

# Seasons of Life

## Springing Forth

### Features

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Tasting the Goodness of God

Discovering the Person of the Holy Spirit

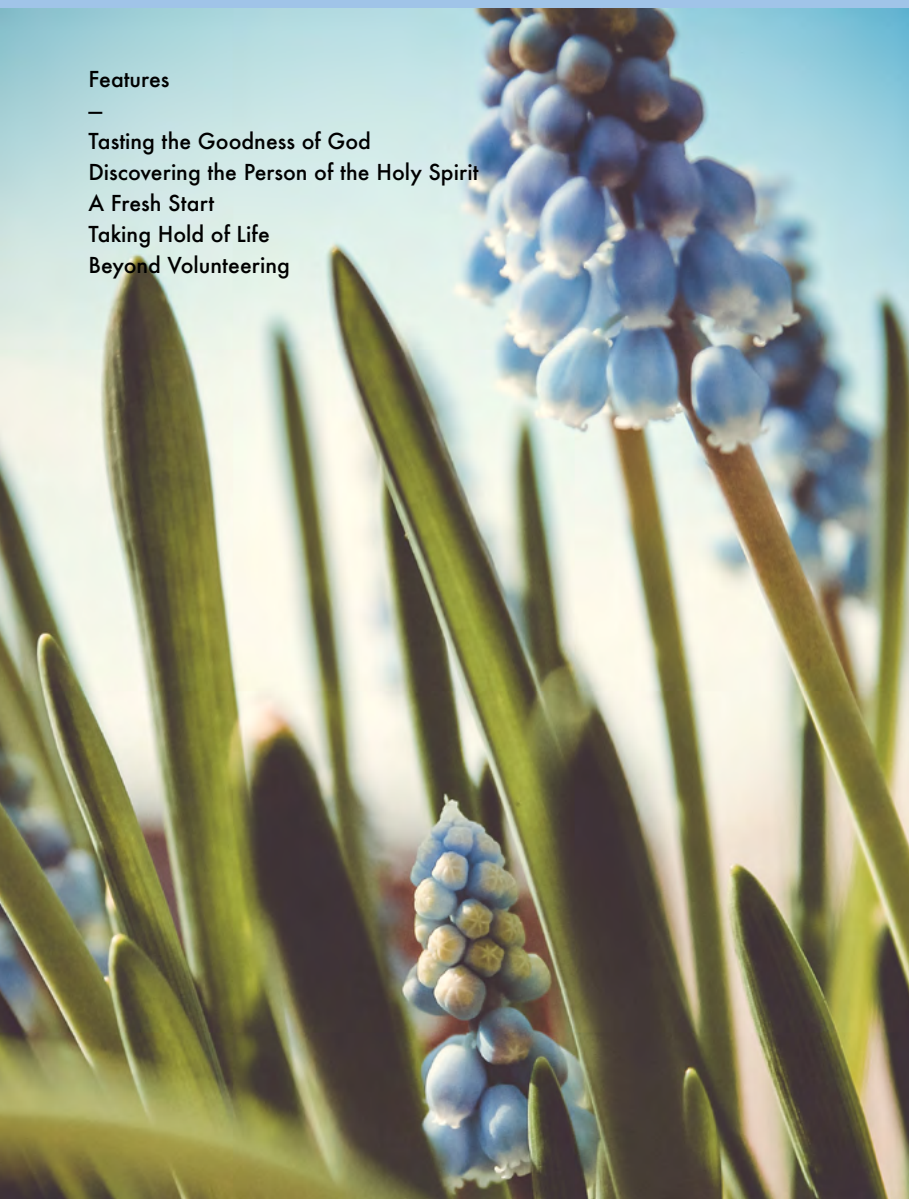
A Fresh Start

Taking Hold of Life

Beyond Volunteering

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## Springing Forth

Little needs to be said about how our lives have been altered in the past year. It is now difficult to imagine that we used to sit shoulder-to-shoulder in non-segregated zones, or that Zoom was once an alien platform. Like it or not, we have grown accustomed to these tweaked arrangements.

Yet, even as the world strains to move past this sobering juncture of history, things remain as volatile as ever. Just yesterday (at the time of writing), the Singapore Government announced a return to Phase 2 regulations amidst a spike in community cases. We seem to have taken one step forward and two steps back; a joyless jig with no end in sight.

The Seasons of Life (SOL) team hopes that the stories illuminated in this issue will encourage SJSMers during these trying times. The theme “Springing Forth” is an extension of the agrarian metaphor SOL has adopted for 2021. In the previous issue, we explored the importance of becoming “The Good Soil.” Following the trajectory, this issue centres on springing forth and bearing fruit, the promised outcome of sowing seeds in good soil. The feature articles highlight new works that are beginning to sprout in the lives of SJSMers, on both personal and ministry levels.

With the SJSM village on the cusp of blossoming, In Focus aptly reflects on SJSM’s Project Spring-Winter journey. From the Word reviews the idea of newness through the lens of Isaiah 42:1-9. We also hear from SJSMers from various walks of life: a congee hawker, an undergraduate studying in the UK, a youth ministry leader, a clergy member, and many more. Through these accounts of Spirit-led change, growth, and flourishing, we pray that you will find assurance in this unwavering truth: hope placed in Christ always prevails (Proverbs 23:18).

**Eleanor Que**

On behalf of the Editorial Team

# Keeping new, staying fresh!

Michael Tan

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## **New is not new**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”  
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

The Christian faith is premised on newness. It begins with becoming a new creation when we accept Jesus into our lives (2 Corinthians 5:17), and continues with the renewing of our minds and hearts to become more like God, in order to live lives worthy of His calling. And while God is immutable and unchanging, His works are perfect and His ways are new. Such is the projection of true Life—each moment is lived as new in the Lord even if the routine seems familiar. Enjoying an infinite God will require more than an eternity of new moments with Him!

God always works with us from the inside out: the newness begins with a regenerating heart, followed by the eyes, mouth, hands, and feet that do the bidding that comes from the heart, the spring of life that Proverbs 4:23 speaks of. God, however, harnesses all that happens in life to refine us, personally and corporately as a body of believers. It is important for us then not to be caught in either extreme: only minding our hearts (rare but possible) while being oblivious or indifferent to the circumstances that God permits; or being almost entirely driven by circumstances with scant opportunity for the heart to sense what God intends for the time (a more likely human gravitation).

SJSM is at such a juncture in her journey with God. On the cusp of 50

years of experiencing God's grace, it "coincides" most perfectly with our embarkation onto a new journey with much enlarged tents at the impending completion of Project Spring-Winter (PSW). PSW is a project of unprecedented scale and complexity that SJSM has undertaken, and it is new in every sense of the word, as compared to smaller projects that we have taken on previously. How then are we to prepare ourselves personally and corporately for this momentous new season? Much as we have been preparing ourselves for this in recent years, this, as the adage goes, is when "the rubber meets the road."

### **New means new!**

We are creatures of habit and that becomes even more apparent with age; old habits die hard and will not budge without a fight. It is also no different for either the individual or the church as a whole. Allowing God to do new things His way has to mean:

**1. No rehashing of the old** - We do not just dust off what we already possess or have done studiously over the years and improve it a little, simply repackaging the same effort to be offered to God once again. God forbid! Our sacrifice of love through our service as worship to God necessitates a newness that may not always be outwardly apparent, but that is surely involved in consecration.


