Maggie's voice broke with emotions as she recalled that experience.

"From there, I've never looked back," she said, adding that she had encountered God many times since then. "He spoke through books, gave me many dreams and visions, even

Beauty queen turned princess of the Most High King.



Maggie crowned Miss Malaysia Universe in 1973.

about the end times, and told me what He wanted me to do.”

In her early days at Tabernacle of Glory, when worship was a full-day affair, she used to ‘see’ a man dancing with a child in his arms. “I didn’t know much of God then, but I could feel that He is our Father,” Maggie said, tears rolling down her famous prominent cheeks. “Even to this day, I carry that image with me. I know God is real.”

As she grew in her faith, Maggie found herself relating to people differently. “Before knowing God, if anyone scolded us, we would scold back. We didn’t know that words had power. Last time, we would point at people first. Now, we will point at ourselves first and ask, ‘Lord, is it me?’”

Another area of transformation is in her attitude towards wealth. When once she just wanted to earn more money, she now has a strong desire to train women, children and young people to become confident leaders in the Kingdom as a witness for the Lord.

Together with her inventor husband Lim Nam Aik, she runs Maggie Loo Models & Beauties Academy (ML-MBA), a modeling and personal development academy as a ministry.

Maggie believes that believers need to reflect God’s best by carrying themselves with self-respect. “If

you’re not groomed properly, and if you want to talk about God, do you think people will want to listen right away?” she asked.

Her grooming, deportment and personal development courses are aimed at women of all ages, shapes and sizes as well as at children, teenagers and young adults entering the workforce. “In the corporate world, a degree is not enough. Learn how to take care of yourself because then, when you talk, people will be willing to listen to you,” she stressed. “If you become a model or beauty queen, that’s just a bonus.”

Being in the modeling industry has its treacherous temptations and Maggie is one who has survived the pitfalls of this industry with self-discipline and healthy respect for herself. “When I was famous, I had a lot of offers from guys, you know what I mean,” she winked. “I thank God for my parents. My mother always said, ‘Always bring honour to your family’”

With her mother’s words ringing in her ears, Maggie would turn down party invitations. In fact, she was known in her circle for her refusal to party around. And her father would faithfully wait for her to come home from work with his umbrella at the bus stop. “I didn’t accept invitations unless there’s a good purpose,” she said. She was also

careful to dress to respect others as her strict mother frowned at see-through clothes. “As models, we’re the classy ones. But since knowing God, I’ve been even extra careful,” she said.

Her firm, no-nonsense approach has now spilled over to how she mentors her protégés, dismissing “breezes”

(people who come and go) who are not teachable or truly committed to improving themselves.

OF BEAUTY AND PLASTIC SURGERIES

Having trained thousands of women in her 48 years’ experience, Maggie knows exactly how to spot a girl with the X-factor.

“If you want to be different, be original!” she exclaimed, her firm mentor demeanour coming alive through her husky voice. “You don’t need a high nose. Even with a flat nose, you can be beautiful,” she said. “Make-up is ‘make up’ if you cover yourself to disguise yourself. Why do that?” Now that she knows God, she implores women, instead, to bring out their unique essence.

“I tell my students, ‘What I want is YOU, your core heart!’ Just like how God wants us each to shine our personal uniqueness,” she pointed out.

What is beauty? “Beauty is when you’re remembered and leave an impact,” she was quick to respond.

Maggie has had many offers to have plastic surgeries done, some costing up to six figures. “I declined and told them, ‘My God has already made me beautiful’”

Winnie Lee, Maggie’s protégé, a model scouted by Maggie at church and the one who connected *Asian Beacon* to Maggie, jumped in during the interview, “I believe if you get close to God more and more, your face will be radiating and shining no matter how old you are.” Winnie recalled spending days with elderly prayer warrior ladies who possessed a special, beautiful glow on their faces.

The interview has come to an end, and Maggie and Winnie obliged to a request for a demonstration of their catwalk routine. As Maggie twirled and turned, it became clear why she was known as the “Queen of the Catwalk” in her heyday. She still glides with elegance, precision and rhythm. Except that she now struts to a different beat. “You can catwalk in the best places like Milan, but it’s more important to walk and win the race for our God, the King of kings.” 🙌



“I believe if you get close to God more and more, your face will be radiant and shining no matter how old you are.” - Winnie Lee (right)

LIFE & DEBT

By Grace Wee & Ong Juat Heng

Photo credit: reesebaker via VisualHunt.com / CC BY

John Ng's father fell madly in love with a younger woman and started drawing huge amounts from his business to splurge on his lover. When the company ran out of funds, he used his and his daughter's credit cards and ran up bills amounting RM40,000. His wife (John's mother) was not spared, losing some RM500,000 to her unfaithful husband. Unpaid statutory obligations, such as GST, almost ground the company to a halt. That's when John stepped in to make things right but the mountain of debts nearly crushed him. John (not his real name) shares how he escaped the web and fell into a liberating relationship with his Saviour with the help of a mentor.

John, in his 30s, grew up in a Christian home and knew God at a very young age but was far away in the world. When he inherited his family's business that came with huge debts, his world came to a dead end. There, he met God.

It's been 13 years since John took over the family business. The early years were riddled with great conflict as he had to deal with ethical and financial issues. The company's management style was against his personal values and its integrity was at stake with many business decisions conducted dubiously and promises given to clients unfulfilled.

"I was forced to do a lot of things that went against my conscience. That was the toughest time in my life," John recalled.

Most painful of all was his father's extra-marital affair and constant demand for money to splurge on his mistress. John recalled the many times his father barged into the office and badger him for money.

Initially, John gave in but the company was bleeding fatally. The emotional stress of constantly facing his raging father was

also a lot to handle.

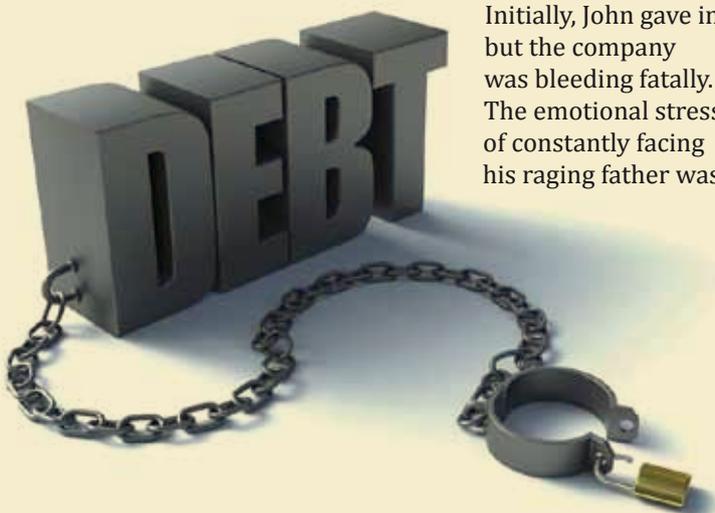
John's mother, though deeply hurt, gave him a lot of moral and emotional support but this was John's personal battle. "I was under a lot of financial duress when personal loans, credit card debts, installments, taxes and unpaid GST poured in all at the same time," he said. John knew the company could not go on and was worried about his future. Friends urged him to sell the business but he decided to dig deep into his problems and figure out a solution.

DESPERATE CRIES

In his most desperate hour, John had no one to turn to and he knew he had to do something. From the far recesses of his memories, he recalled a God who is loving and turned to Him, surrendering all his financial woes and pleading Him desperately for help. He realised only God could help turn his situation around.

God heard his cries and through his older sister, led him to MoneyLife, a practical financial programme that applies biblical teachings to challenging financial situations. John signed up for the course eagerly as it was exactly what he needed to get his perspective on finances right. John had a godly mentor, who went through the dynamic lessons with him and was always a phone call away. (The mentor is also helping others at various levels of financial distress.)

