

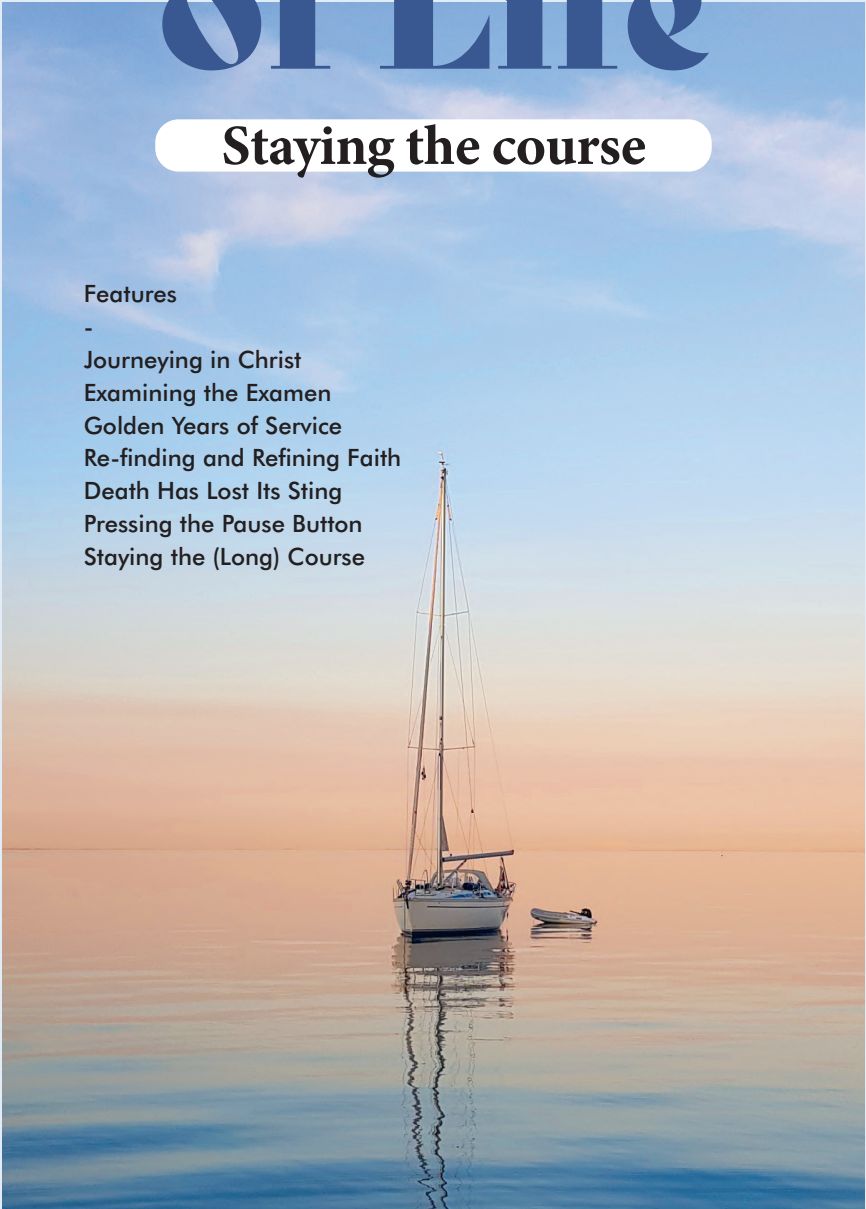
Seasons of Life

Staying the course

Features

-

Journeying in Christ
Examining the Examen
Golden Years of Service
Re-finding and Refining Faith
Death Has Lost Its Sting
Pressing the Pause Button
Staying the (Long) Course



Editor in chief

Allen Lim Teck Chye

Members

Christy Or
Michael K Tan
Yeo Hem Joo
Amanda Chong
Prisca Ang
John Cheong

Annabelle Ang-Bok
Eleanor Que
Tricia Kuan
Valerie Lim
Francina Chan

Contributors

Deaconess Bessie Lee
Ps Lim Ai Yee
Ps Richard Lau
Khaw Siew Ping
Tan Tok Khew
Alice Cheng

Mok King Wee
Jenny Tan
Nigel Sim
Janice Foo
John Peter Isaac
Vernon Martin

Kerine Au Martin
Markus Tan
Claire Tan
Faith Ong
Young Tan
Megan Ang

Designer

Lithospark Pte Ltd

Printer

Excelprint Solutions Pte Ltd

04 | IN FOCUS**Journeying
in Christ**

Lessons each Christian can learn from Hebrews 12:1-2 in our quest to remain faithful to the end.

15 | FEATURE**Re-finding and
Refining Faith**

One young man shares his story of leaving the faith after a loss and how he returned to God.

28 | FEATURE**Staying the
(Long) Course**

How a couple serves with passion and stays spiritually fresh.

37 | REGULAR**Youth Speak**

What a few young people discovered about the impact of boy-girl relationships on their walk with God.

07 | FEATURE**Examining
the Examen**

Learning about the Examen and its five movements.

19 | FEATURE**Death Has
Lost Its Sting**

In experiencing the loss of two family members, one of our church members testifies of the mercy and faithfulness of God.

32 | REGULAR**5 Things
About**

Ps Lim Ai Yee.

41 | REGULAR**Getting to Know**

Deaconess Bessie Lee.

11 | FEATURE**Golden Years
of Service**

Three of our long-time members share how they remain in active service in their retirement years.

23 | FEATURE**Pressing the
Pause Button**

Three SJSM members reflect on their spiritually refreshing three months at Tung Ling Bible School.

35 | REGULAR**Lessons
in Life**

My Dream Holiday Job.

45 | REGULAR**From the Word**

Understanding the place of suffering in a Christian's life.

Staying the Course

Every follower of Christ eventually finds out that the discipleship journey is no walk in the park. Jesus Himself makes this plain when He instructs His disciples to enter by the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13), and plainer still when He says: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24).

After the initial sweet moments of conversion have long passed, and when faced with the distractions, doubts, and difficulties of life that will invariably come our way, how do we muster the strength and the courage to stay on course? What can help us to finish the race well, and be counted faithful at the end of our earthly lives?

In this issue of Seasons of Life (SOL), we look to the witness of various SJSMers for some insight and inspiration. A young man overcomes his crisis of faith with the gentle support and encouragement of his church community. Three members in their seventies find new avenues to actively love God in their golden years. Others reflect on what has helped to sustain and refresh them in their many years of service and ministry. A woman, who loses two loved ones in close succession, continues to place her hope in God.

As you read these stories, we pray that you will be encouraged and emboldened to "run with endurance the race that is set before us", all the while looking to Jesus, who is "the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). May we also find rest, knowing that it is He who supplies us with all joy and all strength to stay the course.

Amanda Chong

On behalf of the Editorial Team

Journeying in Christ

Michael Tan

The Christian should need little reminding that he is but on a journey. There are many takes on what that means. For some it means YOLO - you live only once so live it up, and when combined with FOMO, the fear of missing out, it can lead to a self-centred hedonistic way of life. For others, being on a journey could be a grudging grind, a journey they wish would end soon - be it afflictions of all sorts they or loved ones suffer from or, a life that seems burdened with challenges more often than not. Still others are too taken up with daily life to give thought to the course; they just coast along, too engrossed to reflect on the journey they are carried on.

None of these should be the preoccupation of the Christian. He sees life as precious because of the price Jesus paid for it.

He sees life as a gift but not without the trials and tribulations that plague humankind - be it arising from the nature of sin within or the fallenness of the world without. And he knows

he is not left bereft - God gives him purpose and perspective to life. Further, his life journey is as important as heading to the right destination is.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

(Heb 12:1-2)

The passage above from Hebrews provides us several important lessons regarding our course on earth.

We are not the first of those who journey on earth in Christ.

There have been generations before that journeyed in faith in the Great I Am even before Jesus came, in keen anticipation of the Lamb of God who

takes away the sin of the world. We do well to emulate their journey of faith of staying the course even when they faced all manner of trials and adversity. They kept their focus on God and came through good for Him. God, who is faithful to those faithful to Him, will certainly be faithful to us as well. He does not change.

We need to lay aside every weight.

Everyone who competes in a race runs with as little as he needs to carry and can get away with. Yet we see ourselves hamstrung with untold burdens that weigh us down - be it keeping up with the Joneses, climbing the corporate ladder, concerned with providing for our loved ones and the list goes on.

When we are not careful, what seems to be a blessing can quickly become a burden, a weight, because it does not aid our journey but hampers it instead.

What is the weight that you and I need to lay down so that we can run free and run to win?

We need to keep dealing with the sins that beset our lives.

We will never be totally free of the power that sin asserts in our lives. Sure, the Lord delivers us from its power and from the wages sin brings in death. But our base nature never

fails to overcome us when we let it or let our guard down. As long as we live on in this body, we will need to let God deal with sin in our lives. This means being honest before God, listening to the convictions that the Holy Spirit brings and being increasingly dependent on Jesus as the continuing Redeemer of our lives as He sanctifies us.

This is a work that will only be completed when our course on earth is completed.

“When we are not careful, what seems to be a blessing can quickly become a burden, a weight, because it does not aid our journey but hampers it instead.”

We need to run with endurance!

Unfortunately the race is not only for short stretches of our life; it is over our entire life! There will be ups and downs and even prolonged periods of deep spiritual dryness many experience - we can't give up. We must persevere, we need endurance. God provides the strength but we need to recognise the rigour this journey or race needs and press on. Regardless.

We need to set our sights on Jesus.