God is the Creator God whose children will not run out of glorious ways of serving Him if we defer to Him diligently!

### **2. No comfortable thresholds** -

Our God is the One who needs us to "enlarge the place of your tent...do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes." (Isaiah 54:2) Our God of vastness always seeks to expand the influence of His love and kingdom; indeed, we are to partner with Him to reach out to people hitherto unreached in SJSM's history. Both in physical and spiritual terms, as well as in terms of our heart and our vision. Let us not constrain the Limitless One whom we serve!

**3. Stretching and pain** - Newness, like new wine in fresh wineskins, brings along its fair share of stretching, which is often accompanied by pain. But we must never shrink from venturing into uncharted waters when it comes to new exploits as long as we know that God walks with us! We must not seek the comfortable track in serving Him, trusting that He will see us through the process and that we will be richer for it!

**4. Faith and more faith!** - Ours is a journey of faith. Where we may have been comfortable in parts of our journey where we walked by sight, there is now an opportunity to walk by faith as God leads us. A time to

A close-up photograph of a person's hand reaching upwards, palm facing up. The hand is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the frame. The person is wearing a dark blue, textured sweater. A simple, thin silver ring is visible on the ring finger. The background is a soft, out-of-focus bokeh of warm, golden-yellow light, suggesting sunlight filtering through trees or foliage. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

**"Let us all pause as we  
pray—as perhaps some  
of us already do—for  
God to open our hearts  
and eyes to areas  
where we can serve  
Him and our neighbours  
without limitation."**

re-train our sights instead, focusing on “things hoped for...things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)

**5. Faithfulness and greater faithfulness** - God cherishes our love and faithfulness, and a newness-laden journey requires us to both love Him more and walk faithfully with Him, so that we can understand how much He loves us and is faithful to us.

### **New always!**

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-23)

It is tiring, contrived even, to seek to scale new heights and attempt new exploits on our own and then burn out as a result. The rest that Jesus promises to those who come to Him (Matthew 11:28-30) eludes us when we are firing under our own steam. But that need not be the case, as we serve a God who never runs out of newness. Indeed, His mercies and steadfast love are both new every morning and never cease. He is good for every challenge that you and I and SJSM face every day, and He will achieve nothing short of glory for His name’s sake!

### **What it means to us at SJSM**

We may struggle to fully grasp the stupendous works that the soon-to-be initiated SJSM Village will offer us as a church. Those who have been involved in the project and its planning over these past years would appreciate the scale of ministry and care opportunities, along with the immense amount of resources and commitment that it will require. But this is only seeing one side of the coin. The other side relates to how we will grow as Jesus’ disciples when we rise to the challenge and have Him, our Captain, lead us into these new opportunities for love and service, including those still unforeseen. Such is our God—glorious in wonder, powerful in works.

Let us all pause as we pray—as perhaps some of us already do—for God to open our hearts and eyes to areas where we can serve Him and our neighbours without limitation. To remove the limits that we ourselves have placed on our time, treasure, and talents in serving Him. And then to take a faith-filled first step in the direction that He wants us to be headed. Let us be part of the newness that He is powerfully bringing to SJSM this next season.



# Tasting the goodness of God

Eleanor Que

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Raymond Tan first encountered Christianity at 11 years old. Unbeknownst to him, this humble seed would yield a bountiful harvest and change the course of his life two decades later. His years of vice and rebellion in adolescence and early adulthood were the result of a difficult childhood. However, by God's grace, Raymond was brought to SJSM on Easter Sunday six years ago. That day, he said the Sinner's Prayer and the rest is history.

Raymond, now 34, is happily married with two children, and a proud seafood congee hawker. He reflects on his journey as a Christian hawker and shares about returning the first fruits of his flourishing business to the Lord.

## **SOL: How did you come to Christ?**

**Raymond:** I used to be a heavy gambler. Once, I gambled with whatever money I had left. I prayed to every heavenly entity to help me win. At that moment, I recalled the daycare centre that I went to as a boy. There, they used to make me say grace, and talked about how good Jesus is. In desperation, I decided to pray to this God, and then proceeded to lose every penny. In hindsight, that was God at work. I needed to hit rock bottom before I could pick myself up again. I went home, intending to commit suicide. But just as I was about to jump, I received a text from my wife: she was pregnant. I couldn't bring myself to jump after that.





I worked as a delivery man, saved up, and started a wonton mee stall (now folded). I had reached out to some food bloggers for publicity. None of them replied, except for Dr. Leslie Tay, who invited me to SJS. I said okay only because he hadn't blogged about my stall yet, and I was hoping to get into his good graces. I went to church for the wrong reason...but as usual, God works in amazing ways—He had even planned how I would be brought to church, despite knowing what a shrewd person I was. It's been six years since I was first touched by God, and my life has been transformed ever since.

**SOL: What inspired you to start a new seafood congee stall?**

**Raymond:** At the time, I was paying back the debt that I'd previously accumulated. One day, I came across a sermon that talked about how we should put effort into repaying our debts. The preacher reiterated that being a debtor can sometimes hinder us from serving God. This made me reflect on my experience serving in the prison ministry. There were times where I couldn't share things with full confidence because my own issues hadn't been completely resolved yet. I felt convicted to entrust this matter to God and was led to start this business. I told God, "I will honour You with the earnings from this stall. I want to pay off everything, including my debts to the people who aren't expecting me to repay them."



*Raymond, his wife Vivian, and their two children Vera and Vernon at an SJSM service.*

**"A relationship from my past had been restored, and it was all thanks to this hawker stall that God had led me to start. This is just one of the many crazy stories that have come out of this journey!"**

**SOL: How did this hawker experience differ from your previous one?**

**Raymond:** The difference is vast. When I started the wanton mee stall, I relied on my own strength and intelligence. But with this porridge stall, God led me every step of the way. What I should do, which ingredients to put into the dish, who to reach out to...the business prospects that came my way all fell into place so unbelievably. I'm surprised by the love that we've received from our supporters. There's a queue from the moment we open till we close our shutters—but as I always emphasise, I did nothing. The only thing that I did was to put God first. I acknowledge Him every morning and thank Him during my breaks. This is all to God's glory.

**SOL: How have you honoured God with your first fruits?**

**Raymond:** I used my first fruits to reconcile with my estranged family. During my quiet time, God impressed something heavily on my heart: I felt led to give my first earnings to my uncle's family.

For context, I lived with my extended family at my grandparents' house when I was younger. I was a tyrant.

I ate their food without permission and stole their jewellery. Fast-forward to when I joined SJSJ—my family knew that I had become a Christian. But even then, I didn't reach out to them. I was both a stumbling block and a poor testimony; a man who had hurt them but made no effort to make things right.

I told God, "If this is what you want me to do, I will obey." I went down to their house. Needless to say, my aunt was surprised. She asked, "Why did you come without calling? I'm usually at work in the mornings. I was moved to the evening shift only for today." I took this as confirmation from God. I went in and apologised for all of the trouble that I'd previously caused. Then I told her that the God in whom I believe wanted me to give her family the earnings from my stall. The timing was impeccable; they weren't doing well financially. After some back and forth, she forgave me and accepted the money. A relationship from my past had been restored, and it was all thanks to this hawker stall that God had led me to start. This is just one of the many crazy stories that have come out of this journey!

