

ASIAN BEACON

YOUR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE

Dying Hope



- Will You Attend A Gay Wedding?*
- The Mini-Giant's Big Battle*
- Let Me Die! Let Me Die!*
- What Is Heaven Like?*
- Oh God, I'm Gay!*
- Can Christians Do Yoga?*
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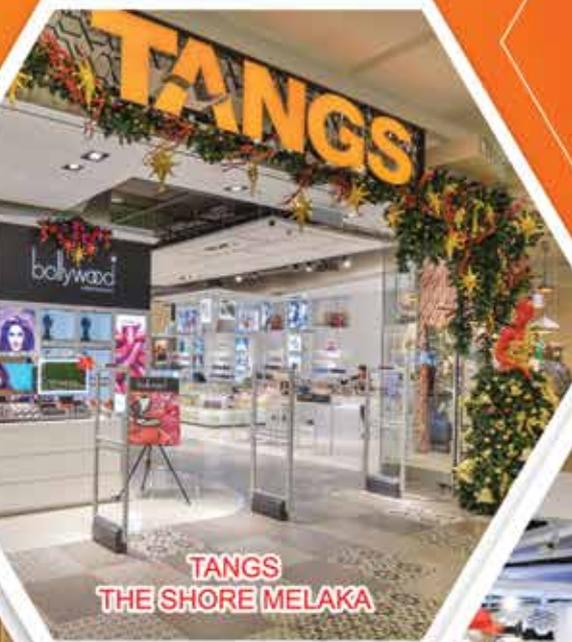
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Editor's Note

Easter does not seem to evoke the same wondrous, magical feelings that Christmas arouses. Perhaps it's because at Christmas, we have the baby Jesus to gush and go soft and sentimental over? Easter may be a low key affair in many churches but it is the pinnacle of our Lord's life, the culmination of His mission. For in His death and resurrection, the hope He inspired at His birth is realised.

Without this hope, we all *mampus*. This hope is especially dear for the dying and the infirm, for those like Rev. Loh Soon Choy – a dear servant of God who seems to be losing his battle with cancer (read his story on page 6). It is this hope that keeps him joyful and excited about the hereafter.

While on the subject of the hereafter, Dr Alex Tang shares his thoughts on euthanasia or mercy killing. When you're faced with a long, costly, painful terminal sickness, euthanasia sure looks merciful. But what does Scripture say? Dr Alex clarifies the issue for us.

Will you attend a gay wedding? Can Christians do yoga? We hope these articles will get us talking (in a loving way) on thorny issues. Even if we don't agree with the writers' points of view, let's disagree lovingly.

We continue to bring you stories about people and ministries that magnify our great God, so take your time to savour them. May each story inspire you to serve our Master more passionately, love Him more deeply and follow Him more closely.

Just

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Contents

April - June 2018 Vol. 50#2



Cover Story

The Mini-Giant's Big Battle 6
What is Heaven Like? 9
Let me die! Let me die! 10

My Story

Oh God, I'm Gay! 12

Features

Young & Daring 14
Stretching Seniors 16
Dribbling Dreams 18

Issues

Will you attend a gay wedding? 21
Can Christians Do Yoga? 24

Features

The Voice of Victory 28
Making Films for the MAKER 30
Honoured Professor, Humble Servant 32
Hard Rockers for Jesus 34
Grief Be Gone 36
God's Makeover For Beauty Doctor 38

Missions

The Ark of Missions 40

Regular

Prosperity & Security 42
Taxes, Tithing & Trust 44
Dear Goldie – Heartbroken 46

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THE MINI-GIANT'S BIG BATTLE

By Chew Sue Lee

Rev. Loh Soon Choy is a faith giant in many sense of the word, having served the Malaysian church for over 40 years in various positions as a pastor and dean of a seminary, as well as a volunteer in para-church organisations. However, he prefers the term “mini-giant”, stating simply, “What are my achievements in life after all? They’re moderate.”

Born to immigrant parents as the 13th child in a line of 16, Rev. Loh’s parents had humble ambitions for their children that revolved around a good education. This was no surprise as his parents came from a poor farming background. Though they were interested in the great Chinese classics and Confucius teachings, they were mostly self-taught.

Despite criticisms from their neighbours, Rev. Loh’s parents chose for him the less popular path of an English education. He excelled in school and was the typical all-rounded A-plus student who did well in the classroom, on the sports field and extra-curricular activities. In 1956, he finished school with several awards under his belt and a Penang State Scholarship to study in the then University of Malaya in Singapore.

Rev. Loh spent his early working years teaching at the Methodist Boys’ School in Penang. “I was offered an opportunity to train in England to be a teacher but turned it down to be near my aging widower father and non-Christian family.”

For 15 years, Rev. Loh saw the Lord honour his sacrifice as one by one, his father and other family members became Christians. While working as a teacher, he also served as a Sunday school superintendent and occasional preacher, amongst many other voluntary roles in organisations such as Scripture Union.

From Teacher To Seminarian

Thirsting for more experiences in life, Rev. Loh left Penang to teach in Johor. There, he gradually earned enough to purchase a house in Penang for his father and two widowed sisters.

With that family obligation fulfilled, he felt he had the confirmation needed to attend the Discipleship Training Centre (DTC) in Singapore to expand his theological learning. His time there led to his decision to enter the ministry full-time, serving as a pastor in Singapore EFC and lecturer at Singapore Bible College.

Up until his retirement at the age of 70 in 2008, Rev. Loh had worked as a pastor in churches in Kuala Terengganu, Malacca and Petaling Jaya, and as a distinguished dean and lecturer at the Malaysia Bible Seminary. He had also served voluntarily in more than a dozen para-church organisations, which he continued serving after his retirement. "All such (voluntary) roles to me were essentially to serve as spiritual theological encourager, empowerer and team-worker."

"A Life-Long Spirit Of Radical Gratitude Will Keep Away Pride."

Today, the 80-year-old is fighting Stage 4 metastatic prostate cancer after more than a decade-long remission, along with other health ailments such as rheumatoid arthritis. Even so, he views his physical suffering as nothing compared with the abundant blessings of God in his life.

Rev. Loh is loved and taken care of by his lovely wife of 46 years, Lydia Kristanto, as well as his eldest daughter Debbie and son-in-law KL Chan. His youngest daughter, Miriam, recently returned to Belize to be with her husband, Christopher Lloyd De Shield, and their two children, Omar and Noemi. According to Rev. Loh, his wife, children and grandchildren are "God's most precious gifts next to salvation".

Rev. Loh regards cancer and his other ailments as part of his life today and he still enjoys the occasional heated theological discussion with others, and time with friends and family over a good meal.

"I have a taste of real community," he says, adding that that some church members cheer him up by sending him uplifting songs and interesting videos or taking him out for meals. He is thankful for their constant prayers and says that he "feels the strength in their prayers".

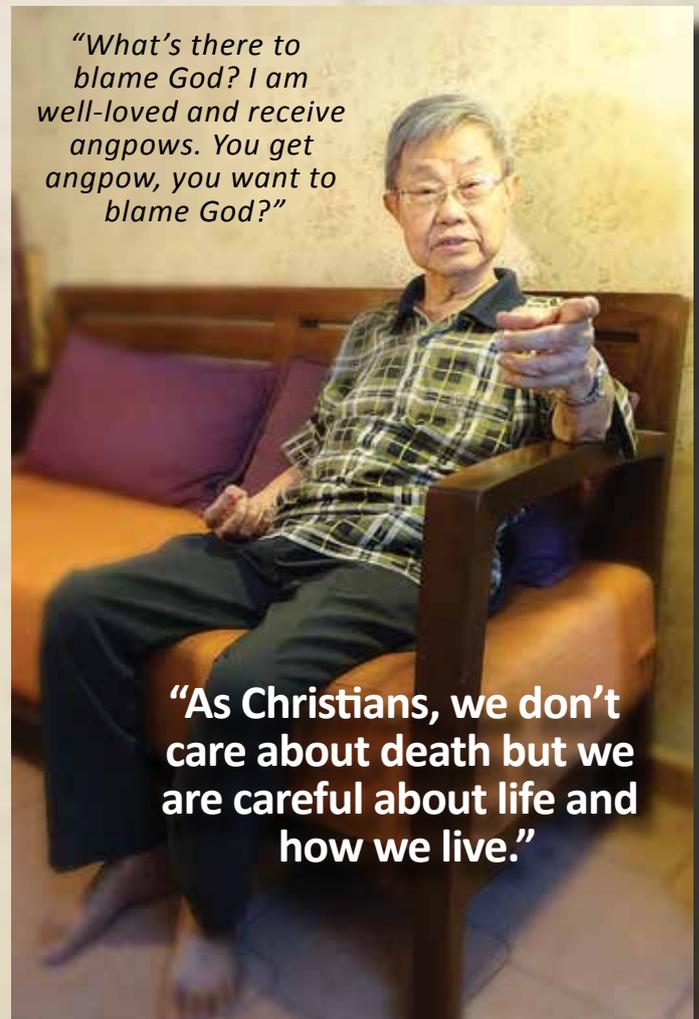
Despite his physical pain, he has not lost his ability to joke and be cheeky. When asked if he has ever questioned God or had a crisis of faith during this time of physical suffering, he replied candidly, "What's there to blame God? I am well-loved and receive *angpows*. You get *angpow* you want to blame God? But whether people give or not, it's fine because we are people of faith."

Facing Death

It is common for the elderly to live in constant worry of dying while they fearfully recount stories of friends or strangers dying prematurely from car accidents or heart attacks.

Not Rev. Loh though. When asked how he faces death, he replies, "Death is in God's hands, just as life is. If you face death well, you face life well. The world is careless about living but worried about death. As Christians, we don't care about death but we are careful about life and how we live. The Bible says to die is gain. So I leave it to God."

He believes the most important thing about approaching death is to have the right attitude. "Be open to die anytime; and in suffering, don't worry. Worse comes to worse, emergency, hospital and morphine. If you overdose, hallelujah, you're in the Lord's presence right away!" he quips, and clarifies there have been cases of death resulting from accidental morphine overdose.



"What's there to blame God? I am well-loved and receive angpows. You get angpow, you want to blame God?"

"As Christians, we don't care about death but we are careful about life and how we live."

While some cancer patients wallow in self-pity or anger, Rev. Loh chooses to continually "take part and be affirmative of life", and is unafraid to push his physical limits. With his ever-positive mindset he says, "Bring along your pharmacy, your walking stick, your girdle or whatever else if you have to!"



Family photo taken in May 2017 after being diagnosed with Stage 4 metastatic prostate cancer earlier in January.
From left: KL Chan and Debbie, Rev. Loh, Lydia, Noemi, Miriam and Omar

Leaving A Lasting Legacy

Because of his ailing health, Rev. Loh has had time to prepare for death in ways that perhaps some of us may never get the chance to. Besides the rich spiritual legacy that he will leave behind, he has written a book called Grandfather Stories, which he hopes to have the strength to perfect and complete as a legacy for his children and grandchildren.

He is thankful that his wife and children are prolific writers in their own right, and has thus given them a free hand to tidy up the book and add in his thoughts in the event he is unable to finish it.

As a teacher and lecturer, Rev. Loh has touched and influenced the lives of many young people. Today, he is still in contact with his students through Whatsapp chat groups and the occasional reunion gatherings. One could say that his network of students reaches to the thousands and he hopes to leave behind his life example. "I want to pass all my influence to my students," he says.

A Tireless Servant Of God

"I have no regrets having worked as a teacher or a 'full-time worker' even though the pay was low then. I was on God's mission and it was an exciting privilege to be a pioneer after Malaysia's independence and have a clear sense of calling to these as vocations, not just occupations," he says.

When asked how he would like to be remembered when he is gone, Rev. Loh says without much thought, "I don't really care lah. There are so many more important people around." But when pressed, he brought up this Bible verse, "Whatever your hands find to do, do it with all your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). That is how he wishes to be remembered – a man who worked tirelessly and with all his might for his Master.

Indeed, Rev. Loh's life thus far is a testimony of how the Lord can use us if we are only available and faithful to Him. In fact, as one of the first pastors of Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church (PJEFC) and possibly the longest-staying member, he says that staying on for so long in PJEFC has been one of his proudest achievements in life, and jokes that he has become like a piece of furniture in the church. He adds with his trademark cheeky twinkle in his eyes that perhaps he has stayed so long because the Elder Chairman has yet to kick him out.



Surrounded by church members after receiving the EFC Malaysia Legacy Award 2017 in recognition of his contributions.

Spoken like the true humble servant of God that he is, Rev. Loh ends on this note, "I am deeply grateful that even with my advanced cancer, God has continually encouraged and empowered me to continue to serve Him on a reduced scale. We never retire from God's ministry – only from our 'official' positions. We are made to serve the Lord." 🙏

THOUGHTS ON ASSISTED SUICIDE

The state of Victoria in Australia recently passed a law to allow voluntary assisted dying, which will be legalised in 2019. Meanwhile, human euthanasia is legal in first world countries such as Netherlands, Belgium and Canada. The word euthanasia means "good death" in Greek and is the "practice of intentionally ending a human life to relieve pain and suffering" (Wikipedia).

To someone like Rev. Loh who experiences a significant amount of pain daily, euthanasia would be an attractive option to end the suffering. He admits that while he cannot in good conscience and faith choose euthanasia, he would be happy for it as it would mean his family need not spend exorbitant amounts of money on his cancer treatment, and his wife Lydia can carry on enjoying life with the children and grandchildren.



However, he believes that though death is "no big deal in the whole scheme of life", euthanasia cannot be legalised as the state "should not decide on matters of soul and spirit". Life is sacred and that even with all the qualifications for euthanasia in place, people could be coerced to choose death and family members may manipulate the system for their own gain.

"How do we know that miracles won't happen and what will be the unintended consequences of our actions? In the end, it (euthanasia) may not be merciful," he points out. "It is a non-negotiable to me that only God can decide on matters of life and death."

What is Heaven Like?

Pastor Chris Kam

In a very intense discussion at our Master of Ministry class on the course titled “Caring for the sick and dying”, I realised that much of how we respond to crisis in our lives is dependent on our perspective of life.

I think it is only human to cling on to what’s here in this brief life on earth. When we minister to those terminally sick or aging, when do we decide to stop praying for healing and face the fact that it is probably better to go to be with the Lord?

Prepare To Die

I am reminded of how Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones prepared himself to die. This man of God was a Welsh Protestant minister, preacher and medical doctor who went to glory in 1981 at the ripe old age of 81. He had accomplished much in life, a chief influence in the British evangelical movement in the 20th century and a minister of Westminster Chapel in London for almost 30 years.

