

ISSUE #2

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To be an Andrew

Storms of Life

The Gift of Serving

A Season of Refreshment

Hope in Action

When Nature Calls –

Reflections from the

Cannonball Tree

SEASONS OF LIFE

Heaven Bound



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HEAVEN BOUND JOURNEY

“... but our journey towards eternity is not without its challenges.”



In my younger days, I enjoyed reading fantasy novels. The elements that make up a fantasy - an epic quest, a chosen one, special powers, overcoming of obstacle - all made for a gripping read, and the accomplishing of a mission brought me a real sense of satisfaction.

To some extent, our lives here on earth as Christians mirror that genre: we, the Chosen people, know well our ultimate quest, but our journey towards eternity is not without its challenges.

In this issue of *Seasons of Life*, we explore what this journey means and holds for everyday folks. First, in the Cover Story, the writer takes a closer look at what the Bible says about heaven, prompting us to consider whether we are indeed readying ourselves for it in our lives today.

Then, there are articles that give snapshots of lives lived with eternity in mind: different individuals share about their quests to impact society, be it through organising prayer

gatherings in school, reaching out to the elderly or migrant workers, going for overseas missions, serving in church, or simply seizing divine opportunities in day-to-day moments to present Christ to others. With raw honesty, one youth shares about a major health challenge that he faces; his struggle to make sense of it and continue keeping the faith.

For those further along in this journey, there are times when a pause is necessary, and different individuals recount their experiences going back to school to keep growing and be equipped. From the Word, the writer examines what makes for a purposeful life by answering three essential questions.

Wherever you are in your heavenward journey, we hope you find encouragement in this issue to press on towards that eventual and glorious day of meeting Him face to face!

Yeo Hem Joo

On behalf of the Editorial team

BY MICHAEL TAN

∴

**Heaven is a wonderful place,
Filled with glory and grace
I want to see my Saviour's face
Heaven is a wonderful,
Heaven is a wonderful,
Heaven is a wonderful place! ¹**

THINKIN' HEAVEN

My earliest recollection of a place called heaven predates my Christian life of four decades. In my early primary school days, a Christian teacher taught us this cheerful and catchy tune during music lesson. While I am not sure if I fully understood what I was singing, this tune continues to ring in my ears and heart all these years.

How much thought do we give to the subject of heaven? My struggle with writing this article (much to the anguish of our editorial coordinator) was perhaps the lack of personal familiarity with the subject – ironic for one who has spent years in active church life and Christian service. While I am certainly not proud of it, this has prompted a considerable amount of soul searching.

The Christian faith is premised on the belief in life after death and more importantly, that salvation through Jesus Christ means eternity with God in heaven. And if we seriously consider the bible's perspective of life as brief and fleeting – like grass, here today and gone tomorrow (Isaiah 40:6-8) – then heaven should really feature more in our thoughts and lives.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes about seeking and setting our minds on the things that are above (3:1-4). How much do we really do that?

Biblical glimpses of Heaven

When we look to the bible for insights into heaven, we must remember that often the terms and allegories used cannot be taken literally. It would also

be quite impossible to be exhaustive, so a summary will have to do².

1. Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for us (John 14:2-3). The term used for the place Jesus is preparing for us has sometimes been translated as “mansions”, but the important thing is that Jesus will be bringing us to be where He is.
2. We will be in the vast company of angels and fellow believers, before God, the Judge of all (Heb 12:22-23). Those who are not in Christ will be eternally parted from me; and those who are, eternally with me. And none of us can escape judgement, before God who is the Judge of all.
3. Heaven revolves around God (Rev 7:9-10; 22:4-5). God is absolutely central and transcendent in heaven, providing light so brilliant that no other light is needed. Our only appropriate response is worship.
4. Day and night is spent serving God, our Great Shepherd and Comforter (Rev 7:15-17). God dwells in our midst, shepherding us beside living fountains and wiping our every tear. In heaven there is no more hunger or thirst, while we serve Him day and night.
5. There will be majestic roars of lightning, noises, thunder, an earthquake and great hail (Rev 11:19) I imagine this as the crescendo from a full orchestra, like the coming

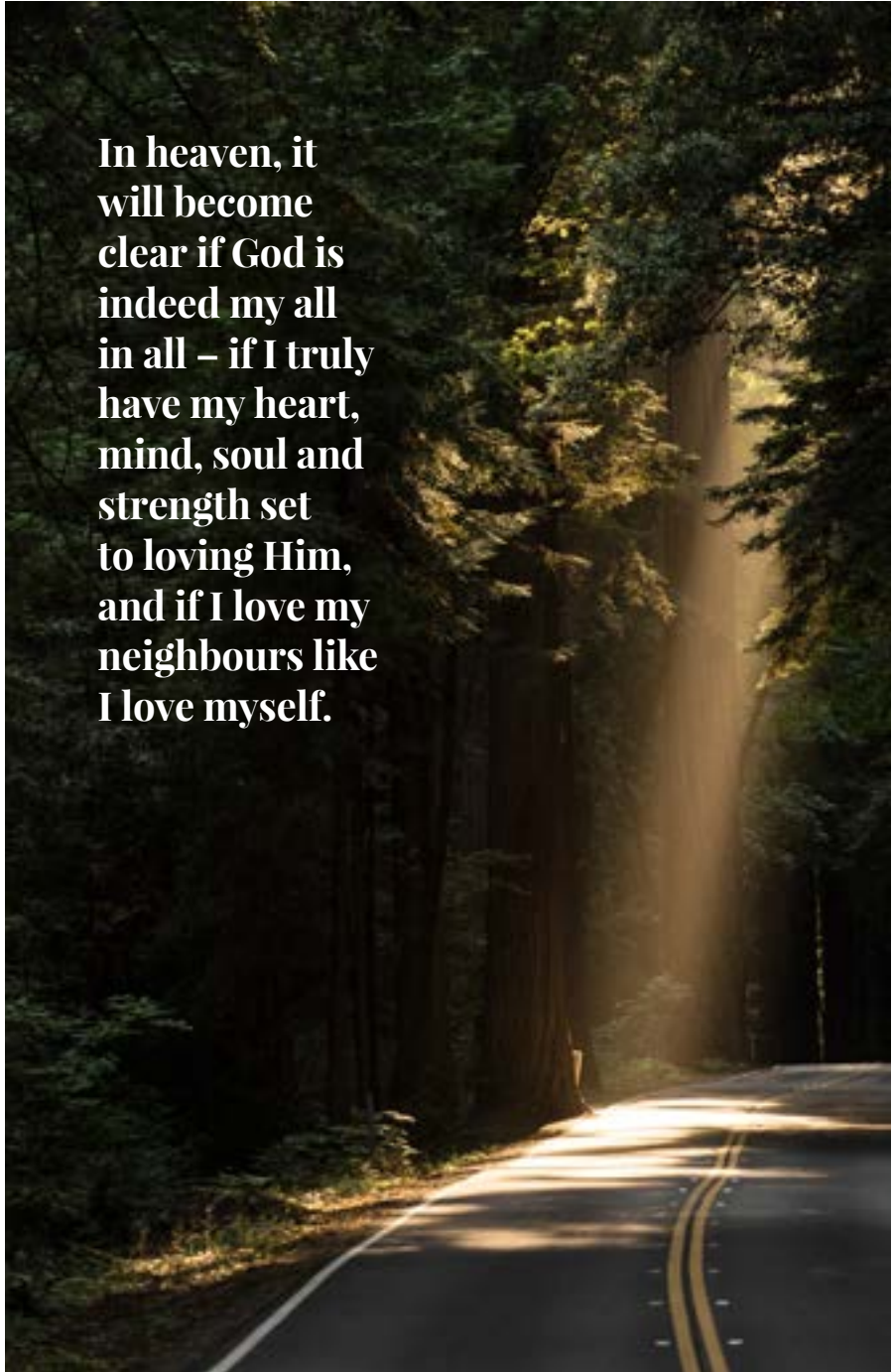
together of all the sounds of nature inspiring awe, wonder and a measure of fear of the Almighty God.