**SOL: Wow! What else happened?**

**Raymond:** At this hawker centre, I had unexpected opportunities to

reconnect with people from my past. One time, I was queuing up behind a man who looked very familiar. When I tapped him on the shoulder, he snapped at me, "Who are you? I don't know you." From his hostile response, I was sure that I'd offended him before. Then, God helped me to remember: I used to pick on him during my army days. For the next 15 minutes, I prayed for the courage to apologise to him. I tapped him on the shoulder again and said, "I remember where we met before." He retorted loudly, "You're Raymond! The fat guy who bullied people in army!" Everyone was staring. I was so embarrassed. I said, "Bro, firstly, I'll always be fat." People chuckled and the tension eased. "I'm sorry for how I treated you. I hope that you can forgive me because I've changed a lot. The old Raymond has died; this new Raymond is different in Christ." He was surprised. After chatting more, he promised to support my stall. He brought his mum and friends, and we even took a picture together. It was another relationship restored.

Remember the person from the daycare centre who sowed the first seed? I also bumped into him at this hawker centre! When he realised that it was me, he was shocked. I told him, "The seed that you first sowed has grown. I'm a Christian now and God has been so real in my life!" We stood there at peak hour, hugging, laughing and crying.

**SOL: Are there any words of encouragement that you would like to share?**

**Raymond:** I recently came across a sermon that spoke to me, and I hold fast to it. We often think that we're insignificant beings with limited bandwidths. But God doesn't need us to do big things. He only needs us to do certain things right. God can use a small hawker stall to show you His glory—any place that God calls us to can be an area of ministry.

**"The seed that you first sowed has grown. I'm a Christian now and God has been so real in my life!"**

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# Discovering the person of the Holy Spirit

David Neo

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Being a Christian for over four decades does not automatically make you a black belt in knowing everything about God. This is my journey of discovering the person of the Holy Spirit and how little I knew of Him.

I became a believer when I was in my teens. Over the years as a Christian, I have believed in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that the Bible was wholly true even though there were parts of it I found hard to interpret or challenging to practise. Some days when I felt dry, I wished the words had more power demonstrated in my life and that there was more power in my prayers. In over four decades as a Christian, deep in my heart, I felt I should have won souls to Christ—but I had not. The truth is I had hardly shared Jesus with anyone as I feared rejection or the loss of reputation. I was taught the “methods” but I

remained disappointed in myself that I rarely applied any of them. I had heard of the importance of the Holy Spirit in evangelism but I did not spend a lot of time with Him or pay much attention to Him.

I started hungering for more of God in my life: surely it had to be more than the sum of cell group meetings, prayer meetings, church services, Festival of Praise, and other meetings that we attended! I desired more boldness to witness, a greater passion to spend time with God, a deeper ability to love others, and a higher view of Him. Little did I know what God had in store for me.

### **The breakthrough**

My discovery of going deeper into the Holy Spirit came through learning how to really listen to Him. One day, Su Yen (my wife) and I stumbled

**"I desired more boldness to witness, a greater passion to spend time with God, a deeper ability to love others, and a higher view of Him. Little did I know what God had in store for me."**

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upon a workshop and we found out that one of our pastors and our cell leader had also coincidentally signed up for it.

I learned many things in that workshop but the greatest thing was that I could "hear" the Holy Spirit (John 10:27). I heard Him speak into past trauma and hurts in my life. Feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy were replaced with the truth of God's Word spoken clearly and directly! I learned there is a truth that trumps our reality, despite the storms around and accusations of the devil. I discovered how important my identity in Christ is and what being a child of God really means.

Instead of accepting the lies and accusations of the devil of all my faults, inabilities, and weaknesses, I chose to accept what God's Word

says about me and the abundant life I have in Jesus (John 10:10). In time I would also learn that if my identity in Christ is grounded, then it does not really matter whether I am commended by people for what I have done or not done. If I am dead to myself and alive in Christ, then it is not about how I see me but how God sees me (Galatians 2:20). The only commendation that matters is from God Himself.

That workshop also taught me how to ask the Holy Spirit questions. Amazingly, He gave answers that brought much healing and encouragement into my life. It is hard to explain how liberating it was to actually hear Him so clearly. For so long, I had been looking for this breakthrough; suddenly I found it and was really having a deep conversation with Him. Learning the practical steps to do so while being



ministered to, was the lever that led to this breakthrough.

## **Greater faith**

With the little we learned, Su Yen and I went with a missions group to Dagupan Philippines, where to our surprise we were invited to minister to local church workers and pastors. "Who are we to do this?" we thought to ourselves with some trepidation. Yet it was mind-blowing and humbling at the same time that as we practised what we had learned, it set the stage for the Holy Spirit to do His marvellous work—everyone ministered to received inner healing and breakthroughs in the issues they faced, because they themselves heard from Him. For the first time, I witnessed someone having a demonic manifestation. A more experienced brother came along and showed me how deliverance is done so simply and effortlessly—in Jesus' name! Since then, we have continued to pray for and minister to people brought to us by divine appointments.

Around that time, I lost my job after working for over a decade in the company. For six months, I had time to go deeper into the Lord before I found another role through a miracle—but that would be a story for another time. On one of those days, I heard and saw a testimony of someone praying for others and seeing Jesus work. Then in simple faith, I told God I wanted

that type of faith. I then tried it out by modelling the prayer and prayed for my wife's back. And I was more surprised than her when she said that all the pain had left.

And so, we just kept on praying for more people, believing that God would do what He says in His Word (Mark 16:15-18; John 14:13-14). I could not have imagined that the Lord would lead me into a new season of ministering to others in just about any situation: at work, in a taxi, at the airport, or in homes. And He keeps wowing me by showing me how BIG He really is. Indeed, He is a God of miracles!

Here I recount just some of the amazing testimonies of what Jesus has done: a lady who was sick because of vertigo was completely and instantaneously healed at one of our SJSM Alpha sessions, and she testified about it. A cell member's mother instantaneously regained her lost sense of taste and smell after prayer. At Easter, fever was immediately lifted from a baby in Japan after prayer over the phone. Before the pandemic, I met a helicopter pilot in Qatar airport with a broken collar bone and he was instantly healed, and then he gave his life to Christ. At a mall in the United States, a lady who was in much pain due to a burst blood vessel in her hand was instantaneously freed from

pain. More than that, her husband's bad back was also healed, as well as her mother whose body had been wrecked by fibromyalgia. The best part was that they all gave their lives to Christ, and we got the local church to follow up with them.

In this new and amazing season I find myself in, I am still learning about the Holy Spirit and thrilled to see how He can work anywhere and all the time. When He works, He brings healing, hope, and wholeness. I no longer struggle to share Christ with others as I lean on Him and walk in the Spirit. Now, my ministry is simply one of reconciliation and restoration, pointing people to Jesus. All glory to Christ our Saviour!

*David and Su Yen have been with SJSM for nearly 20 years and they have three adult children. In this season of life, their desire is to continue to grow in the Lord and bring His love, presence, and restoration everywhere they go as He leads.*

**"Yet it was mind-blowing and humbling at the same time that as we practised what we had learned, it set the stage for the Holy Spirit to do His marvellous work—everyone ministered to received inner healing and breakthroughs in the issues they faced, because they themselves heard from Him."**

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# A fresh start

Tricia Kuan and John Cheong

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The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about many changes to the SJSJ community and the way we function. Meanwhile, it has also given many of us unexpected opportunities to draw closer to God and experience His love and grace like never before.

