

Seasons of Life

Larger Than Life:
The Love That Compels!

Features:

A Time To Give, A Time To Care

Those Who Are Loved Right, Love Right

When Grace Begets Forgiveness

Jesus – Larger Than Life!

Friendcipleship

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Is it possible for ordinary Christians to love as Jesus loves? The answer to this is both yes and no, says Allen Lim, who examines what it means to put Jesus' command to love one another into practice.

Larger Than Life: The Love That Compels!

Another year is drawing to an end. We once again find ourselves navigating various places of joy, change, grief and everything in between, as we reflect on who we are and our relationships with others.

In all things, Jesus is the answer. It is greatly comforting to know that we have an abundant life in Him even as we grapple with the complexities of our world and its shifting values. Jesus is our good shepherd who has come that we may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

The life that we have in Christ is too good for us to keep to ourselves; this is where intentional discipleship comes into the picture. It's easier said than done, though. Through our own human efforts, our love for others is often shallow. We may find it near impossible to journey together with those who exhaust and frustrate us.

So how should we love others and help them to grow in their spiritual life, in a way that pleases God? The Seasons of Life (SOL) team finds answers through stories of people who have gone out of their comfort zones and allowed God to shape their perspectives of what it means to build relationships rooted in His love.

An overseas student is inspired by the Gospel to love her housemates even when they are messy. Caregivers share about what keeps them going as they look after family members who need long-term assistance. A young adult draws lessons about forgiving a family member, while another SJSM member opens up about her struggle with being attracted to others of the same sex.

There are also stories examining how God is working in the lives of our youth, and others that explore why we should love others and what it means to live an abundant life despite our troubles.

We hope you'll get a glimpse of God's goodness through these stories. Have a blessed Christmas and new year in advance.

Prisca Ang

On behalf of the Editorial Team

Jesus the Man: Love Personified

Tricia Kuan

Growing up in church, we often hear that loving our neighbours is an intrinsic part of the Christian life. But it's sometimes unclear how exactly we should be doing so in our day-to-day lives.

Being presented with the privilege of starting university overseas, I wanted to devote this new season to pursuing Christ-likeness by taking heed of Jesus' compassion towards others in the gospel of Luke.

Seeking the Lord

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself."

(Luke 10:27-28)

Unless the Lord builds the house, we labour in vain. As alluded to in Luke 10, we can fully love others only when we first learn to love God wholeheartedly.

It was a game changer when I made a habit of starting my days by seeking the Lord, just as Jesus did in spite of His constant ministry and requests from people who clamoured for His attention.

We know from Luke 5:15-16 that He *"would withdraw to desolate places and pray"* even as many people learnt of his miracles and wanted to hear him and receive healing.

By mirroring Jesus' posture of prayer, I have learnt to align my heart with God's and be more attentive to His voice. This has also helped me to better listen to what He is saying to me or prompting me to do throughout the day. As I experienced the magnitude of God's love during these quiet moments, I was all the more motivated to let His love, in turn, overflow to those around me.

Seeing others as Jesus sees us

In the gospels, we see Jesus spending time with those considered to be the dregs of society. Levi the tax collector



Tricia (third from left) says that God has prompted her to go out of her comfort zone in her interactions with others, be it her housemates (pictured) or strangers whom she comes across daily.

in Luke 5 and the sinful woman who anointed Jesus in Luke 7 were among many of such individuals with whom Jesus had extensive, albeit controversial, interactions with.

Today, we often walk past others without a second glance. Fatigued by our own problems and bombarded by headlines depicting turmoil in the world, it is easy to be numb to the plights of those around us.

But Jesus offers a different response in Luke 7:13. When He sees a widow mourning the loss of her son, His heart goes out to her.

For us, this might look like taking notice of those who often go “unseen” in the hustle and bustle of our routines.

I share an apartment with six girls

whom I had not met before. I soon learned that it was the norm for everyone to keep to themselves, making occasional polite conversation and gingerly skirting around one another in the shared spaces. As an introvert, it was tempting to maintain the status quo.

However, God challenged me to step out of my comfort zone to engage with people I usually would not engage with, be it at home or with strangers I come across daily. This has led to some unexpected and interesting conversations.

We can make a huge difference when we avail ourselves to be a listening ear for someone and take a genuine interest in their life.

Attempting to go beyond surface-level conversations with my housemates

really helped to break the ice, fostering a sense of community over time. When it's difficult, ask God to increase your capacity to love and see people as He sees them. He's more than happy to help!

“In the gospels, we see Jesus spending time with those considered to be the dregs of society... Today, we often walk past others without a second glance.”

Having a giving heart

“Sell your possessions, and give to the needy... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

(Luke 12:33-34)



Saving money is important, especially as an international student. There's a delicate balance between being good stewards of our finances and doing our utmost to give where we can. After all, Jesus continually shows how

it is important to care especially for the lowest and the least.

God has at times asked me to bless someone, and I've happily obeyed Him even though it meant having a little less for my personal expenses. Seeing how much these small gestures mean to the recipients, and knowing that my obedience has pleased God, have been worth my meagre sacrifices.

Besides finances, time is also a precious commodity which we can dedicate to others. Just like every other season of life, university can be hectic. But God impressed on my heart to intentionally bless others instead of focusing solely on my own academic and social life.

I've since joined various activities and clubs which facilitate volunteer opportunities, and although these responsibilities can be tough to manage, God has used these situations to provide many opportunities for me to give to others and love them.

Serving unceasingly

“For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.”

(Luke 22:27, NIV)

Service can look like many things, and for me, it came in the form of cleaning. I got a nasty shock when I first moved

into my apartment. Between the gut-churning odour from the freezer, and the stains and crumbs that littered almost every surface, I realised I was living through every roommate horror story I'd ever heard.

Even after having conversations with my housemates, the situation wasn't looking any better. Eventually, I decided that I'd still attempt to reason with them, but if nothing changed, I'd just clean the areas myself.

I'd definitely get annoyed if a housemate leaves a mess after I had just cleaned the kitchen, or when I'd return from school and have to spend time clearing up.

But what I found was that even though my circumstances weren't changing, God was changing me. Slowly but surely, my response of annoyance soon turned into joy.



Thinking about how my small acts of service paled in comparison to everything God, in His love, had done for me on the cross helped to put things into perspective when the

uncleanliness irked me.

Pointing others to Christ

For every miracle Jesus performed and every sermon He gave, the goal was always the same: to point people to the kingdom of God.

As we minister to people, it can feel good to know that we are making an impact. But ultimately, every act of compassion and love that we show to others should glorify the Lord, and never ourselves.

The time I spent cleaning the apartment wasn't all for naught, as my housemate asked why I was taking on responsibilities that weren't mine. I had a chance to share about my faith, so praise God!

Overall, making the effort to love others is something that we need to work on every day, and it's never easy. I've often chosen to give in to my own selfishness, but God has been so patient with me throughout this journey. I've truly been able to see His hand in every interaction I've had with others, and I have been blessed beyond comprehension.

I hope that my journey will encourage others to seek Christ-likeness too. Loving others as He loves us may not come naturally, but in time and by God's grace, I hope we can all be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) in every place He puts us and each season He lays before us.