6. We are dressed in pure linen, led by the One whose name is The Word of God (Rev 19:11-14). Jesus, the Word of God, reigns in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords, and leads us, clothed in white linen, riding with Him.
7. Heaven and the new Jerusalem resplendent with precious stones and metals (Rev 21:9-11; 21:21). Heaven will be a spectacle of light and sound, bathed in all manner of precious stones and metals. In other words, its beauty will be unparalleled.
8. No more pain and suffering (Rev 22:2-3). The Tree of Life and its fruit will feature prominently in heaven. All the sickness and pain that plagues fallen mankind will be dispelled.

Now the above knowledge of heaven may be reassuring or consoling for many of us. But do we fully grasp the implications of our present life this side of eternity in the light of the life hereafter?

Heaven to me?

“For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but



**In heaven, it
will become
clear if God is
indeed my all
in all – if I truly
have my heart,
mind, soul and
strength set
to loving Him,
and if I love my
neighbours like
I love myself.**



whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:15-17)

The Apostle John minces no words in the verses above, pitting the lure of the world against the accomplishment of the Father’s will. While hard words, these were not quite his own – he was merely stating the teachings of Jesus, who time and again warned of how seeking and serving God’s will needs to be our surpassing quest and prayer (the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:9-13) here on earth. No man can serve two masters! (Matt 6:24)

As I reflect on heaven and what it means to me while I am here on earth, I find myself dealing with some rather troubling thoughts:

1. God is pre-eminent and it will be unmistakable in heaven that He

is. In this world, we might be blind to God’s pre-eminence, choose to be ignorant, or simply be blatantly disobedient or blasé about it. But there can be none of that in heaven. Will I be quite at home or ill at ease?

2. Where are my treasures? Matthew 6 tells us that there are only two types of treasure – those laid up on earth that will be destroyed by rust or moth or stolen by thieves, and those laid up in heaven untouched by these. I wonder how my heavenly bank account looks like. If I am as concerned about that as I have been with my earthly ones, I am sure I would have fared better.

3. How does worship feature in my life? There will be plenty of worship in heaven. In fact, it is going to be unceasing and eternal, the sum of all my earthly understanding and

“ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21)

practice of worship and much, much more. Will I be enjoying worshipping and enjoying God?

4. How am I keeping the great commandments? Heaven is going to be reminding me a lot about the two great commandments (Matt 22:34-40). In heaven, it will become clear if God is indeed my all in all – if I truly have my heart, mind, soul and strength set to loving Him, and if I love my neighbours like I love myself. Will that be a welcome transition or an abrupt shock when I reach heaven?

I guess a litmus test as to whether I harbour right thoughts of heaven can be as simple as asking myself if I long to be in heaven with Jesus (Phil 1:21 – “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain”), whether I see my earthly life as a preparation for eternity ahead, whether my hopes are placed in things seen or unseen, and finally, if there is true transformation from the old man to the new.

Longing, preparing, hoping, transforming – catchwords of a life thinking of heaven and readying for heaven.

1 © Words and music by O.A. Lambert. Copyright 1958, 1964 SACRED SONGS (a div. of WORD INC.)

2 The following list is adapted from “10 Beautiful Descriptions of Heaven from the Bible” by Jennifer Waddle (<https://www.crosswalk.com/slideshows/10-beautiful-descriptions-of-heaven-from-the-bible.html>).



TO BE AN ANDREW

BY YEO HEM JOO

∴

The Celebration of Hope (COH) events have come and gone. I wonder if this milestone in local church history has impacted individual believers in any way. Has it deepened a hunger and thirst in us to see more and more people come into the saving grace of God? Has it expanded our minds to be more aware of how evangelism can be more intentional and effective in our daily life? Or has nothing much changed? Did some of us inwardly heave a sigh of relief that a major project had been ‘successfully accomplished’ and we could return to our routine of ‘business as usual’?

Continuing the momentum

Looking back, I sensed mounting anticipation as the COH rallies drew closer over the months. It was a cause for churches to unite and cooperate in many areas. It was also an exercise of faith for many of us to share the good news more actively, invite pre-believers to the events, as well as volunteer time and energy to serve in various capacities. Similar to many people who attended the Andrew Initiative Evangelism Training aimed at equipping and preparing us for COH, I found it to be immensely engaging and enlightening. Truly, all of us can be an Andrew – someone who shares his or her faith naturally and effectively. In fact, among the many things that struck me, one major takeaway was learning how to share my own salvation testimony in a way that makes it more focused and relevant. Since then, I have looked harder around me for opportunities to share Christ in my weekly activities

and to be more intentional in reaching out to pre-believing family members and friends. I have also found it helpful to get inspiration from others who have more experience in sharing the gospel, like a friend whom I followed to Chinatown to speak to and pray for elderly folk in the area.

Opportunities are everywhere

Likewise, there are others who have experienced a gathering momentum or newfound excitement to share Christ with people wherever the chance presents itself. Kelvin Mok, a church staff, shared that last December’s Power & Love Conference opened his eyes to better understand how to share Christ wherever he is and in whatever he does.

“In the past, I thought I must have a special sensing, a word of knowledge before sharing with someone.... Now it is as simple as starting a conversation with someone and being open to see where it leads,” he says. To him, the

key is to be faithful to what we have been called to do and shine as a light to the world. He believes that in our daily walk with Christ, there is always something applicable to share with anyone, even if it is a stranger seated next to us on a bus or across us at a food court.

Kelvin had one such encounter a few months ago at the National University Hospital (NUH) food court. “I was having lunch at an NUH food court after visiting someone and sharing a table with two strangers. One was a volunteer who brought an elderly woman for her regular medical appointment. I started talking with the younger person about volunteer work and sharing about Project Spring Winter. I also chatted with the elderly lady. At the end, I asked if I could pray for her. She was open and I prayed for her for healing,” he says. The ease with which this conversation took place has encouraged Kelvin to continue to minister to others when opportunities present themselves.

God-directed encounters

Quek Li Huan, another church staff, says that her circle of pre-believing friends has become increasingly smaller over the years. However, COH has encouraged her to open her eyes and see people around her through the Lord’s eyes. “So many people are in need of grace and mercy they aren’t

even aware is readily available. The Andrew Initiative drove home the point: It’s urgent. I’m trained. I can reach out and God will do the rest.”

She has this experience to share: “I turned up for a medical scan only to find the machine was under repair. They redirected me to another clinic. During the scan, the technician asked me if I had eczema. I said ‘yes, for decades.’ She proceeded to tell me, through her tears, the story of her young son whose eczema was so bad he could no longer continue Primary One because of the itch and disfigurement. As she cried, I asked for permission to pray for her, which she accepted. The following week she brought her son to our Gospel and Healing Service to be prayed for. That very week he could resume his sleep.

Two weeks later, he was back in school – praise the Lord! Although he still struggles with it now, he is in a better place than before. I hope to invite her to Alpha this year.”