Even as restrictions ease and we start to regain a sense of normalcy by returning to physical services, have the changes brought about by COVID-19 spurred us to emerge with newfound conviction and faith?

We spoke to Allen Lim, our youth pastor at Heartbeat, for his perspective on the challenges brought about by COVID-19, areas of thanksgiving, and his hopes for the youth ministry.

**SOL: What were some challenges you faced that were brought about by COVID-19?**

**Allen:** For much of 2020, youth service was conducted online. This was first met with excitement, but as time progressed, weekly online attendance fell. Perhaps this was brought about by a loss in the sense of sacredness that the youths once held for church service. Somewhere along the Circuit Breaker timeline, service became less of a centrepiece of their weekend, and more like any YouTube video that they could watch if they felt like it.

During this period, another impacted area was community life since much of the youth community could only meet online and not physically.



The zoom workouts were a popular part of the Heartbeat Live (HBL) series, which the youth's media ministry launched over the Circuit Breaker period.

One group that was particularly affected were the 16-year-old youths, who barely knew each other when the lockdown happened. As such, conducting cell group and bonding through Zoom was particularly trying for them.

Even with the return to physical services, another challenge was the inability to simply linger in church. Before COVID-19, church was more than a functional space to the youths. Church was a venue for both studying and hanging out, which made church feel more like home. But when they could no longer linger before and after services, church became to them less like a home, and more like an institution.

**SOL:** Were there things you would like to give thanks for during this period?

**Allen:** One area of thanksgiving has been the wonderful response of the youths to services resuming. Even when we were not allowed to sing in worship, the weekly attendance was very good at each service. And when allowed to sing during worship, we expect things to only get better.

Another area of thanksgiving is the positive changes and transformation among the youths. For example, since

they were unable to meet in church, many youths took turns to host cell groups in their homes, which in my opinion is much more beneficial since they are able to spend more time together. It also enables more interaction between youths and parents. Such a move would not have been possible in the past, simply because it was far more convenient to just meet in church.

A third area of thanksgiving has been the way we used our online platforms. Forced to shift online during Circuit Breaker, the youths not only grew accustomed to these

**"Many suggestions were given and implemented including special devotional sharings, mid-week live worship, and even mass workout sessions. And even now, this spirit of creativity continues, with new suggestions such as pre-sermon preparation, sermon recaps, and even Christian memes."**

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*Allen preaching during one of Heartbeat's online services back in July last year.*

platforms but also came together to improve them. Many suggestions were given and implemented including special devotional sharings, mid-week live worship, and even mass workout sessions. And even now, this spirit of creativity continues, with new suggestions such as pre-sermon preparation, sermon recaps, and even Christian memes.

None of these were things that I could have come up with, but it was the youths who took the initiative. They looked at the situation and asked themselves, "What can I do?," and as a result of their initiative, many have been blessed. To see these creative minds come together has been such an encouragement and support for me.

### **SOL: How have you seen God's hand in this season?**

**Allen:** I see the sufficiency of His grace. Heartbeat has always struggled with a lack of young adult leaders to walk alongside the youths, an issue which was made worse when Kelvin, a previous youth staff member, stepped down.

God's provision came through in the form of two young adults, Julia and Guan Yu. In Julia's case, even before I found out Kelvin was leaving, God put it on my heart to start thinking about who are the young people that I can invest in. I spoke to Julia as someone I could challenge and who could step up to serve the youths. And to cut a long story short, she felt God calling her into full-time

ministry as a youth pastoral staff. In addition to this, Julia's husband Guan Yu has also come alongside the youths to serve as a cluster leader, and since then, he has been passionately pouring himself into serving the cells in his cluster.

In particular, both Julia and Guan Yu are actively involved in local missions and I see their involvement in youth ministry as one of God's provisions to begin to engage our youths more in mission work.

### **SOL: What hopes do you have for the youths?**

**Allen:** One of the greatest joys of working with the youths is seeing how they grow and mature in the faith. For example, I remember that as a youth, Jana Koh was someone who did give us some trouble. Who would have thought that, a few years later, she would be instrumental in setting up the "siblings ministry," a gender-based ministry for the youths? And now, she's in the US pursuing theological courses and going on mission trips around the USA. Most recently, she even updated me about her plans for an upcoming mission trip to Zambia.

In the same way, my main hope is to see this same kind of change brought about in each and every youth. Of course not every youth will choose the path Jana took, but I certainly hope to see them owning their faith, serving in church, and engaging in God's mission both at school and at work—to those who need it, such as those in the nursing home, or to the migrant workers in Singapore.

Aside from this, I especially hope that some in Heartbeat will grow into young adults who also have a passion to help raise the next generation. This is so important especially because our youths often seek mentors and role models who are just a few years older than them.

### **SOL: Any last words for our readers?**

**Allen:** I'm very grateful that SJSJ has always said that it prioritises the next generation. Unfortunately, this confession of priority has seldom been translated into action. We really do need many people of all ages—but especially those in their late 20s to 30s—to invest in our youths. So do come visit us, see what Heartbeat is about, and if the Lord impresses it on your heart, then come join us in forging and forming the next generation.



# Taking hold of life

Annabelle Bok

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The bulk of Scripture was written in a period of human history in which economies depended on, and societal customs revolved around, agriculture. So it is not surprising that the Bible contains plant-related metaphors galore, and there is much we can learn in the practice of husbanding green, growing things. How many of these metaphors are we aware of, and are their truths being applied in our lives?

"As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments." (Psalm 103:15–18)



## Life lessons from plants



Our last issue, *The Good Soil*, reminded us that we, through Adam, are made from soil/dust (Genesis 2:7), and brought us through the concept of our hearts being types of ground (Matthew 13:1–23).

But while we are meant to be good ground for the sowing of the Word, and good stewards of God's vineyard (John 15), we are also the "planting of the Lord" (Isaiah 61:3)—and in Scripture, mankind is likened to all sorts of plant life.

There is plenty to learn from studying the forms and life cycles of the myriads of plants in creation. Our Lord made them, and it is written that creation pours forth praise to Him and that there is much we can learn from what He has made (Jeremiah 17:5–8, Romans 1:19–20).

### Light, water, air

But what do plants need in order to

flourish anyway? The fundamental basics are light, fresh water, and fresh air. It's clear from hydroponics and aeroponics that this is true, though one can also look to epiphytic plants like orchids and tillandsias (you may know these as air plants) for a more grounded, "natural" picture: they need neither soil nor fertiliser, and grow well if simply provided with favourable amounts of sunlight, water, and air circulation.



Interestingly, our corresponding spiritual necessities are found in the Trinity: God—the Father—is light (1 John 1:5); Jesus the Son is the Word (John 1:1–2, 14), which is the water we need (Ephesians 5:25–27); and the Holy Spirit is likened to air, wind, or the breath of God (John 3:6–8, Acts 2:2–4).

### Tillandsias

Personally, I've found keeping tillandsias to be an extremely rewarding experience, not only because they have fascinating shapes, but also because so many

spiritual truths seem to suddenly become apparent as I watch over their growth day by day.



Different species have different needs with regard to light, water, and wind—as we all do, as unique individuals learning in different ways and maturing at different rates.

Tillandsias appear duller and their leaves curl or shrink when they are not being properly cared for, but a thriving tillandsia seems almost to flaunt itself like a dancer, and may even take on colours that deepen with exposure to bright light. Does that not remind us of how we find our greatest potential when soaked in the Lord's presence?

