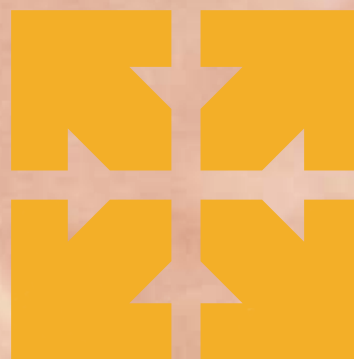


ASIAN BEACON



VOL 2025.02

A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

220 pastors and leaders gather for
a time of rest and fellowship.

JARS & JUGS

In Sabah, senior ladies make
communion wafers from scratch

JOHN JOEL

A youth leader's journey of hope
and transformation

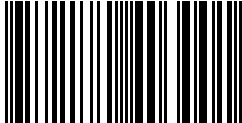
SOOKY ONG

The Prince of Pins founder on
being lost, then found in Jesus

TEACHING MATTERS

The impact of one teacher is
staggering. Will believers rise to
the call?

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EDITOR'S NOTE

"I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart." - Jeremiah 24:7

All around us, something is stirring. It may never make headlines or go viral, but it is seen in the quiet turning of hearts back to God. He is still at work. In prayer gatherings and classrooms, on mountaintops and around family tables, His Spirit is awakening His people to seek Him afresh.

This issue carries that heartbeat.

From the muddy climb up Mount Murud, where revival's flame still burns 40 years on, to retreats where weary pastors have found renewal, every story reminds us: revival begins with prayer and hunger for the presence of God. You'll read of lives transformed, purpose rediscovered, redemption that restores, and repentance that leads to new beginnings.

Awakening is also found in quieter ways, hands preparing communion bread, teachers shaping young lives, families learning to love with the Father's heart.

These stories remind us that awakening is not a distant hope but a present invitation. In a world marked by division, uncertainty, and longing, God is writing a story of hope through His people. The Spirit is drawing us back to the One who gives life, purpose, and joy.

May this issue invite you to pause, return, and draw near, so that God's promise in Jeremiah 24:7 will be ours: to know the Lord, to be His people, and to return to Him wholeheartedly.

Blessings,
Deborah

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Built on Prayer and Partnership, Malaysia is Experiencing a Spiritual Awakening

BY MICHELLE CHUN

In May, 220 pastors and church leaders from West Malaysia's southern region gathered in Batu Pahat, Johor, for three days of refreshment, rest, and fellowship.

The retreat, anchored by the Lentilpatch Ministry of SIBKL and organised by the Batu Pahat Pastors' Fellowship, was fully sponsored so that leaders could come without financial burden. Many of the participants, aged 40 to 70, had been faithfully serving in small towns for decades, often without rest or recognition.

"We thank God for the pastors and leaders who came from different cities, towns, languages, and denominations. Much time was spent in worship to usher in God's presence, as many pastors were worn out and tired," said retreat coordinator Rev. Teo Kwee Keng.

Dato' Pr. Daniel Ho, Pr. Dr. Chew Weng Chee, and Pr. Dr. Lew Lee Choo ministered from the Word of God, uplifting weary spirits. At the altar, pastors found healing from past trauma, grief, and years of spiritual fatigue.



It's been said that leadership is lonely at the top. Pastors are human too, prone to weakness, grief, and isolation. Let us be spurred to pray for, befriend and bless our shepherds as often as we can.

"For the first time in a long time, pastors were able to sit around tables, chat freely and share their challenges. The retreat really gifted the pastors' refreshment, refiring and importantly, the realisation that they are not walking alone," Rev. Teo said.

A generous donor also gave each pastor a monetary love gift in appreciation of their years of faithful service to the Lord and His church.

"We must also acknowledge Pr. Dr. Chew, who is truly a spiritual father to this land. He has shown his love for our pastors not just in word, but in action," she added.

Rev. Teo, a church planter since 1974 and chair of the Prayer Commission for the Assemblies of God Malaysia, knows firsthand the struggles of small-church pastors. She entered full-time ministry in 1976, at just 24 years old.

"In Malaysia, 80% of our churches have fewer than 100 members. That means thousands of small congregations scattered across the nation.

For their leaders, the journey can feel lonely and without reward," she explained.

"As a small church, we often face a lack. Lack of manpower, resources, and finance. I know a pastor who passed away, and there were not enough funds to even buy a casket for his body," she said soberly.

The difficulties extend beyond finances. "Many small-town churches struggle with slow or no numerical growth, as younger generations move to the cities. It can be very disheartening," Rev. Teo admitted.

In Batu Pahat, where she is based, there are more than 400 Chinese temples, making the spiritual climate especially challenging.

However, Rev. Teo is convinced that the answer lies in prayer and unity.

"That's why we are not stopping at just the retreat. In the past few months, Pr. Lee Choo and I have returned with a team to train the pastors in raising 'watchmen' who can raise and establish prayer altars in their churches," she said excitedly.

Rev. Teo also serves in the core team of the Malaysia United Firewall (MUFW), a prayer network with a vision to see prayer altars established across the nation.

"Only when God's presence rests on Malaysia again will we see true transformation," she declared.

This vision is already taking root. During this year's 40-Day Fast and Prayer by the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF), MUFW hosted online prayer gatherings every morning at 6:30 a.m. Hundreds logged in daily, demonstrating a hunger for God's presence.

"Since the pandemic, we have been seeing better participation, greater unity and an urgency amongst believers to pray for our land. There is a spiritual awakening and greater alignment with God's purposes," Rev. Teo exclaimed.

Still, she believes that the Malaysian Church must first be healed of its disunity and division before the Lord can bring healing to this nation. "The physical condition of a nation is but a reflection of the spiritual condition of its church," she said.

When asked how ordinary believers can prepare for what God wants to do in Malaysia, her answer was simple and direct: "Build prayer altars: first in your own heart, then in your family, and in your church."

Her voice softened as she shared her personal conviction:

"At 17, the Lord gave me a love for Malaysia. It is His own heart, a land He loves and has never given up on. God loves Malaysia so much. That is why I have hope for Malaysia, that our future can be great, and that one day, we will see revival." ■



← The seeds of disunity and division are subtle, often stemming from self-righteousness and spiritual superiority. As believers, how often do we conduct self-checks of our own heart and build a culture of honour, love and encouragement in our churches?



From Fugitive to Faith-driven Entrepreneur, Vivy Koo's Life Points to Jesus

BY MICHELLE CHUN

When Vivy Koo was 13, her family went on the run after her father's business failed, leaving them with insurmountable debt.

She was sent to live with her uncle and aunt, who cared for her well but could not shoulder all her expenses. Vivy had to work to pay for school fees, books, and tuition.

Her first job was in a school supplies shop. At 14, she began waitressing in a seafood restaurant.

"When I was 15, I spent school holidays working in a daycare kindergarten in the mornings and waitressing in a seafood restaurant in the evenings. My health suffered greatly due to overwork," recalls Vivy.

In Form 4, her weak immunity made her susceptible to illness. She was admitted for a viral infection that left her with painful throat ulcers and caused her to lose her sense of smell for over a month.

After high school, Vivy earned a scholarship to study film and television production in Kuala Lumpur. Growing up, TV dramas had been her 'teachers' - showing her how to understand life, gain wisdom, and become a better person. She dreamed of creating meaningful, educational programs for others.



After graduation, she threw herself into work, joining a small production company. She sought **self-worth in her job** and quickly became a workaholic, outperforming everyone's expectations and cementing her role in the team.

Yet, something was missing.