For 10 weeks, John's mentor took him through the 10-lesson course and guided him on how to deal with finances in a God-centric manner. "I had to read a chapter each week and do the coursework assigned by my mentor. It



was really amazing to read anecdotes of people who had faced tremendous financial stress and how God helped them overcome their problems and changed their lives in the process.

“My mentor explained biblical financial principles in a modern context and I learned how to apply the principles in my life and business. This course has really helped me and it’s applicable to people from all walks of life,” John said.

More importantly is getting a financially savvy spiritual mentor who can dispense wise, firm and godly counsel.

“My mentor provided spiritual mentoring and good financial coaching to make wise financial decisions to get out of debt the godly way. One of the things I learned is to stand my ground against my father. In fact, I had to cut him off so that the business could stop bleeding. Once the bleeding stopped, the business slowly healed. God also began to bless us with more business,” John shared.

“I am truly grateful to God that He brought someone who gave me the precise help and knowledge that I needed to get out of my dire situation.”

One needs great perseverance and fortitude to get out of the debt web. John remembered wanting to give up as his mountain of debt piled higher each day, but his mentor kept urging him to press on, reminding him constantly that God’s timing was “perfect”.

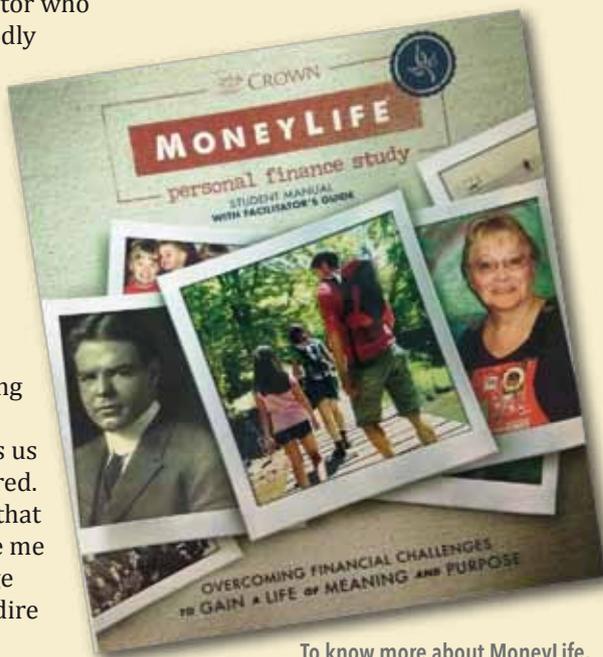
“My mentor shared a lot of his own personal experiences and encouraged me that my seemingly impossible situation could be resolved with God’s intervention.”

Through MoneyLife, John’s faith in God has greatly strengthened to the point that he can now trust Him completely. “I now let God take full control and will follow Him wherever He takes me,” John declared, quickly adding that he had also learned not to let pride interfere with God’s mighty work in his life.

CLEAN SLATE

On hindsight, the problems John faced had led him to a close personal relationship with God, something that he didn’t enjoy before. God had not allowed John’s problems to beat him down but instead, took him out of the debt web. Immensely grateful to his Rescuer, John is eager to introduce His Rescuer to those caught in the debt web.

Through God’s faithfulness and



To know more about MoneyLife, call Yoke Tee at 016-323 8044.

guidance, John managed to turn the entire situation in his office around in one year. Even his mentor was surprised. To date, John has cleared close to half of his company’s RM150,000 debt. God has also provided enough for his personal expenses, salaries for the employees and payment for various office bills.

As for his mother’s and sister’s debts, they are slowly clearing them and it will be a while before they are back in the black. However, John is not perturbed as he has seen God turning his situation around. In fact, he is more excited about the transformation that has taken place inside him.

“I want to live for Him now and will make every effort to reach out to others and share God’s love with them. God can free us from sin and a life of

bondage,” he declared.

Abiding by God’s laws and the law of the land has become his discipline and he is keen to honour God in all his business dealings with his clients, suppliers and contractors. His perspective of life has changed and he daily commits everything he does to God.

Daily too he reminds himself that he is merely God’s steward and everything he owns belongs to God. “I view my business as God’s, not mine, and wait upon Him to send the right people – the right clients, right suppliers, right

"ONCE THE BLEEDING STOPPED, THE BUSINESS SLOWLY HEALED."

employees. I know that if I honour Him, He will also honour me,” John said.

However, the temptation to do wrong still lurks. John admitted to being tempted “from time to time, but God’s Word enables me to resist the devil and not give in”.

Once, John despaired at the thought of going to work; today, he skips into the office. Not only has God changed him, his entire team is different too. John can now hear his staff walking into the office whistling. He has also learned to respectfully stand up to his father, who continues to harass him for money, and not give in.

Today, there’s laughter and music in John’s life despite his and his family’s debts hanging over their heads because God walks with and ahead of them. 🙌



Bonding time... CJ Hong (right) with daughter (centre) and an autistic child that she has been looking after.

Spirited After Spirit Encounter

DRUMS CRASH IN A FRENZY. THE MUSIC IS EAR-PIERCING. THE SINGERS APPEAR TO BE CHALLENGING IT. A POOR 70-SOMETHING CUPS HER HANDS CLOSER TO HER EARS. A ONE-YEAR-OLD WAILS IN DISCOMFORT, EYES WIDE OPEN AND HAS TO BE TAKEN OUT. THIS IS A SCENE IN SOME 'MODERN' CHURCHES TODAY.

CJ Hong, 71, was raised in a 'traditional' mainline church where she attended the Hokkien Sunday School and Hokkien services.

One can understand her annoyance when she first attended one such 'modern' church. "This dancing, jumping trance-like worship. How different is it from idol worship? How can God accept such worship!" she asked incredulously.

But that was more than 20 years ago.

One day, Hong met a charismatic pastor at a family gathering. There, she had an encounter with the Holy Spirit. After that spiritual experience, she came to understand that God enjoys all kinds of worship.

"My whole life turned around. Last time, I just went to church like every 'normal' Sunday Christian. I never

By Goh Bee Lee

experienced much of God," she said. She and her non-believer husband were working hard in the hotel to raise their two boys and a girl.

After that Holy Spirit experience, Hong was consumed by a passion for God and His Word. Her husband, however, just wanted to be left alone.

"Every night I read the Bible and it spoke to me. Lights flashed and the words became alive. I began to pray a lot in tongues. I would pray all the time, wherever I was, even while driving and I would hear the Spirit speaking to me," she said.

Soon, Hong was actively participating in church life, throwing herself into prayer warfare and women's ministry. "I would drive to work at 6.30 a.m. and pray in the hotel car park until it was time to start work."

LITTLE MIRACLES

Hong recounted with excitement the miracles in their lives.

Danny, her older son, recalled one. "My dad was holding a glass of beer in his hand. Mum looked at him, praying he would give up drinking even though he was only a social drinker. Suddenly, the glass cracked and the beer flowed out!"

Hong remembered with gratitude how God "threw money from heaven". Kevyn, the younger son, wanted to further his studies in the US. Danny was already studying there. Both she and

her husband had no savings.

Out of the blue, someone head-hunted her to work as a Sales Executive for a resort hotel in Penang, even though she had no experience in sales. The pay was good; she accepted it but had to face the taunts of the evil one. "Hey, you are working for a 'gambling' company!"

Hong, however, was at peace, comparing herself with Joseph working for Pharaoh. God provided for Kevyn's studies in the US when Hong was allowed to take out a RM30,000 advance with a pay cut every month for two years.

During the 1997 economic crisis, the resort was also not spared and suffered financial losses. To her amazement, Hong and her colleagues were given extra bonuses at mid-year, which had never happened before in her career. The RM14,000 she received was just what they needed for Kevyn's last semester tuition.

Many such miracles later, Hong continues to see miracles in her life today. Retired from hotel work at 55, she now provides childcare services. Her husband, who has seen God in her life, has become a Christian.

"By God's grace, I can, at my age, carry a baby and rise from the floor unaided!"