Tillandsia also only grow roots when they are truly flourishing, in a bid to anchor themselves to the place that is meeting all of their needs—this is usually a rock or a piece of wood, depending on the gardener's choice, though it is not dissimilar in the wild. Does this not make one think of how

Jesus is the Branch (Isaiah 4:2), the Cross a Tree (Acts 13:29), and how the Lord is our Rock (Deuteronomy 32:4)?

## Seeds

If you give it some thought, seeds are fascinating. They contain within themselves everything necessary to kickstart a new life except light, water, and air. Similarly, the Word wants to spring forth into fruit-bearing life at the slightest hint of favourable conditions, because it is “living and active” (Hebrews 4:12).



It is fascinating to look at all the various environments in which seeds can germinate and flourish—from sulphuric hot springs in which specialised algae thrive, to desert plains which explode into vibrant colours with the seasonal rains. Truly, we all have different capacities, abilities, and callings; we just need to be ready to receive whatever the Lord gives, and obey His command to grow and bear fruit—wherever and whenever He has planted us.



# Beyond volunteering

Michael Tan

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“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”  
(Mark 10:45)

SJSM will soon be quite unrecognisable, though not in a bad way! In fact, it has been unrecognisable for almost three years now as we see a tall nursing home rise on our grounds and a new wing added to our church offices. The hoardings that we are now so used to seeing will disappear. The grounds that primarily hosted church members

and visitors for all manner of church life will now see new crowds coming from the nursing home and preschool operating here. SJSM will grow from just a church to become the SJSM Village!

By now, it has been several years in the making that we have been preparing to serve this enlarged community as a church, not only by hosting it physically, but also by reaching out to others through the new relationships and circles that come to us through the Village.

While only God knows how wide this layered community will become, we can be certain that it will be unprecedented in terms of what we are familiar with, whether in scale, scope, or variety of interactions. And while we have prepared ourselves in earnest until now, with the construction completed and the facilities soon to be in full swing, the areas of service that we had planned for will become a reality. And whether we are equal to the task now becomes critical: are we good stewards of the doors of service and ministry that the Lord has opened and will continue to open to us?

It is easy to get hung up on semantics—ministry, service, volunteers, etc. Instead, it is important, critical even, that we know our charter, our call to action as children of the living God. While they do have their place, we should not get too fixated on organising, planning, or naming the service that we hope to see from SJSM members or the community, to the point that we lose sight of the Christian marks of service. How then is volunteering different from Christian service?

**1. The volunteer serves of his own volition, wherein the service appeals to his better self to do what is socially apt. The Christian servant, on the other hand, is beholden to his**

**Lord to serve as He served, serving to the pleasure of his Master. He is indeed saved to serve the Lord and his neighbour. In truth, we cannot do one without the other!**

**2. While the volunteer serves out of social duty, the Christian serves out of love. The Christian recognises that without love, his service is empty (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). This love stems from a conscious desire for God to increasingly fill us with love for those whom He directs us to serve. Yes, the service may seem plodding, but as long as we keep our eyes on Him, we will learn to see, value, and love the people we serve as He does, and thereby do well by Him.**

**“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”  
(Mark 10:45)**

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**3. The volunteer may serve sacrificially, but it is not a mandate. He often serves as he is practically able to. The Christian, on the other hand, can only serve sacrificially! King David recognised this principle when he refused to offer to God anything that cost him nothing, as seen in 2 Samuel 24:24 when a well-intending subject offered oxen and wood free of charge for his king's sacrifice to God. In the same way, we can expect that it will cost us to serve our neighbour, and in turn, God.**

**4. The volunteer may expect some level of recognition for the good work done. The Christian, however, should go quietly about his service and expect nothing apart from the delight of his Master.**

**5. Finally, the volunteer serves out of his own strength, time, and talents. The Christian does that and more, as he knows that God may lead him into areas that are uncomfortable, unfamiliar, or both. We follow our Shepherd wherever His voice leads us.**



We are not disparaging volunteerism here. In fact, as a society, we sorely need volunteers and their efforts ought to be soundly encouraged and lauded. Nevertheless, in the context of the newly founded SJSM Village, things can go awry when Christians consider themselves as mere volunteers for the King's work of loving and caring for others. We would do well to see ourselves as His servants; the people we serve His field and harvest; and the work we undertake together a labour of love that builds and strengthens us as His body and His voice. And that is more than just volunteering.

Let us go and serve as Jesus did, unreservedly and full of love!

## 5 THINGS ABOUT: **Winnie Chan**

Kevin Kwang

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**"I feel that every resident brought to us is brought in with a purpose. It's up to us to find that purpose for them...to fill their unmet needs. To help them live the last stage of their lives peacefully, happily.**

**That's what keeps me going."**

For Winnie Chan, leaving the world of banking and finance in 2012 to join the Intermediate and Long-Term Care sector wasn't a difficult decision to make.

The move was, as she puts it, "a calling of duties and changes in the seasons of one's life."

As she approached mid-life, Winnie began searching for the meaning of life and work. It was also at that point when she realised that her mother needed her the most.

Her mother, she tells SOL during an interview, has been a "frequent

flier" at hospitals due to her multiple health conditions, recurrent falls, and strokes. In fact, she doesn't recognise her daughter and has not been communicative since five years ago.

After her mother's caregiver left last year, Winnie had to put her in a nursing home so that she could be cared for by nurses.

In 2012, Winnie took up the Masters in Gerontology course at Singapore University of Social Sciences while still juggling her corporate job and caring for her mother. She joined the Agency for Integrated Care prior to graduating the next year.



About a year later, she moved to St. Andrew's Mission Hospital and was tasked to run the 300-bed psychiatric nursing home at Buangkok. It was only in 2016 when she joined SJSM's Project Spring-Winter team in the planning of SJSM nursing home wards.

Despite the increasing workload ahead of the nursing home's opening, she takes some time to chat with SOL about her personal philosophy in caring for residents and what she does to de-stress.

**SOL: What does the upcoming SJSM nursing home mean for you personally?**

**Winnie:** When I was caring for the residents at Buangkok, I saw that life could be pretty meaningless for them. Even though the nursing home provides three meals a day, and there are occasional activities organised by volunteers, it does not fully fill the void in their hearts and their desire to reconnect with their families.

In other words, their psychosocial and emotional needs may not have been adequately addressed. As care professionals, beyond nursing care, we need to reach deep into understanding their personhood

and their life story so that we can better support them.

Residents coming into a nursing home do not usually do so by choice; it's just that their circumstances are such that nobody is caring for them.

I feel that every resident brought to us is brought in with a purpose. It's up to us to find that purpose for them...to fill their unmet needs. To help them live the last stage of their lives peacefully, happily.

That's what keeps me going.

**SOL: What are the challenges in managing a nursing home?**

**Winnie:** Every day is different because you never know which resident will have an emergency, like if they fall or become very worked up, screaming and shouting because that is the only way they can communicate.

Managing the different and sometimes difficult behaviours of residents is an important aspect of our care staff's daily tasks and responsibilities.

We also need to be aware of the expectations of the next-of-kins. They



Above: Winnie Chan, the executive director of SJSM's upcoming nursing home, is also an avid bird-watcher.

Right: Winnie during one of her visits to Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.