It is his personal belief that no one should begin the inevitable journey of dying and then die unprepared. He often preached about it and now, to walk the talk. While battling cancer towards the end of his life, he knew it was time not to write more books, but to prepare to die.

A year before he died in March 1981, his biographer, Iain Murray, visited him to discuss an autobiography. The old minister decided against it and Murray wrote: “It had to do with his final assessment of the right use of such time as remained to him.

It came home to him with much conviction that time to prepare for death was very important; he needed such time and believed that its right use was now his

“Where, O death,
is your victory?
Where, O death,
is your sting?”

(1 Cor. 15:55)



chief work as a Christian. What was uppermost in his thoughts did not lie in the past at all. The big thing before him was that all Christians need a pause from the activities of life in order to prepare for heaven.”

In the last days of his life at the end of February 1981, he had great peace and assured hope, believing that his earthly work was done. To his immediate family he said, “Don’t pray for healing, don’t try to hold me back from the glory.” On March 1, he passed on to the glory he had so often preached about on meeting the Saviour he had so faithfully proclaimed.

Heaven On My Mind

This also reminds me of Apostle Paul. He understood the future glory when he said, “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:8) Having a healthy appreciation of what our future holds will set us on a hopeful perspective when we are at the brink of death.

The lack of eternal hope creates the proliferation of health products and supplements, exercise routines to shape up the body and cover up the signs of aging through plastic surgery. I am amused at how people are often in denial over their true age. Jokingly they would say, “After 40, we stop counting.”

Consider the joy of being able to grow old gracefully and to see that there’s beauty too in aging. I am not saying this because I am approaching the point of eternity or graying at a rapid rate (which is totally superfluous with my crown of graying hair).

...Continue on page 19

Let me die! Let me die!



By Dr Alex Tang

We cannot decide when we are born but we can decide when we die. Janet Adkins was 54 when she was diagnosed with early stage Alzheimer’s disease. When informed about the progressively deteriorating condition of the disease, she decided to kill herself but in a painless and dignified manner. She sought help from Dr Jack Kevorkian, a pathologist from Michigan, USA. On June 4, 1990, Dr Kevorkian hooked her up to a heart monitor and an intravenous line. Janet Adkins pushed a button that released a lethal dose of medication that killed her in 5 minutes. Dr Kevorkian was charged with murder but this was dismissed because of the vague laws on assisted suicide. Since then, the “right-to-die” or euthanasia movement has been steadily gaining momentum.

On April 11, 2001, the Netherlands became the first country to legalise euthanasia. Since then, many Western countries as well as some states in the US and Japan have followed suit.

Commonly, euthanasia means mercy killing or assisted suicide and is often considered by people suffering painful incurable diseases. It is not euthanasia when doctors discontinue a treatment that is no longer effective and the patient then dies. For euthanasia to happen, doctors are needed to inject the deadly dose of medication. But doctors are healers, not killers. Will they be forced to kill or assist in a suicide if their country legalise euthanasia?

Right To Die

Two strong cultural trends – absolute autonomy and fear of pain – that originate from the West have provided the global groundswell of support for euthanasia. Absolute autonomy asserts, **“This is my body and I decide what I want to do with it and society has no right to interfere.”** This movement of individualised autonomy is so powerful that it has reformed modern medicine and empowered the issues of abortion, human sexuality, and euthanasia. Autonomy demands that people have a say in when and how they die, and is closely related to the fear of pain and suffering.

Modern medicine has not only prolonged life but has also prolonged death, and many people fear constant unrelieved pain. Others fear they may reach a point where they want to die in relative peace, only to find that they are forced to receive intensive and intrusive medical treatments that desperately attempt to prolong their lives. Yet others dread being bedridden for months or years. With the high cost of medical care, some fear their terminal illness may put their families in debts for years.

All these fears are real and therefore, people want a “right-to-die” option to end their misery. We are now less likely to die from accidents and infectious diseases than stroke, heart attacks and cancer, diseases that are often associated with disabilities, pain and expensive treatment. Doesn’t it make sense that we can “check out” if the going gets tough?

Scriptural Perspective

Surprisingly, the Bible says little about euthanasia. Theologian Karl Barth says in his multivolume Church Dogmatics that it is “a remarkable fact that in the Bible, suicide is nowhere explicitly forbidden”. But there are two Scriptural principles that can help us in facing the issue of euthanasia – firstly, the sanctity of human life and secondly, human autonomy and divine sovereignty.

Firstly, Scripture provides four inferences about the **sanctity of human life**.

1. Human dignity comes from God since we are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-27). Human life is a gift from God. In response, we should approach this life with gratitude, thanksgiving and deep responsibility.
2. All human lives have equal dignity. In Gen. 1:27, man and woman bear the same dignity. This dignity applies to all. However incapacitated, mentally retarded, chronically ill, physically dependent or in a persistent vegetative state, that person bears that same dignity.
3. The sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exo. 20:13; Deut. 5:17), has its roots in the Creation narrative – “Let us

“Advances in pain control medication have allowed better pain reduction with minimal side effects while precision surgical procedure can disconnect pain pathways.”

make man in our own image” (Gen. 1:26) and in the Noachic Covenant, “Whosoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen. 9:6). Man, being made in the image of God, is not to be intentionally killed.

4. Love your neighbour – Christians are called to love their neighbour, including caring for one another. It excludes helping each other to die.

Secondly, **human autonomy and divine sovereignty**. Christians must seriously take the claims of autonomy, which is the main argument for euthanasia. We are created in God’s image. An essential part of that image is our ability to make free choices. The Scriptural model for human autonomy, self-determination and human responsibility, is portrayed in Gen. 2:19. As Hebrew scholars have noted, to “name” something is not simply to label it; it is to give it a meaning and order it in the nature of things, Hence, Adam is called upon to continue the creation by bringing order into being, rather than simply replicating preordained orders. This is stewardship.

The fundamental distinction between the Creator and the created is the limits to the freedom and scope of our stewardship. The limitations to human autonomy are found earlier in Genesis 2:15-17. The story asserts a fundamental conviction of biblical faith that from the very beginning, human freedom over life has been limited. God alone is sovereign over life and death.

The principles of divine sovereignty and human stewardship and responsibility argue against unlimited autonomy. Euthanasia violates both these principles.

How Now?

Christians must be in the forefront of offering viable alternatives to euthanasia to face the realities of pain and suffering during terminal or serious illnesses. Instead of an action to end life, the alternative to euthanasia is death with dignity through these four ways.

pain reduction with minimal side effects while precision surgical procedure can disconnect pain pathways.

Secondly, palliative care (care of the dying) has made significant advances. Patients now have more say in their treatment. With better information, they may decide what treatments to receive, when to stop when the treatments fail and when not to be given extraordinary medical measures (such as putting a terminally ill patient on a ventilator when there is no hope for recovery). All these may be put into in a will and/or a medical directive.

Modern hospice care is doing a remarkable job in helping terminally ill patients to die with dignity. In Malaysia, Hospis Malaysia and a few other NGOs run a few centres but there is a great need for the Church to be involved in setting up and running hospices.

Thirdly, prayer is a powerful alternative to euthanasia and the Church has a God-given role to pray for the sick (James 5:14-16) and those facing death. The Church will have failed in its mission if it does not pray for and with the sick and dying.

Finally, with the escalating medical costs, a good medical insurance plan will alleviate any financial burden to the family, so plan ahead.

Euthanasia is laudable because it is based on compassion. Unfortunately, its basic premise is flawed as it goes against the Scriptural principles of the sanctity of human life, divine sovereignty and limited human autonomy. The Christian alternative of death with dignity is the better choice. 🙏



Dr Alex Tang is a Consultant Paediatrician at Johor Specialist Hospital and Associate Professor of Paediatrics at Monash University Malaysia. He is also an independent scholar in Practical Theology and teaches spiritual formation and biomedical ethics to seminaries and churches worldwide. Check out his website at:

www.alextang.org

Oh God, I'm gay!

By Queerkyna

I grew up resenting the fact that I was a girl. From the outside, you wouldn't even have guessed that. People tell me I'm feminine. But inside, I was always unsure who I really was. Welcome to the sweet discordance of gender and identity confusion.

I accepted the fact that physically I was female, but I truly envied how boys seemed to have this freedom to be boisterous, to walk around without shirts whereas we girls were told "it's good to be quiet". I was appalled to think that the girl's role was in the kitchen, doing all the hard work while boys had all the fun outside. Worst of all, men can still produce babies with younger wives when they're old and decrepit while women's eggs expire after a certain age. Not fair, God. Not fair!

Oh yes. I was an angry bird. But I kept it all tied up neatly inside a sweet, girly package for fear that no one would love me if they knew how furiously angry and foul-mouthed I was inside.

So I strived hard intellectually to be like a boy. I always imagined how nice it would be to have my dad talk to me about the "manly" stuff like politics, and other big news behind the large newspaper he read every morning while sitting on his *jamban* (toilet) whistling. These feelings of gender envy (I still hate the term "penis envy") and despising my own gender didn't change even after growing up in a Bible-centred church.

During my secondary school years, I was very fascinated by this "nature versus nurture" debate. I looked at my transgender friends and felt deeply for them because they'd always felt that way since birth. Why? I pondered.

When I saw a college mate turn gay, that convinced me that on some level, same-sex attraction is nurtured. How about those raped or molested as children? Statistics show correlations between childhood sexual abuse (CSA) and homosexuality¹.

The gay community has this saying that if you're homophobic, it must be that you are probably gay inside. Of course this is debatable. I was only consciously concerned then because homosexuals were listed in the category of those who wouldn't inherit the Kingdom.

Earthquakes Of The Soul

Until one day, without warning, I developed this attraction for an older woman. If she were to make a move, I would've fallen for her. For months, I felt crippled by these emotions for her. The Christian side of me was terrified.

This awakening came at a time when I felt depressed. I couldn't put a finger to it. Nothing in life worked anymore. Everything about me was wrong. Suicidal thoughts swirled in my head.

¹ <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0603/6421d52b1728b9c69e2c-9d19a9106770ae4b.pdf>

Kneeling naked after a shower and naked before my God, who I knew was real, I prayed with all my heart, “Please just show me what is wrong with me!”

Very soon, one day, after a prayer meeting, an aunt at church whom I haven’t spoken to in a long time came up to me. She asked me a “normal” question I haven’t heard from anyone at church for a while, “How are your parents?” Immediately, I burst into sobs. I knew that was the answer to my prayers – my existential angst which perched precariously on unstable emotions was triggered by my parents’ separation at that time. Thirty years of suppressed emotions rose to the surface.

I ended up at a prayer counselling ministry and taking a course after hearing of its life-changing reviews. I needed help. The pain of living as me then outweighed the fear and pain of confronting my inner darkness and ugliness.

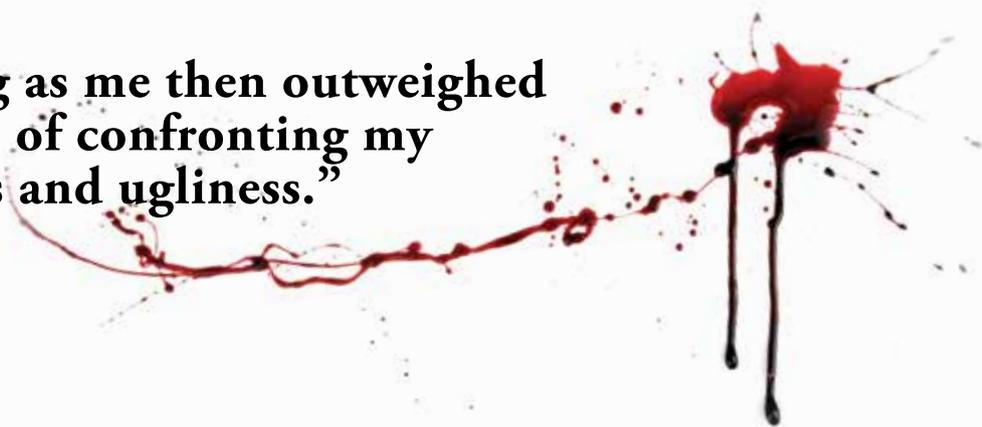
That was the beginning of my journey to loving myself and discovering who my Father is. That was 10 years ago! I have since gone through many prayer counselling sessions and the pain of being me has softened. I can’t say my experience applies to others. Everyone’s circumstances are unique. But the patterns of our responses are similar and He has never changed.

This confession is never meant to blame my parents. I honour them now. They (siblings, too, and other adults) didn’t know how their words, thoughts and actions (or neglect) have ruined my belief about my sexuality or identity. I also take responsibility over my sinful responses towards these hurts.

Don’t Quit

I don’t have all the answers for other factors that could make a person gay. The best way forward is to get help in seeking your answers. Be bold to go for counselling. Surround yourself with

“The pain of living as me then outweighed the fear and pain of confronting my inner darkness and ugliness.”



My New Birth

During one session, my counsellor only had the words “wrong gender” impressed upon her. Before she said that, I had a “flash-back” to my actual full-moon party photos. I’d always noticed that mom and grandmother didn’t smile in that photo. There was a glumness surrounding my birth because I wasn’t a boy.

That feeling of deep rejection had always been there. My mother had constantly reminded us how my grandmother would chide her for giving birth to a girl rather than a boy. I believe the Holy Spirit reminded me of this photo as a confirmation of my counsellor’s impression of the root issue – my undesired gender. I learned there was such a thing as in-utero wounding.

I also learned that my hatred for my own gender and wishing to be a boy became like a “hook” in my spirit that attracted other girls with the same type of wound. When they prayed for me, they pronounced the truth, that God made me a girl and He was very pleased. I forgave my mom and grandmother who wished I were a boy. I forgave dad for his degrading views of women among layers of forgiveness over hurts and assaults to my gender and identity.

My prayer counsellor also blessed the day I was born. Words have such power. And with much forgiveness on my part, I felt a huge burden lifted. I felt welcomed. I felt the Holy Spirit’s guidance through that time of prayer and that my prayer counsellors were merely ready vessels, like midwives helping me to enter a new life.

safe, loving people. I am indebted to the obedience, prayers and love shown by my counsellors from Elijah House Malaysia and my dear, dear friends.

Pray for wisdom. Forgiveness is hard, especially when it isn’t a one-off act (it’s seventy times seven). So I prayed for God to enable me. I still struggle with those feelings of attraction, usually during days when I feel tired and unloved, so I have to rely on His grace constantly to help me through weak moments. But I know my Father holds me now.