She looks forward to more fruitful years, teaching the young to pray and blessing them with God's presence. 🙏



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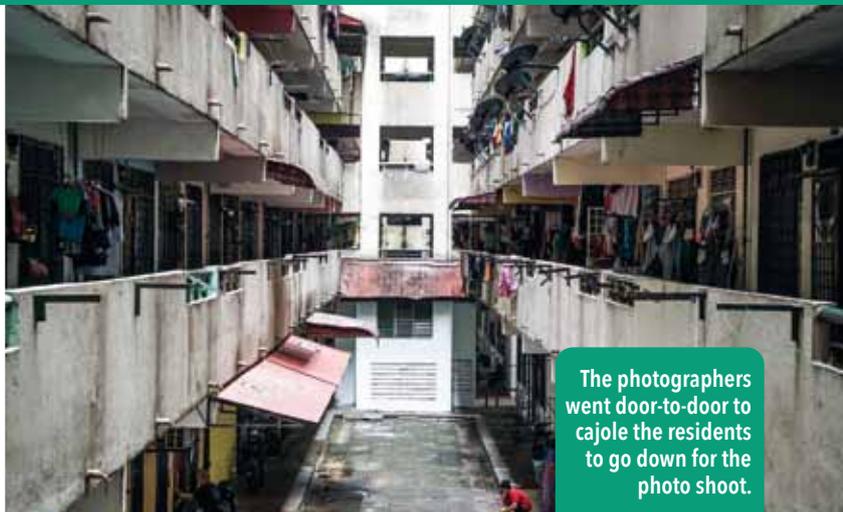
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The Desa Mentari Block A community hall is turned into a studio. Eugene Khoo is at the foreground (in white shorts).



The photographers went door-to-door to cajole the residents to go down for the photo shoot.

TODAY, WE BECAME CELEBRITIES

By Ong Juat Heng

SHUTTERBUGS GIVE UNDERPRIVILEGED FAMILIES A TASTE OF STARDOM WITH FREE PHOTO SHOOT.

Don't we look gorgeous?



Eugene Khoo stoically snapped away, his camera trained on the frail terminally ill five-year-old girl and her family members at their low-cost flat in Kuala Lumpur. The avid photographer had been shooting family portraits as his voluntary service to Hospis Malaysia, but that day's shoot was the most emotionally wrecking experience he's ever faced.

After the one-hour session, he gathered his gear and walked to his car. Once in, he broke down and cried. "I took half an hour to compose myself before driving home," he unashamedly shared. When he got home, he grabbed his four-year-old son, Jayden, and hugged him tightly for a long time.

Months later, Hospis Malaysia sent Eugene a photo of the flat where he had photographed the terminally ill girl. She had passed on. "They had her photos all over the flat and asked for reprints," Eugene said.

Saddened that she had gone, Eugene nevertheless felt greatly privileged to have given her family the photos to remember her by. The photo shoot took place three years ago when Eugene had a busy, rising IT career. Despite his hectic work life, he volunteered his photography skills

for *Hospis Malaysia to stay grounded, knowing the people in the photos would soon be gone. (*A charitable organisation providing palliative care for terminally ill patients.)

"It's heartbreaking but you look at the families and they clutch that photo like it's the only thing that matters. It's because that is what they have left. Then you realise, hey, that's really making a difference. One photo at a time," Eugene mulled pensively.

"The Hospis time also taught me that when doctors can't do anything else, the photographer can."

Eugene has also gone on mission trips to Orang Asli settlements although he, in his own words, "can't pray in BM, am not a doctor, am an introvert but I think I can organise an expedition and drive us there and back".

Ultimately, it's about what you can do that will bless the people, especially the underprivileged. He's heard people saying, "I'm just a photographer, hiding behind a camera". "But photos are a legacy and they are treasured. Those Orang Asli parents loved their kids' photos," he pointed out.

Slowly, an idea germinated. Why not gather photographers from the church together and do a photo shoot for underprivileged families free of charge? The idea was spurred by an American professional photographer that Eugene admires. Every year, the photographer will gather his peers at a park and take photos for needy families, single



Precious in God's sight.

mothers, orphans and the like without charge.

Eugene broached the idea with his church leaders. Many months later on a Saturday morning in August, a group of 10 volunteers from the Media+Comm ministry of PJEFCC unloaded their gear at the community hall of the Desa Mentari Block 5 flats in Kuala Lumpur to take family portraits for the flat dwellers.

“BRING A SMILE TO A FAMILY” PHOTO PROJECT

Setting up the studio was a breeze; getting the shy residents to come down from their flats took a lot more work. It was immediately apparent that the residents had never taken family portraits before and the photographers had to go up to their flats to cajole them to dress up and go down.

Slowly, they made their way down and as families meet other families all dressed up, the whole atmosphere began to sizzle with gaiety and merriment. In the end, the residents were trying to out-pose one another, and coaxing the reluctant fathers to join in.

“I hope the photo session would be one highlight the residents can recall in the future and with the photos in their hand, hold on to what matters most – their families,” Eugene said.

That day, 60 families had their photos taken, including a wheelchair-bound resident, who had to be carried down by the photographers.

Several weeks after the photo shoot, 27 volunteers, including three children, from the church went to the flats to present the beautifully-framed portraits to the families. “You may not think much of a family photo but for these families, it was priceless,” Eugene said.

BLESSING YOU, BLESSING ME

For most of the photographers and volunteers, this excursion was their first, so they were definitely out of their comfort zone but they knew they were making a difference. The smiles on the faces of the Desa Mentari Block A families gave them a sense of fulfilment that they were able to bring some cheer to them.

Many of the photographers must have felt they had no avenue or skill to reach out to the communities. After all, they are photographers, not doctors or teachers. But for once, the photographers made the residents feel important.

“Sometimes, that’s all you need to do – to make others feel they matter,” said Eugene. And felt important they did because the flats’ Residents’ Association chairman said after the photo shoot, “Today, we became celebrities!”

While the photographers gave the residents a sense of significance, their smiles and appreciation made the photographers’ day, according to Ho Sin See, one of the photographers. “Some of us can help to feed the hungry or chat with the lonely. Others like us can use our camera to bring some cheer to the family. We can all play our part as change agents in transforming our community,” she said.

As for the volunteers who distributed the photos after the shoot, the chance to peek into the lives of the urban poor that they wouldn’t otherwise normally meet is a “starting point”, according to Debbie Loh, who led the photo project as head of the church’s Media+Comm ministry.

“Maybe it will inspire someone to missions or spur someone to get more

involved. I think these are ways we can allow others to experience for themselves and let a call or seed be planted through that experience,” said Debbie, who is also the church deaconess/secretary.

Will there be another similar photo project? “Definitely,” Eugene replied. “In fact, once we got back, most of them were already asking for the next project and discussing the places we can reach.”

The photographers’ enthusiasm towards the next project must have warmed Debbie’s heart, for she had hoped that they would be inspired to use their skills and passion for something more than just photography for church events.

“Amateur photography can end up being just a self-gratifying hobby. Why not use it for something bigger?” she pointed out.

For her, the photo project recognised and affirmed that every person, especially the poor, is made in the image of God and derives his or her worth from the Creator.

“If you read about the lives of the urban poor, you will know how difficult life can be for them. As we shot the portraits, we saw families, husbands and wives, friends and neighbours come together with smiles and laughter to pose for the camera. I think it is life-affirming to have been able to bring them some joy and to have a part in fostering family and neighbourly cohesiveness in the community,” she said.

“When communities thrive and are at peace, isn’t that a blessing?” 🙏

(Photos by Ho Sin See and Gary Ng)



Caleb Yeoh's tattoo reflects his faith.

TALKING ABOUT

Tattoos

By James Lee

If you grew up in an Asian home, and more specifically a 'Christian Asian home', chances are you would have heard the following about tattoos: "It's a sin", "Only gangsters have tattoos", "Later you cannot find job or girlfriend, how?"