Winnie during one of her visits to Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.

may come with a lot of demands on how they want us to care for their loved ones, without understanding the constraints of the nursing home. We need to appreciate the caregiving burdens they have been shouldering and see how we can work with them over time.

Manpower adequacy, especially of nurses, is always an issue in the long-term care sector. In Singapore, we rely predominantly on foreign manpower and with the cultural differences, it takes time for nurses and residents to communicate well and build rapport.

Recruiting staff whose personal values align with SJSN's values of compassion and love are important, so that we can be the vessels for God's work every single moment of our service.

**SOL: What would you like to say to families who entrust their loved ones to the nursing home?**

**Winnie:** I do not want to just admit families' loved ones into the nursing home and let them transfer their responsibility of care to the nurses.

We need to be on the same team and participate in the care journey

of their loved ones together. To this end, we will share the care plans and progress with the families every quarter and encourage them to visit regularly.

**SOL: What do you do in your free time to avoid becoming overwhelmed and to de-stress?**

**Winnie:** I've been married for 26 years but do not have children. My husband, Kong Peng, and I thus have the freedom to do the things we both enjoy, like taking long walks in nature reserves and travelling (pre-COVID-19). Cooking is also a form of therapy for me.

I used to be an avid bird-watcher and would go every weekend to one of the primary forests in Johor Bahru to look for birds. I even took a 24-day birding trip to South Africa to look for birds and sighted more than 400 different species.

But now, being a Christian with different priorities in life and having to attend church on the weekends, I can only watch garden birds!

**SOL: Let's talk birds. What's one memorable experience while bird-watching?**

**"I was assured that He would always be there waiting for me and will lift me on HIS wings whenever I face challenges in life and work."**

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**Winnie:** Did you know that I was baptised in 2005 after watching birds one time?

This was when I was taking a break from my career. One day, a fellow "birder" and photographer invited me to join her at Lower Pierce Reservoir to watch a white-bellied sea eagle usually sighted at a particular tree every morning. The thing about watching eagles is you have to be earlier than them, so off we went at 6am—two ladies entering a quiet, deserted road and camouflaged so as to not startle the birds.

After we picked our spot, my eyes were drawn to some birds searching for food at the water's edge when we realised the eagle we sought was perched on a bare tree branch nearby. It was dawn, and it stared down at us as we stared back. It was so close we didn't need to use our binoculars.

As my friend went to look for a better vantage point to snap the picture, I spent a full minute enjoying the

rare sight. It then flew off with the rising sun as its backdrop—it was a wonderful moment for me as a birder.

The next day, I met another Christian friend and recounted this experience. She pointed me to Isaiah 40:31 (NIV): "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

I felt God telling me: "You were late in coming to me, but I waited. You saw the little birds on the water bank; those are the issues you're so preoccupied with in life that you forgot to look up—I was there waiting for you."

I was assured that He would always be there waiting for me and will lift me on HIS wings whenever I face challenges in life and work.

With such a clear, loving message from God, I got baptised two months later.

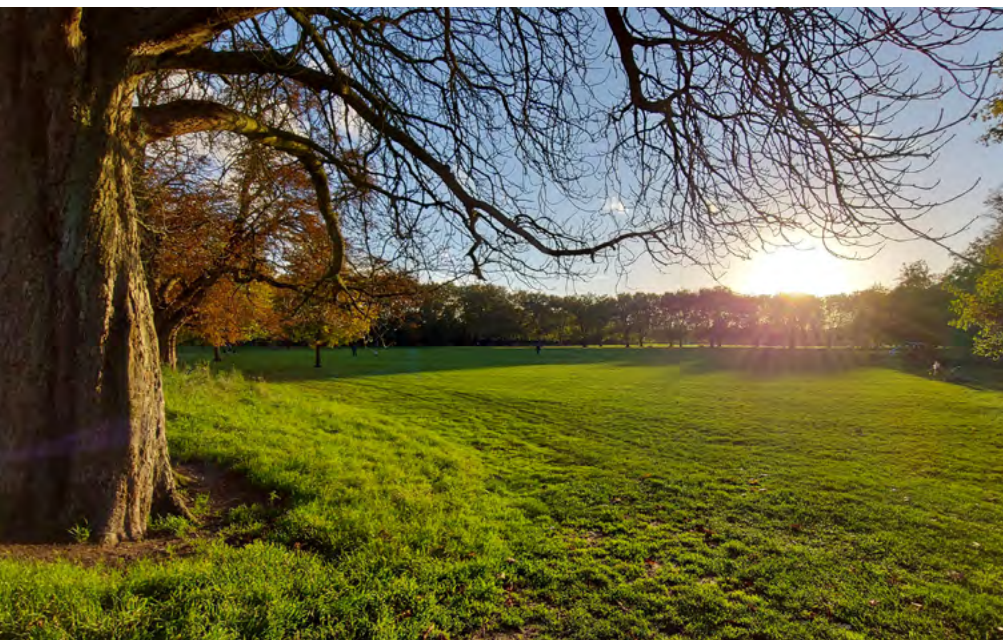
LESSONS IN LIFE:

# A faithful God in a foreign land

*Words and photos:*

Yap Kai Xing

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Not too long ago, a letter appeared in my college pigeonhole. It was from my mother, who wrote that it had been a full year since the day in March 2020 when I hurriedly flew back to Singapore from pandemic-stricken UK. She recounted how God had been faithful through

those tumultuous weeks, when I first tested positive for COVID-19, spent a month in a community isolation facility and all the turbulence in between.

I remember smiling wryly as I read the letter, thinking about how things



had continued to unfold. After I returned to the UK last September for school, the country entered its second lockdown in November and its third in January, punctuated by a brief respite in December, and easing of restrictions have only just begun this April.

The last one year has been for me a time of upheaval, uncertainty, and isolation—having to handle being sick, taking care of myself in a foreign land, navigating the constantly changing regulations of the UK whilst never being sure about when I could see my friends again. It was all a bit overwhelming at times.

And yet, there have been surprising mercies and unexpected shades of grace. One thing that this season has gifted me with is a renewed experience of the goodness and faithfulness of God. Living through national lockdowns, both in Singapore and then in the UK, meant that life began to take on a different pace. It was as if a gear had shifted and I was suddenly alive to a different way of being, one that was marked by a deeper restedness and awareness. With extra-curriculars put on hold, events cancelled, and shops closed, the lockdowns afforded me the time and space to slow down significantly and draw close to God. I was able, for the first time, to keep consistently to a schedule of quiet



time in the mornings. I would spend hours on my walks talking to Him about everything that was going on in my head and in my life. I would see the way that He answered my prayers through the little things—the rainbow out my window, a text from a friend, the odd card that appeared in my pigeonhole. I learnt to better recognise the presence of God. In His Word and through His Spirit, He comforted and reminded me that I was neither forsaken nor forgotten.

I also began to speak more with my parents, talking to them for hours on end over Zoom, something we never had the luxury of doing when my schedule was packed full whenever I returned home. Sharing about both the minutiae of our respective lives and the deeper reflections that



we had. I began to see my parents in a new light, recognising and appreciating them not just as parents but as humans who are growing, changing, and doing their best to follow God faithfully.

In my still-evolving COVID-19 experience, the intense amounts of isolation and uncertainty—while initially daunting—taught me to depend on God’s presence and trust in His sovereignty even when I could not understand what He was up to. He tuned my ears to hear His still small voice in the little blessings of each day and sharpened my vision to recognise His biggest gifts—such

as my family—that He had already bestowed on me all along. God gives and takes away, but in all things, I have tasted and seen that He is always good.