The real you uncovered is a glorious delight to God’s heart. It’s the truth that He delights in each of us. (Genesis 1; Psalms 149:4; Zephaniah 3:17)

And the real me isn’t gay. I know you might think “what if the real me is gay?” Ha! Satan lies. God loves and created you in truth and love.

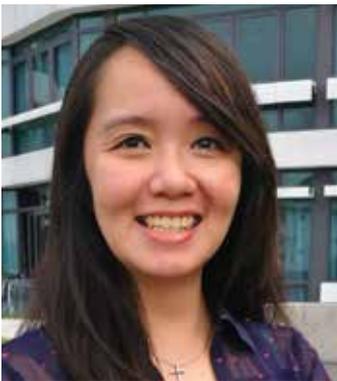
All that pain of uncovering the roots of my identity crisis was worth becoming the person God has made me to be. Being a girl is now something I enjoy. (You get to be a confounding mystery while looking great!) I’ve never felt more at peace with myself, God and my sexuality. It’s also enlarged my capacity to help others while navigating healthier boundaries. This is, for me, how “it only gets better”. 🌟

YOUNG & DARING

By Joanna Lee

Two bright, well-educated lasses choose to heed God's calling and take on less-paid but highly-fulfilling jobs.

THE LAWYER WHO CHAMPIONS THE DOWNTRODDEN



Michelle Ng, 28, is DAP party's legal secretary and a lawyer at Gobind Singh Deo's firm. Her leap into politics quietly unfolded when, at the age of 14, she heard a little voice telling her, "I'm going to bring you to the ends of the earth".

"I've always had a calling for Malaysia. I see potential in

her, especially in those who are still struggling financially and socially," Ng said.

During her student days, she found a keen interest in law, particularly policy and litigation, and later did one of her three internships with Tony Pua and Ong Kian Ming, MPs for PJ Utara and Serdang respectively.

After graduating from the London School of Economics on a scholarship, completing her Bar and being called to the Inner Temple, she started her pupillage and career at Sreenivasan Young in Malaysia.

She had a good job but still felt something missing in her life. In 2017, Pua asked her to take up a legal case on the side. After that case, he offered her a more active role in DAP. She accepted and put in her resignation. "I was very sad because I really had a comfortable job and good bosses," she recalled.

Thrown Into Deep Ends

Ng's learning curve has been steep. "Taking a pay cut was not easy. And increments in politics are not certain as well. In politics, the natural progression is stepping into office," she shared. "But getting into office depends on whether the party has the confidence to let you contest and whether you win. I was forced to re-learn Mandarin fast. I've to also learn to explain (legal) things very simply to the press and to the public."

Of navigating her work and uncertainties with her faith in God, she said, "The struggle is not so much figuring out what's up ahead, but being courageous enough to take that step through the door."



"Darkness doesn't cast out darkness. You need light."

Michelle Ng addressing the audience at the Fake News Forum on Feb. 28. Looking on is her co-panelist, Lembah Pantai MP Nurul Izzah Anwar.

One of Ng's biggest tests was when she had to represent and write an entire public interest case involving a group of Segamat constituents in 2017. Only in her fourth year of practising law, the legal technicalities and her decision's impact on the voters' future kept her up for three nights. Her only reassurance was a still, small voice that told her "it's okay". She questioned the voice but it ended well when the judge allowed their appeal for a judicial review in January 2018. She learned that "it's okay" meant that God was in control.

Fulfilments And Trust

Ng believes that God has so far fulfilled His words to her. "When God said He'll bring me to the ends of the earth, it wasn't so much of expanding my horizons outside Malaysia as it was my capacity, experiences and this entire journey as a whole," Ng said. "The perception that politics is dirty is not wrong, but that's all the more reason why we need good people. Darkness doesn't cast out darkness. We need light. But we also need wisdom to know when, what and how to talk."

For now, Ng takes one day at a time while believing she's found her fulfilment. Her dream is that one day, she can affect change at the policy level, and draft laws and table them at the Parliament.

That sounds like a lot. "Yes. But someone's got to do it," she said.



The teacher who helps student discover their potential



Chan Yen Ping, 25, graduated from Cambridge University on a scholarship. This was something beyond the A-levels teacher's dreams. But she sees God's fingerprints all over her journey so far.

Chan's decision to be an educator was triggered when she encountered trainee teachers

struggling to teach Maths and Science in English. That got her thinking deeply about the state of education for the next generation. When she was thinking about teaching as a profession while in secondary school, her mother told her to consider carefully as she won't be as financially comfortable as her friends. She didn't waver.

Exercising Faith

"I never planned to go to the UK," Chan shared. She was only thinking of going to a teachers' college. "But the university counsellor here said I had fairly good grades, why not try for the UK?" Chan replied she didn't have the finances.

"Aim higher," the counsellor said.

After coming out of the counselling room, Chan told God, "If You want me to go to Cambridge University, You must get me through three impossibilities – I must get an offer, I must get the grade, and I must get a sponsor willing to pay a bomb for an education course," Chan recounted.

She made the grade with just one mark above the university's requirement. "That was a reminder that it was not my strength and that God's grace is sufficient for me," she said.

Chan's third miracle came through when in 2013, Methodist College Kuala Lumpur CEO Moey Yoke Lai and Director of Institutional Development Khoo Teng Sooi looked into her case and mooted the MCKL Teaching Scholarship to support students pursuing education as a major. Chan later became the first recipient of the scholarship.

Chan's parents were supportive of her decision but she had to learn to rely on God and not ride on the faith of her parents or others.

Modelling The Role

Chan's years at Cambridge University were among the best years of her life. In 2016, she returned with a B.A. in Education with Physical Sciences and started teaching at MCKL to serve her four-year bond.

"I love my job, although it has its ups and downs. You get to be involved in the student's lives apart from academics," Chan said. "Every student has value and is worth listening and talking to on a one-on-one basis." This, she learned from her one-on-one tutorial sessions with the professors at Cambridge University.



"Every student has value and is worth listening and talking to on a one-on-one basis."

She admitted that she struggled with how "Christian" she should be in the classroom. "But MCKL is great in the sense that you get a lot of opportunities to have such conversations with the students."

Once, a student asked her, "How do you believe in a God that you can't see?"

"I realise that opportunities (to discuss Christianity) happen and it's up to you to seize them," Chan said.

She hopes to inspire her students as much as her teachers and mentors have inspired her. "Grades aside, I want to help them find out what they want to do in life, to realise what God has made them for and not be dictated by society."

The Perdana fellow added, "Education involves a whole nation. It is not a one-profession job. Teachers can only do so much. So if people will just stop complaining and think, 'How can I help in education?', that will be the first step forward.

"I do have a passion for policy. But I know that's a distant dream, so I'll take it one step at a time and see where God leads. From my experience, He's always wrecked my plans so I'm not going to fix too many things!" Chan laughed. 🙏

Stretching SENIORS

BY CHEW SUE LEE

Regular gym goers would not often find themselves pumping iron next to a septuagenarian. What more a 70-year old doing a variety of heart-thumping but joint-friendly exercise routines for over 1.5 hours. Well, pop by Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church (PJEFC) Sit-down Exercise (SDE) programme and you'll find some 100 seniors doing just that.

The unofficial gym for seniors, (minus the exorbitant gym membership fee as it's free), PJEFC's SDE programme is held at the church's spacious concourse on Tuesday and Friday mornings.

With just a two-foot PVC pipe and a plastic chair, the participants are ready to do their exercise, mostly performed seated to make it less strenuous and intimidating for seniors suffering the daily aches and pains.

Reaching Out

SDE was started in April 2015 as an outreach programme by PJEFC's JOY (Just Older Youths) Ministry for the seniors. Earlier on, one of the JOY committee members had chanced upon SDE while conducting a course at Canning Gardens Methodist Church, Ipoh. It was a God-timed coincidence as PJEFC was looking for a means to reach out to the unchurched community.

Led by Lee Lai Sheong, an energetic and youthful senior who is also one of the SDE instructors, JOY's vision is to raise people who will stay fresh and green, even in old age, and continue bearing fruit for the Lord (Psalm 92:14-15). "We saw this programme as a viable outreach activity to benefit seniors in our community. Exercise is one way of keeping seniors 'fresh and green,' that is, fit," she says.

Developed by Mr Yeoh Kit Koon, a retired Physical Education teacher and trainer from Ipoh, SDE aims to strengthen the entire body and focuses on most of the muscles, from the neck all the way to the toes.

The exercise provides three Ss to its participants: suppleness, strength and stamina. Suppleness alludes to the flexibility of joints (increased suppleness can help prevent injuries). By improving muscular strength and endurance, SDE can help participants perform daily activities without getting tired easily. And lastly, stamina is improved through the repetition of each routine.

New Friends

Sally Foo, one of the SDE instructors, shares that meeting weekly for exercise gives seniors an avenue to build friendships and enlarge their social circle. Through the added monthly fellowship tea following the exercise, some participants have found new friends and they keep in touch regularly. Indeed, the camaraderie among the participants can be felt throughout the SDE session as they jointly exhale with loud "hei" sounds more often heard at a tae-kwon-do class.

Since the class is large, several other instructors lead the class while others move around the concourse to ensure the routines are done correctly.

PJEFC's SDE programme has five trained instructors, with Chan Yoke Heng (the only male) heading the team. Like the instructors, the participants have a 1:4 male-to-female ratio.

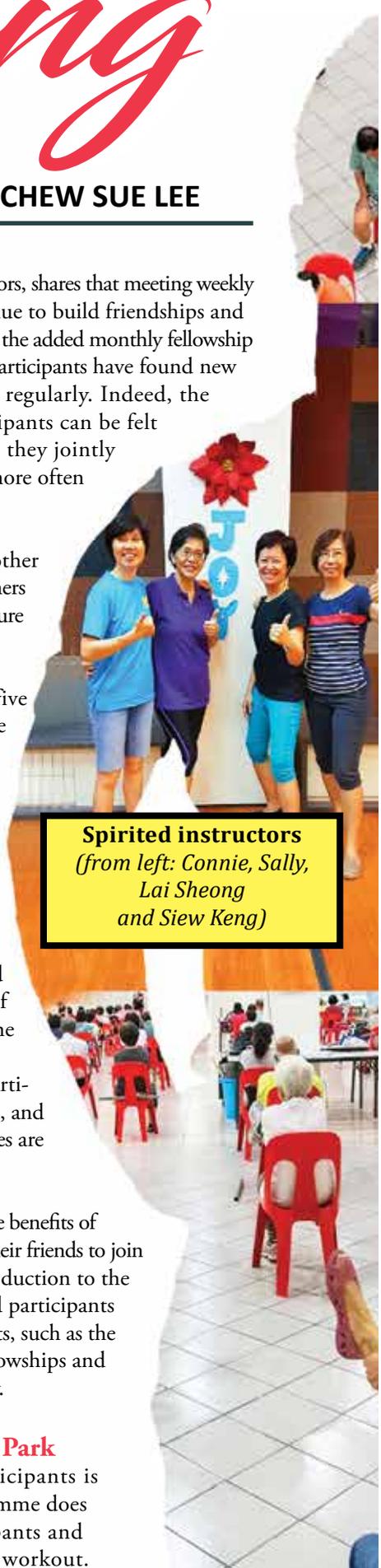
According to the instructors, attendance increased dramatically from an average of 30 per session in 2015 to 47 in 2016 and 89 in 2017. In the last quarter of 2017 up to the time of print, the average attendance exceeded 100 per session. A majority of the participants are non-PJEFC members, and an estimated 30% of the attendees are unchurched.

As the participants experience the benefits of the exercise, they go on to invite their friends to join the classes. Following their introduction to the church, some of the unchurched participants have attended other PJEFC events, such as the Christmas celebration, lunch fellowships and talks organised by JOY Ministry.

Not Quite A Walk In The Park

While the average age of participants is between 60 and 70, the programme does see some middle-aged participants and young students joining in the workout.

Spirited instructors
(from left: Connie, Sally, Lai Sheong and Siew Keng)



Lest you are tempted to pooh-pooh the exercise as “easy” and only for frail seniors, the instructors share that newcomers are usually surprised that they break a sweat.

First-timers can definitely expect a full body workout and perhaps even some body aches for the next day or two.

In fact, a middle-aged person who is unaccustomed to exercising would probably find the exercise “breath taking” as it requires energy and stamina to complete the full 1.5-hour exercise. Much like our spiritual walk, to attain the full benefits from this exercise and become physically strong, one requires discipline, consistency and diligence over the long term, according to the instructors.

Visible Benefits

Judging from the high attendance at each session, it is safe to assume that all the participants enjoy the exercise and find it beneficial.

For retirees, the programme provides a great avenue to get out of the house and keep active.

steadily up the stairs while carrying my hand luggage, unlike before.” He testifies that since starting SDE and changing his eating habits, he no longer suffers from high blood pressure.

Testimonies such as Arnold’s are common. Chief instructor Yoke Heng shares that participants often testify of greater mobility, flexibility and strength after attending the programme regularly. Some have seen a reduction or complete healing of chronic bodily pains in their back, knee and neck. Positive reports such as these give the instructors the joy and incentive to go on.



Thumbs-up for stretch exercise – head instructor Chan Yoke Heng



Kingdom-Focused

Given the success of the programme, it is not surprising that PJEFC has received requests to help start the SDE programme at other churches. To date, the PJEFC team has helped seven other churches within the Klang Valley to get the programme going. Not wanting to be left behind, some overseas attendees from Canada and Australia have plans to start it in their home church too.

In 1 Timothy 4:8, Paul writes “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

Even as the JOY Ministry of PJEFC seeks to strengthen the physical health of those attending the SDE programme, ultimately, their prayer is that through meaningful connections and God-given opportunities at the weekly sessions, the unchurched seniors will come to a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ in their ‘golden age’.

Arnold Lee is one such retiree. Prior to his retirement two and a half years ago, Arnold only did some light walking around the neighbourhood on the rare occasion, acknowledging that it was hardly sufficient to keep him healthy. Having had two hernia operations previously, Arnold found that since he started attending the SDE regularly two years ago, his lower body had strengthened significantly.

“The proof is when I fly on Air Asia. There are a lot of stairs to climb and I am now able to walk

(The SDE Programme is also available at the following churches: Trinity Methodist Church, People’s Park Baptist Church, SS Gospel Centre, Emmanuel Methodist Church, Faith Covenant Tabernacle, Damansara Utama Methodist Church and Grace Assembly Church.)