Today however, tattoos are seen more as body art and self-expression, predominantly among the younger generation and even among Christian youth.

Why are tattoos controversial, especially among the older Christians? Most evangelical Christians quote Leviticus 19:28, which says, "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord."

Here, God specifically told the Israelites en route to the Promised Land to stay away from foreign religious practices, such as eating bloody meat, certain haircuts and markings of the body for dead relatives, as these practices would lead them astray. However, in the same passage, God also told them not to shave the sides of their heads. Yet, we don't grow up being told that shaving the sides of our heads is a sin.

So then, how should we interpret and understand this tattoo text today?

Pastor Mike Ngui of Damansara Utama Methodist Church (DUMC) said, "In such situations, we can do either one of these three: Ignore all of them because, it's the OLD law and we live by the New Testament now; take ALL of them at face value, because it IS the written Word of God; or carefully consider them in its time and context."

His advice is option 3. "Firstly, I understand this sole verse explicitly about tattoos to be forbidding a practice closely associated with ancient idolatrous worship of that region and of that time.

"These 'neighbours' cut themselves as part of their worship to Baal. Therefore, I think it is inappropriate to use this verse to forbid tattoos in the modern-day context.

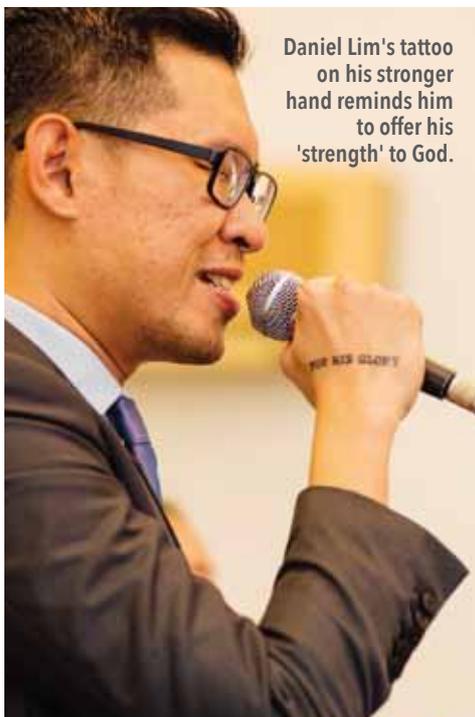
"Today, tattoos in our modern Malaysian society may not have any association to abominable religions, but tattoos are still viewed unfavourably. As a Christian, it is not merely about whether something is intrinsically wrong or evil, but also about how it is perceived. Apostle Paul exhorts us to live a better way – the way of love, which is to refrain from something that may not be wrong in itself for the sake of not stumbling others."

If tattoos are not intrinsically 'sinful', why then does it still 'stumble' our brothers and sisters? Ps Mike believed it's due to the negative association with tattoos.

CHRISTIANS AND THEIR TATTOOS

Daniel Lim, 33, grew up being taught that tattoos were associated with gangsterism and that those who had them were bad hats. This is historically and culturally true, as in 17th century Japan when tattoos were used to mark prison inmates as criminals.

Daniel, a worship leader from Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church, said since he understood tattoos to be cultural and show association to a community or a leader, "I want to show my allegiance to God, my leader and my King".



Daniel's tattoos are deeply significant to him. After his rededication to God in 2015, he decided to tattoo the words, "By His Grace" and "For His Glory", on the back of his left and right hands respectively.

He explained: "I tattooed 'By His Grace' on my left hand because it's the weaker hand, so it reminds me to live my life in weakness 'By His grace'. My right hand is stronger and so, I offer my strength 'For His glory'!" When asked if his tattoos had hindered his ministry, Daniel said most church members accept them.

Today, many Christians get themselves 'inked' with symbols, words or Scripture verses that demonstrate their faith in the Lord. Stephanie Yap, 22, is

the former Christian Fellowship President at IACT College and she sports a tattoo on her left wrist.

"My tattoo says 'RUN'. I got it to remind myself to run from sin but later on, I saw it as running TOWARDS God rather than just away from sin," she said. "This has given me a new meaning on how I view sin and how to tackle it."

For Caleb Yeoh, his tattoo, "the God who clothes the lilies is looking out for me", is inspired by Matthew 6:28. With his right arm 'inked', the drummer from FGA Centre Penang will cover his arm whenever he serves in church out of respect to the church.

BEFORE YOU TATTOO

What should a Christian consider before getting a tattoo? Josh Sebastian believed that we should treat tattoos like anything we do to our bodies, which is to be done in wisdom and with God in mind.

As a former youth pastor of nearly



300 youth in Kingdomcity, Josh advises his youth that "firstly, Scripture, whether Old Testament or New Testament, is always relevant but it should not be taken out of context".

"The whole book of Leviticus is about sanctification and talks about how we should treat our bodies as a sacrifice to God. It talks so much about rituals because God was very specific about how we should honour His gift to us."

Josh, who recently got his fourth tattoo, shared that his tattoo journey was a reflection of his walk with God.

"There's a song by Leeland that goes, 'I have seen Your face, and now I can't walk away'. It's the same for me with tattoos: I've come this far in my revelation with God, and I want something permanent that would not go away."

"Don't just get a tattoo because it's cool. Think long and hard about what it means to God, to yourself and to others," he advised.

Josh's church accepts his tattoos and does not stop him from serving because of them. "It's not about what you look like externally, but how you are internally. We can't say 'This person LOOKS like a sinner' when there are others who LOOK fine but could be secretly abusing their spouse or living in sin."

Pastor Andy Yeoh, the youth pastor of ACTS Church, thinks tattoos may still be a taboo because of perception, upbringing, education and the fear of what we don't understand. However, he also believed that today, there is more acceptance and compromise among the older and younger generation.

When asked if he would consider getting tattoos, he said, "No, but that is mainly because I don't think I will look good in them."

MY TATTOO THOUGHTS

I have tattoos, some which I thought long and hard over and some which I should have considered a lot more. I would say to anybody who wants to get a tattoo to be prayerful about it. While having tattoos may not be a 'sin', we should not live selfishly.

Even though one of my tattoos says "set free" as a reminder that I am set free from the bondage of sin, I realise that I am not "set free" from the consequences of my actions. I must be ready to answer when people ask me about my tattoos and to be careful not to stumble others because of them.

I would like to end by quoting Pastor Mike, who said: "The main focus of church life is to encourage people and to draw people closer to Christ and to help them cultivate a vibrant relationship with the living God. If your (visible) tattoos distract people, I would suggest keeping them under wraps, if at all possible." ❏

HERE COME THE FOOD

By Goh Chee Beng and Ong Juat Heng

Food trucks are part of the landscape in many countries, especially in the West. In Malaysia, these meals-on-wheels fad is catching on. Scour the Internet and you'll see titles such as "15 Local Food Trucks In Malaysia You Die Die Must Try" and "6 Must Try Food Trucks in Klang Valley".

Most food trucks are scattered everywhere but when there is a big event, you can often find many gathered there. Event organisers know that food trucks draw the crowd not only because of their lip-smacking food but also because of the carnival atmosphere they wheel in. And when hordes of food trucks gather, you'll most likely run into Alfred Ong – the man who can mobilise food truckers in a jiffy.

Alfred, 54, is the Administrative Manager of the Retailers' Association, which helps the retailers in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (Jalan TAR) in Kuala Lumpur to improve their business. Three years ago, as they were mulling over how to boost the retailers' bottom-line, they came up with the idea of using food trucks to lure the crowd to Jalan TAR.

With City Hall's blessing, the food trucks came and business there has been bustling ever since. Slowly, Alfred's role in helping the Jalan TAR retailers expanded to helping the food truckers improve their business.