This is something every Christian knows but finds hard to practise faithfully, moment in moment out, day in and day out. We are by nature distracted and we walk a lot easier by sight than by faith. Being able to set our eyes on Jesus is only part of it. The even harder part is being obedient to His call for our life as He reveals it to us. Hence it is not just about keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus but to not turn away from staying the course even when it is the hardest thing before us. We then realise that that is why our eyes need to be resolutely set on Jesus and all the more, when the going threatens to derail us.

The joy is yet to come.

While Jesus ushers us into a joy unspeakable when we invite Him into our life, and while the Holy Spirit grows that joy within us, the final consummation of true joy comes at the end of our life's journey when we are in God's presence. When we have stayed the course and finished it the way He wants us to. That is a joy beyond all human experience of joy!

How do we stay the course when we know we have not been on course all the time? We thank God that He is the One who does not give up on us in the periods of our lives where we have been way less than loving Him with "all our heart, mind, soul and

strength". Do we stray off course? Of course we do!

Does going off course mean we are out of the destiny God has mapped for us? I believe that is a resolute no. God is the One who is the Corrector of courses! Even if we know we have veered or for some, careened off course, we can return and continue - stay the course - when we return to Him.





Examining the Examen

Ps Richard Lau

When I first came across the word 'examen', I did a double take. I thought someone misspelled the word "exam". *Examen* comes from Latin, and most English dictionaries define it as some kind of examination of the conscience.

Widely understood as a daily prayer, the Examen originated more than 400 years ago with St Ignatius of Loyola, who encouraged the practice of prayer-filled mindfulness to develop discipline, ask for God's grace, and see how God works through and among us daily. It is a way of reflecting prayerfully on the day's events to detect God's presence and discern His direction for us. It's actually more of an attitude than a method, and is best done in a fluid rather than mechanical way, more like a conversation with Jesus as our best, most trusted, and most understanding friend, or even our lover.

The steps for practising the Examen vary, but generally they comprise five 'movements' — thanksgiving, petition, review, response, and looking ahead.

Personally, I have adapted it into a '5R pattern'.

Movement 1: Recognise & Return to God's Presence

We often miss what lies plainly in front of us. As 19th century British poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning wryly described,

*Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common
bush afire with God;
But only he who sees,
takes off his shoes —
The rest sit round it and
pluck blackberries.*

If we desire it and attune ourselves to look and listen, we may recognise that God is present within us, all around us, and speaking to us constantly.

The Examen, you see, is about intentionally setting aside time to be still and return to His presence.

Movement 2: Review your day & Request God's light and wisdom

Reflect on the day's events. You can do it in a chronological manner or just allow the Holy Spirit to draw you back and bring to mind particular events (e.g. high or low points). You might want to reflect on them on your own, talk to Jesus about some of them, or journal — whatever works for you or seems natural. Review the day through the lens of God's light and love, not your own. Ask God to bring divine insights, clarity, and discernment to detect His 'hidden' presence and actions in the course of the day.

One good way to discern God's movements is to pay attention to your moods and feelings through your daily encounters and activities. Boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? Don't try to change them or make them 'acceptable'. Offer them to God. Talk to Him about them, like a friend. Reflect on those emotions and ask yourself what He is saying through those feelings. Where was God in those feelings? What have you learned about yourself?

You could also ask yourself questions: Where did I give or receive love in this activity or interaction? Did I withhold love? What activity gave me the greatest high? Which one made me feel low?

Movement 3: Relish the moments that went well and all the gifts you have today

Gratitude for and acceptance of the gifts in our relationship can be easily presumed or missed. As you review your day in the Lord's presence, note His gifts: its joys, encouragement, surprises, and delights. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What did you receive from them? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things — God is in the details.



Choose one or two moments you are most grateful for, and ponder and pray about them further. Was there a significant encounter with someone? A vivid moment of pleasure or peace? Something that made you feel fully alive, connected, comforted, whole, your best self? It might be something 'insignificant' or even mysterious that somehow touched you, or in which you felt close to God.

It might be expressions of the gift of faith, like traces of vulnerability, surrender, willingness, openness, acceptance, patience, grace, etc.

This can result in prayer arising spontaneously from your heart — whether intercession, praise or gratitude. Breathe in your gratitude to God. Journal your gratitude to God if this is helpful.

Movement 4: Repent of any mistakes or experiences which make us feel distant from God

There will be experiences that caused us to feel drained of energy, frustrated, irritated, angry, sad, alone, rejected, less than our best, etc. Oftentimes, such moments make us feel far away from God.

It's humbling to be made aware that we are sinners. We do not always make choices that lead us to praise, honour, and serve God. We do not always believe that we are loved. We can be and often are ungrateful and unfaithful. Often, we fail to love Him and our neighbours.

Sin is the failure to bother to love; it's not only things we do but also things we fail to do. St Ignatius traces it to a lack of gratitude — failure to recognise everything as a gift to be cherished, fostered, and shared; failure to love as God has loved us.

Sorrow, while uncomfortable and distressing, is an invitation to

acknowledge the humbling fact of our fallibility — which is good for the soul. But it can also accompany the acceptance of the truth of who we are in God's love, and the forgiveness extended to us through repentance. God loves us even when we are sinners. Only when we know the depth of our sin do we know the depth of God's mercy. We are not as good as we thought, but we are much more loved than we can ever imagine.

As we take note of our sins and weaknesses, we also carefully consider other implications. Does a feeling of frustration perhaps mean that God wants us to consider a new direction in some area of our work? A sense of guilt about a friend may mean that God wants us to reach out to him in some way.

“If we desire it and attune ourselves to look and listen, we may recognise that God is present within us, all around us, and speaking to us constantly.”

Movement 5: Resolve (practically) and look ahead

As you end this time of conversation with God, bring whatever insights,

perspectives, direction, and wisdom you have received (or the lack thereof) to some resolution. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God. You may resolve to ask for God's protection and help, or ask for His wisdom about the questions you have, and guidance for tomorrow's challenges and problems.

You can end the Daily Examen with the Lord's Prayer, and pray for hope and courage.

The Examen can be difficult prayer to learn and do on your own. I have been practising it for more than 10 years but still feel there is room for growth. I now do it on a weekly basis using an (unfortunately obsolete) app although some people do it more frequently. What matters is not technique but one's conversational relationship with God, experiencing His presence and His love.

I am aware there are concerns about this mode of prayer: its Catholic origins, the heavy use of imagination which can be subjective, to name a couple. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine all these concerns in detail.

Ephesians 6:18 encourages us to pray "*at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication*". I use the Examen because for me, it is a great way to pray, to develop greater self-awareness and sensitivity and to look for God's presence in my life; to go the distance and stay the course.

Its Catholic or Ignatian associations are less important to me — but I do make it a point to keep grounded in God's Word.

Happy Examen-ing!

Helpful websites & apps:

Reimagining the Examen
(Examen app with topical prayer guide list)

<https://reimaginingexamen.ignatianspirituality.com/>

Examen (An app by Fuller Studio, associated with Fuller Theological Seminary)

<https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/prayer-of-examen/>

<https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/rediscovering-the-prayer-of-examen/>

<https://www.emotionallyhealthy.org/the-most-important-question-of-every-day/>

<https://renovare.org/articles/the-sustaining-bread-of-self-knowledge>

Examen: Bringing My Whole Self to God. Ruth Barton. ZONDERVAN / 2011 / VIDEO DOWNLOAD

Golden Years of Service

Yeo Hem Joo

What do you feel when you hear the word “retirement”?

- Anticipation because, finally, you can live a relaxed and comfortable life, travel round the world, take up some hobbies you never had a chance to?
- Unease because your identity has been so tied to your job you can’t imagine life after that?
- Anxiety because of the prospect of declining health and rising medical bills?

A disciple of Christ is called to embark on this lifelong journey of growth into holiness and humble service to God. Retirement is but another phase in this journey, albeit closer to the end - of returning home to God. In one recent YouTube video I watched, theologian and writer, John Piper, with characteristic candour and conviction, pleads with older believers “not to waste their retirement but to live out their golden years with a far greater purpose in mind.”

He quotes J I Packer from his book *Finishing Our Course with Joy: Guidance from God for Engaging with Our Aging*:

“The challenge that faces us is not to let physical slowing down produce spiritual slowing down but to cultivate the maximum zeal for the closing phase of our earthly life.”

Among the older congregants in SJSM, I am encouraged by some of these stalwart senior members who have stayed the course and who model for the younger ones a sincere faith in action. This article features three of them: Tan Tok Khew, Alice Cheng and Mok King Wee, all in their seventies. From what I have learnt from them, their retirement life has not produced “spiritual slowing down”; instead, they continue to abide in Christ with joy and gratitude.

Remaining active in service

All three of them had careers and juggled work, family and church commitments before reaching

retirement. In their earlier years, they had always been active in church: Tok Khew gave much of his time and energy, sitting on committees that take charge of various church or church building projects over the years; prior to the pandemic, Alice was often seen participating in events like line-dancing, a picture of unbridled enthusiasm; on many Sundays, King Wee, the veteran usher, stood outside the church sanctuary welcoming all visitors to the service with a warm smile.

When asked about their feelings about retirement, all of them agreed that they had looked forward to retirement as a new season of life where they were free to spend more quality time with family and friends, as well as to explore new avenues of service to God.

Tok Khew retired way earlier than the other two, in 2003 from his job with an oil refinery. He then started working as a volunteer with the Alpha Office to bring the Alpha program to the Prisons from 2003-2007. Seeing some inmates coming to faith and getting baptised was rewarding. He also received in-depth training in the Christian ministry of deliverance and inner healing which subsequently brought him to China between 2012 and 2017 to lead and participate in training and healing workshops. Witnessing people being set free from demonic influences manifesting in physical, emotional and mental illnesses deepened his appreciation of

the power of God.