On another occasion while queuing for chicken rice at a hawker centre, Li Huan, with her limited Mandarin, had the opportunity to share with an elderly woman what Christianity is about. She still keeps the woman in prayer.

Witnessing as a lifestyle

A sermon James Cheong, a full-time national serviceman (NSF), heard last



year changed his perspective about evangelism. According to the preacher, successful evangelism includes getting a person one step closer to Christ. Prior to that, James got discouraged easily as he thought that he had to make converts, yet he has seen how aggressive peddling of the gospel pushes people away from instead of drawing them to Christ. Now, he feels encouraged to share his faith with many of his pre-believing friends and to help them understand it better. For him, an important aspect of reaching out is to genuinely care about the person you share the gospel with. This means investing time and energy to build relationships, an effort that has paid off, he says. One of his former classmates, a staunch atheist who used to challenge him with difficult existential questions, accepted his invitation to attend COH as they have become good friends over

the years. Despite not coming to Christ at that event, James was able to pray for him and his friend accepted a copy of the Bible given out at COH. Now, James has opportunities to share about Christ with his fellow NSF's and pray with them, as they see that there is something different about him.

Apostle Paul’s example

These testimonies are not earth-shattering, but they demonstrate what it means to live daily as a witness for Christ. Perhaps for some of us, there are still hindrances such as fear of rejection, of being challenged, of offending others and feelings of inadequacy that stop us from reaching out. However, the joy of seeing someone saved into the Kingdom of God should supersede them. Furthermore, Jesus did not ask us to do this task alone but to partner Him and be empowered by the Holy Spirit.



Finally, I find it helpful to consider Paul's exhortation:

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison — that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.' (Colossians 4:2-6)

Though in prison, Paul remained unwavering in his passion to share the gospel. He asked for prayers – not for deliverance from his difficult circumstances – but for an open door for his message and that it will be clear! May we, who enjoy religious freedom here in our country, make wonderful use of opportunities to present Christ to others through the way we speak and the way we live our lives.

¹ The training handbook is available for download at <https://celebrationofhope.sg/training-resources/>

STORMS OF LIFE



The storm rages on and the wind grows louder as the waves pound the already soaked wood. Flashes of lightning break the pitch blackness, casting eerie shadows, while the claps of thunder compete with the roar of the merciless waves. Chaos erupts as the crew scrambles about in vain, adjusting the sails and securing loose items, while trying to regain their balance. I am wet, cold and dead afraid as I shout for help, to no avail. Gasping for air, I cling desperately to anything I can hold on to. I know that I am on the brink of death and all I can do is call out to God for help and pray and pray and pray in my heart.

Suddenly, a figure appears in the distance. I scream in terror as he walks ever so calmly towards me. The wind softens to a whisper and the waves stop roaring. He does not sink, but reaches out to me and looks at me with eyes that see me. Then the figure opens his mouth. Above the roar of the wind and waves, I somehow hear him so clearly say "*Ego Eimi*", or "I am". The words sink into my heart and I break down in tears. Raw, wet, sticky tears roll down my cheeks and I cannot control myself. And just like that, all is calm. He climbs into the boat and says: "Be still". He looks at me and stretches out his hand towards the creature before him. The creature takes his hand, crying as the figure holds him.

BY SAMUEL NG

∴

I am the creature. The boat represents my life, a fragile and old vessel that has seen better days. The storm embodies the challenges in it, such as school, my health and friendships. The wind is lies and the waves failure and rejection. Each one hits harder than before. I am cold and wet and tired, which are physical representations of emotional, spiritual or mental discomfort and hurt. I have lost all hope and belief. So I resort to the last thing I still have remaining about me: God's touch. It is that first love from Him that keeps me barely sane and praying, although the odds are against me. When He speaks, He calms my heart and doubts, embracing me in his overwhelming love.

Facing the storm

Life is an odd thing. We despise it yet cling on to it. When things go wrong, we complain and sulk. When things go well, we rejoice and are thankful, but we go on to complain and sulk about other things. We also go through challenges and periods of shock, confusion, sadness, anger and hopelessness. In the depth of that pit, our only source of resurrection is God. Trapped in the miry clay, nothing can free us, except for God. Like the disciples, we might be fighting for our lives as we face our storms. What are our wind and waves, our thunder and lightning?

I met one of the largest storms in my life when I was 16. I discovered that I had a kidney condition called IgA Nephropathy. It is an auto-immune disease that scars the kidney tissue. In simple terms, my own immune system is tricked into attacking my kidney cells. Think of a sieve. Instead of filtering out only the bad waste, my kidneys filter out everything. Trust me, it is not fun to see blood in your urine. The next few years would be some of the hardest in my life. When I was 17, I had to undergo a biopsy, and at age 18, I dropped out of school twice as I struggled with depression.

The future seemed bleak, with my medical condition and disrupted education. Wah, this boy really hopeless! Future gone case.

However, in the midst of the darkness, my walk with God grew. In 2017, I joined the youth camp committee. It was through this that God would draw me back to Him. Preparing for youth camp allowed me to escape my pain and sorrow. It was something that I loved and looked forward to. It felt ironic that I was in the prayer committee. How could I, who was going through the darkest moments, intercede and be a watchman for the rest of the youth? But I had to keep pressing on. And the more time I spent seeking God, the more He revealed Himself to me. In that year, I learned



Samuel (second from left) with members of his mission team to Dagupan

how much God loves me. He showed me His love through the friends that He brought alongside me in the camp committee. These friends are some of the most understanding, patient and loving people I have met. Furthermore, the theme for that year's camp was 'For God So Loves', given by our speaker, a missionary to Democratic Republic of The Congo.

Another memorable event in my journey of healing was my mission trip in late 2018 with four of my friends to Dagupan, Philippines. During the trip, my kidney condition took a turn for the worse, and I saw blood in my urine again. Being at least three hours away from home and without medical aid, I found myself in uncharted waters. With no way home yet, I focused on completing our mission.

“ He used my failings to teach me. He used my pain to help me understand others better. I lost nearly everything, but only then did I learn to fully surrender to God. ”

BY AMANDA CHONG

∴

If you are anything like me, an article about serving in church is not something you would gravitate to naturally. You might think that it would tell you what you already know but wish to forget, posing more of a challenge to the heart than to the mind.

Some time ago, as Pastor Joshua was leading us into a time of reflection during a worship service, he asked a question that still lingers in my mind: “Have you been neglecting your spiritual gifts?”

Have we been neglecting our spiritual gifts?

20

Our mandate

The Bible tells us that all believers have at least one spiritual gift. It is replete with commands for us to use these gifts to serve one another and build up the body of Christ, which ultimately gives glory to God. (1 Pet 4:10-11)

To the church of Corinth, Paul said, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Cor 12:4-7)

Some gifts such as teaching or healing may seem more ‘spiritual’ in nature, but there are many other so-called ‘practical’ gifts that are just as important, such as serving others, giving generously, and

doing acts of mercy. (Rom 12:6-8) The crux of the matter is that we are not to hoard our gifts, but rather to hone and harness them for the good of the community. If we truly profess to be followers of Christ, we must recognise that a lifestyle of servanthood – to Christ and in turn to each other – is not an option, but a mandate.

Our blessing

It is not all duty and gloom though; in fact it’s quite the opposite. Serving is an act of obedience that is also a great gift to us, a practical way in which we can internalise God’s word, experience His power, and grow deeper in our faith.