In fact these days, Alfred spends a lot of time mobilising the food trucks for big events throughout the Klang Valley through partnerships with the local councils and event organisers. Among the events Alfred has helped to move the food truckers to are the Petaling Jaya Fair 2016, Citrawarna 2017 at Dataran Merdeka, Charity event for children of Perkim, Canteen On Wheel at New Era University, Boys' Brigade Pesta 2016 and the Combined PJ Churches Healing Rally 2017.

A MINORITY

Alfred tells Asian Beacon that his many food truckers comprise only 3% Indians, 7% Chinese and a whopping 90% Bumiputras. Being a Chinese and a Christian, he realises he's in a blessed

position to make an impact by "setting high standards with sincere intentions so that God's name is honoured".

"I am a servant of Christ, and whatever I do for the food truckers, I do it as a service to the Lord. Whatever I do, I do all to the glory of God," he says.

When it comes to sharing the good news, Alfred prefers to let his actions speak, especially



Alfred's presence throughout the event is an encouragement to the food truckers... Alfred (far left) with food truckers at an event at Mont Kiara Plaza, Kuala Lumpur.

through prayer. He explains: "One major obstacle for food truckers is the unpredictable Malaysian weather. Rain, haze and extremely hot days can affect their business as most people would rather stay indoors or go to restaurants to enjoy the cool air-con comfort.

"That's why I always tell the truckers that I pray for good weather. Now, the truckers will ask me whether I have prayed whenever we have an event. I truly believe prayer is an aspect that has been impressed on them that our God is always there for them."

IMPROVING THEIR GAME

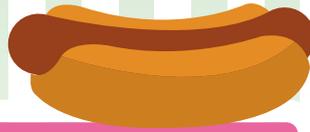
The truckers pay a small participating fee to the Retailers' Association when they take part in the events, and part of the money is used to promote the events. Alfred explains that the fee is to get the truckers to commit to the event so that the organiser and Alfred are not caught in a bind if they don't show up.

Generally, the truckers do not have business training and here's where Alfred steps in. He tries to instil in them good business values, such as discipline, high hygiene standard and professionalism in their appearance.

"For example, I make sure they wear their caps, gloves and aprons at all times. If they don't (wear them), they'll be penalised. Also, their trucks must always be clean as cleanliness is critical. By consistently impressing on them all these things, the truckers have come to learn that we are serious and in turn, they've also become serious about how to handle their business," Alfred shares, adding that they must also be disciplined in turning up for events that they have agreed to participate in.

For those who show commitment, Alfred rewards them by turning down truckers who want to participate.

TRUCKS



Colourful food trucks adorn the Petaling Jaya Fair.



Patrons patiently lining up at the PJ Combined Churches Healing Rally.



Hordes of people of all races and ages enjoying food truck delicacies and carnival atmosphere at the Citrawarna 2017 event at Dataran Merdeka.

untuk tegur orang lain. (The person who cannot accept the reprimand of others will not change. The person who does not want to change is not worthy to reprimand others.)

While profits are topmost on the truckers' minds, Alfred also encourages them to give back to society by helping the needy. At one recent charity event for children, the truckers gave a portion of their profits to the NGO, Alfred shares.



CHANGING MINDSETS

One of the greatest challenges Alfred has faced is stationing the food trucks at religious events, particularly Christian healing meetings. At one such meeting recently, a food trucker hesitantly asked Alfred before agreeing to participate, *"Ada hantu ke dalam event itu?"* ("Will there be ghosts at the event?")

The anxious trucker agreed to participate after Alfred's assurance. Well, the truckers did not encounter any *"hantu"* at the Christian event, but they did experience the warmest hospitality by the mainly Christian customers.

"Some of the food truckers have told me they were surprised by the pleasant experience at Christian events, that customers there were not demanding but were kind, friendly and thoughtful," Alfred says proudly. "The food truckers could sense something very different in their surroundings even though the meetings were inside the premises," he adds.

Perhaps, the food truckers' good experience at the Christian events will give them a measure of confidence in the Christian God to help them tide through the worsening economy. Alfred says that the number of food truckers is increasing but the business is decreasing due to the weak economy. Furthermore, the locations for doing the business are limited. In light of this, Alfred is relying on God to help boost the profits in all the events he is mobilising for the food truckers. 🙏



(Fewer trucks means the committed ones will have a bigger share of the business.)

Alfred shares that at a recent Christian event at the MBPJ Stadium in Kelana Jaya, Selangor, only nine food truckers participated as the participating fee was rather high. On the first day of the event, business was so brisk that they had to replenish their supplies several times.

When the other food truckers heard about the good business, some called Alfred to let them do business there. Now, extra truckers mean extra income for the Retailers' Association but Alfred decided not to offer any space to the late-comer truckers.

"It is my principle to honour the supportive truckers whom I consider risk takers. That's why I turned down those who called me when the event had started," explains Alfred. "When food truckers become opportunists, I

need to be fair to the risk takers."

Through Alfred's consistent firm dealings, the truckers have gradually felt his passion and sincerity in wanting to help them succeed. Meanwhile, Alfred has also learned valuable heartwarming lessons from the food truckers. There were times when business was not so encouraging, and the food truckers would console him, *"Boss, ini bisnes ada naik, ada turun punya!"* ("Boss, there are good and bad times in this business!")

This upbeat attitude was put to test at another Christian event at Stadium Melawati in Shah Alam where the sales were not too good. Alfred was warmed by the food truckers' uncomplaining attitude. It somehow reminds him of a Malay proverb, which sounds like this: *Orang yang tak boleh terima teguran orang lain, dia takkan berubah. Orang yang tak mahu berubah, dia tak layak*



Thanksgiving

AS A SPIRITUAL WEAPON

By Pastor Chris Kam

On Dec. 1, 2014, my wife and I had dinner with a Korean American missionary couple and the subject of thanksgiving came up as the Americans had just celebrated it. He said his church in America had encouraged him to make it personal by listing down the things that he was thankful for at the end of each year. He encouraged me to do likewise and to make it a habit.

So armed with my Evernote, I started ambitiously by having a goal of listing down 500 things I was thankful for in 2014. It was hard going at some points but for the next 30 days, I kept writing. By the time Dec. 31, 2014 arrived, I had completed my list of 500. I was amazed that I did have 500 things to be thankful for!

I did the same for 2015 but reduced the target to 400 as I wanted to chew on each item a little longer, to savour the blessing and grace of God over the last 12 months. When 2016 came, I reduced the target even further to 50 so that I could slowly reflect over the things I was grateful to God for. What did I learn from these exercises?

The psalmist exhorts us to "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise..." (Psalm 100:4a)

Being thankful and content is a virtue. Thankfulness is reflected throughout all of Paul's letters. Despite having borne the brunt of persecutions, sufferings, hardship, dangers, poverty, rejections and even when he wasn't healed of a lifelong ailment, he remained in a state of thankfulness. His assurance from God was "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:7-8)

This heart of thanksgiving is encapsulated in this exhortation: "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thess. 5:16-18)

It is easy to give thanks when things are good. We see that all the time on social media. Rarely have I seen someone who gives thanks when things go wrong, except one in the recent weeks where a brother gave thanks to God for his wife who had just gone home to be with the Lord due to cancer. His Facebook post said: "It has been 11 days since my beloved went to be with the Lord. She is walking and leaping and praising God and I am so happy for her. It still leaves me in a place of loneliness and aching heart but I am OK because my God is supplying all that I need."

BENEFITS OF THANKFULNESS

It is not always easy to give thanks in ALL circumstances, but this is precisely what we must do to experience God's grace in our lives. Two things happen when we inculcate a heart of thanksgiving.

First, it breaks the power of the enemy over us. It is a powerful weapon for spiritual warfare. When we are thankful, we invite God's pleasure over us and the enemy no longer has the ability to hold or manipulate us in our discouragement, despair or anger. We begin to learn to ask WHAT-can-we-learn instead of WHY-is-this-happening in our circumstances. We may never know or control the 'whys' but we can certainly decide to learn from the 'whats'.