“As we minister to people, it can feel good to know that we are making an impact. But ultimately, every act of compassion and love that we show to others should glorify the Lord, and never ourselves.”



A Time to Give, A Time to Care

Yeo Hem Joo



"There are only four kinds of people in the world: those who have been caregivers, those who are currently caregivers, those who will be caregivers and those who will need caregivers."

– Rosalynn Carter

Last year, I came across an Instagram video of a young man demonstrating how he would transfer his petite and frail grandma from her wheelchair to her bed without hurting his back. What was unusual was that 29-year-old Chris Punsalan had been a full-time caregiver to his sweet-tempered, 97-year-old grandmother for about 8 years now. His one million followers are inspired by the posts of his round-the-clock caregiving routines and heartwarming relationship with his Lola. No one will deny that a caregiver's journey can be very demanding, frustrating and emotionally draining, which is why Chris' candid sharing has struck a chord with many.

Singapore has one of the most rapidly ageing populations in the world. It is estimated that by 2030, almost one in four people will be aged over 65 years, and this figure will rise to almost one in two by 2050. In view of this, more senior care options will have to be explored to meet the need but for now, the responsibility of eldercare still falls primarily on their families.

As Christians, how do we embrace this season of life where more and more of us will need to take on the role of caregivers to our elderly family members, or even require care for ourselves?

Personally, I have observed several of my peers become primary or secondary caregivers to their elderly parents or spouses. One cell member lives near her mother who has dementia and goes over on a daily basis to help with her shower. Another, whose mother suffers from Parkinson's disease, tries to work from the hospital whenever her mother is warded, taking turns with

her sisters to stay overnight. These are just some of the many examples of those who juggle multiple responsibilities at work and caregiving at home.

I reached out to a couple of SJSM members who have heavy caregiving responsibilities, to learn about the joys and challenges of their journey.

In sickness and in health

About 8 years ago, Mary Kwee realised that her husband, Ernst, now 90, was experiencing episodes of forgetfulness and becoming quieter. He was finally diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease right before the pandemic. As the main caregiver, she is assisted by their domestic helper. Their children, who have their own work and family commitments, still support as best as they can, financially and practically.



Mary and her husband, Ernst.

"I see this as my duty as his wife... to take care of him, to fulfil my marriage vows," she said.

She readily admitted that in the beginning, she was impatient and got frustrated easily with him over things like his refusal to take a shower or listen to reason.

"He likes to say, 'Are we going yet?' and I could not understand where he wanted to go or what he wanted to do exactly," she shared. He got upset when she asked for clarifications, so to appease him, she would sometimes drive him to the places that she thought he wanted to visit. It was tiring, to say the least.

Apart from his mood swings, sudden bouts of anger and incoherent babbling, there was also the sundown syndrome to deal with – anxiety, hallucinations, paranoia and confusion that occur around sunset. "He thinks there are people waiting outside for him... If a car drives past or is parked nearby, he gets anxious."

Thankfully, over time she has learnt to better manage his condition. A longtime Christian and member of SJSM, her faith has been instrumental in sustaining and guiding her. She prays earnestly for God to halt the worsening of Ernst's mental faculties, as well as for patience, kindness and gentleness when responding to him in trying situations. In fact, whenever she loses her temper and feels discouraged, the Holy Spirit would convict and encourage her.

She cited Psalm 27:13-14 as a

passage of scripture that strengthens her faith:

*I believe that I shall look upon the
goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!
Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take
courage;
wait for the LORD!*

Caregivers' mental wellbeing is a topic addressed more frequently in the media these days, and in Mary's case, she has some "me-time" when Ernst attends a senior daycare centre twice a week, for half a day.

On one of those days, she leads an exercise class for over 40 seniors at the St Andrew's Senior Care Centre at Dover. Her involvement began more than 12 years ago at the void deck of one of the HDB blocks and till now, it energises her and brings much joy. She also loves going for long walks where she sings aloud to the Lord, prays and meditates. This time with the Lord has richly refreshed her soul and spirit.

Mary's sociable and generous nature has won her many good neighbours and friends and she is thankful for how they have blessed her with food, gifts and practical help such as providing transport. Now 84, she believes that she has led an abundant life in Christ even as her current season has been a humbling one—in her own words, a "stripping away" of the things that she had: giving up the car she had driven

for 15 years; and being prepared to move into a small assisted living public housing for seniors soon.

"This is *Metamorphousthe* (spiritual transformation)!" she reminded me. "Whatever I do is a worship to God."

"She prays earnestly for God to halt the worsening of Ernst's mental faculties, as well as for patience, kindness and gentleness when responding to him in trying situations. In fact, whenever she loses her temper and feels discouraged, the Holy Spirit would convict and encourage her."

"It's not a sacrifice"

A few years ago, with the support of her brothers, Quek Li Huan quit her job at the SJSN Nursing Home to look after her 95-year-old father. A fun-loving, extroverted man who loves food and a good game of mahjong, Uncle Quek had not let age slow him down until he had a slipped disc. Although he eventually recovered from it, his mobility was affected, which led to a decline in his overall well-being.

In describing her caregiving journey, it is clear how much Li Huan loves her dad and does not consider what she is doing to be a sacrifice.

“Actually, it’s been a wonderful journey so far. Dad’s very easy... sweet, gentle and hardly ever throws a tantrum.” She is immensely thankful for this, as well as for her helper who does the cooking and cleaning at home.



Li Huan and her dad at his 95th birthday celebration.

During our conversation, I also learnt that her father recently had a fall, which led to some injuries in his brain and right eye. The reality is that accidents can still happen even with the utmost care. Li Huan trusts that the Lord will work things out for good, and shared how the Lord had previously granted healing to her

father, clearing his blocked arteries to the point that he could stop his diabetes medication altogether.

They attend a midweek service at St Andrew’s Cathedral together, as often as he is able to go. She also leads her father in reciting the Lord’s prayer and the Boys’ Brigade Vesper every night, to bolster his faith and bring peace into his heart.

Mary and Li Huan’s stories illustrate that no two caregivers’ journeys are alike. Even so, the common thread is that in this season of giving and caring selflessly for a loved one, God is always at work to give strength to His people.

“The reality is that accidents can still happen even with the utmost care. Li Huan trusts that the Lord will work things out for good, and shared how the Lord had previously granted healing to her father.”

Those Who Are Loved Right, Love Right

Anonymous

"Love is love." "Love is a human experience, not a political statement." What are your reactions, reading these statements? Do you resonate with any of them in any way? Does that make you uncomfortable? Do you know why?

A matter of semantics?

We live in a world where university publications quote leading neuroscientists' theories on "the true nature of consciousness" and conclude that "*I feel, therefore I am*"¹ is the truth about what makes us human, and where a person's primary identity is increasingly understood as sexual. Choices that involve restraint or abstinence are often reframed as ignorant repression and mocked. A majority of my peers in school regarded pornography and sex as something to do when you'd run out of money and still wanted to have a good time — gender preferences made no difference — and I was once laughed out of the Honours room for admitting virginity.