DRIBBLING Dreams

By Hailey Chung

Like many organisations serving the poor, Dream Village Football Academy (DVFA) helps alleviate youth poverty by providing survival resources. But DVFA is doing things a bit differently – the academy works to take underprivileged youth out of their slums through football.

There are many social outreach programmes to the needy. For Samuel Siew, DVFA's pioneer head coach, football is his calling and the football pitch is his mission field.

“For most Christians, Sunday is their church day. For me, Saturday football training is my church day. The football field is where the youth come to receive encouragement and be loved,” Siew said.

Dream On

DVFA, a social enterprise of Asian Youth Ambassador*, is all about helping the youth break free from the circumstances that have been holding them back. The multi-racial academy aims to inspire hope in and open doors of opportunities for the youth to achieve their football dreams. (*A non-profit youth organisation set up by Acts Church, Subang Jaya.)

Currently, DVFA has 150 students aged between four and 16. Of these, 100 are paying students and their fees help support the other 50 disadvantaged children and youth from Angsana low-cost flats in Subang and Kota Kemuning Promise Home (for orang asli children).

It is sheer joy watching the multi-racial students from the “have” and “have-not” background slugging it out on the football pitch week after week. Siew said the strategy to have the can-afford-to-pay students support those who can't pay has gone beyond just the finances.

“The community students (those who can't pay) are natural drivers during the

football practices as they inspire the well-to-do students with their passion. In pairing these two groups of students, they not only learn about football skills but about each other's lives. This creates a bridge between the rich and the poor,” Siew explained.

In addition, the students also learn to care for one another, especially the “special” students who are physically challenged. “We have one autistic and three disabled students who come to the academy. We do not reject them, and I think that message



Here's how you do it...
Siew (right) with two eager beavers.

“Ultimately, it's about being a light among the students and their families, not just alleviating poverty and instilling good values.”
– Samuel Siew

Furthermore, on the field, the students – whether rich or poor and whatever their skin colour – are all equal with equal opportunities to prove their mettle.

Siew maintained that as an academy, DVFA is not competitive and eager for tournaments. “We are an academy that nurtures the dreams of our young players. Our goal is to help them become their personal best.”

“Personal best” goes beyond football; it includes the students' character. Hence, DVFA's curriculum includes *gotong-royong* activities in rural areas to teach the students that they, whether rich or poor, can contribute to society.

of hope has brought smiles to their parents and the other parents,” Siew said.

Like any football academy, Siew dreams of DVFA producing top players but more than that, he hopes DVFA will be a beacon that shines in the “spirit of excellence that God has given”.

I am driven by a different type of spirit; I want to do well for God,” he confessed. “And to do well for God in this sports ministry is to do

your work so well that even non-Christians will actually pay for your good work.

“This is a powerful way to earn their respect. They need to believe in what you believe, rather than what you tell them to believe,” he said.

Ultimately, it’s about being a light among the students and their families, not just alleviating poverty and instilling good values. Siew feels he’s like a little light that radiates the life-giving Light. “I hang out with the students and I will be the light among them. I will show them kindness and the love of Christ through my actions and words.”



Bend down, not look up... Siew prepping the girls and boys for a game.



Can eat ah?... learning about community care, not just football techniques.

Editor’s note: Siew recently received and subsequently accepted an offer to join the Football Association of Malaysia as the Head of Grassroots overseeing the country’s 6-to 12-year-old players. DVFA has appointed Albert Low as the new Academy Manger.

Kicking Off The Dream

DVFA started in 2012 after Siew was inspired by Pastor Kenneth Chin, senior pastor of Acts Church, who had started Asian Youth Ambassador to reach out to the youth.

“He knew I was passionate about football, so we sat down one day and agreed to create a platform to reach young people through football.”

The first two years of DVFA were frustrating ones for Siew as he couldn’t seem to get the academy kicking. He was busy with the administration and web design, and far from the green grass that he signed up for.

At the same time, the greener grass around him was tempting him to leave his dream of establishing the academy. “I was looking left and right. My friends were earning good money. I was tempted to give up and become a web designer,” he recalled. Then, Siew encountered Fabio, a missionary from Brazil who was in Malaysia for a year. Fabio went into the rural areas and reached out to the folks there through football. It reignited Siew’s passion as he learned how to use football as a ministry instead of focusing on the sport itself.

“Skill is the bridge. I have the football skills but without the passion for people, there is no point. Passion for people was the kingdom principle that was lacking thus far,” he said. With this a-ha realisation, Siew put the academy in order and it began to grow.

As DVFA blossomed, Siew was assured of God’s plan for his life. “I’ve always wanted to be a professional player but coaching is my calling.”

He added that being a pioneer coach for the academy was more satisfying than his initial dream as he is helping the youth realise their dreams. “There’s a saying that what goes up must come down. When our praises to God go up, His blessings come down,” Siew concluded. 🌟

...contd. from page 9

I probably have a good 25 years before that point if nothing serious happens to my body or if God decides it’s “time’s up” for me!

But we need to start thinking about heaven a little more so that we are not so earthly bound that we have no eternal perspective.

When I say heaven, I do mean the NEW heaven and earth that we read about in Revelation 21. We will then be blessed with a new perfect body. God now dwells with His people so much so that His glory will be the everlasting light source. We will be living on a new earth and not flapping our wings into ethereal worship!

I find myself asking some of the following questions. What is heaven like? Will we ever be bored with eternity? Will we recognise our loved ones; will we have emotions? What kind of bodies will we have and what will earthly nature be like then? Do we still eat and never grow fat or do we still need to exercise? Are we clothed, and will there be music and what kind?

How big will the new earth be and do we still keep time? At what age will we remain for eternity and what language do we use? Is there privacy and will we have a super mind? Will we still use science, and can I be the scientist that build a starship like Enterprise and explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilisations, to boldly go where no man has gone before? “Beam me up, Scotty!” It sure is an exciting place! Think about that! 🌟



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.



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Will you attend a GAY WEDDING?

We threw this question to Christians and here are some responses.

Lee Shin Yiing, 23,
Journalism student

Yes, if I'm close to them. Somewhere down the road, I can share my Christian stance with them if they know I'm someone they can rely on. Gay marriages are somewhat similar to traditional cultural weddings. We Christians may not agree with some of the practices at cultural weddings but we'll still attend to show that we care for them. Jesus loves and accepts everyone, and homosexuals are our neighbours too.

Joseline, 43

No, because according to my faith, gay marriage is wrong. But I will assure them of my love and that I haven't given up on them but will continue to pray for them. And I will keep trying to share God's truth with them.

Thomas, 23,
Computer Science student

I'll attend if they're close to me but since younger Chris-

tians may be stumbled by my attending and think I'm supporting gay marriage, I would be low key on it. But I think it's important to be there for the people we care about during the important times of their life. Many non-believers perceive Christians as judgmental, and if these people are close to us, it'll do more harm to not attend. It's best to just be there for them, for Jesus loves the Samaritans and the Gentiles.

Simon, 20, Corporate
Communications student

We are all sinners before God, we all have our struggles and so I will not judge my friends. Rather, I'll thank and wish them well. But I won't attend because that would be officially supporting homosexuality.

Deanna, 54

Today, the gay lifestyle is more widely accepted, but that does not mean God approves it. The Bible says

marriage is between a man and a woman. After gay marriage becomes lawful, man will push God's boundaries further. In the near future, perhaps sex with animals will be strongly pushed through. It might become a new and accepted lifestyle for men and women to marry their animals. Today, we think it is silly. Tomorrow, it's reality. Man's standards keep changing but God's standards remain constant. Attending a gay wedding, wedding with your pets, orgy party, Harry Potter movie, drinking party or whatever that pricks your conscience will require a personal judgement call. That is when our personal faith is tested. I will not attend a gay wedding. If the invitees are very close friends, they will understand/respect me. We can always have dinner as any close friends will. Last and most importantly, I must not judge another believer who attends such a wedding.

Cheryl, 35

I'll attend because I love the person and I suppose he/she values our friendship enough to even invite me. We may disagree with each other's beliefs but we can still freely talk about our differences. Perhaps one day he/she will see the light and we can come to an agreement.

Wong, 37

I will not attend the wedding as I don't agree with gay marriage. But as I respect and love him/her, I'll give an *ang pow*.

Cheryl, 30, graphic designer

Yes. The person knows that same-gender marriage is against my belief and still invites me. I see that as a wish for acceptance. My attendance does not mean I approve of his lifestyle choice (and I have no intention of showing my disapproval) but I accept him as he is. God accepts us as we are, I'll do the same. He calls us to love and

I want to be there for my friend. Change of scenario. I invite my family members who are staunch Buddhists, etc. to witness my baptism. Their attendance, to me, is to show support and love for me. Nothing more.

Alwine, 50

No I won't. God created

Adam and Eve. One man and one woman, to be fruitful and multiply. I believe LGBT is a direct violation of God's will. He did not create Adam and Steve, but Adam and Eve.

Josie, 50s

Gay unions are against my biblical convictions

and being present at a gay wedding will mean I'm supporting it. Also, weddings are celebrations; my presence there is not only to celebrate but to bless the union. I'm sorry I can't do that in good conscience. I'll explain to them my stand and plead with them for their understanding, and

continue to be their friend.

Julian, 36

I'll attend and leave the judgement to God. Who are we to judge? I may not agree with their act but I will choose to love them and continue to journey with them as a friend.

Keep The Connection

DR HERA LUKMAN dives deeper into the question, "Will you attend a gay wedding?"

My response to this question has evolved over the last decade. I started thinking about this question from a hypothetical perspective, given that I didn't personally know of anyone who was same-sex attracted, let alone someone who was in a same-sex relationship aiming for matrimony. Hence, my initial analysis of the said question was done within an extremely limited context where the focus was solely on my moral stand regarding same-sex marriage while little consideration was given to the character(s) involved in the wedding ceremony.

A few years ago, I was forced to revisit this question when I came to know that someone very dear to me has same-sex attraction. When there is a face to this question, I found myself no longer satisfied with my initial categorical and uni-dimensional analysis of this question. Somehow, my response to a

"We must work towards maintaining connection if we value the relationship and if we want the other to understand where we are coming from."

hypothetical situation has become markedly different when it becomes personalised. Today, this question is no longer just an academic discourse or a subject matter for debate. It demands a practical response.

As I wrestle with this question, I was reminded of a few aspects of human nature that I tend to overlook, particularly during self-evaluation. I wish to share a couple of these with you.

1. We Have The Tendency To Simplify
Evidence from behavioural sciences has informed us that human beings tend to use limited data in decision making. Our tendency to simplify often results in erroneous assumptions about a subject matter and/or a person. It is not surprising that many unnecessary miscommunications and misunderstandings in relationships are due to such assumptions.

In the context of our discussion on same-sex wedding, there are multiple reasons why people choose to attend or otherwise, as in any event. We must not assume that being present at the wedding is tantamount to supporting same-sex marriage. Likewise, we should refrain from assuming that being absent represents disapproval of same-sex marriage and/or a rejection of friendship or kinship. Such assumptions not only oversimplify the complexity of relationships, they may cause us to make unrealistic demands on relationships, i.e. if you care for me, we must always see eye to eye.

In my opinion, a strong bond between two people can still exist despite holding on to different perspectives. It is the bond that sustains the relationship and it is through this sustained connection that different perspectives are heard and exchanged. We must work towards maintaining connection if we value the relationship and if we want the other to understand where we are coming from.

2. We Have The Tendency To Defend Our Stand

To some of us, deciding on whether to attend a same-sex wedding is more than wrestling with social expectations. It is a measure of our allegiance to God. Even if we are aware that attending does not correspond to endorsing same-sex marriage, we may still decline the invitation because we are compelled to defend our moral stand. Some of us may even be willing to sacrifice the relationship in the name of “honouring God”.

In my opinion, while defending a moral stand is essential for Christians who desire to honour God, we are called to do more than defend our stand. We must also relate our stand. The posture of relating is person-centric, while that of defending is subject-centric. During Jesus’ time on earth, while He opposed sin, He proactively sought connections, particularly with those ostracised by society and the religious community.

His method of connecting is not always socially sanctioned but He did it anyway! In so doing, Jesus did much more than just defend the commandments to love God and to love man, He related His stand and demonstrated this stand with His actions.

In my journey with friends in the LGBTQ community, I am regularly reminded how similar we are as people who wrestle daily with various aspects of our fallen human nature. We all fall short of God’s standard and we all face challenges to live righteously before God.

In other words, we are all “Work-in-Progress” and God is not done with us yet. Before He is done with us, let us not be too quick to simplify how God would work in and through us as we model after Jesus in the way we relate with one another.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40 🏡

Dr Hera Lukman is a registered Chartered Health Psychologist with the British Psychological Society. She obtained her BA (Hons) at Simon Fraser University, Canada, her MSc at the University of Sheffield, UK, and her Ph.D. at the University of Leeds, UK. For the past 15 years, Hera has taught Psychology at several Universities in the UK and Malaysia. She is currently the Head of Psychology and Learning Centre at Methodist College Kuala Lumpur. As a Christian psychologist, Hera is passionate in integrating psychology with Biblical principles in understanding personhood and one’s identity in Christ.



Suggested reading: Washed And Waiting by Wesley Hill



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Can Christians do YOGA?

NO. NO?

Yoga is a popular exercise that, many claim, can relieve physical and emotional ailments, and even treat certain infirmities. Developed by the Indus-Sarasvati civilisation in Northern India over 5,000 years ago, yoga was first mentioned in the oldest sacred text, the Rig Veda. Historically, yoga has evolved from Vedic Yoga to Preclassical Yoga, Classical Yoga and Postclassical Yoga¹.

Vedic Yoga aimed to transcend the limitations of the ordinary mind while Preclassical Yoga focused on achieving deep meditation so as to transcend the body and mind and discover the true nature. Classical Yoga was taught by Patanjali in the 2nd or 3rd century A.D. in his *Yoga-Sûtra*, which outlines the eight limbs of yoga like a staircase leading the yogi (practitioners of yoga) from ignorance to enlightenment. Finally, postclassical Yoga centres on Hatha-Yoga (spiritual union through body control and meditation).

The purpose of traditional yoga is to connect the individual with the Supreme Being. Considering the Hindu underpinnings, semi-retired pastor K.M. Lee from Glad Tidings Petaling Jaya quoted Exodus 20:3: “Christians shall have no other gods beside Jehovah God”. Moreover, the Bible teaches that “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities... against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places...” (Ephesians 6: 11-13).

Typical exercises encourage students to combine a variety of breathing techniques (pranayama) with relaxation postures (asanas). Both exercises are steps three and four of Patanjali’s road to union with Brahman². Another pose, the lotus position, aims to activate the psychic energy centres (the chakras)³.