Tok Khew and his family on holiday

He cited one memorable incident where one male participant who had slept for 2 hours every night for the last 20 years, was healed after confessing the Lordship of Christ and releasing forgiveness to those who had deeply wounded him. "At the conclusion of the 7-day workshop, the man was able to put in 6 hours of sleep. All praises to God!" he recounted.

Alice, a former primary school teacher till 2015, loves spending time with her grandsons on some of the weekdays. Ever so energetic and sociable, to widen her circle of pre-believing friends, she attends courses at community centres, joins a

Residents' Committee and even volunteers with the Citizens On Patrol. In this way, she has had opportunities to share Christ with others.

Prior to the pandemic, she was also a regular at the exercise sessions and dance activities held in church. It is no wonder that this question is often posed to her: "Where did you get all your energy from?" With a twinkle in her eyes, her response would be: "vitamin G: G-O-D!"



Alice with her grandson

For the last 10 years before King Wee retired in 2019, he had worked in Brazil. While he was there, he felt led to serve as an usher at the international church he attended and by the time he left, he had already been put in charge of offertory collection for some years and then presented with a token of appreciation for his service. Since his return and retirement, apart from participating in one Alpha program as a group leader, following up a new believer he has also started joining a home visitation team to encourage

those homebound. And of course, he is still seen helping out with ushering whenever he is available. "I thank God that He has given me a gift of hospitality for His service," he said humbly.



King Wee with wife, Betty

Remaining in Christ

Accompanying active service, these three retirees know the importance of remaining in close communion with the Lord. For Tok Khew, his habits of daily Bible reading and attending weekly dawn prayer sessions have continued and his spiritual life has been greatly enriched by experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit to heal and deliver people from bondages. Alice enjoys journaling daily her prayers and devotions, makes an effort to memorise scriptures and also reads relevant and encouraging books on aging. On top of all this, she joined the Bible Study Fellowship two years ago to deepen her understanding of God's word. Similarly, King Wee maintains regular quiet time with the Lord and makes it a point to attend many of the courses the church offers like "Know The Word", contemplative

retreat and mentoring sessions with other brothers in Christ.

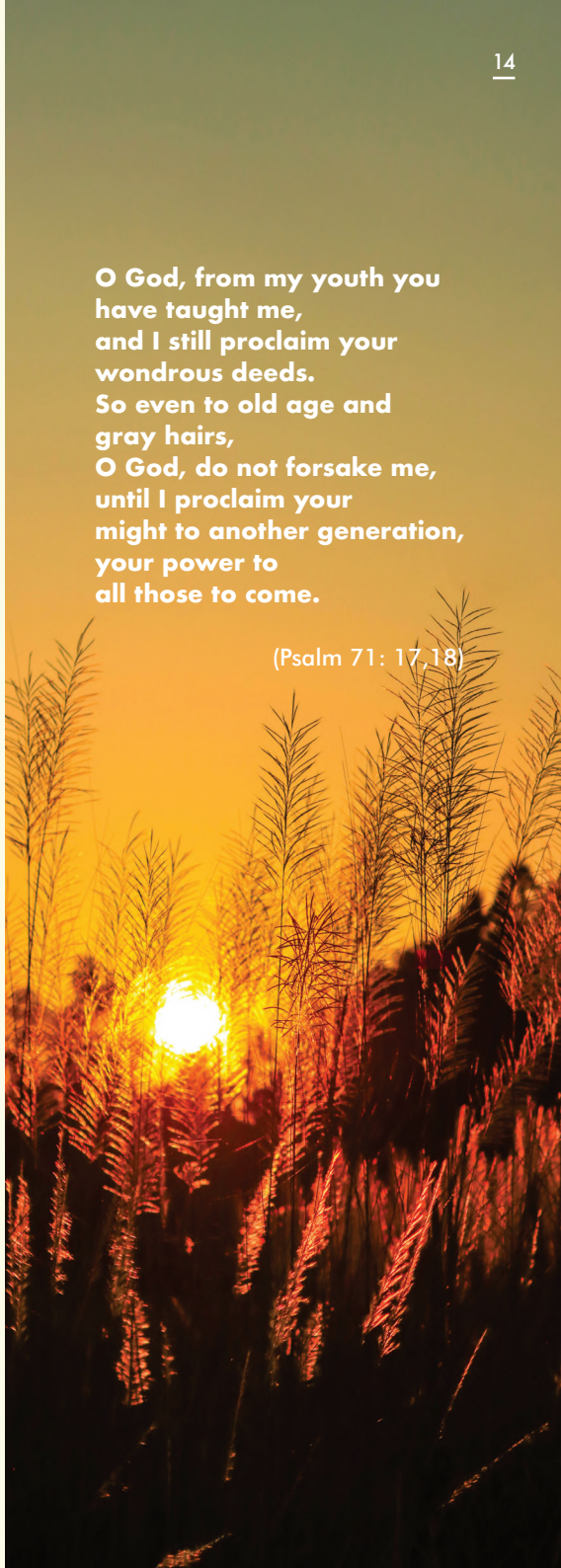
All of them acknowledge that with age, their bodies are not as before and at times, they are outpaced by technology. Tok Khew shared he could not change a punctured car tyre recently as he had no strength to lift the tyre; Alice's hearing and eyesight are less sharp and she struggles with all the apps everyone is using like Singpass, QR Code, etc. Yet I sense in them a deep assurance in God that is inspiring.

I feel thankful indeed to learn from these three older believers who have shown me what it is like to age gracefully. In fact, it made me realise that if I take time to have tea or coffee with other elderly church members in our midst, I would almost certainly discover a wealth of uplifting testimonies of God's goodness and faithfulness!

“The challenge that faces us is not to let physical slowing down produce spiritual slowing down but to cultivate the maximum zeal for the closing phase of our earthly life.”

**O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.
So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation,
your power to all those to come.**

(Psalm 71: 17,18)



Re-finding and Refining Faith

Markus Tan



“My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

(Psalm 71: 17,18)

Leaving the faith in my younger years

I was born into a Christian family and attending church on Sundays was always a given. But while my physical presence in church was consistent, much of it was simply following my parents out of routine. I paid little attention to my inner life and relationship with God. I knew these were important but life was fine the way it was.

All of that changed in June 2017, when during my Basic Military Training, I received a call from my dad. I will never forget his words over the phone, “Markus, your brother has been diagnosed with the big C.” The news hit me hard, especially since

there was no warning or precursor. In the following year or so, our family’s life took a turn for the worse.

Ivan, my older brother, was diagnosed with stage 4 Ewing Sarcoma cancer, a rare type of cancer that occurs in bones or soft tissue around bones. By the time of diagnosis, the cancerous cells had spread to his crucial organs. He went through five rounds of chemotherapy, two rounds of laser therapy and a stem cell transplant as the doctors tried their best to stop the cancer from taking over his body. It was heartbreaking coming home every weekend to a pale and weak older brother with a body covered in plasters from the many injections he received. In the days I got to spend with him, our time was mostly spent together on the sofa, with a machine beside him to regulate his breathing and stabilise his vitals.

This period was difficult for my parents too. They exhausted every means to ensure that Ivan received the best care possible, regardless of how much time and money it cost.

Perhaps what was most heart-wrenching was watching my parents on their knees every night, praying for my brother's miraculous recovery. It also got me thinking – "If God is such a good God, why would this happen to my family? Why us?" These thoughts, coupled with my lack of a relationship with God, put my faith on shaky ground.

On Oct 14, 2018, while in church, I received a call requesting that I head to the hospital as soon as possible. I remember speeding to the hospital, sensing that it could be the last time I could be around my brother. By the time I arrived at the ward, the Lord had called Ivan home.



The months following Ivan's passing saw me completely leave the faith. I plunged myself into things that I thought could fill the emptiness inside, only to wake up the next morning with the same sense of loss I felt the day Ivan had left us. I no longer gave excuses to skip church – only because I had expressed to my parents that I did not want to believe

in a God who would put me through such agonising pain.

The journey back to Christ

After a period away from the faith, Ryan, a close friend of mine since our rugby playing days in JC, persuaded me to visit SJSM for church services. There was a lot of inertia to set foot in church again, but I eventually gave in to Ryan's relentless nudging. It is hard to pinpoint what was different during my second experience of being in church, but I found it refreshing to find my feet in Christ again in a new place, without concerns about serving in ministry.

I began attending services more regularly and even brought my partner along with me. To my surprise, I found myself showing up for services even when Ryan could not accompany me. It was during one of these services that I came across the Alpha course.

Watching the Alpha promotional video got me thinking – if I was going to start over, why not do it like how someone new to the faith would?

Alpha played a huge role in my journey back to Christ and a big thank you must be said to my Alpha hosts, Alex and Pearl. As a couple, they were incredibly warm and hospitable, making every session a space for conversations and learnings that were important in my season of rediscovering God. As the

cherry on top of the cake, Pearl always made sure my belly was full and happy at every session.

Fast forward to the end of 2019, I joined a cell group with individuals around my age. Although Covid-19 restrictions made it difficult to share life, I appreciated that we intentionally carved out time to meet each other virtually and physically, when measures allowed for it. Sharing Christian life with others in the same life stage has been very encouraging.

Looking back, a lot has happened since I first took up Ryan's invitation to attend a service in SJSM. It has been very helpful that with every step back into church and into faith, I have been met with hospitality and love from members of the church. Folks like Ryan, Alex and Pearl went the extra mile to reach out to me, and always welcomed me and my questions about Christ. My cell group has also been important in my journey to re-find my faith. After two years with them, I still seldom share about Ivan, but unbeknown to them, our interactions and conversations have in many ways supported me in my recovery from losing a loved one.