I grew up on a diet of hellfire-and-brimstone teaching, and was a self-professed odd child who read the dictionary and thesaurus for fun. From a very young age, I knew that the Bible uses different Greek words in different contexts that are all translated "love" in the English versions we use, and I understood that love and lust are antithetical.

In school, I was a nerdy tomboy who was attracted to girls, but oddly enough young men kept pursuing me. While being courted was a heady experience, the male body really didn't interest me. (The one or two guys I fancied myself in love with, I really only admired for their intellect and artistic skills.)

But I was too afraid of God's wrath to act on my adolescent impulses to indulge in my same-sex attraction (SSA); even in university, when deep dives into philosophical arguments made me question my faith, that gut-deep terror of God being actually real and having to eventually face judgement curbed

any impetuosity.

As an intellectual, I also could not see how “love is love” made sense. We ‘love’ so many different things, and in so many different ways: family members, pets, foods, textures, scenic views, exercise and its accompanying endorphin rush. Even secular /anti-Christian professionals have to admit that just because one feels very strongly about something doesn’t make it right, so why, in this area of romantic affections alone, are feelings the only reality that should be acknowledged?

Additionally, I’ve long questioned our current society’s lack of understanding of friendship, admiration, and the desire for affirmation. We’ve all had crushes, some on standout individuals of the same biological sex. It would be more helpful to be allowed space to feel and work through those impulses at our own time, than being pounced on with “Ah ha! You have SSA! You are gay!”

“Even secular /anti-Christian professionals have to admit that just because one feels very strongly about something doesn’t make it right, so why, in this area of romantic affections alone, are feelings the only reality that should be acknowledged?”

A revelation of the sovereignty of God

Some who know me have asked how I’ve coped or am coping with my SSA. The truth is that while it still exists, it no longer troubles me. This wasn’t due to any sort of conversion therapy; neither did it require hours of counselling or deliverance ministry. What it really came down to

was a revelation of the sovereignty of God, and this was catalysed by a revelation of the Father's love.

Despite having said the sinner's prayer at five, it was only in my late teens that I was finally able to address God as 'Father', because of problematic associations with the concept/word. It happened during the sermon of a youth service: I was inexplicably swamped by a deep conviction that God truly was a good, good Father, and an overwhelming sense of His fathomless love and acceptance sent me to my knees in tears. Weeks later, my personal reflections led to awestruck wonder of how incomprehensibly vast and limitless God is.

Here's where art is very helpful in one's spirituality. Creating things gives you a perspective on creation that one cannot find anywhere else. As a writer, my love for and understanding of the characters I created drove me to put them through hard situations that would bring out the best of them. In the same vein, I could begin to see how God is not at all self-contradictory in how He deals with us.

So I told God that I would accept SSA as my thorn in the flesh, and asked Him to show me the way to bear it, as He promised in 1 Corinthians 10:13. I asked Him to reveal His purpose for this struggle, that I might find the strength to rightly represent and honour Him in spite of it. I asked Him to give me the desire to obey Him

instead of my flesh, simply because it is His command. I held fast to these words from Romans 12: *"...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind..."*

Grace for the journey

Friend, the Lord was faithful. He honoured my sincere attempts to honour Him. I would very frankly tell Him whenever I felt tempted by girls around me, and often I would sense His response in my spirit, "I am an artist," diffusing the tension and allowing me to appreciate their beauty as His work. And whenever I confessed to feelings of lust, I would sense the Holy Spirit reminding me gently, "My way is better." I leaned in and studied how the marriage relationship is meant to depict the relationship between Christ and the Church, and the more I found wonder in His love, the less physical desire had a hold on my imagination.

And then, when I was at a point where I believed I could happily remain single and celibate as long as I could remain actively serving in the house of God, He brought a young man to my attention. At first I simply admired his musical skill, then I grew curious about his personality and other interests... and suddenly, one day, he walked past me at a poolside dressed in nothing but a tiny pair of

shorts and I had a visceral reaction to the sight. This had never happened before with any male, and I tell you the truth, it has not happened with any other male since. Only him. That's probably the miracle in this story. Friend, I married him.

The Lord's grace extends into our relationship, too. My husband knows that I still notice girls. But it's something that I feel free to admit to him without fear of judgement. This dynamic has also freed him to admit to me whenever he notices someone or takes a second look, knowing that I will help redirect him without judgement. I know that not everyone's journey with SSA looks like this, but I share this story in the hope that those who are still wondering if it's possible to find grace in the midst of their struggle with SSA will know that it is. It very much is.



“The Lord was faithful. He honoured my sincere attempts to honour Him. I would very frankly tell Him whenever I felt tempted by girls around me, and often I would sense His response in my spirit, “I am an artist,” diffusing the tension and allowing me to appreciate their beauty as His work.”

¹ <https://dailynexus.com/2023-05-11/i-feel-therefore-i-am-leading-neuroscientist-antonio-damasio-speaks-on-human-consciousness/>

When Grace Begets Forgiveness

Anonymous

Growing up, I didn't have a good relationship with my dad. While he brought me up to be disciplined in all areas of my life, doing so meant that he was often strict and firm with me, and he never really expressed love openly to me.

Not feeling loved by my own dad created a rift between us, and it was a struggle to get close to him. He attempted to bond with me, but his efforts fell flat due to our strained relationship.

Apart from this, he would argue frequently with my mom. It was upsetting to witness their intolerance of each other, and all the negativity at home added to the anger and impatience I harboured towards my family situation and my dad.

It got to a point where these feelings would sometimes bare their teeth in my day-to-day conversations with him, bringing more tension to our already distant relationship.

Things worsened when my dad's

health took a sudden and detrimental hit. Though he was discharged from the hospital after a few days, he was unfit to work for months on end.

From then on, it was as if he was a totally different person.

His condition left parts of his body paralysed, and his character changed drastically as he often lost control of his emotions. It was all the more challenging for me to love and honour my dad, especially when even minor inconveniences easily made him angry and impatient.

I did not realise it then, but I had been building up so much resentment towards my dad due to the hurt he had involuntarily caused me and my family over the years. Unforgiveness festered in my heart, and I couldn't fathom what a normal relationship with my dad would even look like.

I still remember periods where I silently broke down in my room when I was at my lowest.

"Is this what a normal family should look like? Why can't we be like other families that look so much happier?"

These were some of the questions I asked God in my anguish.

"I did not realise it then, but I had been building up so much resentment towards my dad due to the hurt he had involuntarily caused me and my family over the years. Unforgiveness festered in my heart and I couldn't fathom what a normal relationship with my dad would even look like."

Years later, I entered a new season that completely changed the trajectory of my life. Through some friends in church, God prompted me to enrol in Bible school.

My mind was clouded with numerous doubts; I worried about how friends and family would react if I were to commit this season of my life to God, or whether I was even 'holy' enough to attend. But I made a split-second decision and told God: *"Whatever it is, Lord, I trust You."* I proceeded to submit my registration form even though the deadline had passed.

When my application was accepted by the school despite the late submission, I knew for sure it was a door God had opened for me.

In hindsight, I shouldn't have let myself be filled with so much doubt and worry; that split-second leap of faith was undoubtedly the best decision I have made in my life!