"I didn't know what I was working so hard for. My relationship with my family was splintering, and I was in a situation with a colleague. Then, I was diagnosed with scoliosis," she revealed.

Much of her income went to medical bills and treatments. Her fragile health kept her in and out of hospitals.

"It all took a toll, and I began having depressive episodes. At work, I looked fine, but alone in my room, I would cry myself to sleep almost every night. That's when I realised I was no longer myself; I used to be so cheerful," the young woman revealed.

In 2017, Vivy began visiting church on and off, mostly out of curiosity.

→ When we view work as self-enriching, we enter an endless, exhausting race for more. By shifting our perspective to see work as worship unto God, we begin to find joy and purpose even in the daily grind.

"Most of my housemates were Christians. I had also remembered Danny and Amanda, two college mates. They lived differently; there was a joy and godly confidence in the way they communicated, handled assignments and carried themselves. And here I was, anxious and fearful. So I was intrigued by them," she said.



That curiosity deepened. One day, while waiting to be admitted for a medical procedure, she decided to talk to “Whoever was up there”.

“I asked, “What is the purpose of my life? Why am I suffering so much?” I felt God say, “Don’t you already know that others around you are suffering too? They are lost. Why not create a platform to help young people find their purpose?” For some reason, that gave me hope that I was on earth for a reason,” Vivy said with a smile.

Over the next two years, she wavered between faith and doubt but noticed herself changing and transforming.

Her years of being on the run had shaped her into a tired, frustrated young woman. She carried unforgiveness towards her father and those she felt had wronged her.

“In my teens, I remember my dad once asking me, “Are you ashamed of being a part of this family?” I cried when God brought this memory back to me, because I realised then that I was now thinking about him without any ill-feelings,” she explained.

It was the beginning of a gradual change as she cautiously opened her heart to the Lord. “I became kinder, more gracious and forgiving. I felt lighter as I went about life, and I knew within me that it was God,” she reflected.

In 2019, Vivy could no longer deny God’s love and gave her life to Jesus. As the first believer in her family, she faced her mother’s displeasure.

“I had been dedicated at a Taoist temple when I was 17 years old and was forced to drink burnt talisman water, so it was not easy. Along the way, however, my mother saw me change as I attended church more. In 2022, when I wanted to get water baptised, she went to the temple medium and, surprisingly, he told her to let me go ahead,” Vivy said with a bright laugh.

It was a tender moment of joy, hope and reconciliation when her mother and two brothers took off work and drove from Johor to KL to witness her water baptism. To Vivy, it was nothing short of a miracle.

As she moved through jobs in production, virtual tour development, recruitment, and even a short stint as a church worker, Vivy began to realise **God was preparing her for something unique.**

In Romans 8:28, we find the assurance that if we love God and live surrendered lives, we will look back on our lives one day and be able to say with certainty that God worked all things – both the pleasant and painful – together for our good.



In a blend of her professional experience and passion for helping others find purpose, she launched The Waymaker Academy, a talent development platform offering 360° Career Virtual Tours, professional skills training, character-building programmes, and real career opportunities.

"Without a vision, people perish. That is the heart behind The Waymaker, where young people can have a tour of how real-life work in different careers look like, then giving them the opportunities to kickstart their career," Vivy shared enthusiastically.

Together with her business partner, she is committed to doing business in a God-honouring way.

In the past, she has witnessed superiors act and lead in ways she personally feels would not bring God glory. Vivy was determined that these would not be trademarks of her leadership.

She started by looking for Christian entrepreneur communities and books because she had no business experience. "I wanted to start and do it right with God. That's how I came across Faith-Driven Entrepreneur (FDE)," she explained.

FDE is a global movement dedicated to gathering one million Christ-following entrepreneurs and equipping them to create and transform the world around them. In 2023, Vivy started an online foundation group in Malaysia. Earlier this year, it multiplied into two groups, each with more than 30 members.

She has seen God move in remarkable ways as Christians break down walls between faith and work. Some, once timid, now rise in confidence, becoming leaders and influencers in their workplaces, while others experience breakthroughs through divine connections and God's provision.

"If you have the conviction that the Gospel can transform life, you can live it out in your workplace. It has been true in my experience. In the marketplace, many people are simply waiting for an invitation to have an encounter with Jesus and a community to grow together," she reflected.

Vivy now encourages Christians in the marketplace to anchor themselves in Christ-centred communities such as FDE or Alpha, for encouragement and accountability to stay the course and view work as worship.

"In business, God must be our foundation. In my own life, He has granted undeserved favour when I put Him first. When we do things right with God's character and His ways, instead of us chasing money, His provision chases us," she concluded. ■





Jars and Jugs Ministry: The Women Blessing Sabahan Churches with Fresh Communion Wafers

BY MICHELLE CHUN

On the upper floor of Wisma BCCM in Kota Kinabalu, several ladies in their sixties and seventies sit in front of shiny, strange-looking machinery. They are hard at work.

Clad in aprons with beaded initials and embroidered daisies, these seniors are part of a unique, lesser-known ministry: making communion hosts (wafers) from scratch.

Reverend Chong Fui Yung is the coordinator of Jars and Jugs Ministry, a ministry established in 2019 by the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM).

Jars and Jugs derives its name from the story of the Widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17, who received a promise from the Lord through Elijah that her flour would never be used up nor her oil run dry.

"In the same manner, we hope our communion hosts will be a blessing to congregations. As church members partake of the Holy Communion and these sacred elements, we remember how Jesus has declared, saying, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 11:35)

And our prayer is that in Christ, they will experience God's faithful provision in every area of their lives," Rev. Chong shared.



A retired minister, she leads their group of eight women made up of grandmothers, retired pastors, housewives, retired executives and former church workers.

"Every month, we meet up for 3-4 days to bake communion hosts. Our hosts are made up of just flour and water; how we get the gloss, fresh aroma, and crispness is our secret," she said with twinkling eyes.

SERVING BELIEVERS SACRED EMBLEMS MADE WITH LOVE

In just a few days, this small but mighty team will bake around 29,000 hosts using 25-27 kg of flour. The entire process involves baking, humidifying, cutting, dehydrating and packing.

The hosts, which have a shelf life of around three months, are then sold for a minimal fee to around 200 BCCM congregations in Sabah. Other churches also purchase the hosts for their communion services.

"All of us are volunteers, and our equipment was graciously sponsored by Mission One World of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria, Germany. All income goes to our operational costs," Rev. Chong said.

In fact, Jars and Jugs was first birthed after a group from BCCM's Central Pastors Fellowship embarked on a study tour to Germany in 2014.

The group found themselves keenly interested in the Communion Bread making ministry, which they visited, and had inspired then-Bishop James Wong to explore the possibility of setting up a similar outfit in Sabah.

A dedicated space at Wisma BCCM was provided for this ministry. Mission One World sent over the equipment: a dough mixer, baking irons, humidifier, racks and cutters. Rev Chong and then bishop's wife, Connie Wong, went for a week's hands-on training in Germany. In September 2019, Jars and Jugs launched its operations.

← The world tells us that once we are past our prime, we are to step aside. But God is a God of generations; whether young or old, we all have a part to play in advancing His kingdom here on earth as long as we have breath.

Two months later, the ministry was dedicated to God and graced by Rev Thomas Paulsteiner, Mission One World Regional Secretary for Papua New Guinea, Pacific and East Asia.

A MINISTRY UNTO GOD AND HIS CHURCH

"Jars and Jugs Ministry is a service unto God and His Church. As it involves the handling of sacred elements, we have a cautious selection process for volunteers," Rev. Chong explained.