Specific breathing exercises are practised to infuse the soul with cosmic energy floating in the air.

Students concentrate on a single object, like a candle, while chanting a mantra to clear their minds and become one with the object. The goal is to achieve unity with the cosmic consciousness.

Pastor Lee clarifies that “yoga exercise movements have religious significance. They really are offerings to the 330 million Hindu gods”. Essentially, one cannot practise a form of Hinduism and remain loyal to Christ, who is not a Hindu Guru.

According to Indian tradition, Kundalini Yoga (spiritual union through focusing inner energy) involves a type of “power” or “force” (shakti) resting in a dormant state at the base of the spine in the human body⁴. When this energy is awakened through the practice of spiritual disciplines, it rushes upward along the spinal column to the crown of the head, whereupon the yogi experiences samadhi or total absorption in the Godhead. Kundalini, or coiled serpent power, recalls the serpent in the Garden of Eden when he beguiled our first parents (“you will be like God”) when they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

Online businessman Moses Kee believes “yoga is a branch of the New Age Movement and is really a channel of spiritual deceptions. Many Christians think that it is harmless. In its very core, yoga is demonic in nature and has been used to cleverly deceive many believers”.

In summary, the ultimate aim of yoga is to strike a balance between the mind and body, and attain unity with a supreme being through the use of mantra and meditative stances.

Christians should ask themselves whether yoga will make them more Christ-like, be more effective in prayer and increase their love for Christ.

Ultimately, any activity we engage in should enhance our godliness and draw us closer to God. – **BY TING MEE KEAN**

1 www.swamij.com/history-yoga.htm

2 <https://www.livescience.com/42204-what-is-yoga.html>

3 <https://www.spiritualresearchnetwork.com/yoga-and-christianity-are-they-compatible/>

4 *Ibid.* In Lee Sannella, *The Kundalini Experience: Psychosis or Transcendence* (Lower Lake, CA: Integral Publishing, 1987, Revised 1992), p. 25.

5 <https://relevantmagazine.com/life/whole-life/features/23243-is-it-okay-for-christians-to-do-yoga>





NO?

Susan attends a yoga class. “I can’t answer for all yoga classes except for my personal experience with my instructor, who’s a Christian. We only do breathing and physical exercises in our classes, and none of the chanting and meditating you read about,” she says.



Nell has been doing yoga for 10 years and sees it as a purely physical exercise that has increased her body awareness and encouraged good body postures. She observes that yoga has evolved into “mild gymnastics” and feels that many Christians who denounce yoga have not attended any yoga class and are therefore not aware there are yoga classes that only focus on the physical exercise.

As for the warning against following the stretching and breathing exercises of yoga, Nell questions whether Christians are so insecure in their faith that they have to avoid them (the stretching and breathing exercises). “Are we doing them in front of any idol? Are we going to get ‘demonised’ if we practise yoga? Is our faith so shallow?”

She adds, “We hardly utilise our lungs to full capacity on a normal daily basis. Therefore, practising deep breathing is good and beneficial to our health and well being.”

Ellen, in her 70s, was attending yoga classes until a group of ladies from her church coerced her into quitting. “They went on about how demonic yoga was. But the classes I attended had no chanting and meditating. Anyway, I quit because they kept pestering me and I wanted to stop their nagging.”

Ellen maintains that while attending the yoga classes, she “knew what she was doing during the class and was ever conscious of her Christian position”.

Linda took up yoga long before she became a Christian. An instructor now, she says she was not comfortable with the chanting and meditating during her past classes even when she was not a Christian back then, and did not participate in them.

“I took up yoga for the stretching and core-strengthening exercises. I became a Christian years later and as a Christian instructor, I run my classes completely without the spiritual elements. The students in my classes, Christians and non-Christians alike, join my classes to build strength and agility,” she explains.

Objection

Susan, Nell, Ellen and Linda decline to be named as they have experienced their fellow Christians’ disapproval of yoga. Susan says some of her Christian friends react negatively and warn her against yoga. “I tell them my conscience is clear and it’s just a form of exercise. To each his own. I don’t try to convince people to come for yoga class and neither do I judge them for seeing it in a negative light. I just do it quietly, without drawing too much attention lest I stumble anyone,” she shares.

For Nell, most of her Christian friends will give her the disapproving look. “Some even lecture me! I try to explain that my yoga class is purely stretching and breathing. No chanting. Even the instructor is a practising Christian.

“I can’t control how Christians respond and judge. The best way is to invite them to observe or try out one session to get a more balanced view. The bottomline is that my attitude and spirit is right with God,” she says.

Most Christians object to yoga because of its origin (Hinduism). But so are Easter, which originally celebrated the Assyrian fertility goddess Ishtar (hence the eggs), and the Christmas traditions of gift-giving, evergreen trees and even mistletoe and holly, which originated in ancient Babylon during the feast of the Son of Isis ⁵.

One wonders how the early Christians reacted when their fellow believers started celebrating Easter and Christmas. With the benefit of history on our side, perhaps we should give more charity to fellow believers who practise yoga in the non-religious form.

Finally, to quote the article in *Relevant* magazine: “To say that Christians can’t take a practice that was intended for something else and use it to worship God is to ignore not only history, but the transformational power of Christ.”

– BY ONG JUAT HENG

ADVERTORIAL

A CALLING TO EDUCATE

by Lee Tiek Seng
Principal, RENG College

Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits. Lord Jesus had been practising and teaching in the synagogue on a very regular basis. In Mark 1:21, the Bible said “They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach.” (NIV)



One of the good practises driving RENG College is to provide a quality and affordable higher education to needy students. “Now Everyone Can Learn” has evolved to become the college’s new campaign slogan. At RENG



“
Now
everyone
can
learn”

College, the small class environment will give you a much greater opportunity to ask questions, participate in discussion, and have a lecturer who actually knows who you are. It's always nice to be a real person, rather than a nameless spectator in the crowd of a mega-college. In Luke 20:21, it is written that “So the spies questioned Him: “Teacher, we know that You speak and teach what is right,

and that You do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.” (NIV)

Students in RENG College are closely knitted to one another. They can have a time of fellowship and helping one another especially to those who are academically weaker. The bonding is truly commendable and this is one thing that you can only find in a small college. The niche programs and courses offered by RENG College such as Architectural Studies, Interior Architecture, Graphic Design, Multi-media Design, Web Design and Digital Animation are part of the attractions for school leaver who has completed the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM).



We offer scholarships and bursary to qualifying students especially those who are high achievers, needy or talented. In Proverbs 21 and 22, it is written that “Do not exploit the poor because they are poor.” (NIV) It is the interest of these students that we have in mind and when we see them graduate and find employment quickly, we know the Lord’s will be done.

In Him and through faith in Him we may approach God with freedom and confidence, Ephesians 3:12 (NIV). For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen, Romans 11:36 (NIV).



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The VOICE of VICTORY

By Ong Juat Heng

“Losing is part of winning.”

You’re never too old to discover new talents, as Sim Bock San has found. At 52, he joined a Toastmasters club to pick up some public speaking tips; nine months later, he was crowned champion at the national Toastmasters contest, beating over 1,000 far more experienced competitors. That was in 2013 and since then, he had competed in two more Toastmasters national contests and decidedly won.

As the national champion, he represented Malaysia at the world contest, competing with the crème de la crème of the world’s top public speakers. A totally unassuming man who stands out in the crowd with his stark bald egg-shaped head, Sim has been coaching other Toastmasters to improve their game. He’s also been seeking opportunities to serve his fellow Christians with his gift. He is still seeking.

“There are always areas we can use our talents to bring Him glory and further His kingdom,” he told *Asian Beacon*. “Once, my friend, a Malay Muslim, asked me, ‘Sim, how are you using this talent God has given you?’ Well, I’m still looking for avenues to serve God with this gift He’s given me,” Sim said.

Perhaps he can help train our local preachers to enhance their preaching skill? At this suggestion, Sim’s face lighted up and he sat up. “Yes, that will be good.”

Stumbled On His Gift

A human resource development consultant, Sim only addresses small-group discussions of 16-25 people. With no opportunity to speak to large crowds, he decided to take up public speaking to learn a new skill. He promptly joined a Toastmasters club, “just for self-development”. Competing was the last thing on his mind. “I only had one goal when I joined Toastmasters – to complete my 10 speeches and get the Competent Communicator certificate.

But one month after joining, the club president persuaded me to take part in the club’s humorous speech contest. I wasn’t keen. Look, I’m not funny, not the clown of the class, but after much persuasion, I joined. And won,” he laughed. Sim’s winning streak continued as he competed in the other three levels to reach the national contest. Heady from his smooth ride to the top, he headed to the world contest in Cincinnati, USA, in 2013. There, he crashed.

Crushing Defeat

“I didn’t win the top three places in my semi-final group. It was the first time in my public speaking journey that I failed. I felt so crushed and after the competition, I went straight to my hotel room, went into the toilet and sat on the toilet bowl for 45 minutes, feeling sorry for myself,” he recalled.

From this failure, Sim learned that he needed to embrace failure and carry himself well as a loser. So, after his long toilet call, he put on a brave face and went back to the hall to congratulate the winners. He also learned to view losing as part of winning. “Losing helps you to empathise and relate with people who didn’t win and with those who did. This makes you a better person.”

Getting Up

From his bitter defeat, Sim steeled himself to do better at the next world contest. For the next two years, he studied the art and science of winning – how to craft winning speeches; how judges think and decide the winners, especially when the contestants are equally good; and what differentiate the winner from the rest of the pack. This paid off when he won the national contest for the second time in 2016 and flew to Washington for the world contest.

This time, he won second place in his semi-final group (there are 10 semi-final groups). Even though he didn’t get into the final round*,

he was thrilled with his progress. (*Only the top winner of each semi-final group enters the final round.)

Last year, Sim won the national contest for the third time but couldn't compete in the world contest in Canada due to visa problems. His singular goal now is to enter the final round of the world contest and become one of the top 10 public speakers in the world.

"Once you're in the final round, you've made it; you're among the top 10 in the world," Sim glowed, as he pictured himself in that

final round. "God willing, I'll make it this time. I really want to make a name for Malaysia."

But more important than achieving that goal, Sim now deeply desires to use this gift God has given him for the Kingdom. After all, earthly victories are temporal whereas work done for the Lord lasts forever. Keep seeking, Sim. 🙏

(Photos by Lim Han Wee)

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POINTERS FOR PREACHERS

PREACHERS are like public speakers, and not every preacher has the natural ability to speak publicly but like any other skill, it can be honed. As a long-time Christian (27 years), Sim, who attends Acts Church, Subang Jaya, has sat through countless sermons and observes that generally, the sermons are "content-rich".

"But sometimes, it's not about how much you give, but how much the audience receive," he said and added, "Less is more." He offers some pointers for preachers to better engage the listeners.

Illustrate With Stories

Stories are powerful; they bring the preacher's points and the Word of God to life. And good stories touch the senses – they get the listeners to see, hear and feel.

Write And Re-Write

Good sermons are well written; winning sermons are re-written. Sermons are 'living' things that grow, so preachers should re-write their drafts several times and let their sermons grow in abundance and power. For my world contest speech, I revised it 50 times.

Less Is More

What's a good length for a sermon? 45 minutes? In Toastmasters, we're given seven minutes for our speech. During that seven minutes, we have to make our audience laugh, cry, feel and take home something meaningful. I'm not saying sermons should be seven minutes long but I do believe that less is more in that it's better to preach a short powerful sermon that cuts the heart than a long-winded one that is not heard. This said, there are preachers who can preach long sermons and keep their listeners engaged, but they are rare.

Action Call

Sermons must conclude with an action call that tells me what to do for the rest of the week. So, even if I miss the message, I know what to do when I walk out.

Rehearse

After putting in so much to prepare your sermon, you should spend time to rehearse. Not just mental rehearsal, but live rehearsals. The more times you rehearse, the more your sermon will grow on you. And your nervousness will dissipate too.

Record Your Rehearsals

People usually hold back when giving feedback on your



preaching but videos won't lie. So, record yourself rehearsing. Imagine the video camera as your congregation and preach to it. Then play back and see how you can do better.

Passion

I'll never forget that speaker who said, "I'm so happy to see you here", in a flat, dull voice. I don't doubt his sincerity but his tone and facial expression said otherwise. Was he really happy to see us? I was confused. Preach with passion. You are preaching God's Word and if you're not excited about God's Word, how can you expect your listeners to be excited. You have to connect at the emotional level, not just intellectual level. Of course, the spiritual level too and that's where prayer comes in.

Feedback

Get honest feedback and accept it humbly, even if you don't agree with the people giving the feedback. They are the ones listening to your sermon, not you. And ask a variety of people to get a better sampling of your congregation.

Making Films

for the MAKER

By Chris Quah

Who would have thought that two amateurs and a hand-held camera would win local and international awards for short films? God works in ways beyond human expectations, as amateur film makers Pastor Winson Phuah and Kyle Soong discovered. They share their story with *Asian Beacon*.

Winson and Kyle have always been passionate about short films. Furthermore, they realised that the most effective way to reach this young generation is through digital media. So in 2014, while serving as the youth pastor of B & P ministries, Winson discussed the idea of starting a production company with Kyle where he would be the producer and Kyle the director. But they wanted to be sure and asked God for a sign.

While waiting for His sign, the duo signed up for the Berjaya Youth Short Film Competition. “The top prize was RM30,000 cash and a Mac Book Pro computer worth RM15,000. We figured that if we won, it would be the sign from God,” Winson said.

Their video entry, titled “Sam Sir”, was based on Winson’s journey to becoming a pastor. The story revolved around the character Sam and his friends and their dreams in life. The film opened with flashbacks of their student days and their discussions about their dreams. All had big dreams, except Sam who just wanted a happy life.

Fast forward to the future and the scene showed Sam and his friends talking about their jobs and material possessions. The most successful was the student who wanted to be a successful businessman. Sam, on the other hand, had settled into teaching and this provoked ridicule from his friends. The story ended with the entrepreneur confessing that he envied Sam, who might seem the simplest but was in fact the happiest.

Simple, yet deeply moving, the film won the first prize.

Winson admitted they had aimed for the top prize but didn’t expect to win. “It was truly by God’s grace. Our greatest struggle was manpower as we did not have a full-time crew. We were only two people, and all the others were volunteers,” Winson shared.

“Winning the first prize was God’s sign for us to set up the video production firm. As an act of thanksgiving, we gave the entire cash prize to the church, which was used to set up the video production ministry, called Seed Pictures. As for the computer prize, we’re still using it for our production.”