Every day, I experienced the joy of encountering the Lord through heartfelt worship unto Him and opportunities to grow closer to Him. By God's grace, I found myself surrounded by a loving community with whom I have exchanged countless moments of laughter and tears.

From vulnerably sharing our personal struggles to celebrating the numerous victories in our lives, Jesus gathered us from our unique backgrounds to form this community – one I'm proud to call family.

But that was just the start. In fact, I couldn't even begin to comprehend how much God had in store for me. Besides blessing me with this newfound family, He also wanted me to address the hurt I felt with my own family that I had kept deep inside me for so long, and Bible school forced me to do just that. During one of our courses, we learned that we tend to form misconceptions about God's character when we have negative experiences with family or other



loved ones.

Over the next few days, our class learned to correct our misunderstandings of who God is, and to embrace who He really is: Our heavenly Father who receives us with open arms as we run to Him, emotional burdens and baggage in tow.

God ministered to me, and I shed many tears as I released all my pent-up emotions and burdens to Him, including hurts from my family that He brought to light. When I was being prayed for, God struck me with a revelation, and it resonated with what Jesus taught:

"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

(Matthew 6:14-15)

I realised that the rift between my dad and me had grown wider over the years as I clung to the hurt and hatred I felt towards him. I had also subjected myself to years of emotional and spiritual turmoil by allowing unforgiveness to brew in my heart.

But Jesus wanted me to let go of these burdens.

Through the immense and unconditional act of love He displayed on the cross, Jesus extends forgiveness to every soul. He revealed to me that I was just as much of an imperfect human, a sinner, as my father. I too have made mistakes. And if Jesus has chosen to love and forgive my father, what right did I have to be unwilling to forgive him?

As I thought back to the times it seemed as if my dad didn't love me, the Lord also brought to memory countless instances of him showering

me with love in different ways. Having a roof over my head and food on the table every day and being ferried to and fro school when I was younger were all reminders that I was in fact loved and should be grateful and forgiving to my dad.

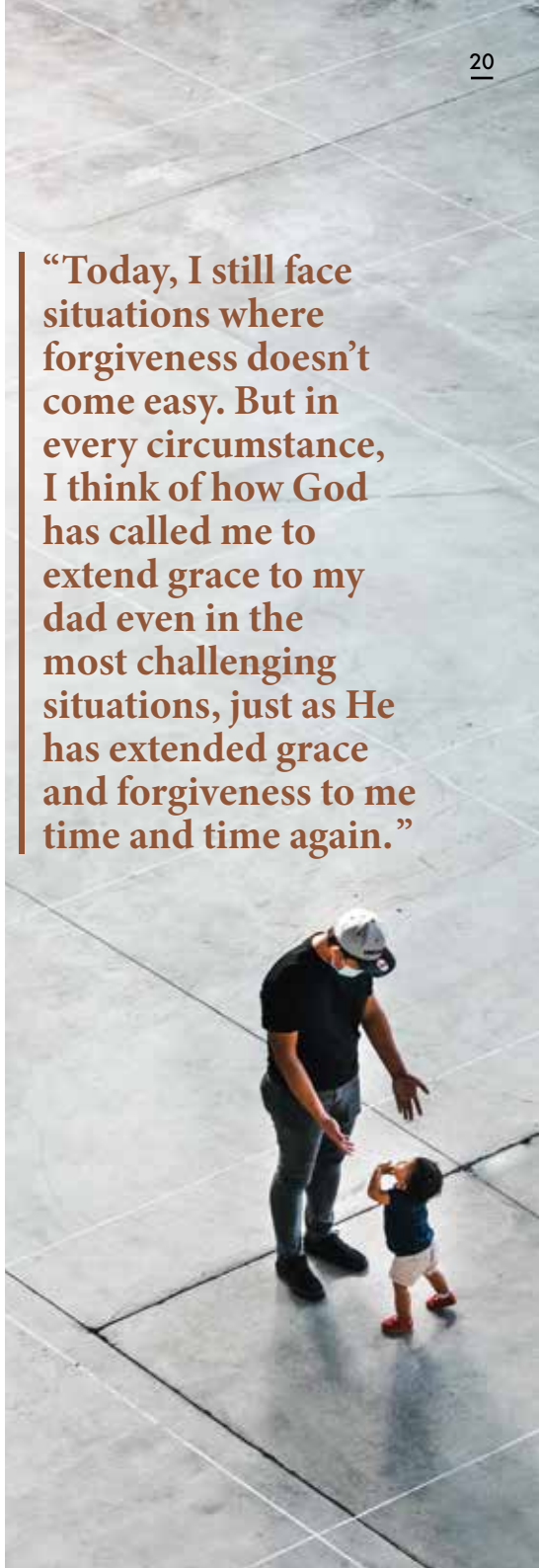
Today, I still face situations where forgiveness doesn't come easy. But in every circumstance, I think of how God has called me to extend grace to my dad even in the most challenging situations, just as He has extended grace and forgiveness to me time and time again.

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

(Matthew 11:28-30)

I experience peace and comfort from God, knowing that He strengthens me to be more like Him every day. How undeserving are we, to be on the receiving end of God's boundless and timeless grace! Even in my darkest valleys, He has and will continue to endlessly pour His love and mercy over me, for our God is faithful and never fails.

"Today, I still face situations where forgiveness doesn't come easy. But in every circumstance, I think of how God has called me to extend grace to my dad even in the most challenging situations, just as He has extended grace and forgiveness to me time and time again."





Jesus – Larger Than Life!

Michael Tan

What is life?

A sum of years, months and days? A sum of moments, thoughts, words and deeds? If life was only defined as such, we are pitiful indeed since the Bible likens our days to “a vapour or grass of the field; here today and gone tomorrow” (James 4:14; Isaiah 40:6-8).

Benjamin Franklin wisely said, “a long life may not be good, but a good life is long enough”. As the world clamours after youth, immortality and “living well”, how should you and I as Christians be living out our lives?

In this piece, we look at what the Bible says of what we are to expect in life. We find that we are not spared the lot of common man – one marked by moments of joy or abject moments of loss, pain and grief – but we are certainly not called to live our lives simply according to what is “thrown” at us; we are called to live it in Jesus, Jesus who is larger than life, life itself!

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

(John 1:4-5)

Just as much as Jesus is both life and light, the world is shrouded and pervaded by darkness. But the pronouncement here is clear: the darkness cannot overcome Jesus’ light! He calls us to walk daily and abide in His light, not to merely tick checkboxes.

It is fundamentally paramount for us as Christians to have a clear understanding of what life means to us where the Bible is concerned:

Life is fleeting and brief

“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

(Isaiah 40:8)

Both when seen in the light of eternity and speaking as a person entering my sixth decade of existence, *time*

goes by *fast!* When I was in my 30s, I observed that life seemed to accelerate as you age. The counter to this sober warning of the brevity of life, however, is that God's Word is eternal and so is the one who does His will (1 John 2:17).

Life is full of toil and trouble

"The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away."