From the Bible, we read that God intends for us to follow Him as a part of the body of Christ. I have experienced first-hand the encouragement and life that comes from being rooted in a church and I hope that all of us have a community of believers pointing us back to God

and persistently reaching out to us in love.

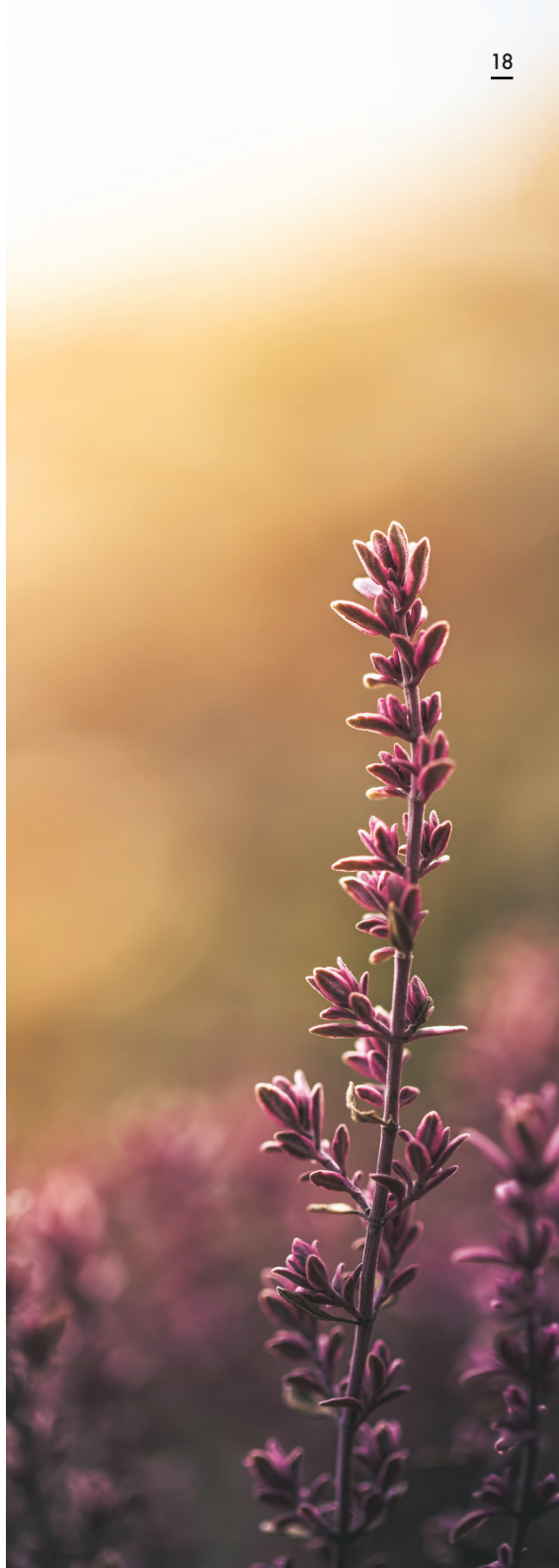
“Watching the Alpha promotional video got me thinking – if I was going to start over, why not do it like how someone new to the faith would?”

Continuing to seek God even after finding him

It has been some time since we said goodbye to Ivan and over time, we as a family have come to accept that he has gone home to be with our Lord. Even today, there are moments of grieving, but there is also hope — that because of the cross, we will see him again one day. The further I journey with the Lord, the more I have come to know Him as a loving and sovereign provider, whose provision may not necessarily look like what we have in mind. Even as I begin my working life, he is bringing me through experiences that grow my faith and show me His goodness. While my attention is often on the outcomes and tangibles, slowly I see that our God uses the journey to renew the heart and mind. And as the loving God He is, He gives strength and the assurance of His presence to complete the journey.

For those of us who feel far from God or who may be struggling with loss, my prayer is that we will know the Lord's peace and seek refuge in Him. Should there come a time when we find ourselves far from the faith, I pray that we might see that the Lord's door remains open, and it is never too late to turn back to Him.

Markus recently graduated from SMU and is with the Navy now. If he is not working out, he is probably searching for the best marinade for chicken breast meat.



Death Has Lost Its Sting!

Jenny Tan and Yeo Hem Joo

The following is Jenny's testimony of how the Lord saw her through the loss of her loved ones.

The night after the funeral, I had a dream. In it, I saw a long queue of people. Everyone was carrying a bundle. Then, I saw Robert and Lorna among them. Robert said to me, "We have to return all our belongings." And Lorna turned to me and spoke these words: "Death has lost its sting."

I became a Christian in 2010 at an Alpha Course retreat, at the age of 65. By this time, I had retired as a school teacher. My husband, Robert, was unhappy with my decision to accept Christ as he was a member of the Swastika Society. In fact, he threatened to divorce me when I mentioned that I wanted to be baptised. I committed it to the Lord in prayer, and strangely enough, when I eventually went ahead with my baptism a few years later, he did not make good on his threat.

I have five children and Lorna was

my eldest daughter. At 40, she was unexpectedly diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. It had spread to her brain, backbone, and liver. The prognosis was not good: she was given only four months to live.

Everyone was devastated by the news. Why did this happen? She had three children, the youngest of whom was only eight years old at the time. As a believer, Lorna entrusted her life into God's hands and bravely underwent various chemotherapy treatments and surgeries, with many days spent in and out of the hospital.

Family and friends prayed fervently for her to be healed. It is by God's grace and mercy that she lived on for another 11 years, to see her youngest turn 19 years old.

On 22 May 2021, at age 51, Lorna went home to be with the Lord. Unexpectedly, Robert had also passed away on the same day, seven hours earlier.

The circumstances surrounding their

passing, one after another, caused intense heartache and sorrow.

But in the midst of the storm, God's guiding presence was with us, and I can truly testify that His love endures forever.

An answered prayer

In the middle of 2020, Robert, who was 79 then, started feeling weak and could not walk much. We did not have a helper and I became his sole caregiver, accompanying him to his weekly physiotherapy sessions and coaxing him to do his daily exercises at home. On top of this, I had to do the housework and see to all his daily needs like cooking for him, feeding and bathing him. It was a physically exhausting time, but the Lord blessed

hospital. The Lord must have softened his heart through the years of prayers.

On 14 May 2021, to my immense surprise and joy, when I asked him if he would like to become a child of God and be able to pray for Lorna whom he loved very much, he said 'yes'! In the past, whenever I shared the gospel with him or tried persuading him, his reply would be an immediate 'no'. I led him through the sinner's prayer, my heart full of gratitude that he was finally saved.

United in death

The next evening, Robert suddenly experienced breathing difficulties. He was admitted to Sengkang General Hospital, as our second daughter, Benita, was a doctor there and could



Robert's 80th birthday celebration. Lorna is on his left.

me with special strength to cope and look after him.

All this while, I would update Roberton Lorna's progress in the

monitor his condition more easily than if he were to be admitted to the same hospital as Lorna. He was diagnosed with pneumonia. By this time, we had a helper who was able

to care for Robert in the daytime. For the next several days, I shuttled between two hospitals.

During my daily visits, I was glad to learn that Robert had been praying for Lorna whom he missed. Somehow, by the grace of God, two doctors from the two different hospitals arranged for them to see each other via a Zoom meeting. It was a precious moment for the family despite Lorna being unable to talk.

Meanwhile, Lorna's condition was deteriorating. Prior to Robert's hospitalisation, she underwent an operation to drain fluid from her brain. Since then, she had been drifting in and out of consciousness. On the oncologist's advice, she was discharged on 21 May to be with family. It was emotionally difficult when the hospice staff prepared us for what to do in the event of her passing. Lorna had eluded death so many times over the past 11 years; we were hopeful that she would recover once again.

On the day of her discharge, I visited Robert as usual in the evening. Seeing that his nails were long, I trimmed them and then fed him some food. Again, Robert expressed his desire to go home so that he could see Lorna. I encouraged him to do his exercises so that he could recover quickly, to which he responded by vigorously doing his hand exercises.

That very night at home, Lorna's left

lung collapsed and Benita began thumping her chest to dislodge any particles there. In the midst of this, an urgent call came for her to go to the hospital, as her father was having difficulty breathing. She made a tough decision to save her sister first and did not go. Less than half an hour later, another call came: Robert passed away at 10pm.



One of our Chinese New Year reunion dinners

Returning from the hospital morgue after midnight, I fell asleep immediately, emotionally and physically drained. At 7am when I awoke, my heart broke to learn that Lorna had passed on at 5am. Two beloved family members passed away within seven hours of each other! It was hard to describe the depth of sorrow we experienced at this loss.

On the second night of the wake, Pastor Simon presided over the service. Before coming, he received a vision of the word 'unity'. Arriving at the funeral parlour, he noticed the two caskets side by side with a long table that held floral baskets. They formed the letter 'U', seeming to confirm the word. Indeed, the Lord blessed our

families with much unity and cooperation as we supported one another during this painful time of bereavement.

The word also comforted me, assuring me that my husband and daughter were united in life and in death. There would be no more suffering and they are now with Jesus.

**O death, where is
your victory?
O death, where is
your sting?**

(1 Cor 15:55)

The dream that I had on the night after the funeral was a powerful reminder that no matter how successful our earthly lives are or how many possessions we have accumulated, it is salvation in Christ Jesus that counts for eternity. Life and death are in God's hands, and it is through Christ that we have triumphed over sin and death.

“In the midst of the storm, God’s guiding presence was with us, and I can truly testify that His love endures forever.”