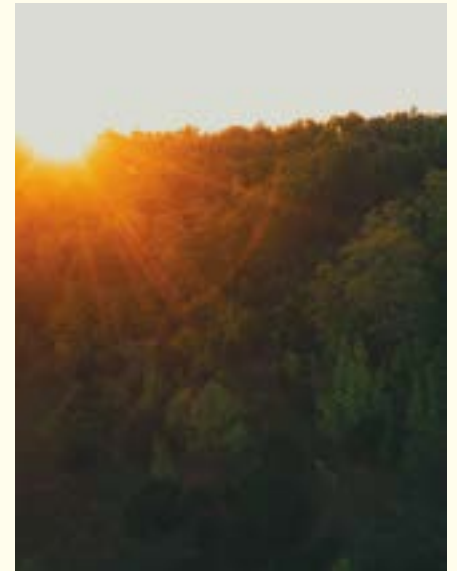
In the book of James, it is made plain that hearing and doing the word of God have to come as a package deal. James describes the one who only hears the word without applying it as a man

who looks intently at his face in the mirror and goes away, at once forgetting what he looks like. However, the one who looks into the word of God and perseveres in obedience “will be blessed in his doing”. (James 1:23-25)

Reflecting on this, I’m reminded of the time when I used to serve as a cell group leader in the youth ministry. It was no doubt difficult, time-consuming and emotionally draining at times. I remember struggling through cell discussions, making not-so-great decisions, and definitely dreading my 7am alarm on a Sunday morning.

However, I also remember how much I grew in my love and understanding of God’s word. I remember the simple happiness of stepping into church at eight in the morning, and hearing guitar sounds from cell members already at the concourse practising for worship. I remember the deep joy of answered prayers and honest conversations about struggles or breakthroughs. I remember lots of laughs. Those years spent journeying with a group of amazing teenagers have coloured my life with a special irreplaceable joy.

When we give of ourselves to service, it does something in our hearts to solidify our faith. True to his nature as the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17), our God blesses us in our service, more than we can ever imagine or hope to give Him.



21

**” He bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.
He never ends.”
(1 Cor 13:4-8)**

The reality

For some of us however, we do not feel, as Jeremiah the prophet did, a burning desire in our bones to serve God. (Jer 20:9) Yes, we know that we should serve Him, and yes, we know that we will be blessed in doing so, but we simply can't find the desire or passion to follow through.

These days, even though I keep asking God to give me a consuming desire to live for Him, it has been some time since I have felt that passion. And how can I, when I have grown so comfortable with being a spectator? I am beginning to realise that prayer alone is not going to rouse me if I choose to remain sedentary.

Instead of waiting for passion to organically make its grand debut or return, maybe we need to cultivate it by biting the bullet and picking one or two areas to start serving in. Let the passion come when we have already built some momentum.

A still more excellent way

Soon after Paul exhorts the church of Corinth to use their spiritual gifts to serve one another, he goes on to tell them of "a still more excellent way" – the way of love. He warns them that all their works are for naught if love is absent.

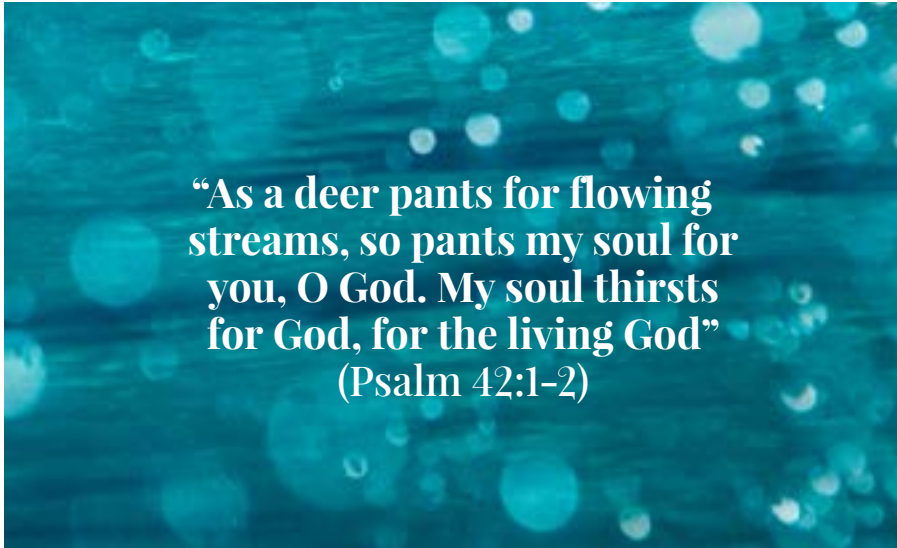
"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I

have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." (1 Cor 13:1-3)

Paul then describes what love is, which interestingly, sounds a lot like Jesus. Like love itself, Jesus is "patient and kind", he "does not envy or boast", "is not arrogant or rude". He "does not insist on his own way and is not irritable or resentful"; he "does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth." He "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." He "never ends". (1 Cor 13:4-8)

The truth is, none of us can ever perfectly love God and people in our own strength, especially when it comes to serving fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are just as broken and sinful as us. What a relief it is, then, to know that we are not alone. We can look to the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, for He is perfect love personified. It is His spirit living in us that will enable us to love the people we serve, and it is He who will see to completion the good work that he has already begun in us. (Phil 1:6)

The question we have to reckon with is, will we let Him?



"As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God"
(Psalm 42:1-2)

A SEASON OF REFRESHMENT

BY PRISCA ANG



In Psalm 42, we witness a desperate cry for the Lord: "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (v1-2). We cannot survive physically without water, and likewise we find our souls parched when we do not partake of God's living water. Our spiritual thirst is quenched

as we spend time seeking and listening to God. In certain seasons of life, God may lead some to camp by the stream for an extended time, soaking in His presence. We spoke to SJSMers who have embarked on courses ranging from months to years, in their search for refreshment and maturity in their journeys with the Lord.

HOPE IN ACTION

BY KEVIN KWANG

∴



It was a May like no other.

Over three days earlier this year, months of seeking God's face, preparing the ground and sowing in prayer by the organisers and churches across Singapore, culminated in the momentous rallies that formed Celebration of Hope (COH).

Through these, 125,000 people attended the six rallies held in four languages and more than 6,000 of them responded to the Gospel preached at the National Stadium.

Want more numbers? There were 2,000 salvations and the same number of re-dedications committed during this time. Praise God!

SJSM, too, played a role in COH – providing prayer support and practical ones from the ushers who volunteered to serve. Seasons of Life spoke to two who attended the rallies in differing circumstances about how their lives were transformed.

No regrets

For Tristen, taking the step of faith to believe in God was many years in the making. The young adult shared that he grew up in a family who practices Buddhism, but he personally did not embrace any faith as he thought religion was just a means for people to “pour out their sorrows or seek solutions to life’s unanswerable questions”.

“When I first heard about the Gospel from my girlfriend Crystal in 2016, it was certainly very questionable,” Tristen said. “I assumed that (the Bible) might just be another fictitious narrative written by an anonymous author who happens to influence millions on earth today.”

For someone who believes in concrete proof, putting his faith in something that nobody can see proved a bridge too far.

“How can people believe in something that is not tangible? Don’t they need scientific or mathematical evidence to believe?” Tristen questioned.

Laden with doubts, he continued to attend SJSM with Crystal. But one experience reinforced his disbelief.

He shared: “It was a sermon about healing and the pastor called out those who were experiencing injuries. He prayed for them and instantly they recovered from chronic injuries. I walked out of the service immediately.”