(Psalm 90:10)



Christians sometimes mistakenly think we are entitled to a life of blessings since we are in Christ. We may have forgotten that with the Fall in the Garden of Eden, Adam (and Eve) ushered in disease, decay and death. Life for the Christian is also described by Jesus and His disciples as one marked by spiritual warfare, suffering and persecution. So yes, we can watch that diet, gym all we want and maintain mental health as much

as we can but life is *still* toil and trouble, even if you think you are prepared for it physically and mentally. Unless of course, we sadly choose the wide gate and the easy way (Matthew 7:13,14).

There is an end, there is judgement

The wise man recognises that it is best to always bear the end in mind, both "end" as in the finality and also "end" as in purpose, whatever his pursuit be. We really have to be careful about "accumulating to our own hurt" since life is not about the "abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15). Jesus pulled no punches when He told the parable of the presumptuous rich man "planning larger barns" and setting up for a life of "eat, drink and be merry" when he could not even be sure if he would be alive the next day (Luke 12:16-21).

"... yes, we can watch that diet, gym all we want and maintain mental health as much as we can but life is *still* toil and trouble, even if you think you are prepared for it physically and mentally. "

You won't be taking anything with you

"And he (Job) said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

(Job 1:21)

In modern day Singapore with its economic success and pursuit of all that makes for a "good life", we invariably get sucked in. But God has a much narrower definition of blessing, success and fruitfulness if we look at what the Bible says (Matthew 6:19-21). Essentially, it relates to His kingdom and righteousness, in things unseen and eternal and even things the world deems unimportant.

The ultimate blessing truly rests on delighting ourselves, first, foremost and always, in Him. God, and all that we do in Him and for Him, is what we take with us into eternity. If He is where our heart and hence

our treasure is, or at least where it *increasingly* is, we are in a good place in this world obsessed with accumulation.

Life is war!

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

(Ephesians 6:10-12)

We should see life as Jesus instructs us to.

Much as Jesus is the Good Shepherd who promised us abundant life, the enemy seeks to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). It is somewhat simplistic to categorise what happens in life strictly as either good or bad, enjoyable or painful, and helpful or

destructive. Why? Because we are to walk and live by faith, not sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). This also means that we need discernment that only God has, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in our lives, to truly perceive and not just see.

While the enemy is already vanquished by Jesus' death and resurrection, he knows he has but a short time before Jesus returns again (Revelation 12:12) and is working in overdrive. We need to be guarded against the wiles of the devil and all that he does to undermine the abundant life Jesus won for and gave us.

Jesus, larger than life!

The great news is, Jesus is larger than life – way way larger. In fact, He is life, life that permeates and enlivens us from the stupor of a life without Him!

What does this mean for the Christian?

For all the turmoil that has and is to come, Jesus still promises us an abundant life as long as we walk with Him, or as the apostle John puts it, abide or remain in Him. These words of "abide" and "remain" that John records of Jesus' final teaching (John 15:5) suggests that we tend to stray. Abiding begins with a hunger for an always-growing relationship with God through Jesus. A hunger that inspires a desire to spend time with Him, meditate on the Word and to seek His

kingdom by drawing people He has placed around us toward Jesus.

Abiding brings life and transformation. Abiding helps us see the world and life as they truly are. Despite all the disease, decay and death that life invariably afflicts us with, we thrive in Christ. Jesus, who has been through it all, will see us through all of life and will return one day for us, His beloved. Maranatha!

Further reflections:

1. To those who feel sapped by life - Matt 11:28-30; John 15:1-5; Psalm 1
2. To those enamoured with life - Luke 9:23-25; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4 "enmity with God"
3. John 10:10 - abundant life, life to the full! Not an ascetic life devoid of joy and focused on only deprivation or abstinence, but one enthralled with God and delighting in His ways.

“The ultimate blessing truly rests on delighting ourselves, first, foremost and always, in Him. God, and all that we do in Him and for Him, is what we take with us into eternity.”

Friendcipleship

John Cheong



“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him — a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (ESV)

The author of Ecclesiastes explicitly highlights how God has designed us, believers, to come together as a community and as friends. Together, Christians can be a source of support, warmth, and godly counsel for one another. In the following accounts, three members of SJSM share how they have experienced friendship as an incredible avenue for discipleship.

From making merry to making disciples, John Cheong (26)

This year marks the 13th year that my cell group has been together. We

started youth cell at the age of 13, so many of us have been friends for half our lives. After numerous Saturdays spent together and countless birthday cakes, I believe many of us consider each other to be our closest group of friends. With years of familiarity and warmth within the group, our time together is always good fun. However, there came a point in our early 20s when we had to answer the question, “What makes us different from a secular group of close friends?”

In an attempt to answer this question for ourselves, we began to place extra emphasis on Bible study and spiritual disciplines. We started sharing more deeply and spending more time praying for one another after each study. We recognised that the many years of friendship gave us the opportunity to speak boldly into each other’s lives, using God’s word as our guiding authority. While it can feel unnatural and rather unpleasant to comment on someone else’s issues and suggest possible corrections, we have found that with loving intention and tactfulness, this act of sharpening

one another (Proverbs 27:17) is important for discipleship.

As we became more serious about Christian discipleship, our friendships deepened. While we still enjoy our outings and karaoke sessions, our relationships now have more depth than ever before. What brings us together is no longer just shared experiences, but also the fact that we are journeying together toward the same destination of Christ-likeness.



John (2nd row, centre) and his cell group at a confirmation service

Next year, we will celebrate the first among us to get married, and many of us have recently begun our careers. As we navigate these new seas, I am praying that we will continue to be a source of support and truth for each other regardless of our changing circumstances. More than that, I hope that we will continue to grow in humility and allow ourselves to be

lovingly guided back to Christ by our God-given community.

Fellowship of the ring, Joseph Lim (31)

I first started journeying with my mentors Paul and Rodney as I was building towards marriage with my then girlfriend/now wife. Even on the cusp on marriage, there were areas in my Christian life that I wanted to work on. After a good first year of journeying together, Paul suggested opening up our group to other newly married men who could benefit from having brothers-in-Christ come alongside them. I subsequently recruited my cell group friends Tristen and Andy, who were also newly married. This arrangement of a five-man fellowship group was new to us. However, we agreed that having guidance from older, married Christian men could prove helpful in our marriages and our personal relationships with God.

Since we started meeting in January, there have been unexpected blessings from this arrangement. While a one-on-one setting may sometimes feel forced and intense, a group dynamic naturally lends itself to more warmth, ease, and cheerfulness. I find myself looking forward to a gathering with friends, rather than keeping to a formal appointment. As Paul pointed out, Jesus did much of His discipling in small groups, not necessarily one-on-one.

I have been incredibly blessed to see

increasing fruitfulness not only in my life but also in my marriage. Much of the wisdom I glean from our sessions comes home with me to inspire important conversations with my wife. Paul and Rodney also share that they learn a lot every time we gather. Perhaps most importantly, this mentoring group has served as a space for us to share our problems and seek prayer – an important part of discipleship that is hard to come by even if one is plugged into a church and a cell group.



(From left to right) Tristen, Rodney, Paul, Andy and Joseph.

Things really took off when Rodney and Paul took the lead to share vulnerably and trusted us with their own struggles. Their genuineness, despite having met most of us only recently, conveyed that we were gathering to share life deeply, even if it got uncomfortable. There is no template for fruitful discipleship, but I have come to find that warmth, trust, and good food (cooked by Paul's family) are good places to start.