It's tempting to believe that the louder our service, the greater the impact. Nothing could be further from the truth. As history has shown, even the quiet, faithful acts of service unto God resonate through eternity.



Mimi Quek, a talented baker known in local circles for her pineapple tarts and butter cake, deftly scoops batter onto the baking iron. "It's a unique ministry, and I wanted to learn this skill so I could serve the Church. Our hosts are tasty and fresh. **This is God's work too,**" she beamed.

Next to her, Gwen Pang trims away excess batter with swiftness and precision. Her friends lightly teased the 70-year-old for coming to 'work' with hair and make-up done, as though she knew her picture would be taken today (the team did not know we would be visiting).

"I was so happy when I was asked to join this ministry," she said sincerely. "We really look forward to coming together every month; the work is stress-free, the fellowship is good and this ministry is meaningful."

IN SERVING GOD, FRIENDSHIP AND PURPOSE MEET

In another sunlit room, retired pastor Chong Syh Mii sits by the window, brows furrowed as she cuts hosts out of large, embossed discs. Across her, Wong Yuk Chu transfers the little discs onto trays, ready for the dehydrator.

"I have no baking experience," Pastor Chong, in her 70's, says with a grin. "That's why I'm here cutting! It feels good to be part of a community and to meet a real need. Plus, this ministry is really not high-stress."

Yuk Chu, a former church clerk, nods in agreement. "I'm retired now, and don't have much to do. This work gives us a sense of purpose, and it's nice to be able to serve together with others."

The atmosphere is light as the women focus on their individual tasks over breezy conversations in English, Hakka, Cantonese, and Mandarin. All of them also look forward to lunch after work is done, when they can share updates about life, church and family.

It is clear that more than ministry partners, the women of Jars and Jugs are friends waltzing through life's golden years together.

"This ministry is meaningful to me," Rev. Chong says quietly. "We are a good team that enjoys each other's fellowship and doing ministry together. Although we come from different congregations, serving the Lord has brought us together in the bigger BCCM church family." ■

Loving God, Loving Malaysia: 5 Ways Believers Can Build the Nation

BY RUTH YONG WANG THEEN

I often think of the stories my parents told me about Malaysia's early days, when neighbours of all races celebrated side by side and churches opened their doors to serve anyone who walked in. These memories, whether lived or inherited, remind me that unity is something we built together, year after year.

From the earliest days, churches have been part of Malaysia's nation-building story, quietly yet significantly sowing seeds of unity, progress, and social care. Mission schools, such as Wesley Methodist School and St. Xavier's Institution provided quality education to children of all races and faiths, shaping leaders and thinkers who would go on to serve the nation.

Church-run hospitals, orphanages, and clinics served the poor without discrimination, embodying Jesus' words in Matthew 25:40, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for Me."

But the question remains: How can believers today carry on the legacy of love and service started by those who have gone before us? Here are five practical and impactful ways to do so:





1. BREAK BREAD WITH NEIGHBOURS

Churches can host community open houses, join local clean-up drives, or organise shared meals. Sometimes the most meaningful connections happen not in big programmes but when a few people gather over a simple meal and share their stories. In an age where social media can divide us with a swipe, these face-to-face gestures remind us of our common humanity and create networks of care that respond quickly in times of crisis.



2. BUILD BRIDGES FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Ecumenical and interfaith partnerships can be strengthened to respond to real needs, from disaster relief to poverty alleviation. Working together allows us to pool resources, coordinate aid effectively, and reach communities more efficiently. Such cooperation becomes a living testimony that Malaysia's diversity is not a problem to be solved but a strength to be celebrated.



3. SPEAK TRUTH WITH LOVE

Believers can help create a healthier national conversation by rejecting divisive rhetoric, standing for justice, and highlighting the inclusive vision of our Constitution. "Speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) should guide our public engagement. This means addressing issues like corruption, discrimination, and inequality with honesty but also with humility, ensuring our words build bridges rather than walls.



4. CARE FOR THOSE WHO CARE FOR OTHERS

We must not forget our pastors and ministry leaders. Churches can budget for counselling services, retreats, and peer support to help them serve with resilience. This support should not be limited to crises; proactive care can prevent burnout before it begins. Congregations can create encouragement teams, ensure pastors have regular sabbaticals, and provide practical support like meal deliveries during busy ministry seasons.



5. SERVE THE VULNERABLE AND MARGINALISED

Finally, the call of the Gospel is clear: to serve "the least of these." Vulnerable groups often face layers of disadvantage, whether through a lack of education, healthcare, or safe housing. Churches can partner with organisations to offer vocational training, set up community kitchens, or provide tuition for children from low-income families. In doing so, we reflect the servant-hearted leadership of Christ, who came "not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

When the church, that's you and me, chooses the harder path of peace-making, nation-building and service, it shows Malaysia why the church still matters. In every neighbourhood where believers embody Christ's love, God's Kingdom breaks through, bringing hope, healing, and unity our nation longs for. ■

Event Snippets



Photo credit: Metro Tabernacle A/G

MALAYSIA DAY OF PRAYER

On September 16, Christians gathered for this year's Malaysia Day of Prayer at St. Faith's Church, Kuching, organised by the Council of Churches Malaysia (CCM), Prayer United and the Association of Churches in Sarawak (ACS). The service was anchored upon the theme, "That they may all be one" (John 17:21). Filled with worship and prayer, believers joined hands and hearts in unity for their beloved country. A 14-hour online service was also held with many coming together, sharing words of exhortation and hope, and encouraging believers to remain strong, stay together and build Malaysia.



TRIBAL GATHERING 2025

In the third year of Tribal Gathering, 3,000 young believers converged in Sibu, Sarawak, for a time of repentance, realignment and renewal of their covenant before God. Held from September 17-19, most were youth and campus-aged students from the interiors of Sarawak and Sabah. "This year, it's been about taking possession: finally going to the (spiritual) enemy's camp and taking back our families for Jesus Christ," shared co-event pastor, Pr. Rachel Bulan of Cornerstone Community Church Borneo. Tribal Gathering 2026 will look quite different with the launch of DISCIPLE-SHEEP, an equipping program for East Malaysia's Christian youths to become true disciples of Jesus Christ. Learn more at www.tribalgatheringborneo.com.

NECF MALAYSIA DAY

On September 14, Christians flocked to Metro Tabernacle A/G, Batu Caves, to mark the conclusion of NECF's annual 40 Days of Prayer and Fast. This year's theme was 'Walking in the Fear of God.' Rev. Dr. Eu Hong Seng, NECF chairman, urged the crowd to live out eight "non-negotiables" of walking in the fear of the Lord, including discipleship, seeking God's presence, perseverance, and passion. With 25 years behind them, NECF reminded the Church that the 40 days are not an end but a beginning - an invitation to carry a lifelong posture of prayer, repentance, and bold witness for Christ into Malaysia's future.

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SCIENCE AND FAITH CONCLAVE

On August 23 and 24, curious minds gathered at the People's Park Baptist Church (PPBC) for a series of talks unpacking the relationship between science and faith. The conclave, jointly organised by Reasons to Believe (RTB) and Apologetics Prayer and Counselling (APAC), featured astrophysicist Dr. Jeff Zweerink, geology expert Prof. Dr. Living Lee; Earth Observatory of Singapore principal investigator Dr. Stephen Chua, medical doctor Dr. Raj Kumar Songa and RTB Asia Pacific's Dr. Balajied Nongrum, who revealed that sound reason and scientific research affirm biblical truths and that the desire to always know more is part of God's design for humanity.