Pressing the Pause Button

Compiled by Yeo Hem Joo

Living in this fast-paced society, our days can fly past us in a blur. So, not surprisingly, there are times when Christians are prompted to hit the pause button. It may be due to an unexplained restlessness or dryness within; it may be to seek clarity about a new direction in life; it may be to take stock of our lives or it may simply be an invitation from the Lord to rest in Him.

Three of our church members decided to do just that by attending a three-month course at Tung Ling Bible School (TLBS) this year and here are their personal reflections.

Janice Foo

I have worked in the education sector for thirty years. In recent years, however, thoughts about 'a new season of life' came to mind time and again. I sought the Lord for discernment and direction. One morning, the devotional reading was 1 Kings 19:19-21 which described the call of Elisha, a farmer, to become God's appointed prophet.

Subsequently, the same passage surfaced again. At the same time, I had this desire to dedicate time to 'sit at the feet of Jesus' and develop a deeper relationship with Him. This eventually led me to enrol into the School of Ministry (SOM) course at TLBS in January.

The theme for our cohort was the "Wind of Change". It spoke volumes to the students, many of whom were at the crossroads in life. For me, it was a confirmation of a divine call to a new beginning.

During my time there, I took on a new identity - from educator to full-time student. It was a refreshing change. However, more significant were the following memorable transformative experiences:

Diversity of student cohort

It was heart-warming to see a multi-generational cohort of students from diverse backgrounds coming together to study the Word of God, serve in ministries and engage in

social activities. My interaction with the millennials at SOM has inspired me to consider a new ministry involving young adults.

for students to exercise the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There was room for learning even from mistakes. These spiritual gifts were instruments to bring



Janice holding a copy of the latest TLBS publication, Polished Shaft

Daily 'Spiritual Manna'

The "Early Bird Devotions" and the lectures were God's daily provision of 'spiritual manna'. They provided both spiritual direction and practical guidance to Christian living. The module on "Father Heart of God" had a profound impact on me due to fresh insights into the heart and character of God. The ability to release long-held painful memories and experiences led to 'freedom in Christ'.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

TLBS provided a nurturing environment

the "Wind of Change" to our lives. I received with thanksgiving, physical healing as well as a prophetic word which confirmed God's calling.

Through the SOM programme in TLBS, I had a deeper engagement with God, His Word and His people, leading to a spiritual renewal.

The wind of God has led me through a process of transformation which is still ongoing. For the new season of my life, I am looking to the leading of the Good Shepherd for every step I take for the journey ahead.

John Peter Isaac

In the busyness of my work in church, there had been a stirring within to go into another area of ministry. I wanted to seek God's direction and confirmation of His plan for the next season of my life. That was when I came to know about TLBS and signed up for the SOM.

I was not prepared for how it would impact my life and do such a deep restorative work within.

It was a mountain top experience to encounter God through worship, lectures and ministry time. Every day was a discovery journey of learning who God is and who I am.

Surrendering to God

In my encounter with God at TLBS, He dealt first with my past baggage: in my younger days, I had many experiences of emotional hurts and cutting words spoken by people I looked up to. I was unaware how deep the wounds were or how I had let them fester inside my heart for years.

All these had led to a build-up of subconscious resentment, unforgiveness and inadequacy that had prevented me from a deeper growth in my discipleship journey. Worse, they were wearing me down and robbing me of my joy.



John with the dean of TLBS School of Leadership, Philip Ong, at the Graduation Service

I felt I was a piece of iron placed in the hands of a master blacksmith and being forged and shaped into a tool for the master's use.

The Lord brought these up to the surface - just like impurities that float when a metal is refined in the furnace - during ministry time

when I went forward for prayer. He did a deep work in my heart and “stitched” me up as said by the dean who prayed over me. With that, I surrendered my life anew to God.

I was reminded of a vision years ago. I saw a man trying to help a fish caught in a net but it wriggled and struggled so much till the man had to stop. The fish became more entangled than before until it finally lay still, completely worn out. I sensed the Lord telling me that I was like that fish, not allowing Him to do the work but trusting in my own strength and abilities to overcome life’s challenges. In a way, He brought me to TLBS to teach me to “let go and let God”.

“I was not prepared for how it would impact my life and do such a deep restorative work within.”

I am very thankful for this experience that is like no other, walking into an “open heaven” daily, to meet with God, to be fed and nourished by His Word and Spirit. In addition, the community was very supportive and open: the lecturers poured their hearts into ours to teach and minister to us; the friends I made there have stayed in touch, encouraging me onward in my spiritual journey to be transformed

and equipped according to His perfect plan and purpose. I highly recommend this course to anyone seeking to be refreshed spiritually.

Nigel Sim

The last two years before attending TLBS had taken a toll on me, not least because of the intensity of work and changes brought on by the COVID pandemic. By late 2021, I needed rest. Not just physical rest, but a rest and refreshment that only God could give. I wasn’t burnt out or unable to carry on, but in a place where I had allowed the enemy to rob me of the joy in Christ. It was a kind of spiritual doldrums.

I had heard about TLBS many years ago through the testimonies of past alumni and friends, and made vague plans to attend one day. As it turned out, there was no practical way for me to enroll until this year. When things finally fell into place, I knew the Lord had made it possible.

The SOM was such a blessing. It is not a course primarily to gain useful information or build up an academic understanding of the bible. It is focused instead on transformation - which comes through meeting the living and felt presence of the Holy Spirit. There is such an anointing on this school. I think this is because we are taught by people who are in love with Jesus and that love flows through them.



Nigel performing at the Graduation Service

I think the students catch a bit of that passion too and you see it in the beautiful way the Lord works through them as they serve together and minister to each other. Some of these are kids just out of secondary school. Some are in seasons of transition between jobs. Many are people who enrolled in obedience to the sensing that this is what God calls them to do. In the course of the term, I got to know some wonderful people whose fellowship was such an encouragement to me. It was a privilege to learn with them and hear their often very moving testimonies at our daily morning chapel.

Hearing from God

Through TLBS, I learnt about waiting on the Lord. In doing so, I received strength and hope through the Holy Spirit. It was not just through attending classes, but also how God attending

classes, but also how God spoke to me during this period.

On my long commute early in the morning to school, the Lord would often drop a verse into my heart. On more than one occasion, these verses got refrained in different ways over the course of the day. Something I meditated on in the morning would get covered in the day whether through the teaching or through worship, prayer or ministry time. It was like He was saying "These are My words for you, pay attention to them."

Overall, I came away from these three months spiritually refreshed having experienced the unmistakable leading of the Holy Spirit as well as being embraced by the intimate, affirming and comforting love of the Father.

Staying the (Long) Course



If you've been attending SJSM with some regularity, it's highly unlikely you haven't encountered either or both Vernon and Kerine. Here, they share how they stay joyful and energised despite what many would consider a daunting work and ministry schedule.

Words & Photos Vernon Martin & Kerine Au Martin

One comment we frequently get is: "You guys are everywhere!" It's often followed by this piece of advice: "Please set aside time for rest." It's not surprising, since we serve in quite a few ministries like cell and children's ministries, outreach efforts such as working with our foreign brothers, and overseas missions.

To be honest, we find it difficult to respond to such comments. We know they are intended to encourage us and cheer us on, but we're uncomfortable drawing attention to ourselves. It probably sounds like a clichéd 'good Christian answer', but we really feel it's God who should

be marvelled at, for He is the One working behind it all. Our response is usually to give thanks to God for the privilege of serving Him and being part of His grand plan. We attribute or direct all honour to Him, from whom all blessings flow.

The Road to the Starting Block

Our spiritual backgrounds and journeys are rather similar. We both grew up in Roman Catholic families, and were each greatly influenced by a particular family member who ensured that we attended church regularly. Neither of us really had a personal relationship with Jesus, though. Nearly everything we knew about God was head knowledge.

A few years into our marriage, we were invited to attend Alpha here in SJSM. We accepted. At the end of the course, we decided to commit ourselves to Christ. Alpha was an eye-opening experience for us; it brought us to the realisation that it is by grace we are saved, and not by works. That was the turning point;

we recognise that our relationship with Jesus began after Alpha.

Hearing and Answering the Call

Our cell leader Yuen Kit, who is a great role model in this area, encouraged us to serve. Cell Word Time was and is really helpful; reflecting on practical applications of God's Word often steer us towards having a heart to serve others. There's also our involvement in BSF: Apart from studying the Word, our leadership role in this ministry has enabled us to undergo training that equips us to grow spiritually and look beyond ourselves to serve others in the church and the community.

Actively listening to sermons has also encouraged us to serve. Back in 2015, SJSM embarked on a sermon series on the theme of having a fruitful life, which spoke to us deeply. It covered the 3Ms — Maturity, Ministry and Mission — which has stuck with us since. We were also deeply moved by a church camp sermon by Mike Raiter — that was what really launched us into service.

The Word is the main reason we are convicted. The Scriptures call God's people to Christ-centredness, personal holiness, bold witness, and selfless service. Through reading the Word, we began to know God more and more. Having a high view of His Church encourages us to reach out to the needy and serve others.

The Word also helped us to know ourselves. Having a high view of God and receiving revelation about our true nature in Christ, we began to see that serving is not a decision to make but a call to answer.



The Reality of Challenges

Kerine's main challenge is balancing our children's needs and ministry work. We began serving when our children were around six years old. We struggled with deciding on and arranging for childcare each time we had to leave them. It required forward planning, especially regarding travelling to and from school.

We often had to make difficult decisions when faced with invitations to a fun day out with their friends from school that clashed with our church service schedule. We would either have to arrange for them to be in the care of others (and then we would be distracted while in church due to concern about how they were doing), or we would turn down the



reasons to them. There were also times we found ourselves heavy hearted due to missing our family devotion which we normally do with them before bedtime. Coming home to a quiet house (as the kids have already turned in) often caused a pang, as they had gone to bed without us spending our evening praying and talking through our day together.