Cultivating spiritual friendships, as easy as 3-2-1, Rachel Yip (31), with inputs from her cell group

Our cell group has been practising the "3-2-1" model for spiritual friendships for a couple of years. It was initiated by our cell leader Joshua Lin as a platform to cultivate spiritual growth through deeper friendships. "3-2-1" – three friends meeting for two hours once a month – has been helpful in building meaningful spiritual friendships and journeying more deeply with a smaller group of cell group members. For our cell of 20 people, we split into small groups to facilitate a deeper time of sharing. We share life updates, discuss our walks with God, and pray for one another. We also organise group activities, especially when some members return from overseas postings and periods of busyness, and this has been useful in adding warmth to our friendships.



Rachel (right most) and her cell group

Through our experience, we see God working in us more clearly and using

us to disciple one another. Joshua Teo shared that the “3-2-1” group has been a great opportunity to grow, love, and challenge his brothers. Sandar Koh similarly feels that “3-2-1” is a safe space to share her struggles and joys, to hear what God could be saying, and to build one another up with His truth and our prayers for each other.

When examining her “3-2-1” group’s experience, Natalie shared that “Being real takes more courage than keeping your problems to yourself.... When you start being vulnerable with each other, your thoughts and feelings take on a new life. Journeying together, it feels like my struggles have become a starting point for my redemption.”

“While a one-on-one setting may sometimes feel forced and intense, a group dynamic naturally lends itself to more warmth, ease, and cheerfulness. I find myself looking forward to a gathering with friends, rather than keeping to a formal appointment.”



5 Things About **Revd Victor Teo**

Eleanor Que

Early encounters

Revd Victor Teo grew up in a Christian household, but only started taking the faith more seriously when his father was diagnosed with cancer. At age 9, his tutor brought him to Sunday School where he first encountered God. It was during this trying period that the whole family attended church and started praying regularly. Two years later, his father returned to the Lord.

As a young Christian, he struggled with the reality of God after his father's demise.

But the Lord continued to pursue him during his secondary school years. Revd Teo recalls several challenging circumstances that led him to cling to the Lord for strength. He recounts retreating into the bathroom to pour out his heart to God in tears. In those moments, he chose to earnestly seek God and experience the reality of His presence. He subsequently started serving actively in the youth ministry.

Call to ministry

Revd Teo was on the cusp of entering university when his youth pastor suggested that he give up his studies to enter into full-time ministry. His initial response was, "No way!" But the Holy Spirit didn't let him go then and continued to tug at his heart. He wrestled with the Lord further and asked the Lord to give him two clear signs.

First, to allow him to travel the world and second, to let him graduate from university with first class honours. Given his family circumstances and subpar grades, these requests were unfathomable. And yet God miraculously granted both of his requests.

Did he then enter into full-time ministry to fulfil his side of the bargain?

While in university, Revd Teo had already been heavily involved in ministry work with both church and Campus ministry. By the time



SJSM vicar Victor Teo and (from left to right) his wife Priscilla, son Reuel, 9, and daughter Anneli, 11.

he was about to graduate, he was already convinced in his heart that so much more could be done for His kingdom in a full-time capacity than as a layperson. There was already a strong desire and conviction for full-time ministry.

The two fulfilled signs confirmed the call. Revd Teo concluded that God has His own creative ways of ensuring that His voice is heard.

Joys and challenges of ministry

Revd Teo takes joy in creating spaces and platforms where people can connect with each other. As a pastor, he is mindful of the different stages

of life and is constantly reminded of its fleeting nature. He recalls an instance where he had to conduct a wedding and a funeral on the same day. Being surrounded by both joy and sorrow in one day was a sobering experience. Nonetheless, he counts it a privilege to be present for people in their significant moments.

Revd Teo identifies emotional demands and time commitments as challenges that he faces in ministry. He speaks of the need to have a thick skin, and a soft heart as one serves in ministry.

Philippians 3:14 has long served as his anchor verse, “I press on toward

the goal to win the prize of God's heavenly calling in Christ Jesus."

What's next for SJSM?

In this season, Revd Teo views his role as that of journeying and leading the church to fulfil her **Mission** – to be a witnessing community of praying and caring worshippers who base their lives on Scripture and move in the power of the Holy Spirit to reach a world in need of Christ.

The process will start with **Envisioning**, where we will see our common destination together, and then we will move on to developing a **Strategy**, on how we can get there, before discovering our **Values** as a church. Revd Teo is excited about the process, and he sees SJSM as a strong church with good people, staff and leaders.

Out of office

Revd Teo and his family enjoy blaster games involving NERF guns, soft darts and gel balls. He also enjoys spending solo time with the Lord in nature (usually at one of Singapore's reservoirs). The unhurried time spent praying, journaling, talking and listening to God refreshes his soul.

"As a pastor, he is mindful of the different stages of life and is constantly reminded of its fleeting nature. He recalls an instance where he had to conduct a wedding and a funeral on the same day. Being surrounded by both joy and sorrow in one day was a sobering experience. Nonetheless, he counts it a privilege to be present for people in their significant moments."



Lessons in Life

Finding Purpose: A Journey of Faith and Growth Through National Service

Jeyes Tan

Hello, fellow Singaporean guys who are knee-deep in the whirlwind that is National Service (NS). I know the feeling – the dread, the anxiety, the frustration. Picture this: a freshly bald enlistee, caught up in the storm of NS, grappling with the disheartening feeling of having his freedom and precious time snatched away. That was me, and it's an experience I'm sure those who have been through NS can relate to.

As I donned my uniform for the first time, the reality of my situation hit me like a ton of bricks. No more leisurely nights, no more spontaneous plans – as long as I had the green uniform on, my life was going to be dictated by strangers working for the military. For all the hardships I endured within the army camp, perhaps what was most painful was having to sit back and watch as my female peers entered university and carved their own paths. The comparison was inevitable, but boy, it stung.

In the first few months of NS, every day felt like a test of my resolve. I

found myself constantly questioning, wondering, and even despairing at the circumstances I was in. But in the midst of all this turmoil, the one thing that kept me going was my faith.

In my times of desperation, I found myself turning to prayer as a lifeline. I poured out my heart to God, sharing my fears, frustrations and hopes. I was desperate for purpose, for a sign that these two years of my life held some sort of meaning. I prayed for faith – faith that He who held all things together would hold me in the palm of his hand, and that there was a greater plan in motion when it seemed like I was just a tiny cog in a gigantic machine.

Slowly but surely, God started to help me see NS through a different lens. As the weeks went by, I not only began to see it as an opportunity to learn and grow, but more importantly, as a chance to form an intimate relationship with God. Instead of dwelling on my curtailed freedom and on what I could not do, I set my focus on what I could do. I used those

moments of rest as pockets of quiet reflection, praying, reading and seeking solace in the midst of the chaos in my head.

It hasn't been an instant transformation. There are still days where I struggle to muster the strength to stay committed to this new perspective. There are also days where I absolutely dread having to book in. But as I lean into my faith and embrace the belief that God has a purpose for this season, challenges become character-building opportunities.