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ODE TO HOPE BY SALVATION ARMY MALAYSIA

A Christmas choral performance in aid of Salvation Army's Care Centres

6 and 7 December
salvationarmy.org.my

CAMP LEGACY BY SCRIPTURE UNION

A camp for youth leaders aged 13-17

27-31 December
su.org.my

NATIONAL BAPTIST YOUTH CAMP

Theme: Fearless in Christ

29-31 December
mbc.org.my

SCRIPTURE UNION CHINESE YOUTH CAMP

An evangelistic youth camp for secondary school students

3-6 January 2026
su.org.my

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT 25/26 KL BY GLN MALAYSIA

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glnmalaysia.org

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40 Years After Revival Touched Mount Murud: My Muddy Climb To Experience God's Manifest Presence

BY MICHELLE CHUN

It was when one of my adidas kampung (local rubber shoes made for the dense, tropical jungles of Malaysia) squelched in the unforgiving mud and slipped off my muddy foot that I lost it.

"What am I doing here, Lord?" I muttered in frustration as I gazed at the maze of tree roots and brown pools ahead of me. My brain was fogging from the mental strain of choosing my steps to avoid sinking in knee-deep mud.

We were climbing Mount Murud, Sarawak's highest peak, to attend Pelayanan Doa Gunung Murud (Mount Murud Prayer Conference). The yearly conference has been held since July 1985, when a Lun Bawang, Agung Bangau, received a vision from the Lord to build a church on the mountain.

Since then, Pelayanan Doa Gunung Murud has been held annually, alternating between Church Camp on Mount Murud and Buduk Nur, one of the bigger villages in Ba'kelalan.



We travelled from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, to Lawas by car, then took a four-wheel drive on bumpy, rocky roads for six hours to get to Buduk Nur. After an overnight stop and an hour's drive the next day, we arrived at Lepo Bunga, where the hiking trail starts.

For the next four hours, I joined a mish-mash of visitors, porters, and Lun Bawangs on a four-hour hike up to Church Camp, a settlement built by the Lun Bawang community.

It was along this trail that I had my moment with God. This was the first conference I'd attended that required so much effort. I wished it were easier. Little did I know that over the next few days, I would understand what true sacrifice looks like, as well as its immeasurable reward.

We arrived at Church Camp to a chorus of hoots by Lun Bawang teenagers who'd planted themselves at the trail's end, our unofficial welcoming committee. Church Camp was cold, windy and breathtakingly beautiful.

I took it all in: the famous kolam, a square pool of brown river water we would be using to bathe and wash our clothes in, the communal bathing room (gender-divided) and tiny cubicles with flushing toilets, the latest addition to this little village.

Our group was directed to the Gereja #1 (the old church), an empty building where we'd be sleeping for the next three nights. I took my muddy shoes and socks to the kolam for a wash. In seconds, my hands started throbbing from the ice-cold water.

Looking braver than I felt, I decided to have a quick shower. With a singular pail of water, I took the fastest and least effective shower of my life: soaped, rinsed and changed in less than two minutes.

Although my ankles were still muddy, my heart was singing. I returned to our sleeping quarters and immediately felt an unmistakable sense of God's presence. The church walls echoed with prayers and songs of years past. I knew then that Mount Murud was special.

Without connection to the outside world, our phones stayed mostly in our pockets. My husband and I wandered around Church Camp, bumping into old friends and peeking into little, smoked-up houses along the way.

"Come in, come in," boomed a voice from inside a one-room house brimming with young adults. We gingerly stepped around a sea of backpacks. At the corner, two young men watched a kettle whistling merrily over a fire. Maggi hot cups were waiting.

After a hearty dinner by Pak Andy's family, we unrolled our sleeping bags and, safe from the howling winds outside, drifted to sleep.

The sound of a shofar jolted me awake. I looked at my watch. 4:00 am. "What on earth?" I heard hurried whispers from the SIBKL ladies across the room, and a few minutes later, several trudged down the stairs with headlights and rolled-up mats.

At breakfast, I discovered that the Gunung Murud Prayer Committee holds a prayer meeting from 4:00 to 6:00 am every morning, led by Pastor Jeffrey Agung. I resolved to attend the next day and asked God for grace.

Our group leader's voice broke into my thoughts. "Please go to Halleluyah Church soon to book your spot for the session (starting at 9:00 am) as it's filling up quickly." It was 7:00 am. At 7:45 am, we made our way to church. It was 80% full.

Pelayanan Doa opened with worship led by Cikgu Sang Sigar, unhurried and deep. We sang in Bahasa Malaysia and Lun Bawang, old songs with simple lyrics -- songs of adoration, love and hope in an Almighty God. Inexplicably, tears streamed from my cheeks when we sang a Lun Bawang tune penned by the late Pak Agung:

Samal, Samal, Samal kuan lemulun luk muneng iring Tuhan (Blessed, blessed, blessed are the people who walk with God)

One of the committee members, Pak Pudun Tadam, shared about this year's theme: Wisdom from God based on 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. This wisdom, he said, would reveal the mysteries of God to us: what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, or mind has even conceived. (v9-10)

He spoke from his heart. Since 2022, the committee had been asking the Lord to show His plans for the 40th year. They were burdened. With the passing of Ibu Maria (the last of the three core intercessors of the original revival) in June, an era had passed, and a new one was coming.

Who would carry the revival forward?

Silence. It was only now that they were beginning to understand the mystery the Lord had kept hidden for a time. As blustery winds howled outside and shook the walls of the church, Pak Pudun revealed the Lord's desire to bring to remembrance the original revival, filled with signs and wonders. The next era, he said, would be marked by more of the supernatural.

The committee's heart's cry was that the Lord would bring the right people to Gunung Murud in 2025, a new generation who would carry His heart for Sarawak and Malaysia.

This year, numbers had unexpectedly swelled -- around 2,000 people had registered according to park authorities. More than half of those



God is not
awakening hearts just
for the here and now.
Are we living in such
a way that future
generations are inspired
to love, obey and yearn
for His presence?
As a Steve Green
classic goes, "O may
all who come behind
us find us faithful,
may the fire of our
devotion light the way."



Dominic (in red) with friends.
His Spotlight overleaf.



This is me, Michelle!

who came were below 40 years old, people of many tribes and tongues. The Lord had answered their prayer.

As the conference progressed, I began to understand why the Lun Bawangs had succeeded in keeping the embers of revival alive for 40 years. Their hearts were unfettered by the cares of this world, their lives marked by generosity, sacrifice and a burning desire to walk closely with God.

Sessions were loosely structured, allowing room for God to move. Over the next few days, there would be no in-depth exposition or exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2, no tongue-twisting theological terms from the pulpit. Sermons were simple, convicting the heart. We prayed often for one another, worshipping always.

When the generator powering the church failed, we continued singing in perfect unison without missing a beat. For several minutes, I felt I'd caught a glimpse of heaven. Later, two people told the committee that they saw angels surrounding us at that moment.

After the first session, we stepped outside and saw people craning their necks to look upwards, phones pointed at the cloudy sky.

Above us, two circular rainbows, one clear and another faint, encircled a perfect sun. It was a double solar halo, a rare atmospheric phenomenon that appears when ice crystals in cirrus clouds refract the sun's rays.

Later, we found out that when the revival first began in 1985, the Lun Bawang witnessed a similar sight except that the circular rainbow around the sun was fractured, not complete as it was this year.

To the committee and intercessors, it was a sign. The Lord had given His assurance that 40 years later, He was still present, dwelling among His people and bringing to completion what He had promised.

I'm slowly learning that knowing God, and carrying His presence, cannot happen without humility, sacrifice and a heart of service.