Jubilant winners – (from left) Sheena Lock (Production Manager), Kyle Soong (Director), Winson Phuah (Producer) and Agnes Liong (main actor) at the Golden Eagle Awards, Taiwan, in 2016.

Rolling Success

From entering and winning the local competition, Winson and Kyle took on the next challenge of an international competition. In 2016, Seed Pictures took part in the Golden Eagle Award, a global Chinese gospel short film competition held in Taiwan. They were up against contestants from 14 countries but once again, as if God was confirming their decision to set up Seed Pictures, they clinched the top prize.

Their entry was titled “Now I See” and focused on what it really meant to “be Jesus” to the people around us, especially the poor and marginalised. For this film, they had to find a Jesus-looking man for the main role.



Tucking in... crew and cast of "Now I See" taking a break.

"That was one of our biggest problems. We wanted a Middle-eastern actor but those we asked declined. After much praying, I saw a Middle-eastern man walk past me while I was having lunch one day. Immediately, I knew he was the one for the role as he fitted the part with his beard and hair, which made him immediately identifiable as Jesus," Winson said.

we have, however little, to make miracles happen," Winson said.

"We completed the short film in a month. It was just a simple idea and we didn't expect much. We were surprised that we were even shortlisted and even more surprised when we won." Winson revealed that the prize money was given to the church for its ministries.



Sweet victory – (from left) Raphor Chan (in charge of lighting), Sheena Lock (Production Manager), Kyle Soong (Director) and Winson Phuah (Producer) at the Berjaya Youth Short Film Competition in 2015.

So, will Seed Pictures be going for bigger competitions in the future? "We don't have many plans but we will do whatever we can," Winson replied.

"We entered the competitions not for the prizes but to get to know more people in the industry and to network with them." Indeed, God has open doors for them to connect with many people in the film industry, especially those in the Christian film industry.

"Our success has garnered many positive feedbacks, especially from the Chinese Christian circle. They are amazed at what we are doing. There were testimonies from people who were very encouraged by our videos. This encourages us to keep producing good films."

Impacting Churches

When Winson and Kyle started Seed Pictures, they envisioned that it would be more than just an award-winning video production firm; they hoped it would influence the churches in Malaysia to be God-centred. Towards this end, they've produced a series of short videos, available on YouTube, called "What's Up Church?". The videos deliver an important message – that today's believers need to rethink and relearn their faith.

"I quickly approached him and explained the role. He was surprised but listened anyway and finally accepted, even though he was from a different religion." Winson believed it was God's divine favour that the man, a Jordanian, was willing to accept the role.

"Church has become more like a social club than a discipleship training centre under Christ. Our videos aim to provoke churches to re-evaluate their faith. We hope to become a voice in the wilderness to wake up sleeping believers," Winson said.

The entire film was shot using a humble DSLR camera. Despite that, the quality was as good as the other films shot with more advanced equipment.

As Seed Pictures continues to impact churches with its thought-provoking films, it faces the challenge of resources. To alleviate this issue, it has started taking on commercial jobs to fund the work. But the greater challenge is to find volunteers who are passionate about short films to lighten their workload. "Nevertheless, we will continue to make new videos that will bless the churches," Winson concluded. 🙏

"The story took us about a month for discussion and brainstorming. One of the main issues was the storyline. If we couldn't find a story that would convince us, how could we convince others? We almost gave up but after one night of praying, we felt led to continue. A simple idea came to our mind and we developed it, together with what we had at hand," Winson said.

Through this experience, Winson and Kyle learned that God could use what they already had in their hands, just like the five loaves and two fish, and turned it into something significant. "God doesn't need much. All He needs is our willingness to surrender what

(Check out Seed Pictures' short films, "Sam Sir" at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltHzTVg2qsM> and

"Now I see" at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvEix6Duyjg>)

HONoured PROFESSOR, HUMBLE SERVANT

By Dr Tan Gaik Cheng

The annual Anugerah Akademik Negara (AAN) (National Academic Award) is a prestigious award given to high achieving academics in Malaysian institutions of higher education. Prof. Dr Debra Sim from the Faculty of Medicine, Universiti Malaya, won the 10th AAN Teaching Award in the Health Sciences cluster, no small feat considering the number of academics vying for it. She received the award together with the 11th AAN award winners last November. *Asian Beacon* sat down with the diminutive professor to learn how a young girl from the backwaters of Sabah rose to become one of our top teaching professors.

Debra was born in Tawau, Sabah, into a typical Teochew family. "My first exposure to the Christian faith was at St. Patrick's Secondary School, an Anglican mission school where morning assembly consisted of 10 minutes of Bible stories and prayers. Expatriate Christian teachers from India provided the bulk of the Christian input," Debra recalls.

The third of four children, she joined the youth fellowship at a local Baptist church in her teens but only made a decision for Christ at 15 years at a youth camp where the teaching on judgement and the Second Coming convinced her to follow Jesus and not sit on the fence any longer.

After Form 5, Debra left Tawau for England in 1975 where she did her A-levels, proceeding to Liverpool University in 1977 where she would finally graduate in 1984 with a Ph.D. in Pharmacology.

Entering Academia

"When I returned to Malaysia in 1984, God miraculously provided me a job as a lecturer in Universiti Malaya despite my missing my job interview due to unforeseen circumstances. I had been offered a post-doctoral position in Liverpool but had chosen to return to help out in a new church, and this job was a confirmation that I had made the right decision to come home. God also provided senior colleagues as mentors who guided me as a junior lecturer while the University provided free courses to help me improve my teaching skills," she shares.



An award to honour her Master.

Several inspirational teachers would leave a lasting impression on the young Debra and lay the foundation for a life-long love of teaching. From her school teachers, she learnt the importance of using illustrations and models and also teaching for relevance to life, mentioning in particular the late Mrs Grace George who taught Additional Maths in Form 4 and Form 5. In the hands of Mrs George, differentiation and integration were not just formulae to remember but concepts that carried meaning beyond the

Additional Maths classroom to her Pharmacokinetics lectures.

"I would however like to pay tribute to my greatest earthly teacher, Pastor Stuart Olyott of Belvedere Road Baptist Church in Liverpool. Week after week, he would expound God's Word, explaining complex concepts in clear and simple language. He would teach key truths and focus on basic principles with simple but relevant illustrations," enthuses Debra.

"My ultimate role model is of course Jesus, the quintessential teacher who could teach one-on-one as effectively as the thousands he sometimes had in His audience. He used diverse methods to communicate truths, often answering questions with questions to guide a seeker to a personal understanding of fundamental issues."

Debra is quick to add that credit goes to God, who brought into her life these dedicated teachers who were so passionate about



their craft. Their passion has rubbed off on her and motivated and inspired her to follow in their steps.

Winning The AAN Award

Debra is pleased that teachers are finally getting the recognition they deserve with the inclusion of a teaching category in the AAN award. “This is timely acknowledgement for the contribution of teachers in nation building although a single award admittedly cannot recognise the many, many other great teachers that are equally deserving,” she points out.

“In the midst of my success, the Lord however has taught me an important and humbling lesson in the process. Do not make worldly recognition your goal, let others take note of your work and let the acknowledgement come to you rather than draw attention to it yourself. In 2014, urged on by others, I applied for the same award but failed and God had to remind me that He would give it to me at the right time and if it was good for me.”

By 2015, Debra had won the Universiti Malaya Excellence Award in the Teaching Category. The following year when she was least expecting it, the Dean asked her to apply for the AAN award and the rest, as they say, is history.

Working Heartily

“Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well” and “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” are two rules she lives by. Debra makes no clear distinction between the secular and spiritual, viewing her work as a lecturer as something to be done for the Lord. “I don’t view my work as more secular or less spiritual than church-related work. Work is part of God’s creation ordinance and a means to glorify Him,” she explains.

“My philosophy of teaching is founded on the biblical truth that all human beings are created in God’s image. Therefore like our all-wise, almighty and benevolent Creator, every person is capable of thinking, reasoning, creating and innovating for the sake of mankind, using knowledge and skills acquired and developed, given the right environment and guidance. In addition, given the rigorous entry process into our universities, I believe that all my students are capable of learning to a level of excellence and my role is to motivate and help them develop this potential.”

As a lecturer at a public university, she has connected with thousands of students in the last 34 years and has had many opportunities to touch lives and extend Christ’s love. Her research work is also understood as a means to discover and understand more clearly God’s creation.

“My ultimate role model is of course Jesus, the quintessential teacher who could teach one-on-one as effectively as the thousands he sometimes had in His audience.”



From professor to Sunday School teacher, Prof. Debra Sim fully utilises her gift of teaching to impact lives.

Serving Humbly

Debra has taught Sunday school most of her Christian life. “I have taught every age group and am currently teaching the 3- to 5-year-old children at Serdang Grace Baptist Church where I have worshipped since I returned to Malaysia. I also play the guitar for church meetings and Sunday School when needed.”

She has also been actively involved in Bible Study Fellowship since 2007, taking on various roles as group leader, children’s leader and currently as administrative leader. “My priority however is still my ministry in church, which I am careful to always make time for despite a busy work schedule,” she emphasises.

She has three principles governing her ministry: Be faithful in upholding God’s truth; be skilful in teaching God’s Words; and be careful in applying God’s commands.

Prof. Debra retires this year after more than three decades of loyal service to the University and is looking forward to what the Lord has in store for her. At the AAN award ceremony, her photograph was accompanied by a statement explaining her philosophy of life – a testament to her strong faith.

“The sky is the limit to my learning;
Professionalism is the goal of my service;
Integrity is the guiding principle in my research;
The rest I leave to the Almighty,
All-Knowing and All-Loving God.” ❖

Hard Rocker for Jesus

Do not judge them by their music and outward appearance

By Hailey Chung

Armey of Three (AOT) is a popular mainstream rock band whose members have a rock solid faith in Christ Jesus. The band comprises four musicians – lead vocalist Jeffrey Kumar, bass guitarist and back-up vocalist Darren Teh, lead guitarist Alex Martin, and drummer Edmond Matthew.



Fiercely passionate for Jesus – (from left) lead guitarist Alex Martin, lead vocalist Jeffrey Kumar, drummer Edmond Matthew and bass guitarist and back-up vocalist Darren Teh

They love loud music and head banging but behind the curtains, they are passionate for their Saviour and have a gentle heart for their community of rock fans.

For the past 13 years, AOT has been writing and performing songs that revolve around their Hope. “The message is you could be in a not so nice place and you could be struggling, but do not lose hope; look to the sky, look to God,” Kumar pointed out. Their songs are meant for all – in and out of the four walls of the church – and especially the rock enthusiasts.

For the many that are not in the rock genre, they would most probably go, “Uggh! Stop it! I don’t know what you are screaming about!” But for those who rock this type of music, they are compelled to discover and understand the lyrics of the songs.

“Then the songs will make sense and will reach out to the listeners,” Kumar explained.

Forging Friendships With Rockers

AOT aims to make friends with the rocker community and they’ve found it is not difficult. “More than anything, they (the rock community) want to enjoy good music. If you’re a local band, they’ll want to get to know you even more,” Kumar said.

Along the friendship-building path lies the potential for a story of salvation. Martin related a story about their encounter with a band called Furian Esclada in an underground gig years ago. At this dingy place, AOT met the fierce-looking members of Furian Esclada.

Nevertheless, they were able to befriend the group. “Because of our friendship and because they like our music, the band’s lead singer, remembers me,” Martin continued.

“Years later, God told the lead singer to ‘go find Alex’ (Alex Martin). He was going through a lot of turmoil and he needed answers, a way out of his situation, so he called me. When I met him, he said, ‘Bro, my brother is dying.’”

Martin promptly responded by asking him to read the Bible and pray. “The lead singer had backslided after his father’s death. He was young then and to get love and attention, he and his dying brother had committed many wrongful acts, and they were reaping what they had sowed.”

After talking to Martin, the lead singer began his journey of return to the Father and he now serves closely with Martin in the worship ministry in Acts Church Ampang. He also helps drive the community kids to Sunday services. And another miracle – his brother is still alive and recuperating from his illness.

“It is an amazing testimony where a friendship was built out of this music that we love together,” Martin enthused. “We are to be understanding and available. Sometimes when our friends have achieved fame, they will feel big-headed, but when they hit rock bottom, they will start looking for someone to talk to and that’s where we come in.”

The AOT team recognises their calling to be “big brothers” to young aspiring bands, to be a listening ear and guide in their times of deep need. To reach out to the people in their rock community, AOT accepts gigs at any kind of venues, concerts, festivals and even bars. “We interact with them in the same way we interact with others but we do not do the things they do that clash with our faith,” Teh clarified.

“This music genre gives us access to places that may be not decent, and the people might be into various kinds of vices,” Kumar added. “God hasn’t called us to go and flip tables. He just asks us to go and play our best.”

Breaking The Stereotype Of Worship

AOT released a second album, “Heartcore”, in 2016. One of the original songs, “Wonder of Your Greatness”, shot to the third spot in hitz.fm MET. “It is actually a worship album, not as loud as the previous album but it was still in the rock category,” Kumar laughed.

In all their performances on stage, whether in or out of church, they strive to give a heartfelt response to God. “In every note, every gesture, we consciously worship God,” Kumar said.

“Sometimes we have tears in our eyes and we don’t even know why, but we look at each other crying,” Martin added. He related a tearful experience he had after one worship session that AOT led. An old man walked up to the band and told them, “Whatever you guys did just now, that was different.”

The band saw the old man’s appreciation as an affirmation of worship to God. “We offer everything we have to God, God takes the throne and He will draw all men to him,” Martin asserted.

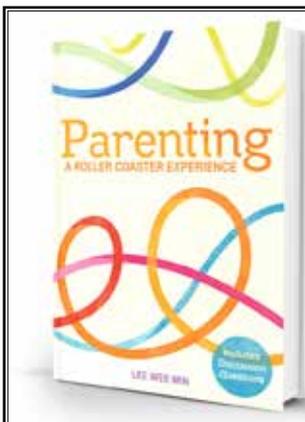


Every song they sing, whether in or out of church, is sung for God.

After 13 years of ministry under the rock category, AOT still believes the vision and the reason they were set apart for this mission. “Our music reaches out to people and tells them that there are other kinds of music aside from Planetshakers,” Teh said.

“We knew what we were getting ourselves into when we started out. We knew that we were not going to play in many churches and be accepted with arms open wide,” Kumar admitted and added that rock music has its place in ministry.