Vernon's primary challenge is balancing work and ministry. Pre-COVID, business travel was frequent and regular. Things are still evolving now with the changing global situation, but work continues to require a lot from him.

The more we serve, especially in diverse areas, the more we are challenged to steward our time well between God, ministry work, family, and our vocations. To be honest, we do often end up leaning on our own

strength. This is where our personal walk with the Lord is critical. Personal devotions, Bible study, and daily prayers help us to recalibrate our hearts and minds. We can say without a doubt that taking personal responsibility for your spiritual health is essential for every person who serves in God's ministry.

Christ Himself is our Reward

Reading God's word reveals God's character as much as it reveals our human nature. These truths have helped us to see how undeserving we are, and to appreciate more how God in His mercy and grace has saved us. Matthew 25:34-40, on loving the least of these because it is akin to loving Christ Himself, is one of the passages that roused us into serving — not only in church but also in the community.

Being part of a community of believers is an important part of Body Life that spurs us on. We are drawn to friendship and fellowship. Our friends in church play a critical role: the thought that we get to meet like-minded friends when we come to serve often gives us a needed nudge.

The joy of family bonding is another reason we serve. Serving in church together is fun, facilitates growth and maturation, and inspires us to spur one another on. As parents, we really want to live out serving the Lord as role models for our children. Seeing our children grow in maturity is one of the main reasons we fight to stay the course. Of course we sometimes make sacrifices in terms of choosing how we spend our time, but that has (thankfully!) helped Ashlyn and Ryan to see love being put into action.

Both our kids now see serving in church as an integral part of our lives as a family; we're proud to be able to say that our shared ethos is "When God calls, we answer". Whenever a serving opportunity becomes known to them, they answer the call.

In the end, it all stems from our gratitude for the saving grace of Jesus Christ. The desire to finish the race and to end well keeps us going. Hebrews 12:1-3 is such a gift from God: We picture the agony Jesus endured on the cross and how He did not give up because of the joy He had in the endgame.

When we are weary, we look to Him, and receive the strength to not give up.

**...when I'm weary and
overwrought
With so many battles
left unfought
I see the Man of Sorrows and
His long troubled road
I see the world on His shoulders
and my easy load
And when the Saints
go marching in
I want to be one of them**

— Sara Groves, "When The Saints"



5 THINGS ABOUT: **Ps Lim Ai Yee**

Our Newest Zone Pastor

Ps Ai Yee may be the newest zone pastor added to the Pastoral Connexion but she is no stranger to SJSM. Her family, consisting of her husband, Teck Chuan and two children, Caleb and Charis, are all active members, serving in various ministries.

SOL: Do share with us a fun fact about yourself.

Ai Yee: I have always seemed like an aunty from a young age because of the way my name sounds in Chinese. My name is 爱艺, which sounds similar to 'aunty' in Chinese but it means "love art". I was named by my late father, who was trained at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. He would have had a career as a famous artist but gave it up to obey his mother to take up something more stable to support the family instead. This is also why I do not have a Christian name and kept my Chinese name - to honour him. Regrettably, I did not inherit his artistic gene – but both Caleb and Charis did!

SOL: Can you share more about your family?

Ai Yee: Teck Chuan and I were invited to SJSM in the early 1990s by our very dear friend, Gerry. Gerry's amazing transformation proved how real Jesus is, and we wanted to worship in a community where he received that grace and where we could grow in the Lord and be fruitful. My journey with the Lord has been relatively plain sailing compared to his. Yet, I am assured by God's promises and faithfulness through my little ups and downs in my marriage, parenting and service ministries.

Looking back on my days in SJSM, I was serving in T4 (tertiary students fellowship) as a cell leader and also as a back-up singer in the music ministry. Teck Chuan and I stepped down from the cell leading when our children came along. We then helped out in junior church as worship leaders, counsellors and then team leads. Those were tiring days but we have been rewarded with the joy of seeing the



little ones in junior church grow into fine young men and women of God.

SJSM has given me many precious memories of my children growing up and forming many friendships. It is for this reason that I felt the need to pay it forward to those who had served faithfully in this community and to encourage or inspire others to do likewise.

SOL: What was your working life experience like before the Lord called you into a full-time pastoral ministry?

Ai Yee: In 2018, I had the chance to work in Alpha Asia Pacific as Regional Coordinator. I was very much impacted by Alpha's culture of hospitality and their mission of bringing the gospel to the ends of the world. It opened my eyes to see how the Holy Spirit moves when we

avail ourselves to Him. It also helped me realise that our ears need to be always attentive and yielded to Him, regardless of whether we are in a secular job or engaged in church work. Hence, from that experience, there was a growing desire within me to serve in the pastoral ministry.

SOL: What are one or two experiences you have encountered in which the hand of God was clearly evident in your life?

Ai Yee: The Lord has increasingly allowed me to experience how submissiveness is key to enjoying the work in church, without which, hearts can easily be wounded and conflicts easily arise. I have learnt to submit to leaders, whose viewpoints I may disagree with from time to time, as this is instructed in Scripture.

Moreover, I am reminded of how the Lord's anger was aroused by the murmuring and grumbling of the Israelites against Moses in the wilderness. So, by His grace, I am being disciplined in the areas of showing grace and submission to God's appointed leaders.

SOL: Can you share a high and a low of your experience as a zone pastor?

Ai Yee: Philippians 2:3 has been my anchor verse: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves." This has been my prayer and request to the Lord - to stay in a position of humility when serving the zone, especially since I am serving amongst veterans.

Leading cells from different age groups comes with many challenges. My biggest one is the feeling of inadequacy due to my lack of formal theological training. I have to keep reminding myself that it is the Lord who calls and enables, like He did with the apostles. Furthermore, it is equally important to build genuine, loving relationships while providing pastoral care and oversight.

One recent highlight has been the well-attended Zone Gathering for Zone 1 on 21 May. The gathering was planned by a team of representatives appointed by their respective cell leaders. The 2.5-hour program's goal was to connect

members through simple introductions to the cells and interactive games. The planning team enthusiastically executed all parts of the program and were thoughtful in ensuring it catered to all ages.

Every cell gave an introduction and a glimpse of the fruitfulness in their growth in Christ through ministry, mission and maturity. There were many encouraging stories shared. We truly went away feeling, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" (Ps 133:1). All glory to God! I pray that we will continue to journey in discipleship to be salt and light for Christ through the help of our Almighty God.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the other zone pastors for their patience, guidance and support. I will be taking up a part-time theological course in the upcoming months, and I pray that besides gaining a deeper knowledge of the Word of God, I will be better equipped to serve God's people pastorally.

LESSONS IN LIFE:

My Dream Holiday Job

Claire Tan

Having several months of holiday before my time in university started, I decided to try something I had always wanted but never had the chance to - working full-time in a café. Honestly speaking, my initial enthusiasm quickly wore thin. As someone with zero work experience in a café, the steep learning curve of handling full-time responsibilities and long hours took a toll on my mental and physical strength. Within my first month of work, I soon found myself having moments of regret as I thought, "Why did I ever sign up for this job when I could have been doing something better with my time?" At times, I even questioned why God opened this door for me and second guessed if it was a mistake for me to take on this supposed 'dream' job.

While working at the café proved challenging and overwhelming, I found that it also pushed me to rely on God more. During the most challenging periods of the work, I found myself seeking prayers from my parents every morning before the

work day and praying on my own till I fell asleep at night.

As I pressed on, the days of work slowly became easier and very soon a few months had passed. As I look back on my progress from when I first started the job, it still surprises me at how natural I have become at café work. As a full-timer in the café, I was forced to learn the art of coffee-making and latte art from scratch and managed to become competent within the first two months, something that surprised many because these skills usually take longer to develop.



The joy of latte art!

The friendships forged over my time working has also been an eye-opening experience for me as I had the chance to interact with colleagues from diverse backgrounds and different life experiences, people whom I would not have met within my usual circles of friends.



Me and my brothers

The joy and excitement of growing friendships with my colleagues and challenging myself to pick up latte art are things I would never have expected, especially given how I had dreaded work at the start. A point of growth for me was when I volunteered to give up days off or even weekends to help out my colleagues who needed a substitute for a shift - something I knew I would be less willing to do a year ago.

This new, albeit short, season of life, has turned out to be a happy and unforgettable one, simply because I actually found myself enjoying the day-to-day work. When I showed up to work each morning, there was a sense of anticipation that could best be summed up: "new day, new story".

Now that this cafe job has come to an end, I still find myself chuckling whenever I recall lighthearted moments and the many funny incidents that happened in the café. I do miss these moments. Looking back at my journey working in the café, it was a fresh new experience that instilled in me a certain resilience and determination and which has somehow made me feel more ready for university. God has really shown Himself to be a God who really does sometimes grant us the desires of our hearts and at the same time, grant us growth that we did not know we needed.

Claire Tan is 19 and an undergraduate at NTU. Though not much of a coffee drinker, ironically, she enjoys going on cafe hopping adventures with her friends and family.



YOUTH SPEAK:

LESSONS FROM THE HEART

Compiled by Tricia Kuan

It is not uncommon to desire a romantic relationship, regardless of the stage of life we're at. Although the Bible sets the bar for godly relationships, it has become harder to meet these guidelines in a world where casual and unequally yoked relationships are prevalent.

In our lifetime, we're likely to find ourselves in various relationships before we eventually find "the one". However, this shouldn't be an excuse for us to jump into relationships as we please.