At 3 am every morning, 50 volunteers would sweep the church, go house to house collecting our day's rubbish left outside, and wash the 12 toilets shared by 2,000 people. As Haleluyah Church could not fit everyone, those from Ba'kelalan braved the elements every session, sitting on wooden planks outside the church.

We also discovered later that the old church we slept in had taken three days to clean -- swift-lets had made it their home and left droppings everywhere. No one came to tell us, so we could not even thank them properly. It is no wonder the Lord trusted this community with so much, for they embrace **sacrifice as service unto the One they love.**

It's hard to put my Mount Murud experience into words. Nothing seems truly adequate. I did attend morning prayer in the end, and also made the second climb to the peak of the mountain. It was a spiritual journey, and one I am still processing weeks later.

What I know is that I spent four days on a holy mountain with thousands who love Jesus, and I felt God's tangible presence. As a believer who in recent years has been drawn more to a rational faith (but grew up with revival meetings and mighty displays of the Spirit's power), I was reminded of my early years in the faith.

I descended from Mount Murud with mixed feelings: joy, heaviness and determination. I had felt His presence tangibly and realised there is so much more of Him to know, through Scripture and in His presence. The Word and Spirit must go hand in hand.

There is also so much to do. God loves Malaysia. He desires to see us prosper as a nation, community and people. He loves people, you and me. He meets us where we are and invites us to experience His love, free us from the grip of sin, and be a part of His restorative plan for this broken world.

On Mount Murud, at an office desk, in a church or a kitchen, the invitation is the same. When we allow His Spirit to dwell in us, we begin to understand the deep things of God, and our lives are forever changed. ■

In a world that glorifies convenience and comfort, the call is to live differently, to think of ourselves less, do good and willingly sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel. In so doing, we glorify our Father in heaven.

SPOTLIGHT

Last July, I took a chance and joined the Mount Murud Prayer Summit with little expectation. As a next-gen Lun Bawang, I often heard stories of revival among my tribe, yet it felt distant because it is not my own experience. People would speak of it with great inspiration, but I longed for an encounter of my own.

On the mountain, my simple prayer was to see His face. And like Moses, I witnessed His hand at work and was overwhelmed by His presence. I realised that He has always been there, it is our desire and hunger for Him that enables us to truly perceive Him. From East to West Malaysia, the call is the same: to seek Him earnestly and set ourselves apart for He is Holy.

What impressed me deeply was the call to build more inter-generational churches in this nation. I noticed many young believers and sensed God's urging to stand between generations—to learn from the wisdom of the old while inspiring the young with fresh faith. Through this, I embraced a new identity, not bound to my tribe's history, but as a next-gen follower of Christ, called to encourage others to keep pressing forward.

"One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts." (Psalm 145:4)

DOMINIC CHAN, 32
OPERATIONS MANAGER



Shaping Generations: Why Christian Teachers Matter Now More Than Ever

BY MICHELLE CHUN

Teaching is one of the rare professions where lives can be shaped directly and deeply. Yet, fewer Malaysian Christians are reportedly choosing this path.

According to the Teachers' Christian Fellowship (TCF) Malaysia, a vacuum now exists in the leadership pipeline of Christian educators, particularly those prepared to assume leadership positions in schools, including mission schools.

There are 417 mission schools under the Ministry of Education. When a Christian principal retires, the School Board of Governors may nominate a candidate who has completed the NPQEL course. Increasingly, this has become difficult simply because there are not enough Christian teachers qualified for the role.

"A growing challenge is that many Christian teachers have now retired," said TCF General Secretary Indy Kannaiya. "We have 1,200 registered members under TCF, but 60% are over 60 years old and no longer in service."

Currently, only 478 of TCF's members are still teaching, and just 101 of them (21%) are below 40 years old.

"As believers, we often ask how we can make an impact, bless our communities and transform our nation. We hope that more young Malaysians will consider teaching as a profession and understand its significance in shaping a nation," Indy said.

The impact of one teacher is staggering. A teacher with four classes of 30 students, for instance, would have more than 22,000 direct contact hours with about 4,200 students over a 35-year career. That's 630 hours of impact a year, over six times more than a pastor preaching a weekly 2-hour sermon.

Indy was also quick to debunk the myth that teachers in Malaysia earn poorly. "A fresh graduate with a tertiary degree can earn a monthly salary of around RM3,000, and if you are sent to rural areas, you could be provided up to RM1,500 more in monthly allowances," she revealed.

It may not be a mountain of money, she acknowledged, but the privilege of shaping lives, sowing hope and building the nation outweighs the sacrifice of some luxuries.

For Ooi Vern Hau, now a TCF staff worker, the call to invest in Malaysia's next generation is personal.

The 33-year-old spent a decade in teaching, rising to become the principal of an established international primary school in KL before making the career shift to join TCF last year.

"When I was a teacher, I realised not every Christian teacher saw teaching as an opportunity to sow, build and impact lives. By joining this ministry, I hope to inspire more teachers on a larger scale to embrace the call," he shared.

For many Christian teachers in Malaysia, TCF has long been a companion and source of encouragement. Established in 1961 by a group of educators, its mission has remained the same for 64 years: to support and strengthen Christian teachers.

Today, TCF runs conferences, seminars and gatherings for teachers to exchange stories, build one another up and guard against burnout.

According to TCF administrator Rosalind Cheong, its members include educators from government, mission, private and international schools, as well as pre-schools and kindergartens.

"Anyone who is a Christian and educator is welcome to join TCF," said Rosalind, who joined the staff team in 2018 after volunteering for a TCF trip to Cambodia, where they trained local Christian teachers.

Vern Hau believes that if more believers answer the call to teach, future generations will be grounded in godly values and **Malaysia will flourish.**

"Our prayer is that more Christian parents will encourage their children to become teachers if they feel called, and for Christians to realise schools and colleges as places where they can make a real and lasting impact," he said quietly.

For the TCF team, finding purpose in any profession starts with a personal conviction, a strong relationship with Jesus and the support of a community like TCF.

It is part of our duty as believers not just to talk about or pray for, but contribute to a godly nation. If we desire to see righteousness, justice and mercy in Malaysia, what are we doing about it?

"To Christian teachers, serving or aspiring, remember that you are not alone. Remember the call. Be encouraged that God is raising up believers across professions, including teaching, with a renewed love for Malaysia," Vern Hau charged.

Next to him, Indy and Rosalind nodded in agreement.

"Impacting Lives, Changing Futures. That's TCF's motto and one we truly believe in. As followers of Christ, we are called to bring His love wherever we go -- and that includes the classroom," Indy finished. ■

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT TCF MALAYSIA OR SUPPORT ITS MINISTRY, VISIT WWW.TCFMALAYSIA.ORG



"Keep Getting Closer to Me": The Words That Changed John Joel's Life

BY JOHN JOEL

From a young age, I've known Jesus but not deeply. As a Klang boy, I would follow my parents to church every week, serve in the media ministry, attend Royal Rangers and even help to organise special events.

Though I looked faithful on the outside, my walk with God had become routine. By the time college began, that lack of depth caught up with me, and the world's pull grew stronger.

I decided to toe the line between Christ and the world, believing I needed to find a 'balance'. As the months rolled by, I began to attend church less and spend more time with friends outside.

Alcohol, partying and smoking became part of my life, and for a season, I floated on the highs of the world. Yet, I felt empty inside. I lived in fear of being looked down upon and did not have the confidence to stand up to anyone. This went on for five years.

The one thing that kept me alive through the turbulent years of my youth was the constant prayers of my parents, Velankani and Flora. One day, I attended a special prayer meeting held in my church.