Different kinds of songs reach out to different people, Martin chipped in, and AOT is determined to be humbly faithful to what they have been called to do. Their music mainly impacts teens to young working adults. Aside from being approachable at gigs and music events, AOT is happy to connect with youth via their FB page. 📺



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Grief be

GOING

By Charmain Sim

Say “grief” and we usually think of death or the loss of a loved one. Actually, there are at least 40 life events that can trigger grief. They include divorce, health issues, losing your job, moving house, and children leaving the nest. Sometimes, grief is addressed rightly. When it isn’t, its effects can be crippling.

April Chan, 62, knows this firsthand. Her story is rather odd, for instead of a loss, her grief was over a life that was not fully lived.

When she was four, Chan was given away to a spinster. Her childhood was dark and depressing. Every day, her foster mother caned and scolded her. From the age of eight, she was put to washing, marketing and cooking. When she was 13, she came to Christ through a friend. She went to church whenever she could. It was her hiding place, but her situation didn’t change.

“When I was 16, my foster mom passed away. I was happy, but at the same time, I was now all alone. I had to work very hard to support myself,” Chan recounts.

She eventually married at 24 to a man she described as kind but was a gambler. Around that time, she found her biological mother. She went to meet her, eager to know why she was given away.

“My father was a gambler, and because they couldn’t provide for us, my parents gave away seven of their 13 children. When I met my mom, she had already gone mad from losing her children,” Chan shares.

Learning the truth about her past and finding her mother in that

tragic mental state triggered Chan’s grief-filled life. She then poured her life into her family, caring for her children and helping her husband make ends meet. She especially treasured the years taking care of her children but there was always a cloud of sadness hovering over her despite attending church faithfully and praying earnestly.

After her husband passed away in 2009, Chan fell into deep depression. She isolated herself, stayed home, watched dramas and cried. When she eventually sought help, counselling didn’t work.

“So much crying and crying, but then nothing happens after that,” she says.

Healing Point

In January 2017, Chan came across an article on the Grief Recovery Method (GRM). Just launched in Singapore, GRM provides systematic steps toward dealing with loss. Chan immediately signed up for the next course. In July, she became part of a small group of women, each dealing with a different kind of grief.

One of her group mates was graphic designer Felicia Tan, 40. A mother of a three-year-old boy, her family is her world, which had taken years to become a reality.

For a long time, Tan and her husband had been trying for a baby. She finally conceived in 2011 and 23 weeks later, she gave birth prematurely to a baby boy. His under-developed lungs failed and he passed away.

“I named him Dominic, which means ‘belonging to God’. I wasn’t a Christian then but I just wanted to name him that,” Tan says.



Grief triggered by sad childhood... April Chan at age four (standing between her parents).

During this sad time, Tan became acquainted with Christianity through a series of “coincidences” – Christian friends “suddenly” showing up and Christian songs “accidentally” playing on her computer. These caused her to take a closer look at Christianity. One Sunday, she followed a friend to church.

“The pastor’s name was Dominic. The sermon that day was ‘Jesus Born as a Baby’. Of course, I cried like crazy. I later joined a cell group and accepted Christ there,” she shares.

Six months later, she conceived again. But her twin boys were also born prematurely at 21 weeks and passed away. Broken, she turned to writing. She wrote and published a book about her ordeal after her first child, and did the same after the twins.

It took two years of waiting on God before she finally conceived for the third time. Though it was a high-risk pregnancy, Tan was assured that God would walk with her through it. In June 2015, Titus was born.



Felicia Tan with her precious Titus and husband.

Through writing and church support, Tan was able to deal with her grief over her first three children. Even so, when she learned about GRM, she signed up.

“I felt that I had dealt with the miscarriages and losses. But I still had this tingly feeling, maybe because of my grandmother’s passing. So I thought it’d be good to attend the course as it was supposed to help cover all areas of losses,” she says.

Healing Steps

Through GRM, Chan, Tan and their group mates walked through their grief, as unique as each was, with practical steps toward letting go and moving on. They were given homework to do, and when they met, they shared openly and honestly without judging, only giving support. One of the assignments was recording every loss in their life on a chart.

“When you chart the graph specifically, you do it very consciously,” Tan explains. “You become aware of just how many losses you’ve experienced throughout the years. Writing it down helps me to embrace and come to terms with my losses. Of course, I still have regrets. But I’ve learned how to move forward,” she shares.

Chan stresses that recording the losses is crucial, although she was initially hesitant to do it.



April Chan – Released from 30 years of grief.

“I was carrying 30 years of grief. I didn’t know how to write down all my losses and share them with others. The facilitator was kind enough to sit through that session with me alone and it wasn’t as bad as I thought it would be. I decided to go through with the rest of the programme because I didn’t want to carry the grief anymore.”

One GRM activity that affected Chan the most was writing a letter to her late husband who had passed away from cancer.

“I never got to say goodbye to him. He was in the hospital and I was at home packing clothes and things for him. By the time I got to the hospital, he was gone. Through writing the letter, I was able to say goodbye to him, tell him I forgave and still love him in spite of everything.” Chan also wrote a letter to her mother.

Today, Chan and Tan are free from the shackles of grief. They also hold the tools that they can use to deal with any future loss.

Chan and Tan encourage people who are dealing with grief to seek help and the right kind of support. And to keep praying and trusting God for His leading. To Chan, coming across GRM through a newspaper article was a real godsend. “Now I’m free from 30 years of grief. I never used to smile. But look at me now!” she beams with joy and gratitude. “God is really great!” 🌟

(Grief Recovery Method is run by Whispering Hope Singapore. Although the programme is not explicitly Christian, the facilitators in Singapore are believers who have personally walked through grief and now seek to help others. You can reach GRM at: whisperinghopesg@gmail.com or <http://www.facebook.com/whisperinghopesg>.)



God's Makeover for Beauty Doctor

By Goh Bee Lee

Aesthetic practitioner Dr Peter Loo* makes people over anew but late last year, he was at the receiving end, getting a makeover at the three-month MoneyLife financial management course.

When he joined the Bible-based course, the already wealthy doctor was on the verge of making a major decision. He was contemplating investing in an expensive machine for his practice and wanted to be sure God approved of it. He didn't want to just make more and more money. Joining the course was a kind of cross-check.

To his pleasant surprise, he discovered there was still much to learn about how a Christian should manage his finances. Married with 14-year-old twins, a boy and a girl, he had been a Christian for some time.

Using His Gift Of Wealth

A humble learner, Dr Loo found out that after all his years in church and walk with God, he had not really seen wealth from God's perspective, nor engaged in the practicalities of wise stewardship.

The course helped him see the wonderful possibilities God can open up with his gift of material wealth. He learned to open his heart and his wallet, and began to see the needs of the people around him and give more generously.

"The course taught me new godly habits to keep track of wealth, as it is all from God. It also drew me closer to God," he said and added he enjoyed the interactive course

where sharing and testimonies built strong bonds. Dr Loo also found that as he engaged with the Lord and served Him willingly, God gave him more than he needed to bless others.

Recharged Family

Dr Loo is keen to leave a legacy of sound financial principles to the next generation, not just to his children but to the younger generation at large.



As God continues to speak to him, he is burdened that the young should learn to handle wealth wisely. "I was encouraged to do my course homework with my son and I was privileged to teach him how to invest."

Being very interested in online shopping, his son took to online investment like a fish to water. During the course, they were assigned to start an investment with RM100.

They raked in a five hundred-fold profit! This brought father and son closer together and the daughter also became interested. As a family, they got excited engaging with God and their family altar took on a new life. Even his wife saw the dramatic change in him. She found a joyful husband who was no longer short-tempered but full of peace and joy – a brand new husband whose giving had grown. She also saw how God blessed his business amazingly. Impressed, she joined the MoneyLife course too.

Changes At The Office

Touched by a real and loving God, Dr Loo now looks at his staff through new eyes. He began to see their needs as he checked on their welfare and became more generous with their wages. His view of work has also changed and he now finds satisfaction in helping his patients. The work of his hands has now become a wonderful service to God and man, and not just a means of making money. Honest feedbacks from patients no longer offend him but are welcomed and he would even waive his fee if he has to repeat the treatment.

For Dr Loo, what began as an attempt to check that his life was in line with God's will has been well-rewarded with wonderfully unexpected changes and blessings. Did not God say "Those who honour me, I will honour"?

So, did he buy that expensive machine? Yes. And recouped the cost within a month. 🍀

**Not his real name*

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THE ARK OF MISSIONS

By Anna Teoh

Martin Chow teared up as he recounted the experiences that greatly impacted him and set the course of his future. At a mission trip in Bangladesh, an impoverished woman cooked him a meal. At an earthquake disaster relief mission in India, the village chief gave the team a warm, hearty meal.

A chartered accountant with two professional degrees, Martin had a bright future as a finance manager in a multinational company back then. But these simple acts of sacrificial kindness stirred his heart and he made a decision to give his life to helping the needy.

As she listened to her husband, Diana too shed a tear. Her move to join Martin as missionaries to China started on a Wednesday morning in 1998 when she heard a voice saying, "What are you doing here?" She ignored it but the voice persisted and she felt a great unease. A Christian colleague told her, "Diana, God is calling you into full-time ministry."

No, the timing is wrong, she thought. She was a successful remisier in a stockbroking company. Besides, they were young and about to start a family. But the call couldn't be clearer when at the closing of a Christian seminar the following year, she saw a vision of a single word on a raised platform: "NOW".

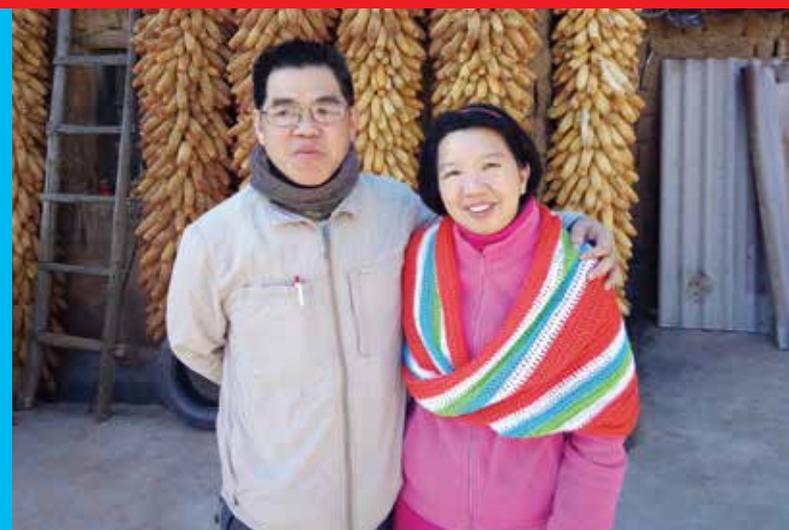
Leaving her five-figure salaried job was not easy, but Martin gently reminded her, "Everything belongs to God. If He could feed the millions of Israelites over 40 years in the desert in Moses' time, why can't you trust Him to feed us?"

Soon after, Diana heard a voice saying, "You are my steward". That's it; she quit her job on June 1, 2001, (her birthday) and the Chows began preparing for the mission field with Wycliffe.

Breaking Hard Ground

In 2005, the Chows and their daughter, Joyous, moved to Kunming in Yunnan, China. As Associate Director for External Relations under SIL East Asia, an international non-governmental organisation for language development and bilingual education, Martin's job was to relate with the local government partners and external parties.

Initially, the locals were sceptical of and hostile towards outsiders. Martin and Diana took their time to blend in by serving and meeting the simple needs of community. Relationships form the basis of any partnership for the Chinese, and so, they invested time in building genuine friendships with the provincial partners.



Martin and Diana... ploughing the ground is a long-term relationship with God.

Over time, they gained the respect and trust of the authorities, including the prince of the Wa ethnic group, who now only allows teachers recognised by the Chows to talk to his people.

So close are Martin and Diana with the authorities that they had even been invited by the local police chief for lunch and ridden in his personal police car!

Caring For Local Migrant Kids

He who can be trusted with little can also be trusted with much, as the Chows have found. From their simple acts of service to the community to their translation and literacy work, their mission has expanded to the Yi minority's handicraft project for impoverished single mothers, widows and families; a scholarship programme for needy students; and the most recent project – Happy Ark, an outreach work that serves the local migrant kids.

Happy Ark was born out of China's rapid economic growth in the last 30 years, which has prompted millions to migrate from the countryside to cities to work. Most migrants bring their children, who face difficulty adjusting to the city schools and are often left without supervision for long hours every day.

The Chows saw the need to provide a safe place and structured programme for the migrant children to learn and thrive. So, together with YINGOS (Yunnan International NGO Society), Public Security Bureau, the local migrant community and Wycliffe, they set Happy Ark sailing in 2013.

In 2015, Martin initiated a library programme at Happy Ark to encourage the kids to read and thus, improve literacy. The first month of the initiative only saw 17 comic books taken out. Martin persisted and today, some 200 books go out monthly, many being thick story books!

Happy Ark provides the much needed discipline lacking in many migrant homes. On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, the children are supervised while they do their homework. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, they get to play in the games room. On Saturdays, they attend classes where they participate in singing, games, arts and craft and storytelling. Through these classes,

better tomorrow despite the turbulent growing-up years. The authorities and academics are very impressed with Happy Ark. The police chief has said that "if all the kids go through the Happy Ark programme, we will not have any social problems in the future". In October 2016, the China government recognised the project and agreed to continue funding it, with Martin and Diana as the consultants overseeing the daily operations. Meanwhile, Happy Ark is studied by academics from partner universities, who refer to the pilot project as a blueprint for future initiatives.



Touching local migrant kids through Christ's love



A musical couple – Martin on the guitar and Diana on the keyboard leading the children in the singing.

they learn values such as obedience, respect, loyalty and wisdom (adapted from the Institute in Basic Life Principles programme).

During the summer holidays, the children attend summer camps where professional volunteers teach life skills such as cooking, baking and music.

From an after-school care programme, Happy Ark has become a full-fledged literacy and counselling ministry, blessing over 1,000 children thus far.

Martin and Diana shared that when given the opportunity, most children can excel in their studies. Through Happy Ark, many have shown great improvement in their academic results while developing positive character traits.

Just as the Happy Ark logo is of an ark with two children on it and a rainbow in the sky, the centre holds the promise of a

The adults too have reported transformed lives. Lydia, a single mother and staff under the Yi handicraft project, used to be timid. Back in 2006, she earned a meagre ¥33 a month (about RM17 then) but she continued to tithe. As she acquired budgeting and bargaining skills, she experienced God's faithfulness in providing and multiplying her resources.