Second, thanksgiving brings contentment. Apostle Paul's advice to Timothy was "...godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Tim. 6:6) He reminded the young man that they came into the world with nothing and would take nothing out. As long as they had food and clothing, they ought to be contented. Elisabeth Elliot, who faced the tragedy of losing a husband in the mission field, was quoted as saying, "Discontent dries up the soul." She



wrote, "To love God is to love His will. It is to wait quietly for life to be measured by one who knows us through and through. It is to be content with His timing and His wise apportionment."

One obstacle to contentment is that we tend to compare upwards. We look at what we don't have rather than what we have. One of the easiest ways to die to that is to get involved with people who are less fortunate than us. Some of the finest people I know are people who are serving the underprivileged. The poor have a way of reminding us how blessed and fortunate we are. Never wish we could be someone else or compare ourselves with them. Be happy with or learn to accept who you are because you cannot change that.

END THE YEAR WITH A THANKFUL SPIRIT

Here's a practical way to start your writing your thanksgiving list before the year ends. What a great way to close the year by re-aligning our attitude and starting the new year with hope. List down the blessings and avoid the temptation to ignore the failures, losses, missteps or defeats. Pause when you need to at some items. Often, the journey may be more important than the destination as it is God's way of moulding us for what He is preparing us for.

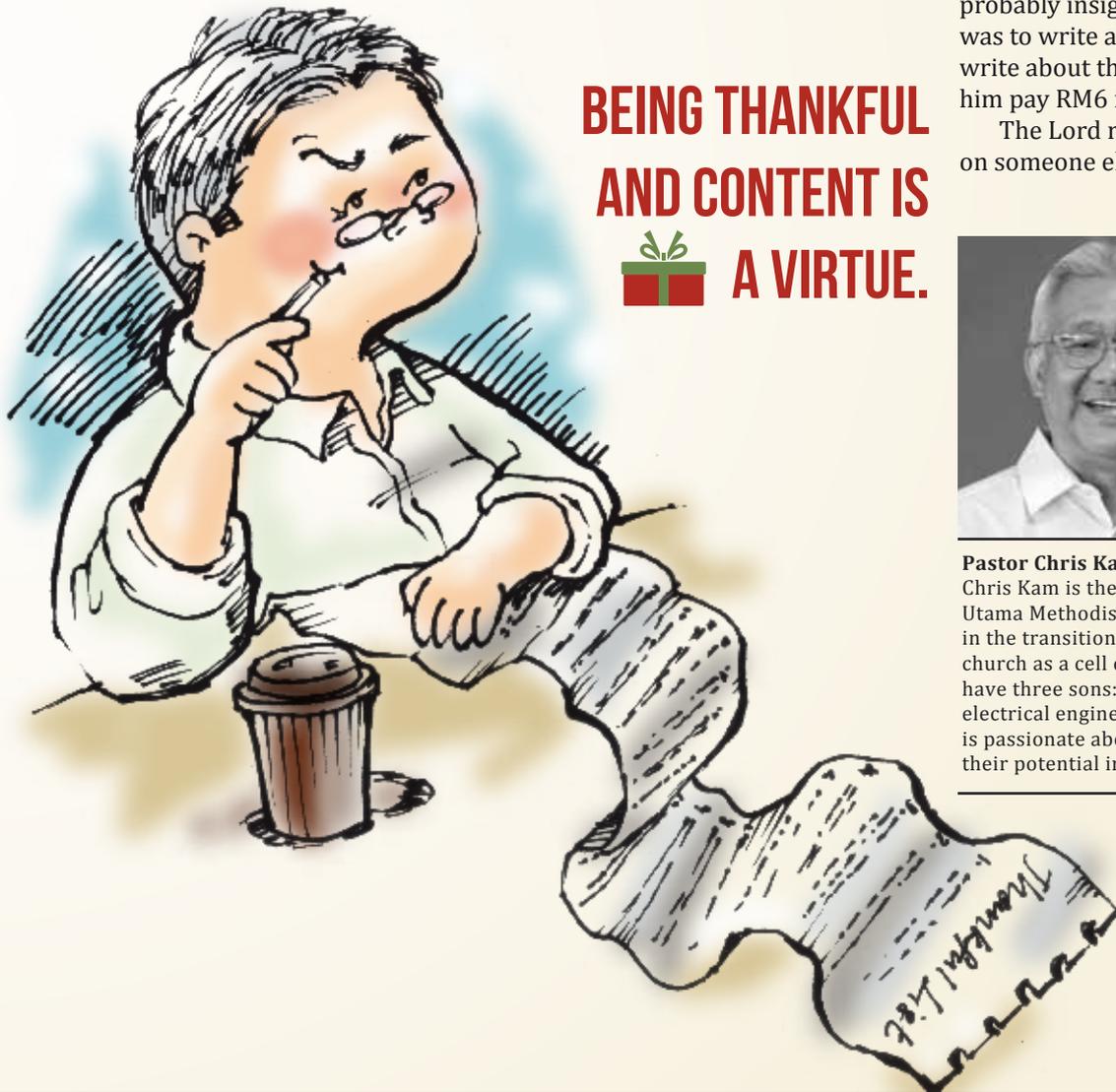
The Lord reminded me that we can go one step further – to be instrumental in helping someone be thankful.

Recently, at a shopping mall, as I was waiting for my turn to pay at the parking token machine, I noticed an

elderly Malay gentleman hesitating in front of me in the queue. He was holding a RM100 bill and he said he had no smaller bills. He didn't know whether the machine would accept it. I told him to give it a go. The machine displayed RM6 as the amount owing and upon inserting his RM100 bill, it was rejected. Instinctively, I took out a RM10 bill from my wallet, inserted it into the machine and gave him the paid token. He didn't have time to react but I could see his concerned face break into a smile and insisting on paying me at least with the other one ringgit bill he had. I walked away, saying "No need, it's my pleasure." The phrase, "It is more blessed to give than receive" (Acts 20:35), flashed across my mind. No doubt it was something small and probably insignificant. But if that man was to write a thanksgiving list, he may write about the stranger who helped him pay RM6 in that time of his need.

The Lord reminded me to be listed on someone else's thanksgiving list. 🙏

BEING THANKFUL AND CONTENT IS A VIRTUE.



Pastor Chris Kam

Chris Kam is the Senior Pastor of Damansara Utama Methodist Church and was instrumental in the transitioning and development of the church as a cell church. Married to Stella, they have three sons: Ian, Shaun and Ashton. An electrical engineer by profession, Pastor Chris is passionate about training people to achieve their potential in life.

FAN INTO FLAME THE GIFT OF GOD

By Dr Lim Poh Ann

Look at John – he’s so gifted in preaching. Wow, Jane really shines when she leads in worship. We often admire the preacher and worship team and tend to downplay the role of the ushers and technical team in charge of the sound system. True, the former are in the limelight but all have a part to play in a Sunday worship service.

Spiritual gifts – as opposed to our natural talents – are special abilities that God bestows upon believers. We cannot choose them; it is the Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts to whoever He wills. (1 Cor. 12:11)

The exercise of spiritual gifts need not necessarily be spectacular or awe-inspiring. Gifted believers can also serve God in quiet ways.

Apostle Peter exhorts us to employ our gifts to benefit others – as “good stewards of God’s varied grace”. Thus, we can serve God through hospitality in a small group or preach with fire over the pulpit to hundreds or even thousands. In both instances, lives are impacted and God is glorified. (1 Peter 4:9-11)

Now, who are deemed good stewards? The answer is found in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). This story reminds believers to utilise whatever spiritual gifts or talents God has given us. The men with two and five talents, who made a 100% return on investment for the master, were praised and given fresh responsibilities. Each received the same commendation: “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25: 21, 23) However, the one-talent man who buried his talent was condemned: “You wicked and lazy servant!” (Matthew 25:26)

Faithful stewards assume responsibility in nurturing their God-given spiritual gifts so that their full potential is realised. Just because we have been endowed with spiritual gifts does not mean they will automatically flourish.