A South African minister prayed for me and prophesied that I was supposed to be standing on the stage, leading the congregation in worship.

That night, I repented before the Lord. I was 24. I committed to attending church regularly, and eventually I joined a youth cell.

The first time I went to a cell group, none of my childhood friends spoke to me except for Bro. Nielsen. If he had not reached out to me that day, I would have returned to my old life. Today, he is my best friend and partner in ministry.

Three months after my return to church, my father went home to be with the Lord. It devastated me. Of his three sons, I had been the closest to him, and during my wayward years, he never gave up on me. His steadfast faith and unwavering prayers became the very example that pushed me to hold on to God even more after his passing.

As my faith grew stronger, I began to lead worship in church and was an upcoming youth leader. However, I had not fully repented. I could not give up smoking and drinking.

On 3 February 2022, God spoke to me through a vision. He told me to completely turn from my old ways and move closer to Him. Deep inside, I felt as though it was my last chance to choose Jesus, a final invitation before I lost myself completely to the world.

Convicted, I cut myself off from nearly everything, except work and church. For six months, I turned down social outings and distanced myself from friends. It was the lowest, hardest point of my life. I often cried out to God, desperate for direction. Each time, His reply was simple:

"Keep getting closer to Me."

That was all He said. No details, no shortcuts. Just that. I didn't know how to do it, but my youth leader at the time, Bro. Sarath walked with me step by step.

The hardest part of the journey was seeking forgiveness from those I had wronged. It took me one year to clear my "ledger," but once I made things right before God, I began to experience His blessing in my life, my work, and my ministry.

I also attended an Alpha course. The conversations there deeply impacted me and strengthened my faith. My relationship with Pr. Abraham, my church's Head of the Tamil Department, also improved with time. With God's help, we partnered together to grow the youth ministry.

When I first stepped up to lead our church's Tamil youth ministry, fewer than 10 youths were attending regularly, even though our church had more than 100 young people.

In 2023, we organised our first youth camp and had 20 sign-ups, and at the time, I thought that was amazing. What began small turned into steady, God-given growth.





After camp, we made it a point to walk with the youths consistently, focusing on authenticity and trust. Slowly but surely, week by week, the numbers began to rise.

At this year's youth camp, 30 youths and 10 young adults turned up - the highest we've had in recent years.

I felt strongly that the focus of our camp had to be this question: "Who is Jesus to you?" Because if my youth truly know who Jesus is, then I have nothing to worry about. Many of today's youth are slaves to technology, shaped by what they consume on social media.

Leading a youth ministry isn't easy. There have been seasons when I was the only active leader. The sacrifices are real, but the reward of seeing lives transformed in Christ is greater.

Even though the numbers may still seem small, the youths are dedicated, enthusiastic, and now serving not only in the youth ministry but also in the main service. God has been so gracious in giving us growth, yet I know there's still much more to be done.

Looking back, the ones who never gave up on me have been the youths themselves. They keep showing up every week, allowing me to lead them and speak into their lives. It has been a humbling, enriching journey to walk with Malaysia's next generation. We must meet them at their level and be the bridge that connects them to Jesus.

Seeing my youth encourages me every day. I believe they will be the future backbone of the Church, because their faith keeps growing.

To any youth reading this, hold onto Jesus. He will never let you go. The easiest choice you can make in life is to love Jesus, because He has never stopped loving you. Once you know who He really is, you will live in a different atmosphere. ■



From Distant Dad to Loving Dad – Rev. Ting Diu Kiong on Faith, Fatherhood and Lessons from the Heavenly Father

BY YEE MAY LEONG

When people think of Rev. Ting Diu Kiong from Sibu, Sarawak, they may recall one of his many past or present identities: a timber businessman in Indonesia, a Methodist pastor, a missionary in Africa, or the superintendent of Methodist Victory Home, a Christian rehabilitation centre.

But in the hearts of his five children, Rev. Ting is first and foremost their beloved father, only then the man of many roles.

A DISTANT FATHER

In the 1970s, after marrying Madam Tang Ing Kiew, Rev. Ting spent 15 years in what could be called a “long-distance marriage.”

To support his family, he worked deep in the jungles of Indonesia’s timber camps and only returned to Sibu occasionally. During his children’s early years, he was not only absent but also strict.

“Back then, I believed that a strict father raises obedient children. I rarely spoke words of encouragement, and I didn’t know how to praise them.”

Like many fathers, he had no preparation for fatherhood, let alone for being a good one. As a young man raising two sons and three daughters, Rev. Ting, though already a Christian, still carried

a traditional patriarchal mindset that left unintended emotional wounds.

HONEST LETTERS AND PAINFUL REALISATIONS

In 2023, at the age of 75, Rev. Ting published *My Lifelong Affairs Are in Your Hands*. Beyond telling his life story, the book includes heartfelt letters from his children, candidly expressing how they viewed their father.

In the final chapter, *A Father Who Didn’t Know How to Be a Father*, he reflects on their honesty.

“After reading their ‘bitter yet honest’ words, I was struck with the painful realisation that I had been a terrible father. I always thought that enduring hardship to earn a living so my children could have a better life and education was enough. A few spankings or threats? I thought those were nothing. But I never realised that those ‘insignificant’ actions left permanent scars in their lives.”

RETURNING HOME AND CHANGING COURSE

In 1991, at the age of 44, Rev. Ting left his career behind and returned to Sibu to study theology, preparing for full-time ministry. By

then, his eldest son had already graduated from high school.

It was in seminary that his views on parenting began to shift.

"I read a book titled *The Family and I* and knew I needed to change." Convicted by the Holy Spirit, he apologised to each of his children, admitting his mistakes and asking for forgiveness.

"For a strict father to admit fault before his children was no easy task," he recalled with a chuckle.

"It took a lot of courage, after all, pride matters! But I submitted to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, there would always be a missing piece in my children's hearts. And Jesus came to tear down the walls between people."

Through the Spirit's work, healing and reconciliation took place within the family. Over time, Rev. Ting grew into a gentler, more affirming father who had learned to see and encourage the good in his children.

PERSONAL LESSONS THAT LED TO FAMILY MINISTRY

This personal transformation awakened Rev. Ting to the importance of family ministry. After graduating from seminary and beginning to pastor a church, he and his wife initiated family-focused programs.

"Back then, churches didn't have parenting or marriage courses, we had to feel our way forward."

In 2013, the couple began serving at Methodist Victory Home, a gospel-based drug rehabilitation centre. By 2019, they even moved in to live among the residents, teaching and guiding them through biblical principles.

"My eldest son once returned from the U.S. and told the men at the centre, 'Treasure this - my dad has spent more time with you than he ever did with me.'"

A desire to change requires courage to face our inadequacies and acknowledge that we cannot do it on our own. It is God's divine power that gives us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), that empowers us to change.

In full-time ministry, the struggle to balance family and other responsibilities is very real. We can honour our pastors by ensuring they are cared for, loving their families and giving them space to rest and recharge.

Since its beginning, the centre has helped more than 700 individuals break free from addiction and become new creations in Christ. Rev. Ting and his wife have become spiritual parents to many of them.

Though he missed much of his own children's childhood, the ministry gave him a second chance at fatherhood.

"We used to think that obedient, well-behaved kids were the good ones. Now we realise, it's the troubled kids who need the most love and presence."

FATHERHOOD AND MINISTRY MUST GO HAND-IN-HAND

Rev. Ting also believes young pastors must integrate family and church life early in their ministry.

"As pastors, we need to ask God for wisdom on how to keep our family and church connected. Our children should be an active part of the church and serve; if they don't, they will be drawn to the world," he said, adding that pastors must also ensure the church is a safe space for their children to make mistakes and grow in faith.

Currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree with a focus on family ministry at Malaysia Bible Seminary, Rev. Ting holds one great hope: that God would bless his children with health, harmony, and godliness, generation after generation, so they may serve Him faithfully.

And to his spiritual children, he leaves this encouragement:

"Your transformation is our greatest joy. Stay away from drugs, build a strong life, and after receiving blessings, go and be a blessing to others who are lost." ■

"Without God, Life Has No Purpose" - Sooky Ong of Prince of Pins on Getting Lost in the World and Being Found in Jesus

BY MICHELLE CHUN



Ong Sook Yee cannot pinpoint exactly when she got lost. "It was a gradual feeling that grew over time, and one day I woke up not knowing what I was doing on this earth. I didn't know why I existed," she says.

Sook Yee, who also goes by Sooky, grew up in a staunch Buddhist family, but in her own words, believed that there was a God somewhere out there.

In 2010, she moved to Melbourne to pursue her undergraduate studies. There, she fell into depression. It was a season of emptiness. "I was just living day to day, soulless and without a purpose," she says gravely.

After graduation, she returned to Malaysia still in a fog. The days went by without start or end until someone invited her to church.

Back then, Sooky remembers, she had a fear of "Jesus", sentiments shaped by past interactions with Christian relatives that were not pleasant.

When she stepped into church, however, she remembers thinking, "This feels like home." It was a strange, unnerving feeling; she did not know what it meant.

"I was still depressed and done with life. Money wasn't an issue; I had friends and work was going well, but the void in me was screaming for purpose. It seemed like I had everything, but felt like I had nothing. One day in 2016, my depression peaked and I decided to end my life," she said.

One night, as she lay in bed, overwhelmed by thoughts of ending her life, God met Sooky.

A strange sensation cocooned her, followed by an audible voice. "Without God, life has no purpose." As the six words sank in, Sooky felt a huge weight lift off.

"I felt I was set free in that very moment, and immediately gave my life to God, right there on my bed. I cannot explain why I did what I did; I only know I had a supernatural encounter," she says simply.

Transformed, Sooky developed an insatiable hunger for God. She was desperate to know this Almighty One who had rescued her from herself.

Does Sooky's statement sound familiar? Perhaps you've felt the same way at some point in life. When we ask the 'whys', we inevitably land on the question of purpose. To know our purpose empowers us to keep going, stay hopeful, and find true joy.

*



She threw herself into studying God's Word, attending church and serving. It was also a time of reordering as God removed old hurts and wrong beliefs.

However, she held off on telling her father of her conversion, worried about how he might react.

As Chinese New Year neared, Sooky knew she could wait no longer, as she did not want to participate in the Buddhist rites.

"When I broke the news, his question was: Of all religions, why Christianity? Why Jesus?" The only thing I could say was, "Don't you want your daughter to be happier than she was before? I'm so much happier now."

Her father listened in silence, but the next day, he told her that he accepted the decision.

A year later, the company she was working for downsized and Sooky found herself at a divine crossroads: look for another job or fulfil her dream of becoming an entrepreneur.

"I'd always wanted to start a business, but my dad (a businessman!) was never keen. He felt salaried jobs offered less stress

and more stability, so he turned down every business plan I had," she grinned.

However, when she pitched a faith-based business selling enamel pins, her father listened in silence at first and then said, "Not bad, your idea."

Her mother then told Sooky that all of the ang pow (red packets) she had received as a child had been saved in a fixed deposit account, and could be used as capital. In November 2017, Sooky started Prince of Pins, a play on words for her Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

To date, Prince of Pins has sold hundreds of thousands of pins and other products to clients in Malaysia, Singapore and other nations. Each design is crafted with prayer and purpose, filled with biblical truth and the desire to bring Him glory.

God has also continued to reveal His plan as she obeys step by step. In 2020, she married the love of her life, Joel, with whom she runs Prince of Pins and Curatebypop, a custom gifts outfit. "Marriage is 10/10," she said with a laugh.

Last March, they also co-founded AWAN, a home living brand selling bamboo bedsheets.

"Ever since I gave my life to God, life hasn't been the same year to year. He peels away layer by layer, from my dependence on self to the need to perform, and even my struggle with wanting to please others," she mullied.

God has been the bedrock of Sooky's life. His love pulled her from the abyss of death, planting her feet on solid ground. His Word has become her life's blueprint, her go-to manual when seeking wisdom for life's decisions.

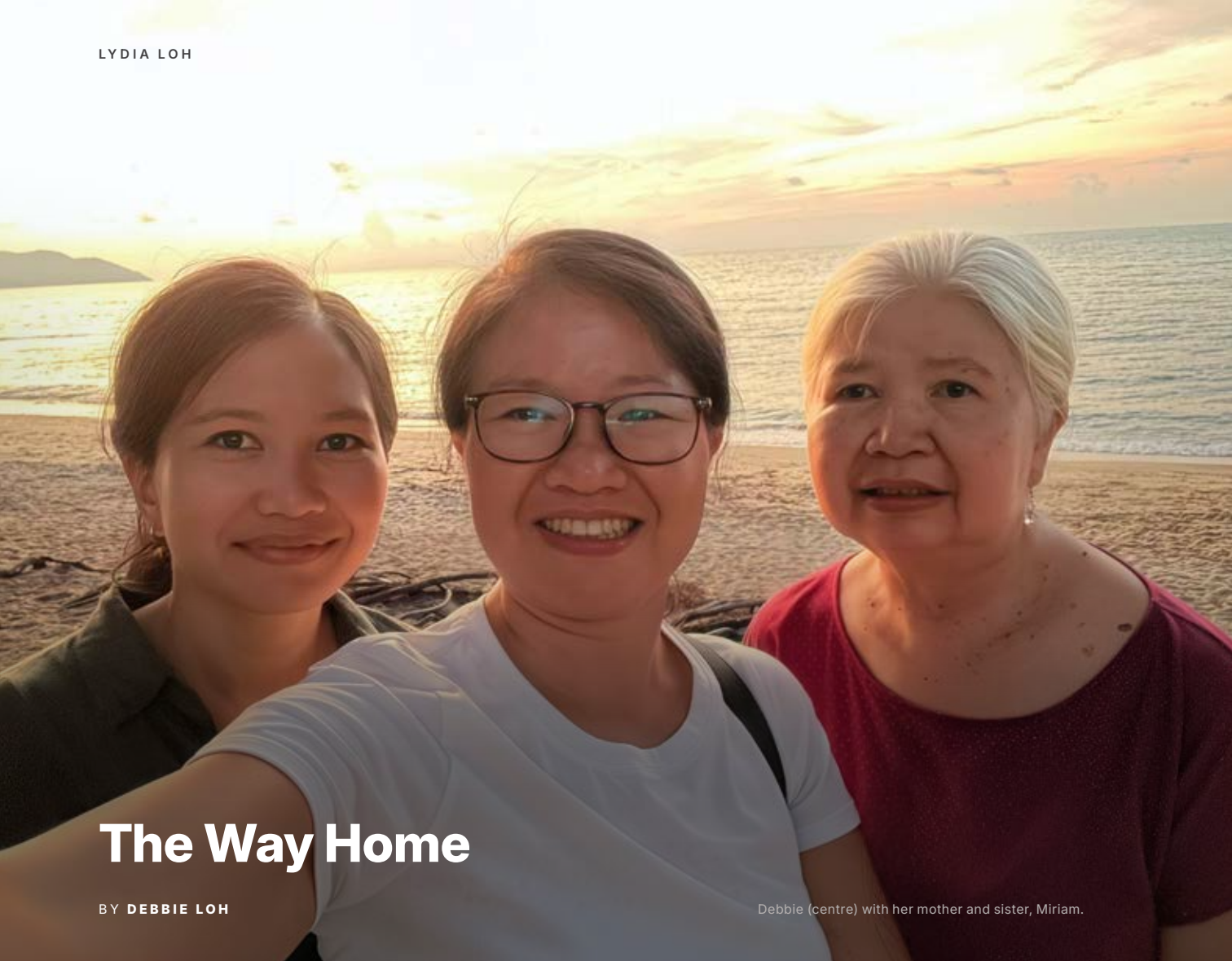
More recently, the Lord has been impressing upon Sooky's heart to reclaim the social media space. "Whenever I feel a prompting from the Lord, I piece it into a devotional post. Social media is messy with lots of unnecessary content out there.