“How is it possible that one recovers

just from prayers?” Tristen recalled, his beliefs wrestling with what he saw.

Yet, his relationship with Crystal helped pave a way for God to touch Tristen’s heart.

Through the years, he saw how his girlfriend’s character had developed through her walk with God, making her more understanding and loving towards the people around her. She also displayed strength and purpose in daunting circumstances, Tristen said.

“I witnessed Crystal’s transformation ever since I met her three years ago and I’m certainly amazed at how one can change by faith,” he shared. “I started becoming interested in learning more about Christianity.”

That’s when COH came into the picture, and how a dinner conversation proved to be the push Tristen needed.

“We met up with Uncle Chee Meng and Auntie Lily for dinner (before COH). During our conversation, we talked about how if we sought Jesus, we will receive God’s grace,” Tristen recounted.

This reminded him of a sermon by Pastor Alvin, which cited Luke 11:9 – “So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

“Maybe this could be how God speaks to me?” he thought.

“When God, in His majesty, answered our prayers even though they were feeble and imperfect.”

And God did speak.

Tristen recalled how he was feeling apprehensive when Canon J. John gave the alter call and asked those who wanted to follow Jesus Christ to come down to the open area for prayer, but encouragement from those around him nudged him to make the step of faith.

“I decided to head down and receive prayer and a sense of relief overwhelmed me as I stood at the arena,” he said.

“I’m glad that I’ve made that decision ever since.”

No tickets? No problem

Li Lim’s journey to attending COH at the National Stadium could not be more different from Tristen’s.

She recounted how she was intending to invite her sister-in-law, Shu Bao, to the May faith rally as she was one of the

few non-Christians in the family, but her plans were nearly derailed due to the huge demand for tickets.

“I was laid back in the beginning, thinking that I didn’t need to apply for (COH) tickets so early. When I finally applied in April, my queue number was 28,000-plus,” Li Lim recalled. “I thought COH stood for Celebration of Hope (for tickets!)”

Still, she prayed for a miracle that seemed like it might not come after some near misses. Li Lim’s friend, for instance, had offered her two tickets on the day before the rally but three were needed.

On the day itself, on May 17, God intervened. Li Lim’s cell member offered her the third ticket after the member heard of the need via an unlikely source – Li Lim’s daughter!

“It was amazing. My cell member heard from another cell member whose daughter was in the same cell group as



mine. My daughter had earlier requested prayer for my situation,” Li Lim shared.

Ticket drama resolved, Li Lim and her husband eventually brought Shu Bao to the rally. But the bigger challenge was still to come.

“The message by the pastor was faith-inspiring and I felt it spoke to Shu Bao, (but) I was hesitant to ask since she didn’t get up from her seat (when the altar call was made),” she recalled.

“It was also challenging to go to the prayer pit because we were seated so high up.”

In boldness, Li Lim invited Shu Bao for the prayer and though they had to be channelled to another location, she was undeterred.

“The delay caused us to miss the sinner’s prayer but my husband and I prayed it with her after the rally. We felt it was important to seal her decision with a

personal prayer response,” she said.

Li Lim was also conscious that Shu Bao’s decision didn’t take place overnight.

“In the past, Shu Bao had been exposed to Christianity by her friends who had invited her to church,” she said. “All the planting and watering of seeds did not come to waste.”

It wasn’t just Shu Bao’s life that was impacted from the rally. Li Lim shared that she caught a glimpse of God’s goodness through the whole experience.

Asked when God was most evident to her throughout this time, she said: “When God, in His majesty, answered our prayers even though they were feeble and imperfect.”

Amen.

THE SIMPLE LIFE

BY ISAIAH TAN



Isaiah (right) during his community project in Cambodia

The idea of going for a mission trip or an overseas community involvement project (OCIP) is not one that is unfamiliar to me. Having been to Nepal, Indonesia and Cambodia in recent years, I have always felt a passion and calling for overseas missions.

Upon entering university, I found out that my hall would be sending a team to Cambodia for three weeks during the summer break for an OCIP trip. Initially, I did not think about joining, as I had many commitments in church and was involved in three different sports in the hall. I was also unsure if I would be able to juggle all of this on

top of my new academic workload. However, I decided that it would be a good opportunity to fuel my passion for overseas missions and eventually signed up for the trip.

Throughout the academic school year, my team (Eusoff Expeditions) organised various fundraising activities to support and fund our trip to Cambodia.

Washing cars, holding a fun fair and selling bubble tea in school were some of the things we did to raise the funds, which primarily went into paying for the construction supplies required for building toilets and wells for the local villagers.

”Being efficient and wanting to do as much as possible for the locals is important, but this can also prevent us from slowing down and appreciating their culture and lifestyle.”

After planning and waiting for an entire academic year, our team was eager and excited to embark on our journey to Cambodia. The primary goal was to assist our partner NGO, Love Cambodia, in the construction of toilets and wells. We also planned to visit a primary school built by the organisation to teach the children some basic hygiene lessons as well as to hold a games day.

Upon landing in Phnom Penh, the team took a two-hour van ride to the village we would be staying in, located in Prey Veng Province. Our first few days in the village were spent acclimatising to the local conditions. The only familiar feeling was the heat. We had to get used to the constant battering

of insects, bathing within ten minutes using our one and only common toilet with limited water supply, cooking for thirty hungry young adults and sleeping within our given sleeping area; the size of one sleeping bag each. All these living conditions might seem daunting to some, but it was an experience I really enjoyed, seeing some team members transform from being afraid of a single bug back home to essentially becoming lord of the flies.

I think one word that really stuck with me throughout the trip was ‘Perspective’. This trip differed from the previous trips I had been on as my leaders planned for quite a bit of free time during the day to soak in the way of living in the village.

Often times, we take our hurried pace of life in Singapore into planning for these trips. Being efficient and wanting to do as much as possible for the locals is important, but this can also prevent us from slowing down and appreciating their culture and lifestyle.

Watching the local kids play for hours throughout the day made me wonder about what their Singaporean counterparts would be doing at their age. It is more of the norm in Singapore for kids to go to school, to go for tuition lessons and various enrichment classes even before the age of seven. These are not bad things per se but it is easy to neglect the ‘smaller’ things in life when we are preoccupied with the hustle and bustle of city life.

Many of us grow up with academic achievement as one of the main focuses of our childhood and youth. Our lives are jam-packed with activities and we often forget what it feels like to have a nice chat with our friends, to sit down and talk about anything under the sun. As I watched the local children play in the open fields, playing with whatever they could find from empty plastic bottles to skipping ropes made from rubber bands to insects crawling on the ground, I really felt a strong sense of sadness for those of us in Singapore, as we often confuse our never-ending list of wants for needs. Sometimes, being born in such a comfortable environment may be less of a blessing because we do not understand the pains of hardship.



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Another instance that opened my eyes happened when we were at the local school. After answering a question, a boy around the age of five was given a sweet. What he did next really made an impression on me. After carefully peeling off the wrapper, the boy took a small bite of the sweet and passed it on to his friend, who took a small bite of the remaining sweet and passed it on to another friend. It was an amazing thing to witness and something stirred inside of me then, when I saw how generous they were with what little they had. I think our perspective should shift from one that focuses on our own well-being to one that is more concerned with those around us. How can we be a better friend, a better cell leader/ member?

We often put ourselves before others, but as Paul says in Philippians 2:3-4, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” As we are called to love others, even our enemies, we should not put ourselves in the centre of our lives but should instead place God in the centre. When our hearts are aligned with His, loving others will become easier and fall into place more naturally.