Don’t let your spiritual gift lie

dormant. Stir it up!

Apostle Paul reminded young Timothy to stir up his spiritual gift – “fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” (2 Timothy 1:6)

He encouraged Timothy, reminding him that God had given him not to have a spirit of fear but one of power and love and self-control. (2 Timothy 1:7) It is God who empowers believers so that we become “competent as ministers of a new covenant”. (2 Cor. 3:6)

Fulfillment of personal prophecy rests not on divine sovereignty alone; we have to work out our calling in obedience. (Phil. 2:12-13) Jeremiah was appointed a prophet while he was still in his mother’s womb. (Jer. 1:5) Yet, he had to persevere in his calling as he faced stubborn resistance while proclaiming God’s message.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Just as the various parts of our body have different functions, believers play diverse roles in the church, which is the body of Christ. Those who go out and win others (apostles, evangelists) as opposed to those who stay on and strengthen others (pastors, teachers) play crucial but varied roles.

As each believer is like a part of a body, no one can say he has no need of the other member. “The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” (1 Cor. 12:21)

The purpose of the five-fold gifts (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) is to equip the saints for ministry and build up the church till it attains maturity – that it might be united amid its diversity (Eph. 4:11-13).

There are different types of spiritual gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord (1 Cor. 12:4-5).

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? (1 Cor. 12: 29) Paul’s rhetorical questions show us that each believer is unique.

THINK RIGHTLY

Before setting aflame our spiritual gifts, we need to have a right estimate of ourselves – neither too low nor too high. Spiritual gifts won’t flourish if we have a low self-esteem or pride. While we may not cherish lofty notions of ourselves, we need healthy self-esteem before we can exercise our spiritual gifts. We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one of us a measure of faith (Romans 12:3).

Every Christian has been endowed with at least one spiritual gift. Therefore, it is false humility to think we are incapable of serving God and others.

How do we determine our spiritual gifts?

Firstly, as we pray and seek God, the Holy Spirit will reveal to us our spiritual gift(s) for He is the One who leads us into all truth. Secondly, other believers will reveal to us area(s) where we have special anointing, be it evangelism, teaching, counseling or worship.

Thirdly, as we stir up the gift, we will receive further confirmation in our spirit and from others of our special calling. Finally, well-structured tests can help us identify our gifts. By answering 100 questions or more, our inclinations and talents are exposed. Though not foolproof, this tool can be used in conjunction with the foregoing in discovering our spiritual gifts.

NEED FOR CAUTION

While spiritual gifts are important in helping the church attain maturity, we should not go overboard and value gifts more than character. Certainly, character is more important than charisma.

The Corinthian church excelled in spiritual gifts, but Paul addressed its members as carnal, not spiritual, believers. In fact, he called them babes in Christ.

Speaking in tongues, a spiritual gift, is not to be prohibited (1 Cor. 14:39). Yet we must not over-emphasise this spectacular gift that we neglect prophecy – proclaiming God’s word so that all

**DON'T LET YOUR
SPIRITUAL GIFT
LIE DORMANT.
STIR IT UP!**

can understand and benefit. The former edifies the one who speaks in tongues but the latter edifies a community of believers (1 Cor. 14:3-5).

The exercise of spiritual gifts is attended by freedom and spontaneity. However, Paul also stressed the need for order and self-control. Let all things be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets, for God is not a God of confusion but of peace (1 Cor. 14:32-33).

Undue emphasis on spiritual power, signs and wonders, has its dangers. We are not to rejoice that evil spirits are subject to us but that our names are recorded in heaven (Luke 10:20).

Christ warned believers, including those with awe-inspiring spiritual gifts, not to be complacent. Not every professing believer who calls Christ “Lord, Lord” will make it to heaven. Even those who prophesy in God’s name, drive out demons and perform many miracles may be excluded from heaven if they do not do God’s will (Matt. 7: 21-23).

Believers need to seek, stir up and serve others through our spiritual gifts. As we rekindle and celebrate our gifts, we must not get carried away by charisma at the expense of character and a Christ-centred relationship. 🙏

Dr Lim Poh Ann is a medical practitioner. A former editor of Asian Beacon (Dec. 2008-Oct. 2011), he can be reached at www.facebook.com/AskDrLim and Porridge for the Soul: <http://bit.ly/1ijiXHp>

Celebrate GOD'S BOUNTY

By Rajen Devadason

God is good. He has always been good, He is good now and He will always be good.

That should be our true north as we face the trials of each new day and as we're saddened by the endless stream of bad news that our media outlets spew out.

Our world is not perfect but we must open our eyes to see the good that coexists with the bad on our fabulous, fractured; beautiful, baleful; great and grimy planet.

As we celebrate Christmas and bask in the excitement of 2018 rolling around with all the potential and promise of a new year, we would be wise to shift our eyes from what's wrong with our body, family, country and world, and choose to be grateful for all that's right.

God the Father sent God the Son, Jesus, to Earth more than two millennia ago. That's why our world is a far better place today than it would have been otherwise.

Jesus taught about the 'Kingdom of God'. For me, the most powerful lesson about that mysterious kingdom is Jesus' reference of yeast working its way through the dough of human civilisation¹.

The teachings of Jesus and the subsequent legacy of at least 70 generations of Christians trying, albeit imperfectly, to live out Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God and experiencing His resurrected life are why humanity has seen more advancement in the last two millennia than in the preceding 100,000 or 200,000 years (based on anthropological estimates²). The most impressive recent example – to my mind – of our accelerated development as a species is the brief 66-year span between December 1903's first powered flights by the Wright brothers³ and July 1969's initial manned lunar landing by Neil Armstrong and Edwin 'Buzz' Aldrin.

It is through Jesus' life and His teachings that we are



**“SO THE WAY WE SHOULD
CELEBRATE GOD'S
GOODNESS AND BOUNTY
IS BY MIRRORING HIS
GENEROSITY.”**



able to celebrate humanity's pursuit of knowledge and truth; enjoy God's favour that leads to personal promotion; rest in His protection; revel in his bountiful provision; and share of our lives and substance.

Truth

Jesus was humble, yet never falsely so. He knew the value of what He taught and declared that if and when His followers heed and hang on to what He taught, they would learn powerful, liberating truths about this life and the next.

Jesus stated that knowing such truth would set us free⁴.

Promotion

There are also promises from the Old Testament that tell of the good that God desires to pour out onto His people. In Deuteronomy, there are many promises of personal blessings. One that lifts my spirit whenever I re-read it states that God is in charge of our promotions.



Regardless of what we do for a living, we all want to do excellent work and to be recognised for it. While that first half is something we have direct control over – working hard, smart and well – gaining recognition and receiving promotions for our diligence and quality of work is often out of our hands. That's why we should celebrate having God in our corner – encouraging us, strengthening us, rewarding us⁵.



Protection

When we observe the materially wealthiest people we know of, it isn't too uncommon to find them exuding fear and insecurity.

While it is common sense to take practical precautions to safeguard our families and ourselves, there is genuine reason for us to rest in God because the Bible speaks repeatedly of how God Himself will be our source of protection⁶.

Jesus taught that God considers it His responsibility to watch over us while it is our responsibility to further the goals of His Kingdom⁷.

Recognising that God cares enough to watch over us should be reason enough for us to celebrate His kindness, attention and protection.

Provision and Generosity

Tough economic times are hitting our shores with increasing regularity. Therefore, the importance of heeding God's instructions on tithing⁸ and of utilising sound secular financial planning principles⁹ has never been greater.

When we tithe, we acknowledge that God owns it all anyway. We then open blessing from Him to us. material blessing into adhere to sound personal finance to pay increase our savings and elevate our levels of charitable giving so that we – just like the Sea of Galilee in Judea – prosper through a healthy balance of inflows and outflows and not – like the Dead Sea – die (economically in our case) from constipation because no healthy outflows occur!