“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one that takes refuge in Him.” (Psalm 34:8)

*Kai Xing recently finished her University studies in the UK in June this year. In her three years schooling in the UK, she has mastered the art of cooking lavish dishes with just a rice cooker.*



YOUTH SPEAK:

## Reflecting Christ in conversations about social issues online

Prisca Ang



A recent article on Christian website Thir.st sparked backlash online as it asked girls to consider dressing modestly. "Let's help our brothers by not dressing in a revealing or provocative way....Avoid it not because we must do it, but because we love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ," Singapore youth pastor Joanne Chow wrote in the article, which was published in the wake of the Ravi Zacharias scandal and advised Christians on how they can guard against sexual temptation.

I felt indignant when I read the article as it seemed to blame victims of sexual advances. My first response was to craft an Instagram Story to disagree with her words but I decided to sit on it as I wanted to process my thoughts further. During that time, Ps Chow clarified that she did not advocate victim blaming and the article was not meant to address sexual predation but to encourage Christians to help one another avoid sexual temptation. This helped me to better understand where she was

coming from, although I still had questions over how the article was phrased.

With hindsight, I'm slightly relieved I did not post that Story as I'm unsure how Christ-like my words would have been amid my anger. However, it might also have been a missed opportunity to express my view in a constructive and loving way that could have pointed others to God. We can't shy away from discussing tough but important topics. So how do we please God while tackling these issues, especially on social media where much of the conversation now takes place?

### **"Social justice warriors"**

It is helpful to understand why we are compelled to speak out against certain issues. We naturally empathise with people whom society discriminates against, in areas such as gender, race, and economic status. Take for example the Black Lives Matter movement, which has involved global protests against police brutality and racially-motivated violence towards black people. Or recent demonstrations against anti-Asian racism and violence in the United States. Closer to home, outbreaks of COVID-19 infections in dormitories have also shone a spotlight on how we should care for our migrant brothers and sisters.

Reacting to social injustice is also part of our spiritual make-up as Christians. In Micah, we see that the Lord does not require our vain and sinful offerings, but rather:

**"He has told you, O man,  
what is good;  
and what does the Lord  
require of you  
but to do justice,  
and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly  
with your God?"  
(Micah 6:8)**

Proverbs shows us that God despises evil and cares deeply for those who are suffering: "Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him." (14:31) We are also called to open our eyes to speak out for the disadvantaged: "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy." (31:8-9)

What does it mean to do justice by using our voice? "Social justice warrior" (SJW) is a term often used to mock someone who is overly progressive and zealous about issues of fairness. But this phrase should take on a different meaning for followers of Christ. We must know



why we are speaking out—not for the sake of it or because everyone else is doing so but to genuinely reflect Christ’s love towards people who are suffering or have been marginalised.

### **Responding with grace and truth**

Social media often highlights the divisiveness of certain topics as people’s views are easily aired. Rather than adding fuel to fire, we are supposed to be salt and light “so that (others) may see (our) good works and give glory to (our) Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). This could be as simple as expressing our views calmly and respectfully towards people whom we disagree with or perceive as unjust, even when things get heated. After all, we too are sinners who have been shown mercy. We can also research and

share insights on social issues to help others arrive at an informed decision, rather than lashing out in anger. For example, some social media users have curated lists of books about racial issues to help others examine their own biases, as well as links to charities that advance racial equality. There is no cookie-cutter response to how we should post on social media, but we can ask ourselves these questions: Are my words hurtful, or do they help to shed light amid darkness? Do they align with truths in God’s Word? How would Christ feel about this issue, and am I reflecting His character in the way I express my thoughts?

Although we should act on injustice, there are also situations where it could be wise to remain silent first—for example, when we are

too angry to rationally process our thoughts and are likely to say things we might later regret. Paul writes that we should “give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Romans 12:17-18). This does not mean we need to be politically correct all the time, but rather we should strive with the help of the Holy Spirit to live a life that reflects Christ.

The fruit of the Spirit gives us a flavour of what this life looks like: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22). Of these, the last fruit is perhaps the hardest to grow when we feel a keen sense of anger at injustice.

Jon Bloom, author and co-founder of web ministry Desiring God, writes: “Righteous anger doesn’t look or feel like sinful anger because godly righteous anger is governed and directed by love. God is righteous, but he is also love (1 John 4:8). And love is patient (1 Corinthians 13:4).” Righteous anger is sparked by evil that goes against God’s holiness and goodness, and requires us to first examine our own sin and grieve over sin, writes Bloom.

Such anger is also “governed by God’s love and therefore slow to



be expressed, allowing redemptive acts of love to be pursued first if at all possible,” as we remember God’s mercy towards us through the cross. However, some forms of evil require us to speak and act quickly, Bloom notes as he cites Proverbs 24:11. Ethnic and economic injustice, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, and sex trafficking are examples of evil that call for “urgent, immediate rescue.”

### **Standing firm on God’s Word**

Many areas of modern life are not black and white. We ultimately need to rely on God for wisdom and discernment when we engage with various contentious and sensitive issues on social media. This will allow us to hold onto the unchanging, absolute truths founded on His Word and show Christlike empathy and grace. Thankfully, He has also given us the Holy Spirit to be our guide and teacher. So, we remember this famous and helpful quote often attributed to Christian theologian Saint Augustine: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF:

## Ps Wong Tak Meng

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**Archdeacon Wong Tak Meng joined the clergy team in SJSM on 11 January 2021. As the Archdeacon for Community Services, he provides spiritual oversight for all our Anglican community services, especially the development of the Chaplaincy Ministry. Ahead, he shares with us what a day in his life usually looks like.**

### Mornings

My alarm goes off at 7am. I read a short devotional passage and commit the day ahead to the Lord. As my head gets clearer, I spend time in the readings for Morning Prayer according to the Anglican bible reading plan (the lectionary), and pray for specific persons whom the Lord places on my heart.

I usually browse through the headlines of The Straits Times before

I wash up and get ready for the day. Much of my work is at the Diocesan level, which is why I'm located at the St. Andrew's Mission Hospital (SAMH)/Singapore Anglican Community Services (SACS) head office in Simei, rather than on the SJSM compound.

Breakfast is usually very light, just a few biscuits or a Medjool date with my coffee. On some days, I send my wife Leng Leng to her office before heading to mine, as I cherish the opportunity to catch up with her along the way.

I find myself more creative in the morning. Other than on Tuesdays, when I attend clergy meetings over Zoom, I spend my mornings preparing for sermons or brainstorming ideas for new initiatives for my various roles. These roles include the Chaplaincy Ministry, the Diocesan Ordination Training programme, the Clinical Pastoral

Education (CPE) programme, SJSM's Discipleship Review, amongst others.

I often have lunch meetings with other leaders in our community services, to catch up with them and understand how our Anglican churches and the Chaplaincy Ministry can better support them in their work. I find this spiritual fellowship very important. Before we play our respective roles, we are first brothers and sisters in Christ, and fellow servants in His vineyard. Without this fellowship, we will be reduced to individuals pursuing our separate careers.

Sometimes during lunch, I may be invited to speak at the staff devotions of various SAMH/SACS centres. I enjoy doing so, as it allows me to share the vision of our Anglican community services being a calling, and not only a job or a career. It is an opportunity for Christians to live out their discipleship "the other six days," and most importantly, it is an expression of Christ's gospel of love.