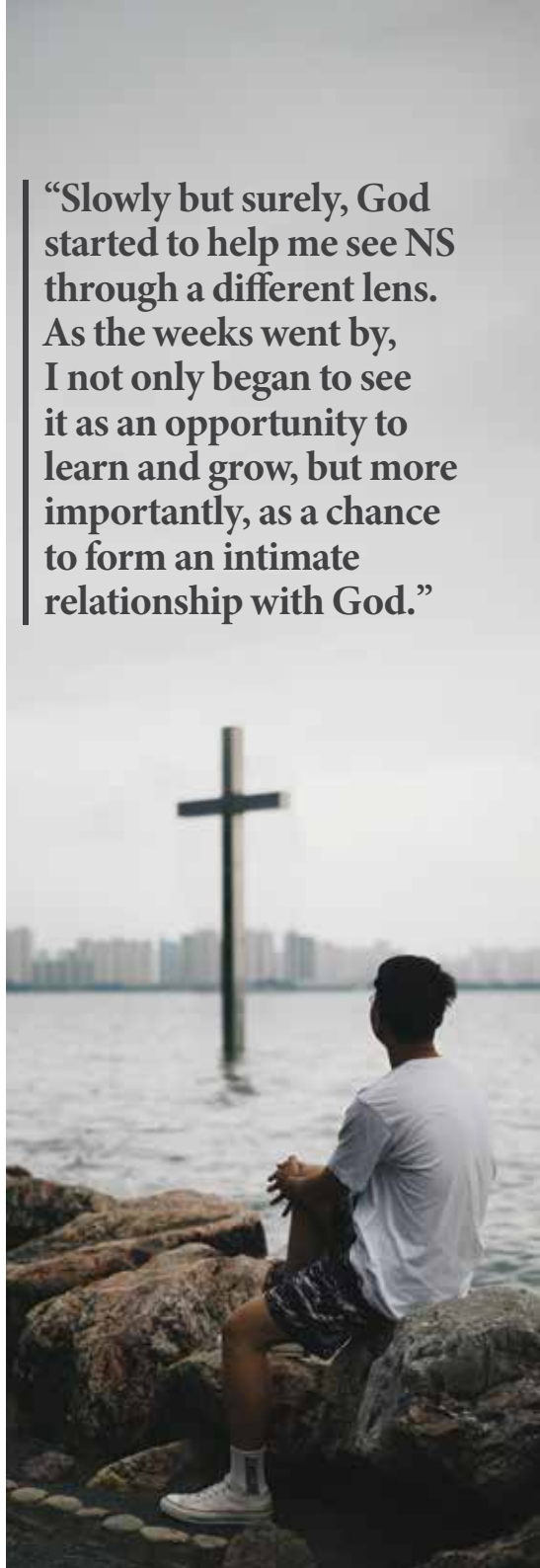
I have come to realise that in a chaotic world where life moves so fast, NS is a unique space for us to slow down and receive pruning from the Lord – to develop resilience and discover our strengths and interests. Even more than that, it is a season that allows us to strengthen our faith and learn to trust God.

In the grand tapestry of life, NS is just one thread. But it's a thread that can be woven into something beautiful – one that shapes our minds and hearts to rely more on the One who provides all things.

Wherever we are placed, whatever the season, may we rely on the Lord and seek His good and perfect will always.

Jeyes is currently serving his national service. He also serves in Heartbeat's music ministry.

“Slowly but surely, God started to help me see NS through a different lens. As the weeks went by, I not only began to see it as an opportunity to learn and grow, but more importantly, as a chance to form an intimate relationship with God.”



Youth Speak: Unveiling the Heartbeat of Missions

Abigail Chen and Valerie Lim

"And He said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed Him."

(Matthew 4:19-20)

In just one sentence, Jesus helped both Peter and Andrew, expert fishermen, to understand the mission He had for them. Their understanding that Jesus was the long-promised Christ, the one who would save Israel and bring the kingdom of heaven down to earth, may explain why they had dropped everything and obeyed Him without any questions asked.

Their faith and quick action were remarkable.

Peter and Andrew's initial act of obedience cascaded into a lifetime of intentional devotion. In their faithfulness, they mirrored Christ's example, eventually becoming disciple-makers themselves. For us, as followers of Christ, the legacy of Peter and Andrew urges us to extend our faith beyond head knowledge.

As a way to nurture discipleships within and beyond their community, Heartbeat's youth boldly embarked on mission trips to various nations in June this year. SOL speaks to members from the five missions teams – Hong Kong, Laos, Timor Leste, Kalimantan, and Cambodia – about their journeys in sharing the hope of the gospel and their greatest takeaways in building one another up as disciples of Christ.

Taking a leap of faith in obedience, Daniel Gan (17) and Irin Chong (18)

One of Peter's most memorable attributes may have been his fervent zealotry for Jesus. This is vividly illustrated in some of our favourite Gospel stories: Caught in a storm on a lake, it was Peter who walked on water at Jesus' command (Matthew 14:22-33). After the Crucifixion, Peter dejectedly went back to fishing. But when the resurrected Lord revealed Himself to His disciples, it was again Peter who jumped out of the boat and into the sea to get to his Master (John

21:1-14). Peter was a faithful follower, not because he was faultless, but because he was ready to chase after God, despite his fears and failures. As disciples of Christ, we are called to emulate Peter's obedience, saying "yes" to God in faith.



The Hong Kong missions team on a night walk with the YWAMers.

The Hong Kong team served at Youth With A Mission (YWAM) Tuen Mun Base. There, we reached out to the mentally disabled and the elderly, including street sleepers and cardboard collectors, by distributing food and gift packs.

With a busy June holiday schedule, I (Daniel) initially had no plans to go on a mission trip. Yet, amid the busyness, some of my plans were shifted. In my uncertainty, I sought God's guidance, wondering if this was my call to serve

Him through missions. I felt a desire to go, and contacted Pastor Richard despite missing the sign-up window. In an unexpected turn of events, he responded affirmatively, extending a place for me within the Hong Kong team. Reflecting on the experience now, I realise how enjoyable and transformative that time was. Through this mission trip, I came to understand that embracing the call to discipleship with a spirit of obedience and faith allows us to experience God and His goodness in remarkable ways.



The Laos missions team in front of the wall we repainted at the church we worked with.

Heartbeat also sent out a team to Laos, where we engaged with children in a language centre. In a country with a Buddhist-majority, Lao Christians are often persecuted and live under intense scrutiny. I (Irin) was amazed to witness their unwavering faith in the face of extreme danger. Their gratitude towards God helped me reflect on our blessings back in Singapore, where we have the privilege of gathering and worshipping openly, uninhibited by fear of harm.

Throughout our journey, my team grappled with our purpose. It seemed as though our role was to lend a helping hand to the people there, rather than to evangelise by sharing God's word and our personal testimonies – a different perspective on what a mission trip should be like. I realised that our purpose was to faithfully heed God's call, regardless of the form it took. If God had called us to this place to lend support to the staff, then obeying that mission was sufficient, even if we did not preach the gospel and see thousands of lives saved. Though this trip was unconventional, recognising God's design fuelled our commitment to obedient service.