We are truly blessed to be a blessing.

So the way we should celebrate God's goodness and bounty is by mirroring His generosity. We do so by managing money wisely and arranging our affairs so we may be generous to others.

Therefore, let's celebrate this holiday season by patterning our generosity after that of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If we do so, ours can be a Merry Christmas 2017 and a truly Happy New Year 2018! 🎁

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5. NIV Deuteronomy 28:12-13, "The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of His bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom."
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8. NIV Malachi 3:10, "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.'"
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DEAR GOLDIE



Dear Goldie,

I am puzzled and disturbed as oftentimes when I discuss with my friends about same-sex marriage, they always accuse us Christians of being without love. They always asked why we are against the marriage of two persons (of whatever sex) who love each other.

Puzzled

Dear Puzzled,

Yes, Christians are often accused of being unloving because it may be our attitude, tone or behaviour that gives the impression that we are dogmatic, bigoted, aggressive or proud. If so, we need to change but I suggest we must also be clear about what exactly is wrong with same-sex marriages. It is not just allowing two same-sex persons who love each other to legalise their relationship. It is more than granting them their rights or giving everyone freedom to choose.

There are far-reaching consequences if the marriage legislation is changed. I will list only a few here.

THE ROOT

Humanist activists who advocate same-sex marriage hold the worldview that religions, especially Christianity, restrict and repress sexual conduct. Hence, they insist that any sexual expression and exploration between consenting adults should be encouraged. They believe the traditional family unit may not work for everyone and people should be free to build a family structure that suits them.

In countries where there are same-sex laws, premarital sex, homo-

SHOULD WE LEGALISE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE?

sexuality, pornography, adultery, abortion and polygamy tend to be acceptable in their societies.

THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE YOUR GENDER

Humanist activists have already managed to enforce the following.

In the US – The Department of Education stated in a letter to schools and colleges in May 2016: “Schools should treat transgender students according to their gender identity and allow them access to sex-segregated activities and facilities even if it makes other people uncomfortable. The school must follow whatever sense of internal gender the students said they had, without asking for documentation or proof of medical diagnosis or treatment... those who do not comply could have their federal funding stopped...”

In South Australia – Even before it becomes law in Australia, a mandatory policy for South Australian schools allows students to choose their bathroom, uniform, sporting team and sleeping quarters, according to their chosen gender without the consent, consultation or even notification of parents. In countries where marriage has been redefined, “optional” programmes, such as this Australian Safe Schools programme, have become compulsory.

In Canada – In 2017, the Canadian Ontario Liberal Government passed legislation Bill 89 that virtually declares that the state knows better than the parents. The state is empowered to take kids away from parents who do not conform to their gender instructions. This is an unprecedented example of government intrusion into the home.

In Australia – In October 2017, the

Family Court ruled against a father who tried to stop his 15-year-old daughter from undergoing irreversible female-to-male hormone treatment. He argued she was too young and had been brainwashed by two doctors “treating” her. Both the doctors are also members of associations that “encourage gender diversity and acceptance”. This is likely to happen again in the future in situations where gender is considered “fluid”, and where parental rights and common sense are trumped by harmful ideologies.

THE FATHERLESS

Jason Wong, who worked in the Singapore Prisons Service for over 20 years and is the founder of the Yellow Ribbon movement (helping prisoners to get back into society), has found that a high percentage of prisoners came from dysfunctional homes.

He has seen enough to realise that fathers play an important role in these broken families – having no father to model after, the prisoners looked for love and security from all different sources such as sex, gangs, drugs and homosexuality.

So, he founded the Dads for Life movement, stressing that having a mother and especially a father, is an important factor for normal, healthy children. Same-sex couples who wish to have children by adopting or IVF will bring up their children either fatherless or motherless.

GOD DEFINED MARRIAGE

Christians believe that God created male and female and invented marriage. The two purposes of marriage are to have children and for emotional and physical intimacy. He intended a married couple to complement each other in the different male and female traits. Homosexual and

Continue on page 42...



TANGS EMPIRE SUBANG



TANGS THE SHORE MELAKA



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Malaysia Retailers Association

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SONGS STEEPED IN MALAYSIAN FLAVOUR

By Patrick Leong

Is there such a thing as “worship identity”, where our worship is identifiable by our sound, music and lyrics? I believe there is. Just listen to African Christians or Indian Christians sing their own worship songs and you’ll hear their clear identifiable sounds.

God has created many nations, each with its unique music and sound, and He is interested in the geographical aspects of where His people’s diverse praise comes from. And Malaysia, like other nations, shall have her own uniqueness in praise and sound.

Increasingly, our Malaysian Christian songwriters are discovering our own Malaysian sound that represents our ethnicity, culture and nationality.

This is obvious when we trace the locally-written Christian songs about our nation from the past till the present.

I believe the melodies and words have been planted in the hearts of those who do not even consider themselves professional songwriters but in obedience to the Holy Spirit, they have penned songs that are truly edifying to the Malay-

sian Church. When sung, their songs inspire such a deep conviction and realisation for our nation to be redeemed.

In our worship, there needs to be a balance in blending the familiar universal contemporary worship approach with one that is driven by local sounds and songs that represent our land. After all, we are destined to be born at a specific time and place, as stated in Acts 17:26. As Malaysians, our praise and worship is unique, carrying an identity in sound and songs that are uniquely ours and like no other.

As such, we bring you these locally produced albums containing original compositions that blend contemporary moods with local sounds, language and the unique instruments of our beloved land. These songs embody our Malaysian worship identity. Let’s be proud of our sound; let’s magnify our Creator God with our own songs. 🙌



1. RISE UP **2. VICTORY COMETH** - This is the third album released by Grace Assembly PJ, after Rise Up 2016 and Crossover 2014. Two songs - “New Sound” found in Victory Cometh 2017 & “Let Your Fire Fall” in Rise Up 2016 - were specially written for Malaysia. **3. SAPEQ IRAU** - HEZEKIAH ASIM RHYTHM of the Kelabit Highlands. **4. MELODI CINTA 2.0** Produced by Jenny Liew **5. PERSIAPKAN JALAN BAGI TUHAN** - Matius 3:3 PRAYER ALTAR ALBUM, Produced by Lerwana Danill (Pengerusi Pelayanan Pemuda-Pemudi SIB Melangkap) Sabah.

(Sapeq Irau, Melodi Cinta and Victory Cometh are available at Canaanland bookstore. Persiapkan Jalan Bagi Tuhan is currently not available but look out for it.)

... from page 40

lesbian behaviour does not fulfil these requirements. We cannot re-define marriage to change what God has defined and therefore, Christians do not endorse these relationships.

OUR RESPONSE

However, although we stand firmly on our worldview, beliefs, principles and values, **we must respect and love those who hold different views.** We should not impose or force our views on others; neither should we leave them alone and not care that they do not know the truth.

Our responsibility is to convince and persuade them with accurate and scholarly research from sociology, physiology, psychology, etc. that what God has instructed will eventually be proven in reality to be the best for humans.

I suggest you read up, study and research this subject so you can be informed. When you discuss with your friends, let your attitude be respectful, loving, humble and pleasant. And pray that they will be open and willing to listen. 🙌

Goldie

Goldie has her own blog www.deargoldie.com

Do you have an issue you need advice on?

Write to *Asian Beacon's* Goldie Chong at aboffice@asianbeacon.org for her godly counsel.

Selected questions may be featured in this column. If you leave an email address, you will have your question answered, whether it's published or not.

A magnifying glass with a black handle is positioned over a document. The lens is focused on a specific paragraph of text. The background text is blurred, while the text inside the lens is sharp and legible. The text inside the lens reads: "By looking at what is below the soil surface may be your clue to achieving better yield and this is what **Hi-KayBio** is all about, Perfecting Soil Harmony and Optimizing Yield." The words "Perfecting Soil Harmony and Optimizing Yield" are in a smaller, green font compared to the rest of the text.

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