One day, she asked Diana for a loan of ¥10,000 to buy sewing machines for the handicraft project. Within two years, she fully paid off the loan from her profits. Her countenance has changed dramatically, and she now welcomes visiting volunteers with cheerful hugs.

After 22 years on the mission field, Martin and Diana have learned that ploughing the ground is a long-term partnership with God, who will bring forth the harvest in His time. They may not overtly preach Christ, as many in China are still hostile towards the Gospel, but it is evident that God has worked and continues to work in the hearts of those whose paths they cross. 📖

(Martin and Diana will be back in Malaysia on June 1-3 to conduct Camp Wycliffe, a short exposure to world missions, cross-cultural ministries and Bible translation work through games and simulations.

Camp Wycliffe was started by Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, in 1942. Thousands of Christians worldwide who have participated in these camps have found new directions from God and renewed their commitment to world missions.

Visit <https://wycliffe.my/camp-wycliffe-2016/> to learn more.

PROSPERITY & SECURITY

Dr Lim Poh Ann



Prosperity is the prevailing theme, especially during the Chinese New Year. Caught up in its festive mood, Chinese Christians often wish one another a new year filled with peace and prosperity.

There is nothing wrong with wishing “A Happy and Prosperous New Year” as it is a socially acceptable greeting akin to what John wrote: “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2).

Certainly, there is no inherent virtue in poverty. And we, in our right mind, would not wish that our family or friends remain poor like a church mouse.

But a rethink is needed. Is this **emphasis on prosperity**, which is ingrained in Chinese culture, **correct** in light of biblical teaching? As believers, how much significance should we attach to prosperity?

Wealth is positive in many ways. It protects us from danger and ill health, and lets us live in secure, guarded and gated homes.

With wealth, we can afford insurance, more nutritious food and better healthcare; and have opportunities to pursue tertiary studies and wider options for work and leisure. Going overseas for holidays, not possible if we are poor, may help us to manage stress and improve our health. After all, a rich man’s wealth is his fortress, the ruin of the poor is their poverty (Proverbs 10:15).

But if he is haughty and thinks there is absolute security in wealth, he is wrong. To cling to prosperity as our security blanket is unwise.

Don’t Be A Fool

In the Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21), Christ warns of the danger of attaching too much importance to wealth. Following a bumper harvest, a rich man decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. He told himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” But God told him, “You fool! This very

night your soul is required of you; now who will own what you have prepared?” Self-centered and covetous, he failed to realise that wealth loses its value upon a person’s death. This reminds me of those who keep on accumulating freehold property, not realising that they themselves are “leasehold”.

Like this rich man, many are constantly driven to acquire stuff. Sadly, they are often insensitive to God’s calling or the needs of others. And when they die, or their empire collapses, everything they hope will grant them security is lost. Our riches won’t help us on Judgment Day; only righteousness counts then (Proverbs 11:4).

We are warned: “Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist” (Proverbs 23:4). The principle here is that we must be wise and not relentlessly pursue wealth. This does not mean, however, that it is wrong to make money through hard work and legitimate means – or even to have a lot of money. Money in itself is not evil; it is the love of money which is a root of all kinds of evils (1 Timothy 6:10).

Those with a consuming desire for riches but neither consult God nor live for Him are foolish from a biblical viewpoint. Why? We brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. Instead, we should be content, generous, set our hopes on God and be rich in good deeds (1 Timothy 6: 7, 1 Timothy 6: 17-18).

Honest work and an enterprising spirit bring honour to God’s name. In fact, businessmen and entrepreneurs can play a vital role in the marketplace by creating job opportunities and funding corporate social responsibility projects. Laziness, on the other hand, ought to be condemned.

The danger lies not in the abundance of wealth we possess but how much the wealth possesses us. The issue is not how much money we have; it is the state of our heart – whether it is covetous or God-centered.

Be Wise

A splendid example of someone unaffected by great wealth is Job. Though very rich, he was blameless, upright and feared God. When afflicted with many woes, including disease and the loss of his children and wealth, he did not curse God despite his wife’s suggestion.

In fact, he philosophically accepted his loss as part of God’s sovereign will: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

How many of us can maintain our integrity like Job in the face of such monumental losses, heartache and misery? If our

security is tied to money, things or self, we’ll be badly shaken, even panicky, if one or more of these props are removed.

However, if God is the centre (not money, things or self), we know that His peace, presence, wisdom and strength are with us as we face trials. For God will keep in perfect peace all who trust in Him, all whose thoughts are fixed on Him (Isaiah 26:3).

Because of his integrity amid adversity, Job was vindicated. God not only restored his fortunes but blessed him with twice as much. He started a new family and died in fullness of age. Thus God blessed Job’s latter years more than his early days.

Here was a man who had absolute trust in God. He did not trust in gold; neither did he rejoice because his wealth was great (Job 31: 24-25). In the storms of life, he was not overwhelmed because he had deep spiritual roots. His security was primarily in God, not in money, things or self.

“The danger lies not in the abundance of wealth we possess but how much the wealth possesses us.”

“If our security is tied to money, things or self, we’ll be badly shaken, even panicky, if one or more of these props are removed.”

Jesus came that we might have an abundant life (John 10:10b). But we must not equate abundance with material wealth. Jesus also taught that a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions (Luke 12:15) and we are to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

Let’s be reminded that when we love the world and the things of the world, we love God less (1 John 2:15). And we cannot love God and money to the same degree. “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matthew 6:24).

Clinging to material wealth as our security blanket is unwise. We certainly do not want to be like the self-centered man in the Parable of the Rich Fool, who met with a tragic end.

Let’s be reminded that while there is nothing wrong in greeting one another, “A Happy and Prosperous New Year”, we must *not* get carried away by its emphasis on prosperity, which is cultural rather than biblical.

Wealth may make us more secure, but it does *not* mean prosperity will invariably guarantee security – now or in the hereafter. 🏠



Dr Lim Poh Ann is a medical practitioner. A former editor of Asian Beacon, he can be reached at his Facebook page: www.facebook.com/AskDrLim and blog, Porridge for the Soul: <http://bit.ly/1ijiXHp>

Money Matters

Taxes Tithing & Trust

By Rajen Devadason

It is commonplace for us to gripe about our taxes. However, as author and professional speaker Dr John Demartini teaches, taxes are the price we pay for living in a civilised society. Perhaps that's why Jesus declared that all of us should not merely pay our dues to God but also to Caesar.¹

In today's context, Jesus' reference was less to Tiberius (the Roman emperor who ruled till 37 A.D.) and more to the government of the day.

Most of us believe we would be happier if our tax burden were lower. That's predictable, but wrong...

Give Your Tithes

There are many things we owe our Creator: love, honour, respect.... But in this context, the tithe is the most relevant.

Malachi 3:10 contains the Bible's most direct teaching about tithing, and the ONLY instance in the entire Bible of God Almighty challenging His people to test His promise of enormous, prodigious blessing to see if it is true!³

It is natural for those who tithe to take God at His Word and to seek personal blessing.

"It is only when we build our lives on Jesus, the Solid Rock, that we secure our present and our future."

The latest United Nations' World Happiness Report, released in late 2017, states that the 10 happiest countries on the planet are Norway, followed by Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, Finland, Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Sweden.² Renowned economist Jeffrey Sachs co-wrote the report.

Sachs states that citizens' satisfaction levels are related to what they get in return for the taxes they pay. CNBC quoted him as saying, "They are happy because these societies are not only prosperous but also with high equality, social trust and honesty of government."

This suggests that where people distrust their governments because of corruption and self-serving policies, happiness levels are lower, which is evident in some countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

(For a closer look at those UN findings, visit worldhappiness.report.)

Pay Your Tax

From a Christian viewpoint, regardless of whether we are happy or upset with our respective governments, we have Christ's instructions to pay ALL the taxes due from us. As wise stewards however, we mustn't pay anything more! Hence, securing the services of a good tax advisor is a sound investment.

My advice is to manage your finances in an honest, transparent, upfront manner so there is never a need to fear any investigation by the authorities.

As for reducing any possible trust deficit in your heart and mind against your government, the solution is, interestingly, tied to the second half of Jesus' famous instructions: "Render... unto God the things that are God's."

But that promise of God may also be claimed and directed to areas of national healing.

Christians living in countries suffering from a high trust deficit arising from corruption, myopia and ineptitude on the part of their respective governments can – and I dare say should – pray for an improvement of governance. The intensity and urgency of such prayers should skyrocket during periods leading up to elections. The apostle Paul instructed his disciple, the young pastor Timothy, to teach others to pray for the government of the day so that national affairs may improve for all people.⁴

Moving on, regardless of how much or how little you trust your government, the importance of taking responsibility for improvements in your family life is essential. Frankly, any such improvement will be tied directly to the strengthening of your personal and family finances.



Manage Your Resources

Financial guru Robert Kiyosaki of Rich Dad, Poor Dad fame self-published that bestseller in 1997, and many books after that. In 2017, he wrote *Why the Rich are Getting Richer*. As each of us focuses on correct behaviour such as paying all the taxes due from us, but not a penny more; paying our tithe to God (for Christians, to the church from which we gain spiritual sustenance); praying for our

government to improve, and voting intelligently; and managing our money wisely, consider this advice from Kiyosaki: "Assets put money in your pocket whether you work or not." "Liabilities take money from your pocket even if they go up in value."

"Anything can be an asset or liability, as defined by the direction of cash flow. Most people have money slipping through their fingers because they insist their house or car is an asset."⁵

It is important for us to manage our money well because if we desire happy, balanced lives of bounty, then having some money is useful. We need to manage our lives and our money competently to succeed. Part of that process involves gradually replacing our reliance on active income derived from toil with passive income that flows into our bank accounts and portfolios in the form of interest, dividends, distributions and rental.

Trust In God

There is stupendous satisfaction in establishing such a pipeline of passive income. However, none of us should make the mistake of setting our hearts on – and placing our trust in – money. Doing so would be like building our lives on a foundation of sand.⁶

It is only when we build our lives on Jesus, the Solid Rock, that we secure our present and our future.

Our ultimate happiness hinges on doing the best we can throughout this tough but short journey we call life; repenting when we fail; restarting our upward journey as many times as necessary; and constantly putting down roots deep into Him who is the ultimate Source of abundant, eternal life.⁷ 🏠

¹ Matthew 22:21b (KJV), "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

² <https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/09/the-happiest-the-happiest-countries-in-the-world-also-pay-a-lot-in-taxes.html>

³ Malachi 3:10 (NIV), "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 there will not be room enough to store it."

⁴ 1 Timothy 2:1-3 (NIV), "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, ..."

⁵ *Why the Rich are Getting Richer – What is Financial Education... Really?* Chapter 8; page 131. 2017 Robert T. Kiyosaki and Tom Wheelwright; Plata Publishing.

⁶ Matthew 7:26-27 (NIV), "But everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

⁷ Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NIV) "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."



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Dear Goldie



Dear Goldie,

My heart is broken by my son. After all my prayers and Christian upbringing, he is going to marry a non-believer divorcee from another culture. I see the prospective in-laws' background, culture, worldview, etc. are very different from our own, so this marriage may face severe problems. I have tried all ways to warn him, even threatened to disown him, all to no avail. My dream of passing on the blessings of a Christian family to the next generation is shattered. Should we boycott the wedding to make a stand on our Christian principles?

Heartbroken Mother

Dear Heartbroken Mother,

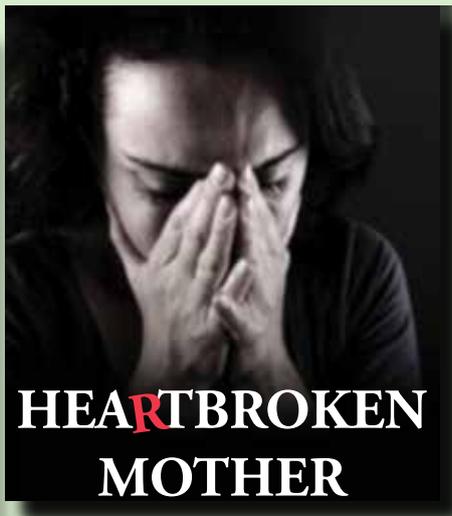
I sympathise with you to see your son ignoring the God's ways. But you need not feel guilty as you've done all you could. Realise he is an adult now and you have to let him go to make his own decisions and bear the consequences. In the Old Testament, Eli and Samuel had sons who departed from God's ways. As to your wanting to take a public stand by boycotting his wedding, it will likely result in a bad start for in-law relationships and definitely worsen your relationship with your son and his bride.

Alternatives

May I make some suggestions?

Firstly, be aware that mothers usually feel that no girl is good enough for their son. Are any of your expectations unrealistic?

Secondly, you may disapprove of his decisions but you can still accept and love him. Think of the father in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. After all the son had done, the father still extended unconditional love. This is the godly way.



Thirdly, you need to rid yourself of the harmful anger and bitterness in your heart. Hebrews 12:15 says, "See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." This poison will destroy your relationship with God and others.

You need to confess your anger and ask God to forgive you. Then you need to forgive your son. You will not be able to do this in the natural but you have God's supernatural power to help, so ask Him for supernatural grace and strength to do it. Having obeyed Jesus' instructions to release forgiveness and receive forgiveness from Him, you will be able to carry out godly solutions to the situation.

By your love, you will let your son know that although you disagree and disapprove of his actions, you still love and accept him. Notice that 'approve' and 'accept' are two different things. You don't approve of what he does but you can accept and regard him as precious and dear.

Jesus commanded us to love even our enemies, so how much more your own son.

Wise Moves

I remember how my parents must have been apprehensive about my marrying Tek, who was taking me away to a remote village of Melaka far from my comfortable upbringing in Hongkong. His family's dialect, culture, background were totally foreign to ours.

Being influential, well-connected, long-time residents in Hongkong, my parents could have helped Tek to establish his medical career in Hongkong. My mother did not oppose; instead, she made positive moves to win over Tek and the in-laws in the hope that they would treat me well.

When she visited Melaka, she would bring a lot of presents for them and when they went to Hongkong she treated them royally. The goodwill created in the family helped our marriage. So do your best to bring goodwill and harmony into the family. It will benefit everyone.

To Go Or Not?

By attending the wedding, are you compromising your Christian principles? No. You have already made your stand clear. Now, use Christian principles to unite the family. After the wedding, continue to maintain a loving relationship with his new family. Continue to intercede for their salvation and sanctification. You are the missionary to bring in God's love and they are your mission field. Regard this as His assignment to you.

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, which is larger and clearer than the surrounding text. The text inside the lens describes the benefits of Hi-Kay Bio.

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