Isaiah is a university student who currently attends and serves in Heartbeat.

ON BEING EP AN INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD



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BY MICHAEL TAN



Many in SJSM are familiar with Richard Lau. He and his wife have been serving in SJSM in many different capacities over the years. More recently, Richard took on a newly created role – the Executive Pastor of SJSM. We get to hear from him what this new role entails.

Hi Richard, for starters, how long have you been in SJSM and what have you been busy with here since?

I joined SJSM in 1999 as a community worker at Heartfriends. I served there for 18 years until 2017. This included the privilege of serving for 12 years as Director of Heartfriends. One of the first lessons I learned as a staff, was the ‘parable of the watermelon and durian’ from Lawrence Chua of Living Sanctuary Brethren Church. It was about being in community work for the long haul. Growing a watermelon only takes as little as 75 days from seed to fruit, whereas durians take at least 5-7 years or more – and we all know which fruit is ‘better’! In those 2 decades, I also had the privilege of many pastoral exposures, including being a cell pastor, service pastor and pastoral counsellor.

Can you tell us a bit more about your family and as I understand, a recent and very cute addition to it?

Yuen Kit or Kit for short, is my wife. She serves actively in various SJSM ministries and she is most closely associated with the ushering ministry at E2 service. She is supportive of me in my ministry. Our daughter, Delci and her husband Daryl Ho also worship in SJSM. Recently God blessed them with a baby boy. So we are now grandparents to baby David. This new arrival meant that Kit is now promoted to

GM - she gets to ‘grandmother’ baby David for at least two full days each week. As for me, I have been ‘demoted’ to becoming an errand boy and chauffeur: I help buy supplies, transport things and ferry family members around ... but I am not complaining. He is a bundle of joy!

You are currently the Executive Pastor - a role that was newly created. Can you share what the role mainly covers and how it fits into the church structure?

Together with the Director of Operations, the Executive Pastor (EP) is part of the Vicar’s office to support Pastor Joshua in his role as Chief Shepherd and Chief Steward of SJSM’s mission and vision. As EP, I assist Pastor Joshua in overseeing the various pastoral ministries (e.g. church services, adults and cell ministry, Christian Education, community services, etc.), particularly, the administration and the inter-divisional coordination of these ministries. The Director of Operations, on the other hand, manages the finance, facilities, human resource, admin and security aspects. We do this together with the council of Divisional Leaders.

From the beginning, Pastor Joshua did warn me that there would be some ambiguity concerning the role of the EP, but the basic



idea was there: I was supposed to take on some of his duties so that he could focus on the things that only he could do, like strategic direction, pastoral communication, and things he must do, like praying, preaching, shepherding the church, and listening to the voice of God. It is just like in Acts 6, where the apostles felt the need to focus on prayer and ministry of the word, so they chose others to administer the food programme.

You have been in the role for quite a while now — care to share some of the challenges and joys you have experienced?

I do not feel particularly gifted in administration, management and execution. So I do feel inadequate for the role. Perhaps just like Moses, God gave me a challenge that I cannot conquer easily. So I need to trust God and also apply myself to re-tool, re-learn and re-organise myself in these administration and management skills.

The scope and intricacies of the duties are much wider than what I am used to. The work implications are also more serious as they have a wider impact. So far, it has been quite a ‘learning journey’; the nickname I gave myself for EP is ‘Error-Prone’ – learning from the many errors I have made in many areas, from simple spelling to over-extending my authority.

Another challenge is to keep this work and role as an act of worship that flows out from my constant communion with God in word and prayer. However, there are constant temptations here. My word and prayer life can easily slip. In my attempt to be responsible and efficient, I sometimes end up getting things done without much worship, love or faith. Perhaps that is why the Lord taught us to pray, “...lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” So this is something I pray for myself regularly.

I thank God for the patience and support of the Vicar’s office, Divisional Leaders and staff. I also thank God for the privilege of working with spiritually mature and highly qualified lay leaders who bring with them their training, gifting and skills to bless the church.

Any pastoral word of encouragement to fellow SJSMers during this season?

We are “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Cor 4:10). What is precious is not the container but the priceless content, which is God’s spirit and power dwelling in us. What I do as EP is less important than what God’s power does in and through me. It is the same with everyone here in SJSM.

Hence, I would like to conclude by encouraging you to pray along with me using these 10 prompters (5 E's and 5 P's):

The 5 E's stand for

Empowerment
(filled and full of the Spirit)

Effectiveness
(gift of doing the right thing at the right time in the right way)

Efficiency
(gift of leading, managing and administration)

Emotional maturity/quotient
(in relationships)

Elephant skin
(to bear all things and not take offence easily!)

The 5 P's stand for

Prayerfulness
(dependence on God)

Protection
(from sin, the world and the devil)

Peace
(contented whatever the circumstances)

Prudence
(filled with wisdom, understanding and knowledge)

Posture
(a servant heart yoked with Jesus)



Most people who know me now often see me as a level-headed and calm person, even when it comes to major examinations or getting lost in a foreign place. They might be surprised to know I was not always like this. I used to be a huge worrier and frequently stressed over the most minute things. However over the past few years, a transformation occurred as I placed my life and my decisions into God's hands.

I was never a grade-A student in school. The most challenging year was when I took my O-Level examination in 2015. I was failing 4 out of 8 subjects, and I was so stressed because I thought that grades were everything. I believed that I would be absolutely lost if I did not obtain the grades I needed to get into my dream

junior college. In the months leading up to the final examination, I slaved over my studies, sacrificed my social life and spent hours with tutors to salvage my grades. It did not help that despite working so hard, my grades did not improve. My studies took a huge emotional toll on me. My heart sank whenever I looked at my previous exam scores and I found myself frequently in tears. During that year, I often cried out to God, begging Him to make my grades better and questioning why I had to suffer when I was already trying my best. God just felt so far away from me.

By God's grace and with the help of many people whom I am grateful for, I managed to do well enough in the O-Level examination to qualify for

Knowing that I graduate in a few months' time, I am aware that I may not be around to see the harvest but I pray my obedience to God plants the seeds of harvest for future batches of ITE students. Many good things have happened in this past year and we would appreciate prayer support. If you know of any Christians in ITE College East, we would love to get in touch and invite them to join us to pray for God's revival to sweep upon this forgotten kingdom.

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Audrey Ong (17)

Whenever I passed by the "aunties" and "uncles" selling tissue paper, I would find myself feeling deeply for them. It could not be easy to stay at a spot for several hours at a go, constantly being ignored by people passing you by. Each time I walked by them, I would also be reminded that they are each individuals with their unique life stories. A part of me also wondered whether there was more I could do for them besides passing them a two-dollar note and wishing them "God bless".

I began to pray for the courage to make conversation and pray for them. With God-given courage, I have started to converse with some of these older folk and have learned more about them. Some have shared some lessons with me that they wished they had learned earlier in life, such as the importance of studying and being obedient to parents. Others have just thanked me with a warm smile on their face. There are also many who are disabled and are unable to speak well. Through these experiences, I grew to realise

" I truly believe that prayer is a powerful love language. "

that praying for someone, even if they do not share the faith, is its own language of care and concern. My hope is that these people can sense this and will one day come to know our God who loves and cares for them.

Ever since I started being more intentionally relational with these "aunties" and "uncles", I have gotten to know some of them better and developed bonds with them. One relationship I hold close to my heart is with an elderly lady in a wheelchair who is often found at Somerset MRT Station. She waits at the bottom of the escalator and is usually there till around 10pm. I had prayed for her on two different occasions and later found out that she herself is a believer in Christ.