If we're not advancing, we're losing ground. It's time for us to claim the ground and introduce God's love to others," she said.

For Sooky, the truth remains the same as the night she first heard God's voice: without Him, life has no purpose, and with Him, it has meaning beyond measure. ■

As Christians, we are called to set the tone in not just the way we live, but the conversations we hold. Whether on social media or over coffee, may our speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt (Col 4:6) and good for building up (Eph 4:29).





The Way Home

BY DEBBIE LOH

Debbie (centre) with her mother and sister, Miriam.

"Your mum was such a faithful servant of God, how could she get cancer?" a friend asked when my mother was diagnosed in February 2022.

For the last three-and-a-half years of her life, Mum lived with Stage 4 lung cancer. During this time, I never heard her ask that question of herself. She died on 19 May 2025, age 83, not of the disease but from stroke complications.

Although it would be incomplete to remember a person based on the last few years of life alone, I believe the final days show the fruit of one's life experiences and relationship with God. If we rely on years of ministry and service to God as a bargaining chip against terminal illness or other hardship, we need to rethink who God is to us.

Lydia Kartika Kristanto, known to many as just Lydia or Mrs Loh, was born Tan Giok Lan in Semarang, Java Tengah, Indonesia, in 1942. Her father, Tan Joe Tak, raised her and her younger brother singlehandedly.

The loss of her mother at a young age, as well as the turbulent times in Indonesia then, were important forces that shaped her. They set her off on an inner journey to find the mother's love missing from her life, discovered later, only when she became a Christian.

By mum's own accounts and from her memoir, *Nine Jewels*, she was fashionable and even owned several pairs of shoes to match her different coloured outfits.

Quiet, gentle, perhaps even timid, her memoir records a shift in priorities and values after she became a Christian at 23. This happened on Christmas Day in 1965, the year of Indonesia's military coup that ushered in Suharto's presidency.

Her new faith saw her buying fewer shoes, so much so that her father noticed. Three years later, at age 26, she left home and her father's glass-cutting business, which she was expected to take over, to Singapore for ministry training at the Discipleship Training Centre (DTC).

By then, she had earned a Bachelor in Education in English Language from Universitas Sanarta Dharma in Yogyakarta. As with all Chinese in Indonesia then, she had also changed her legal name on government orders amid anti-communist fervour. She could never use Tan Giok Lan for official purposes again.

At DTC, she met my dad, Loh Soon Choy, four years her senior. They married in 1971, in Singapore, launching 49 years of marriage and ministry together, which ended with my father's death from metastatic prostate cancer in November 2020.

Influence is not always loud. Some of us are called to the stage, others to the corners of the room. No matter where God places us, we are called to influence, impact and bless those around us.

Mum was a ministry leader and Bible teacher in her own right, not from the front nor before large crowds, but **on the sidelines and with smaller groups**. Friends remarked how Rev. Loh would finish her sentences for her and dominate a conversation while she sat quietly next to him.

Little did they know the weight of the decisions and tasks she bore within our family as finance minister, home affairs minister and health minister.

Before my sister Miriam was born (ten years after me), Mum juggled looking after me and participating in the now-defunct Christian Women's Convention, an inter-denominational gathering that held regular seminars in the 1980s and 1990s.

During this period, she also worked with the Bible Society of Malaysia on projects. A translation project, which began sometime in the mid-1980s, stands out among my childhood memories. I watched mum stuff bundles of translation papers between cupboards and the wall to hide them. "Why?" I asked. "In case the police come to our house," she replied matter-of-factly.

It was the time of Operasi Lalang in 1987, when the government clamped down on dissent, arrested over 100 people and shut three newspapers. For mum, it brought back childhood memories of soldiers doing house-to-house checks for communists. In the 1990s, she returned to similar work, helping to refine and improve earlier translation efforts.

I think of Mum as "cautiously adventurous". She appeared to be a meek and careful housewife, overthinking certain matters to the point of anxiety. Yet she took on risky ventures and tasks that pushed her out of her comfort zone, such as preaching and teaching.

She brought this attitude into life with cancer. The weight of the disease disheartened her appetite for travel and heightened her fears about the long journey to visit Miriam's family in Belize. But she did it anyway, focusing on the time she would get to spend with her grandchildren there.

The effects of treatment depleted her energy, and combined with other age-related issues such as hearing loss and poor eyesight, diminished the appeal of going for Bible studies with her ladies' group and even to Sunday worship. She grew sad that she could no longer enjoy reading comfortably or listen to music. There were days of silence, when she quietly mourned her reduced physical abilities and lamented that she "was no longer who [she] was before".

Mum moved in to live with my husband and me from 2023 until her passing. I saw her wrestle with internal struggles, but knew she had overcome them for that moment when she would enthusiastically declare she wanted to go to Sunday service, or join in an outing.

"Even if I can't hear the sermon clearly or get much out of it, it is good for me to see my friends and for them to see me," she said. This, I learnt, is the ministry of being present.

Another pivotal moment earlier in her life was her coming to terms with her father's sudden death from a hit-and-run accident. This was a personal revelation about "leaning on Jesus" instead of on her father, who had been the pillar of her life.

The image of everlasting arms holding her was one that I believe stayed with her for the rest of her life, as she spoke often of such arms lifting her up whenever she felt down.

Some reading this may recall her testimony shared in church and with a few groups, that in her shocked state upon hearing of her Stage 4 diagnosis, the image that came to her mind was of a shining man standing on a road ahead of her. Turning to face her, he stretches out his hand and says, "Come, I will walk with you".

Mum took that hand which held hers till her return Home. In turn, she brought into the lives of others lessons of grace, peace and true identity; of only and forever being a child of God even when you are no longer physically "useful", and when all other roles have ceased.

Back then, I had no answer to my friend's question posed at the beginning of this article. To say that illness was simply a part of living in a fallen world is not satisfactory. Why are some afflicted and others not?

After accompanying my mum in her final years, this is my conclusion: There are many roads Home. The pain of illness is the way for some, like my mum, and dad, too. To those who are given this road, it is also their final testimony, their last opportunity to show the rest of us what faithfulness means.

Mum, and Pa, thank you for your examples. See you again on that beautiful shore. ■

DEBBIE LOH IS THE ELDER DAUGHTER OF THE LATE REV. LOH SOON CHOY AND LYDIA LOH. REV. LOH SERVED IN ASIAN BEACON AS AN EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD (1989 TO 1992) AND AS AN ADVISOR UNTIL HIS PASSING IN 2020.

* On this side of eternity, we may face abandonment, betrayal and loss. When all we know or love is stripped away, we realise as Debbie did, that Jesus is the only one we can lean on, who will never leave us nor forsake us.

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