## **Afternoons**

Afternoons are flexible. I could be meeting with other pastors and leaders, or visiting one of our 27 SAMH/SACS centres, from Pasir Ris to Taman Jurong, from Henderson to

Woodlands. Or I could be catching up on my writing and preparation for presentations.

My Thursday afternoons are set apart for CPE. This is a professional training programme under the Diocese for those serving or aspiring to serve in pastoral ministry, to hone their understanding, identity, and skills as a "carer of souls." I am also equipping a new cohort of trainers to be able to serve more trainees in the future. This is a calling that the Lord has impressed upon my heart since 2004. I find it very fulfilling, not only because it allows me to sow into the lives of fellow servants of Christ, but also because I get to grow in my learning and maturity as well.

I do welcome people contacting me via WhatsApp for various ministry and pastoral matters. I reply as soon as I can, though often not immediately. I value such opportunities to connect and contribute to the wider church. In recent weeks (at the time of writing), I have received an assortment of enquiries—how to donate to the Autism Centre, how one person recovering from depression can be a peer supporter to fellow sufferers, how to interpret the safe management advisories for weddings (as I am the Diocesan COVID-19 coordinator), and so on.



*My wife Leng Leng and I.*

## Evenings

I usually end work at about 6pm. Unless I have online or in-person meetings in the evening, I fetch my wife from St Andrew's Autism School, where she works as a special needs teacher. She teaches music and oversees the area of expressive arts. As our family consists of just the two of us, we usually have a simple dinner at a neighbourhood coffee shop before going home to rest. To relax, we watch Korean dramas, peruse news articles, or see what our friends are up to on Facebook.

Our evening routine has changed since mid-April 2021. Most nights now, we buy chee cheong fun (rice

noodle rolls) for my 87-year-old father who is hospitalised at Changi General Hospital, and update my sister on his condition in our family WhatsApp group. We are praying for faith, wisdom, and strength as we journey with him through his late-stage liver cancer.

My life and my routines are far from perfect. I could do with more exercise and a healthier diet. I try to pause a few times a day to be mindful of the presence of the Lord, and to bring to mind what He has spoken to me in the morning, but sometimes I get carried away with the task at hand. I want to spend more time reading, to grow and improve myself. Join me as I press on as a work-in-progress!

FROM THE WORD:

# New things springing forth: A reflection on Isaiah 42:1-9

Daniel Tham

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People love new things. In our contemporary, capitalist, and consumerist world, “new” is often understood in terms of things that can be bought, often in replacement of things deemed “old”: new phone, new clothes, new furniture, etc. We also often seek new things that are not material: a new job, a new resolution, a new season of life. In the latter cases, “new” is contrasted against stasis and stagnation; humans naturally seek to grow, develop, and progress, and the pursuit of the “new” enables that.

## A prophetic marker

Centuries before Christ’s birth, a divine declaration was recorded in the book of Isaiah, in what is commonly regarded as the first “servant song”: “Behold, the former

things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them” (Isaiah 42:9). Here, “new things” has to mean something far more significant than anything money can buy, and much greater in scope than any individual’s life pursuit. But what exactly are these new things, and what new things could a statement made more than two and a half millennia ago possibly mean for us today?

The historical context this passage refers to is that of Babylonian captivity, which took place after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Foreign rule, whether under the Babylonians, or previously the Assyrians, was a major threat to the fate, identity, and faith of God’s people. Was He truly sovereign and in control, and what



was He doing for His people in a time when foreign powers, backed by foreign gods, seemed supreme?

### **Layers of meaning**

It must have been both bewildering and comforting for the people to hear God declaring that He was doing “new things.” The God they knew was the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Isaiah 42:5), so if anyone was capable of doing a new thing, it would be Him. However, in a surprising twist, the justice that God promised would not be brought forth by a ruler or warrior mightier than those of the foreign powers, but a chosen servant upon whom God’s Spirit rested (Isaiah 42:1-4). This was new, not only in the promise of putting all existing wrongs to rights, but also—crucially—in the way it would be accomplished. The servant would effect all this quietly, without drawing attention to himself (Isaiah 42:2) or writing off the down-and-out (Isaiah 42:3).

The scope of this “new thing” also went beyond justice for God’s people. It included justice for others, to be administered through His chosen nation. Referred to as righteousness in Isaiah 42:6, it encompasses much more than individual holiness, and is linked to God’s covenant with His people, in which they are called to be “a

light for the nations.” This would be expressed through the restoration of sight and the freeing of captives (Isaiah 42:7). And all this would be done, not for Israel’s fame and power, but that God’s name would be upheld and His glory shown—that He would be shown to be the true God in contrast to man-made gods and idols (Isaiah 42:8).

Our present perspective enjoys the luxury of hindsight; we appreciate the fulfilment of these promises through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Many of the New Testament writings help us understand the new things that God has established in us through Christ. We are, in Him, a new creation, reconciled to God through Jesus bearing our sins upon Himself (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). Through His resurrection, we walk today in “newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

### **Contextualising the present**

But the promised justice and restoration has yet to be fully realised or fulfilled. Creation is still groaning, waiting to be set free, just as we “wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:18-25). In Isaiah, this future hope was very much part of the “new things” God had promised. At the end of the book, God makes the following promise: “For behold,

I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17). This coming together of new heavens and a new earth, in which our physical reality joins completely with God's spiritual realm, is what we all look forward to and long for.

The "new things" that God promised in Isaiah thus encompass what He has already accomplished through Christ and what we eagerly await in the coming of the new heavens and earth. This means you and I are part of a story that is still being written, a journey that God is still taking us through, which has involved all the saints that have gone before us and which we are called presently to undertake with endurance and eyes fixed on Christ (Hebrews 12:1–2).

### **Looking ahead**


This knowledge will take a lifetime to sink in, but what should our responses be? Isaiah 43:18–19 recalls Isaiah 42:9: "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" It seems odd at first that God's people are asked to turn away from what He had done for them in the past, such as the Exodus which is referred to in the preceding verses (Isaiah 43:16–17). This should not be

taken to imply ungratefulness or a forgetting of God's faithfulness. Instead, the people are called to not let a preoccupation with the past hinder their view of the new thing that God was presently doing. As the verses that immediately follow show us, living caught up in past glory can easily translate to present complacency, and even disobedience and faithlessness (Isaiah 43:22–24).

The focus on the "new things" God is accomplishing in us today and in the future is perhaps most vividly captured with the imagery of "springing forth" used in both Isaiah 42:9 and 43:19. The word in the original Hebrew refers to the sprouting and growth of a plant, and is used on several occasions in the book of Isaiah to refer to the life-giving work that our God—who created the heavens and the earth—promises to do (see Isaiah 61:11, for instance).

### **Redeeming our time**

The call for us is therefore not to busy ourselves with doing (or worse, buying) new things. Instead, and in keeping with the imagery used in Isaiah, we ought to be abiding in Christ who is the true vine (John 15:1–11) and allowing God's creative and life-giving power to spring forth in our lives; as individuals and as a church. God is doing a new



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thing in us and in our world today;  
let us keep our eyes open to what  
He is doing, and fixed on his Servant  
upon whom He has poured His Spirit,  
and may our lives grow to reflect the  
righteousness we are all called to  
live—a light for the nations.



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