When I first met her, it was difficult for me to communicate as I am not fluent in Mandarin. However, when I asked if I could pray in English, she was more than receptive and told me in Mandarin that "all that matters is that He hears". While holding onto my hand, she told me about her body aches and how she struggled to sleep peacefully and together we committed it to God. I have not seen her recently but when I think of her, I pray for her health and I thank God for her faith. Her faith has strengthened and inspired me and encounters with people like her keep me motivated to learn to pray more. I truly believe that prayer is a powerful love language.



I began to pray for the courage to make conversation and pray for them. With God-given courage, I have started to converse with some of these older folk and have learned more about them.

Song Yang (20)

As part of my National Service posting, I spend a lot of time at a lighthouse off Singapore's shore. As such, I regularly come into contact with many contractors and migrant workers who come to repair the equipment. Given the association with a lighthouse, I challenged myself to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16) by striking up conversations and befriending these people, particularly the migrant workers.

One of them is Salvom. Our conversations started when he would ask if I had eaten during each mealtime. This gesture of goodwill broke the ice and allowed us to share about ourselves, our families, and in particular, my interest in India and its cultures and cuisines. When I found out that his work at the lighthouse would soon be over, I suggested we exchange contacts to keep in touch and deepen a friendship that had much potential. Ever since, we kept in contact on a regular basis.

In the months leading up to Christmas last year, my good friend Kai Yi had begun exploring avenues to serve and evangelise outside of church. Knowing him as someone who also has a keen interest in meeting new people and building relationships, I asked him along for a Christmas meal with Salvom and his friend.

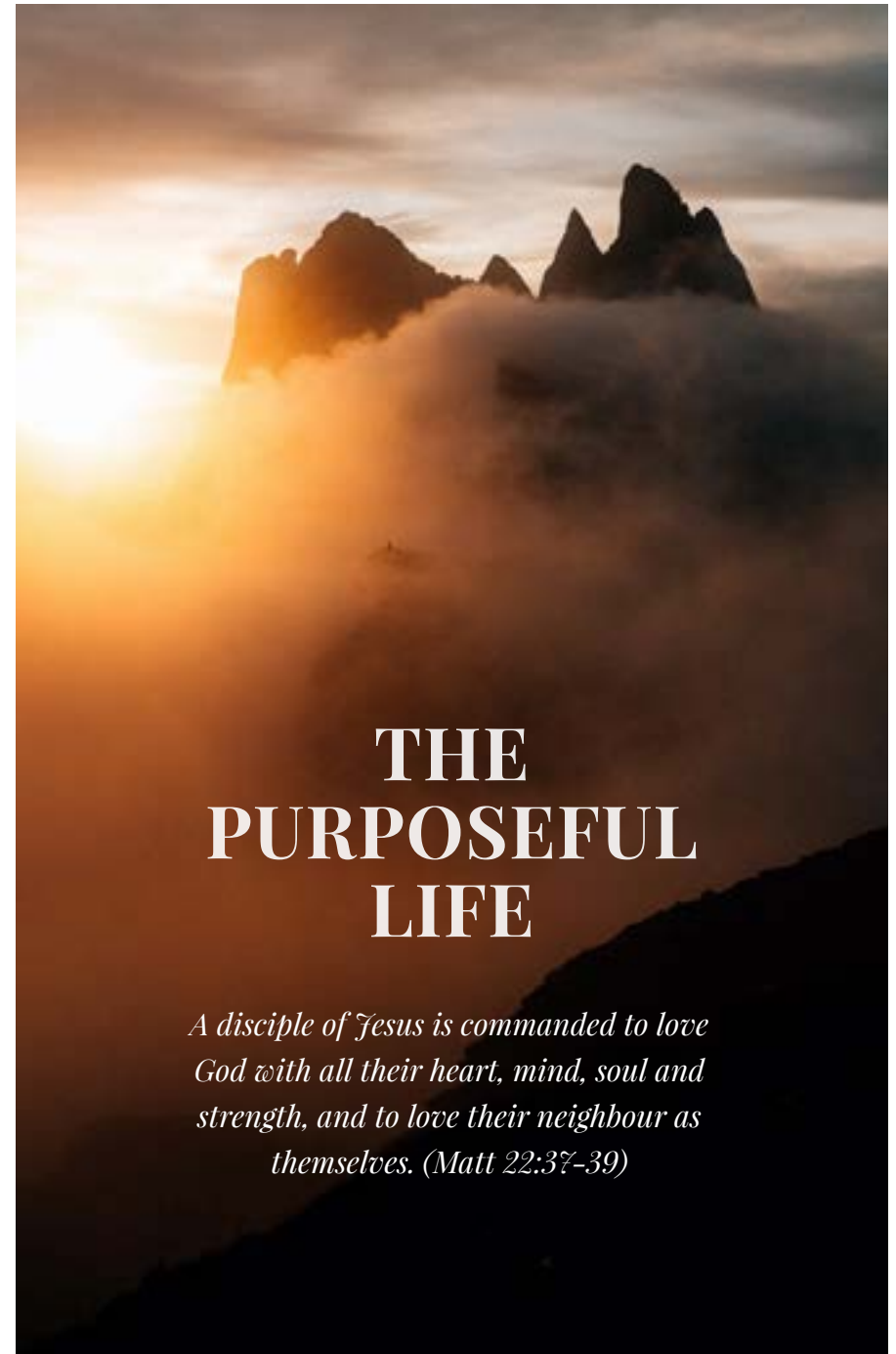
Going to the Christmas dinner, we had our doubts and wondered if it would just be an awkward meal with little chance for meaningful conversation. It was our first time meeting Salvom's friend and Salvom himself had never met Kai Yi. However, these doubts turned out to be unfounded and even in spite of the language barrier, the four of us had a great meal. As we enjoyed the Indian cuisine together, there was much laughter as we fumbled through translated conversations



between both sides. The dinner also opened up the space for us to share in their lives, as we shared our lives with them.

Interacting with these migrant workers has definitely opened my eyes to the lives and backgrounds that these workers come from. The media often paints a narrative that they are neglected and not fully accepted in Singapore. Yet, how much of that knowledge actually translates to us spending time to appreciate and love them?

Interacting and befriending Salvom was never a "mission" to convert him but simply a desire to show him the love that God has extended to us. Serving in Church is good and we are called to serve and encourage one another. However, I believe that our mission does not end within the church walls. God has called us to reach people outside the church as well. After all, Jesus himself went beyond the church to reach out to society's neglected. Likewise, my hope is that in extending such care and love without agenda to others, this love may inspire them to seek the One who first loved us.



THE PURPOSEFUL LIFE

A disciple of Jesus is commanded to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love their neighbour as themselves. (Matt 22:37-39)

BY JULIAN CHIN



When we speak about being “heaven bound”, we must avoid the danger of thinking that only our final destination matters, and that the journey of our earthly lives does not. How we live our lives matters deeply to God, and He intends for all of us to live a purposeful life, in which we can flourish and thrive, and bring Him glory.

The three important questions of life

So, what then is this purposeful life? To know the purposeful life, we need to correctly answer the three important questions of life, in this correct order:

- (1) Who is God? (an issue of ultimate reality)
- (2) Who am I? (an issue of true identity)
- (3) What is my purpose? (an issue of calling and vocation)

Only if we correctly answer the first two questions will we be able to answer the third question of the purposeful life.