Romantic or not, relationships play a major role in our lives and can end up shaping us for the better or worse. Our relationships should ideally not only help ourselves and our partners grow closer to God, but also build His kingdom.

Seasons of Life speaks to three young adults on how romantic relationships have shaped their faith.

Megan Ang, 20

Having dated non-believers, I've realised that differences in innate values and morals can greatly affect a relationship. Something that could seem inconsequential for a non-believer could be a substantial cause for concern for me as a Christian.

Sacrificing time that I would have otherwise dedicated to my faith and quiet time for a relationship also drew me further from where I wanted to be spiritually. This also caused rifts in my friendships with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

I learned through my relationships that the people you surround yourself with shape the little things about you, whether you notice it or not- from the way you talk and think, to the hobbies you pick up.

I've now grown to be a largely independent person and I try not to go with the flow just because it's convenient. Most of all, I am cautious about letting the people around me

tweak certain aspects about myself and am careful not to let the little things add up to form bigger cracks in the key pillars of my life such as my walk with God.

This has also strengthened my resolve to see the best in people and empathise with them, but not excuse behaviour that blatantly disregards my boundaries and values.



Megan (right) puts in extra effort to spend quality time with good friends

I've realised it's important to set aside some time for myself and not always be available to the point of emotional burnout.

Young Tan, 20

I recall a piece of advice a friend from secondary school gave me about a girl I liked. He told me that as long as both of us liked each other, we should be together. Secondary school me wasn't mature enough to think about the numerous logical fallacies in that statement.

I just really liked her, and I suppose that advice was enough justification

for me. Though the relationship was enjoyable and exciting for a short while, it soon ended and I still feel the effects of the emotional and relational fallout today.

I think a large reason why that relationship didn't pan out so well is that I wasn't really serious about my spiritual health and the spiritual health of the relationship. That relationship definitely had some effects on the following one, as my spiritual walk had often stagnated and even been hindered at points.

Thankfully though, my first relationship in secondary school made me much more conscious and intentional about spiritual growth in romantic relationships later on. I am thankful to now find myself in a relationship where I am encouraged to serve God and grow in His likeness.

My girlfriend, Renee, and I encourage each other in various capacities as we serve both in and outside of church. The giving and receiving of love in our relationship spurs me on to make others feel as loved as I do. Additionally, I'm not the best at people skills, which is an important competency to have when we as Christians are in the business of winning souls for Christ. I'm glad she's taught me the ropes by being the best friend I've ever had.

In the past I was guilty of almost completely dissociating from thoughts of God or Christianity when it came

to my romantic relationships. This is something I continually have to guard myself from. As Christians, we are called to lay down our lives for the glory of Christ so every part of our lives should be our worship.



Young and Renee at the beach

A romantic relationship is a big part of our life and if it isn't in tune with our spiritual walk, it's going to cause problems as time and energy are drawn away from our walk with God.

In hindsight, the best thing I could have done differently was to pray about my relationships constantly. The most meaningful and impactful changes that we can make are not epic or drastic - not when it comes to the Christian life. We can pull our tools out of the spiritual toolbox, be it praying, reading the bible or quiet time. These are better than anything we can accomplish in our own strength.

God always has the best ideas and He is ever-present as a stronghold in times of trouble. Bring everything to Him in prayer.

Faith Ong, 25

I was not completely transparent about my past relationship to the people around me. It felt like there was a barrier between me and God, especially when it came to worshipping wholeheartedly or confessing my sins in church since I knew I wasn't ready to change anything about my secret relationship. Needless to say, it did not end well, bringing an end to my goal of dating to marry.



Glenn and Faith tied the knot in church earlier this year

We break God's heart when we fail to honour Him in our relationships or be wise in the way we handle them. We might also break our own hearts and damage our relationships with

people who care about us, as well as the person we are seeing. I have learnt the hard way that it is very difficult for things to go back to the way they were. Yet, I am thankful that this brought me back and closer to God.

My relationship with my husband Glenn was only made possible because of God. When I first met him, he had fallen away from the faith and I was still learning from all the mistakes of my first relationship.

I tried my best to honour God when Glenn and I started getting to know each other. Though we had mutual feelings, I always made it clear that I wanted to date only a Christian. This was not because my parents told me so, but because God was very important to me and the way I lived and viewed life, so I couldn't in the long run date someone who didn't understand this.

I called my parents crying and asked them to pray for me because I was struggling and I didn't understand why I had to go through this. Long story short, God drew Glenn back to Him through Glenn's friends and by intervening in seemingly impossible situations in his life. We finally started properly dating several months after we met.

From courtship to our marriage, I've seen how God's presence in our relationship makes everything better. For example, when we have fights

or disagreements, the resolution comes quicker and in a more gentle and loving manner than I would have expected. And in some of our happiest moments, I also feel God's joy and pleasure as He rejoices with us. I am truly humbled by this.

Megan is an undergraduate who enjoys watching documentaries in her spare time.

Young is defending the country now and enjoys chicken rice - just not the one the army gives him.

Faith is currently in the civil service and on weekends, loves 'terrorising' her 18-year-old cell kids.

GETTING TO KNOW:

Deaconess Bessie



What made you give your life to serving God?

It was not any thunder and lightning kind of calling. I became a Christian in my adult life in 1979; my first church was St Andrew's Cathedral (SAC). I was a school teacher for several years before becoming a church worker in SAC, in 1986. As a school teacher, I spent my mid-year and year-end breaks doing some mission work in the interior of Sabah and serving alongside an Australian missionary.

At that time, the Vicar of SAC was an Englishman named Canon Frank Lomax. He was really a wonderful man. Before coming to Singapore, he spent some years ministering in Sabah where he had learnt to speak Hakka so that he could reach the local people with the gospel. This impressed me greatly. I saw great humility in him. As there was just a very small team in SAC at that time, it seemed he had to attend to many different things. It was then I decided to volunteer to do little things, here

and there, in the cathedral. Over time, my involvement in church made it increasingly difficult for me to accord sufficient time and attention to my teaching job. Eventually I gave up teaching to join the church staff. So no big calling; just some practical decision-making. It helped that I enjoyed doing church work.

Please share how you became a deaconess and some of your initial work as a deaconess.

In 1990, together with another parish worker, June Tan, we became the first "locally-made" deaconesses in the Diocese of Singapore. Prior to that, deaconesses in Singapore were sent over from the Church of England in the UK.

In 1989, besides pastoring a Filipino congregation comprising mainly domestic helpers, I was involved in planting a congregation that gathered outside SAC. We worshipped in a pizza parlour in the basement of Funan Centre.

When the worship service attendance grew to 140 persons, we relocated to a Chinese restaurant at the old Colombo Court, just across the road from the Cathedral. God continued to give growth to this congregation, and we moved to Victoria Concert Hall for our worship service and remained there till 2005 when an underground sanctuary was built on the grounds of the Cathedral.

Then the congregation of about 400 adults moved into this new sanctuary and it continued to grow. By the time Bishop Titus told me to come to SJSM in January 2021, it was about 850 adults and 160 children, and over the years, this congregation had birthed a new church plant and 2 other worship services in the Cathedral.

Jesus told the parable of the mustard seed to teach how the kingdom of God advances (Matthew 13). He said, "It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." I am humbled by the privilege to serve in this kingdom.

The other part of my work was in overseas missions, mainly helping the poor in Cambodia. This work started in 1999 and it is registered as Project Khmer H.O.P.E. (pkhcambodia.org), an international non-governmental organisation in Cambodia. While PKH provides education and before-after-school

care for about 300 tribal children (of the Suoy people) and tuition for about 80 orphans and poor children from the community, our main work lies with equipping poor youths (17-23 years old) with vocational skills which are marketable to the hotel and tourism industry. Before Covid-19, the residential training at the PKH Centres was conducted for about 140 youths annually. After completing their training, these youths would be helped to obtain jobs in the cities, thus helping them out of the poverty cycle. This work has resulted in many young people coming to faith in Christ.

The Bible says let your light shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify God.

What does the job of a deaconess entail?

In the Anglican Church, deaconesses are not the female version of deacons (as in the order of deacons, priests and bishops); the order of deaconesses is a holy order in itself. In practice, I am a pastor. In the Diocese of Singapore, except for a few things like presiding over the Holy Communion service, deaconesses do many things which clergy do. My church duties include preaching and teaching the Word, baptising believers, visiting the sick and the lonely, conducting funerals and weddings, and assisting at the communion.

What is it like for you, on a day-to-day basis?

While I am with the Outreach and Missions Group (Alpha, Chaplaincy, Heartfriends, Evangelism and Missions), day-to-day in SJSM, I am mostly engaged with Heartfriends Community Services in Dover. We are currently gearing up for the onsite resumption of "Kopi Stop" – a Saturday morning outreach to seniors located at Block 4, Dover Road.

Quite a lot of my time is also taken up with the preparations to set up the ministries of the Eldercare Centre under St Andrew's Mission Hospital. Most of the active-ageing and befriending activities of this Centre will be out-posted at Blocks 1 to 5, Dover Road.

Share an experience or two that brought you joy and delight.

My mind goes back to Cambodia several years ago, in Siem Reap City. It was Christmas time and we had

been treated to tea at the posh Sofitel Hotel; the atmosphere in the hotel was festive and tantalising: the sound of Christmas carols, lovely lemongrass scents and the delicious smell of freshly baked ginger bread and cakes. Yet all that could not compare with the presence of the Holy Spirit which we experienced during our visit later to the cramped quarters occupied by some of our former PKH trainees who had just started working in the city. What a great contrast of living conditions! 6 of them shared a rented room with not more than 9 square metres of living space. There they slept on the floor amidst their rations and cooking utensils, all packed like sardines, and with their clothes strung across the room. And yet, when we gathered for a meal on the floor and to worship the Lord together, the fragrance of the Lord filled the room. Their faces displayed such joy and delight as they sang - I felt the tangible presence of the Lord and my heart was tenderly warmed.