The problem

The big problem we face is that we live in a culture that is highly meritocratic and materialistic (“M&M”). This insidiously drives us from young to strive for academic merit (get the best grades, to get into the best schools, to get the best paying job), so that we can achieve material success (enjoy the expensive house, car, clothes, holidays, etc.).

The M&M culture also asks the same three important questions of life, except that they

answer them in the opposite order. First, what is my purpose? (my calling and vocation is to acquire M&M success); secondly, who am I? (I am defined by whether I have achieved M&M success, so my identity is linked to my job or my possessions, and from this I derive my worth); and only lastly, who is God? (I have no time or place for the reality of God in my M&M life, and even if I do, His role is to help me achieve M&M success). This puts M&M people in a precarious position, as their ultimate purpose in life is tethered to circumstances that may always change.

Who is God?

If we want the purposeful life that God intends for us, we must answer the three important questions of life in the correct order. First, who is God? Theologically, God is transcendent (the creator God high above us) and immanent (the personal God close to us). He is great (with perfect power) and good (with perfect character). He has chosen to relate to us as our Father, the closest human relationship we can understand. So, this great and good God is the ultimate reality for us, from whom we derive our identity and purpose.

Who am I?

Secondly, who am I? I am a child of this great and good God. I am created in His image, with my unique character, personality, spiritual gifts, talents and aspirations. I am so loved by God that He sent His Son to die for me, so that I can be heaven bound. My identity is therefore as a precious child of God, and this is why I am of infinite worth, whatever the M&M world may otherwise say.

What is my purpose?

Unless we can answer these first two questions correctly, we cannot answer the third question. If I don’t know who God is and who I am, then what purpose could my life possibly have? So, thirdly, what is my purpose? My purpose is to live out my calling as a disciple of my Lord Jesus in my God-given vocation. A disciple of Jesus is commanded to love God with all their heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love their neighbour as themselves. (Matt 22:37-39)

The disciple’s love for God and others is shown through both their inward posture (cultivating intimacy with God through the Word, prayer, spiritual disciplines, etc.) and outward behaviour through the following aspects:

- (1) Evangelism and disciple-making (Matt 28:18-20)
- (2) Fulfilling the cultural mandate to be salt and light in the M&M world that is decaying and in darkness (Matt 5:13-16)
- (3) Effecting social justice to help the poor and marginalised in the M&M world (Matt 25:31-40)

A true disciple of Jesus must have the inward posture and all three aspects of the outward behaviour. Their inward posture will naturally lead to their outward behaviour, and the latter can only be done in the divine love and strength drawn from the former.

The M&M world needs the disciple’s witness through all three aspects of this outward behaviour – (1) without (2) or (3) is hypocrisy, while (2) and (3) without (1) draws people to the disciple, and not to the Master of the disciple, who is the only One who can save them.

Calling and vocation

All of us have the same calling to be a disciple of Jesus through our inward posture and outward behaviour. We fulfil this calling through our God-given vocation. Our vocation can be our job (as a student, teacher, pastor, stay-home mum, etc.) or our family role (as a child, father, mother, sibling, etc.), and it may change with the different seasons of our lives.

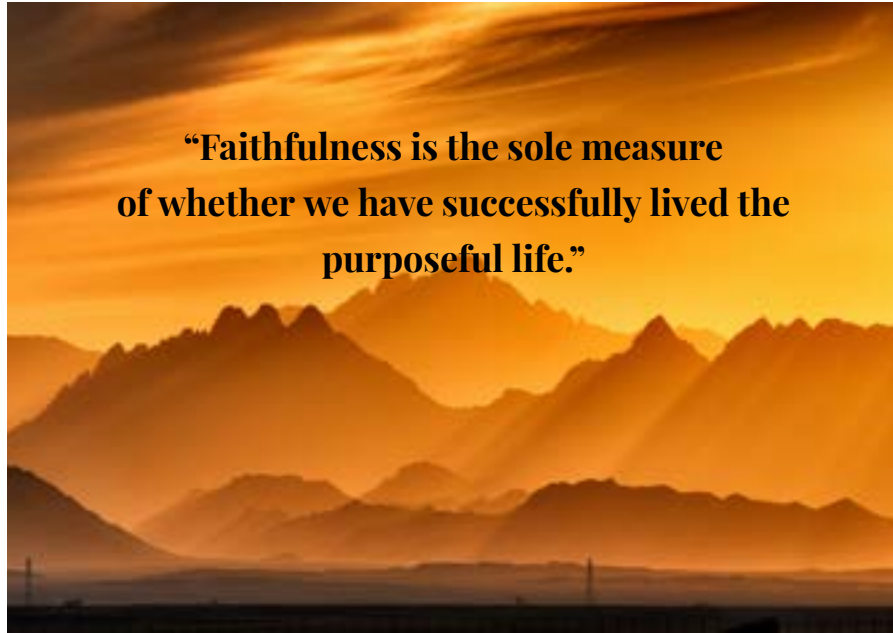
We have the same calling, but different vocations. And in God’s eyes, every vocation has the same value, no one vocation is more important than another. So, the purposeful life is one in which we live out our calling as a disciple of Jesus in our God-given vocations, through our inward posture and outward behaviour.

Success in life

What then is the measure of success in life? To the M&M world, the successful life is measured by M&M achievements. But the sad reality is that such a life is the ultimate failure, because they will not be heaven bound. For what will profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? (Matt 16:26)

For us, the measure of a successful life is whether we have been faithful in trying our best to live a purposeful life. All God requires of us is our faithfulness in living a purposeful life, and not the results (or merit) achieved.

The wonderful reality is that our great and good God does not need us to achieve any result for Him, because He can do it Himself and He can do it perfectly; the mystery is that He desires to partner with weak and imperfect us, because He is more interested in growing us through what we do for Him, than with what we can achieve for Him.



**“Faithfulness is the sole measure
of whether we have successfully lived the
purposeful life.”**

God is also fair; He only requires us to be faithful with the ability He has blessed us with. We see this in the parable of the talents. (Matt 25:14-30) He only required the first servant, who was given five talents, to make five more, and not a higher number. Similarly, He only required the second servant, who was given two talents, to make two more, and not make five like the first servant. And both servants received the same commendation, “well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master”. Faithfulness is the sole measure of whether we have successfully lived the purposeful life.

So, will we faithfully live the purposeful life?

To do this, we must first know how great and good our God is, how precious we are as His children, and then endeavour to faithfully live purposeful lives by fulfilling our calling as disciples of Jesus through our God-given vocations. At the end of our purposeful lives, when we are finally heaven bound, we will hear these wonderful words, “well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master”.



Julian is married to Wō Bin, and they have two lovely daughters, Ashley and Lauren. He also leads a cool youth cell.

ONLY JESUS

BY CASTING CROWNS

Make it count, leave a mark, build a name for yourself
 Dream your dreams, chase your heart, above all else
 Make a name the world remembers
 But all an empty world can sell is empty dreams
 I got lost in the light when it was up to me
 To make a name the world remembers
 But Jesus is the only name to remember

**And I, I don't want to leave a legacy
 I don't care if they remember me
 Only Jesus
 And I, I've only got one life to live
 I'll let every second point to Him
 Only Jesus**

All the kingdoms built, all the trophies won
 Will crumble into dust when it's said and done
 'Cause all that really mattered
 Did I live the truth to the ones I love?
 Was my life the proof that there is only One
 Whose name will last forever?

*Jesus is the only name
 Jesus is the only name
 Jesus is the only name to remember*



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