In SJSM, it would be this year's Easter

dawn service - seeing brothers and sisters in Christ, come back together in worship after a long absence due to the COVID curbs. That was truly delightful, a wonderful experience indeed.

What pains or lows have you encountered in the ministry?

These arise mainly from having to deal with bigotry due to an inflated view of church office or due to gender bias, coupled with a blind refusal to accept the fact that the gospel continues to speak powerfully even to the changing norms in society.

What keeps you going in difficult times?

It is the belief in the power of the gospel to change lives. I sometimes think this way: while one may be deterred by the grumpy and rude attitude of a stall-holder, one would still patronise that food-stall because the food is very good. In Christian ministry, sometimes, unfortunately, the attitudes and behaviour of the ministers of the gospel are less than desirable. This is off-putting and in sales terms, it is said that the service is poor. However, the product, that is the gospel, is superb and powerful to transform lives. I have seen this to be true of my own life, and the lives of others. This keeps me going: while the service may be poor, the product is most excellent, and I am called to this privilege of peddling this gospel.

What do you do for relaxation?

Riding around my kampong on my trusty scooter, playing golf, every now and then.

“The gospel, is superb and powerful to transform lives. I have seen this to be true of my own life, and the lives of others. This keeps me going.”

FROM THE WORD:

The Age-Old Question of Suffering

Khaw Siew Ping

Perplexed by Suffering

One of the first things I did upon being accepted into seminary was to scour its library shelves for books on the Holocaust. It has always puzzled me how the Jews could continue believing in God in the wake of that unprecedented genocide, in which unspeakable evil triumphed.

Did not God hear their cries? Had He not, in the Old Testament, made countless promises to protect, to save, to bless His Chosen People, the Jews? Are not Faithfulness and Love His attributes?

How do we, Christians who believe in the same God as the Jews, reconcile the notion of an Omnipotent God with what often looks like meaningless suffering and unmitigated evil?

But really, I needn't have looked so far back in history. You and I both know people, godly people, who suffer. Some of them lose faith; most do not. It certainly feels as if the Divine Wager, in which the Adversary

is given permission to test God's faithful (Job 1), is constantly being replayed.

No one is Immune from Suffering

Indeed, the Bible is chock full of godly people who suffer. In the Old Testament, besides Job, the prophets who spoke on God's behalf were the ones who suffered the most. Elijah was persecuted by queen Jezebel (1 Ki 19:1-4) and Daniel was framed and thrown into the lions' den (Dan 6). Jeremiah was beaten and put in stocks (Jer 20:1-2), imprisoned (Jer 37:11-16) and survived two attempts to execute him (Jer 26; Jer 38). And according to Jewish tradition, Isaiah, whose prophecies SJSJ is studying in 2022, was sawn in two under King Manasseh, a fate alluded to in Heb 11:37.

In the New Testament, the inevitability of suffering is underscored when Jesus tells His disciples that in this world they will have tribulation (John 16:33). Even in the unlikely

scenario that a believer lives an absolutely charmed life, we are instructed to actively take up our cross, deny ourselves and follow Jesus (Mark 8:34; Matt 16:24; Luke 9:23). 2 Cor 11:24-28 is a litany of Paul's suffering, as he encouraged Timothy to join him, like a good soldier of Christ (2 Tim 2:3) In fact, Paul tells Timothy starkly that anyone who wants to lead a godly life will suffer (2 Tim 3:12). And Peter wrote to remind his fellow Christians to "not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you"(1 Pet 4:12).

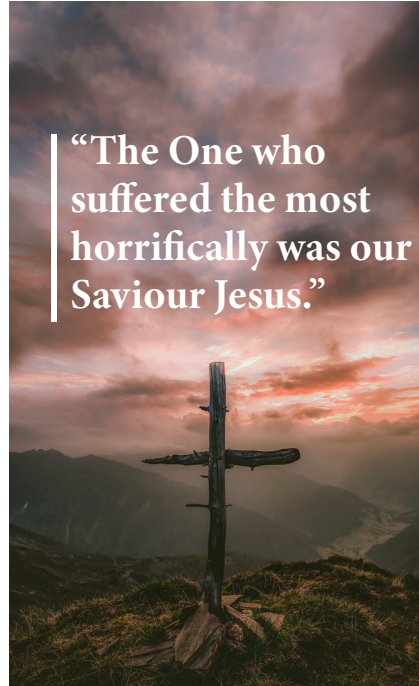
Finally, the One who suffered the most horrifically was our Saviour Jesus.

He was betrayed by His friends, subject to a parody of a trial, mocked, spat upon, and brutally whipped. He had a crown of thorns forcibly pressed on His head and He died an agonizing death on a wooden cross, which, according to Deut 21:22-23, signified that He was cursed by God.

Jesus is the prime example that even perfection itself does not grant immunity from suffering.

Yet the notion that even the good must suffer goes against our intuition. That is why from time immemorial believers have been asking why a good and omnipotent God would allow the innocent to suffer. The book of Job and the Psalms prove that of Job and the Psalms prove that

the ancients did not passively endure suffering without trying to make sense of it. Time and again, the psalmists ask: why do the wicked prosper while the godly suffer? (Ps 10; 42; 43; 73 etc)



“The One who suffered the most horrifically was our Saviour Jesus.”

Suffering + The Right Attitude = Growth

The Bible tells us that suffering produces spiritual growth (James 1:2-4; Rom 5:3-5). While this is proven true in the lives of those such as Moses, Joseph (both the patriarch and the father of Jesus) and Paul himself, we also see counter-examples in the people wandering in the wilderness, who repeatedly fell into grumbling (Ex 15-17), rebellion (Nu

16, 20) and even apostasy (Ex 32) as they sojourn in the wilderness. This goes to show that suffering in itself does not produce growth, but suffering with the right attitude – in repentance and in trusting God to be Who He says He is – will produce growth. God assures His people

In returning (repentance) and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and in trust shall be your strength.

(Isa 30:15a)

That is why James goes so far as to urge believers who suffer to count it all joy when we suffer for the right reasons (James 1:2). We are, in fact, to consider it grace when we suffer unjustly according to the will of God (1 Pet 2: 19-20). Paul uses the word “granted” – intimating that it is a privilege – when according to the will of God we suffer for the sake of Christ. (Phil 1:29). When we remain steadfast in the face of suffering, we will be “perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:4b)

Suffering as following in Jesus’ footsteps

John 15:18-27 has some of the most sobering warnings regarding suffering for followers of Christ. Jesus tells his disciples starkly that the world will hate them because “they do not know [God] who sent [Him]” (v21). Therefore we are to expect persecution (v20). Jesus’ warning does not mean that

we are always blameless when we are persecuted; wisdom ought to be exercised how and when we speak truth too! Nevertheless, Christians will come under pressure to conform to the world’s values, and suffer for standing for truth. There is no avoiding it when we follow in Jesus’ footsteps.



It is hard to reconcile the Peter who denied Jesus because he shrank from the suffering he glimpsed ahead then, with the Peter who wrote the epistles. Jailed after James was martyred (Acts 12), he encourages believers to think of suffering as following in the footsteps of Jesus (1 Pet 2:21); indeed, to “rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.”(1 Pet 4:13)

I believe it is no coincidence that James, Paul and Peter use the words “joy” and “rejoice” to speak of suffering. In the flesh – and we are in the flesh as long as we have breath – it is a counterintuitive response to suffering. But in the Spirit, and admittedly



usually on hindsight, we can often discern when God allowed us to be in a painful place for our own growth and for His glory. Perhaps when our hearts are devoted to the desire to grow and zeal for God's glory the same way that James, Paul and Peter's were, we shall learn to rejoice in following Jesus' footsteps as we suffer.

Making Peace with Unexplained Suffering

Since it has been amply reiterated in the Bible that first, suffering will happen as part of our Christian lives, and second, that it benefits us spiritually, why do we continue to wrestle so intensely with suffering?

One reason might be that we have imbibed erroneous teachings that faith in Jesus grants us immunity from suffering, that we will always emerge winners even this side of eternity. But more likely it stems from

the discontent, the sense of injustice when we simply cannot make sense of the suffering, especially when the magnitude of evil so outrageously dwarfs whatever good we see emerging from it. Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz, says this about suffering and sense-making:

Man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain but rather to see a meaning in his life. That is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning.

(Man's Search for Meaning)

At the end of the day, however cliché it is, the only way believers can make peace with unexplained suffering is to have the kind of faith described in Heb 11:1 – "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Even when things do not make sense, we continue to believe

that God is good and omnipotent, and that unexplainable suffering does not negate His attributes. We lay down our pride in our understanding, and humbly concede that some things will forever remain a mystery to us because we are of a different category from God. We will never fully understand His ways.

“We lay down our pride in our understanding, and humbly concede that some things will forever remain a mystery to us because we are of a different category from God.”

But most important of all is that there is hope! Jesus promises that “The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.” (Rev 21:7)

To conclude, no, I did not find answers to my questions about the Holocaust, mostly because I could not get through those depressing books. Unexpectedly, as I read, the human cause of the Holocaust, the monstrosities of Original Sin, became more apparent. A new question surfaced: The depths of human depravity! Why does God continue to put up with us?

But I bet *that* is a question you and I can answer.





PUBLISHED BY

ST JOHN'S - ST MARGARET'S CHURCH

30 DOVER AVE SINGAPORE 139790

Copyright @ St. John's - St. Margaret's Church, 2022

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.