The Laos missions team playing with the children who attend the Centre.

“If God had called us to this place to lend support to the staff, then obeying that mission was sufficient, even if we did not preach the gospel and see thousands of lives saved.”

Discerning His voice, Joel Poh (22)

There are many voices that can influence our thoughts, behaviour, and the path we take – the voice of God, the devil, outsiders, our family, and even our own inner critic. Our heavenly Father desires for us to cut through the noise, and to connect and have a relationship with Him strengthened by mutual communication. Scripture makes it clear that God still speaks to us:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

(John 10:27)



The Timor Leste missions team with Pastor Nilton at Crista Agape Church (Dili).

On a personal note, my journey led me to grasp the art of discerning God's voice while fearlessly sharing the gospel among the youth of Timor Leste. Collaborating with Crista Agape Church, Heartfriends Centre Kristian (HCK), and Manatuto, my team and I crafted youth-based programmes including topical testimony sharings such as Worrying about Your Future, Honouring and Loving Your Parents, and Sexual Purity.

During the Sexual Purity session in Mantuto, we facilitated deeper conversations by organising the youth into smaller, gender-based groups. While preparing for this, I couldn't shake off my apprehension that the youth would be reserved or find it challenging to open up. Yet, their responses surprised me; they posed candid questions and readily delved into difficult conversations. One that particularly stood out was: "Is it right to marry someone who is pregnant with another man's child?" These were complex questions, and I felt prompted to seek God's guidance on providing biblically sound answers.



Our gender-based Sexual Purity session with the students at Heartfriends Centre Kristian (HCK).

In those moments, certain verses popped into my mind and I had to discern if they were from my own thoughts or from the Holy Spirit's prompting. With careful discernment, these verses framed not just my responses but a way of engaging in discipleship with the Timor youth. I found myself not merely answering their questions but guiding them through the Word of God. Our conversations went beyond the

surface, delving into how these biblical principles could be lived out in their lives.

Deciphering God's voice amid the clamour of conflicting voices is extremely difficult if we do not anchor ourselves in the Word of God. Our knowledge of the Word is cultivated through the discipline of reading and meditating on it. Leading up to the mission trip, I read articles and followed Bible reading plans on my Bible app. My interest in relationship-related topics and what the Bible conveyed about them shaped my approach. During my time in Timor ministering to the youth in small groups, almost all the verses that came to mind were ones that I had encountered earlier in my private reading of the Word.

As disciples of Christ, we are meant to come before the Lord, so that we may find wisdom and clarity with the help of the Holy Spirit.

“Deciphering God’s voice amid the clamour of conflicting voices is extremely difficult if we do not anchor ourselves in the Word of God. Our knowledge of the Word is cultivated through the discipline of reading and meditating on it.”

Dwelling on His Word, Abigail Chen (19)

The true essence of Jesus Christ is most vividly revealed to us through our exploration of His Word. This has been a profound and life-changing journey for me. As we immerse ourselves in the truth of the Bible and engage in the day-to-day journey of obedience and endurance, our intimacy with our Heavenly Father naturally deepens.

In the words of Jesus Himself, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* This excerpt from John 8:31-32 shows what a genuine disciple looks like – one who perseveres in the path illuminated by His Word.

Heartbeat sent a team to serve in Living Waters Village, which is set in the heart of the West Kalimantan Jungle, and home to over 700 underprivileged children. There, the Kalimantan team worshipped and worked with the village's people – building houses, transporting bricks, and even baking and gardening.



Sunset dinner with Rumah Benyamin.



The Kalimantan missions team is affectionately known as "Rumah Chenus", in honour of the many foster homes in Living Waters Village and named after our beloved "parents" (team leaders). We continue to gather regularly for fellowship over bowling, board games, FIFA and food.

Living Waters is a thriving, self-sustainable village and aptly termed a "miracle zone" – a remarkable testament to God's providence and presence among His people there. Despite the meaningful interactions and friendships forged, I found it hard to reconcile the fact that the team did not overtly evangelise or spread the gospel as I had initially expected.

Amid this internal struggle, the team held daily devotions each day, where we delved into Scripture and shared our struggles with pride, finding peace with God, and loving the "Judases" in our life. Dwelling on His word as a team created a safe space, allowing us to openly share and affirm the challenges and doubts we each faced, and the small victories we've experienced along the way. It became clear to me that the Church's calling to fulfil the Great Commission extends beyond sharing the Gospel to unreached people groups through missions – it includes loving, nurturing, and edifying its very

own people to build intimacy and maturity in the faith. (John 13:34-35, Ephesians 4:11-16)

I (Abigail) was immensely moved by this revelation, and my perception of cell groups changed drastically. Now, I attend my peer cell group and lead my cell kids with the hope of creating a space of vulnerability and discipleship rooted in His word, where we come together to deepen our relationships with God and with one another. Cell groups are not solely about receiving spiritual nourishment; they are spaces where we collectively sharpen and challenge one another, and encourage our mutual development of Christ-like character. It's a beautiful cycle of learning, growing, and nurturing that mirrors the Great Commission's call to make disciples and build up the body of believers.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit, Valerie Lim (20)

"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

(Acts 4:31)

In our journey of discipleship, while we may not have the physical presence of Jesus here on earth to teach and guide us like Peter and Andrew did, the comforting truth remains: when we accept Christ as

our Saviour, we receive the Holy Spirit who becomes our constant guide. Though the path of discipleship may seem daunting, we have the assurance of the Holy Spirit to help us grow into Christ's character.



The Cambodia missions team during one of our bonding sessions.

The Cambodia team visited the three centres under Project Khmer H.O.P.E (PKH), set up by St. Andrew's Cathedral. The team conducted youth camps for the youth and the children in Phnom Penh, which included the sharing of personal testimonies, dance, and various activities.

Prior to the trip, I had shared with Julia, one of our team leaders, my struggle to hear directly from God. For a long time I had felt that God



The Cambodia missions team with the youth and staff of Project Khmer H.O.P.E (PKH) Chbarmorn Centre.

only spoke to me indirectly, through people and worship songs. I yearned for a more intimate experience of my Heavenly Father. Julia and Gavin thoughtfully equipped each member with the book “My Sheep Hear My Voice”. Reading it grew my belief that I could indeed receive directly from the Source – simply because I am a child of God. Nevertheless, I was still a little doubtful.

During the trip, after my team member, Evangeline, shared her testimony, she called upon our team to serve as prayer companions to the youth as she gave an altar call. I was struck with anxiety and doubt. What if I heard wrongly? What if I was just imagining things? Could I accurately discern God’s message? Faced with these thoughts, I decided to pause and pray: “Dear God, please give us visions, verses, and the right words to pray.” I surrendered to God and leaned on Him as we ministered to the youth.

As I was praying for one of the girls, I received a vision of a warrior and released it, along with my interpretation of the vision, to her. As she was not familiar with English, I felt led to request for a translator. I repeated the same thing to her again and she started to break down in tears. Later, I learnt from the staff who had helped to translate, that the prayer resonated with her current season of struggle. This encounter affirmed that God can truly work through us if we persist in deepening our relationship with Him and rely on His faithful guidance.

Conclusion

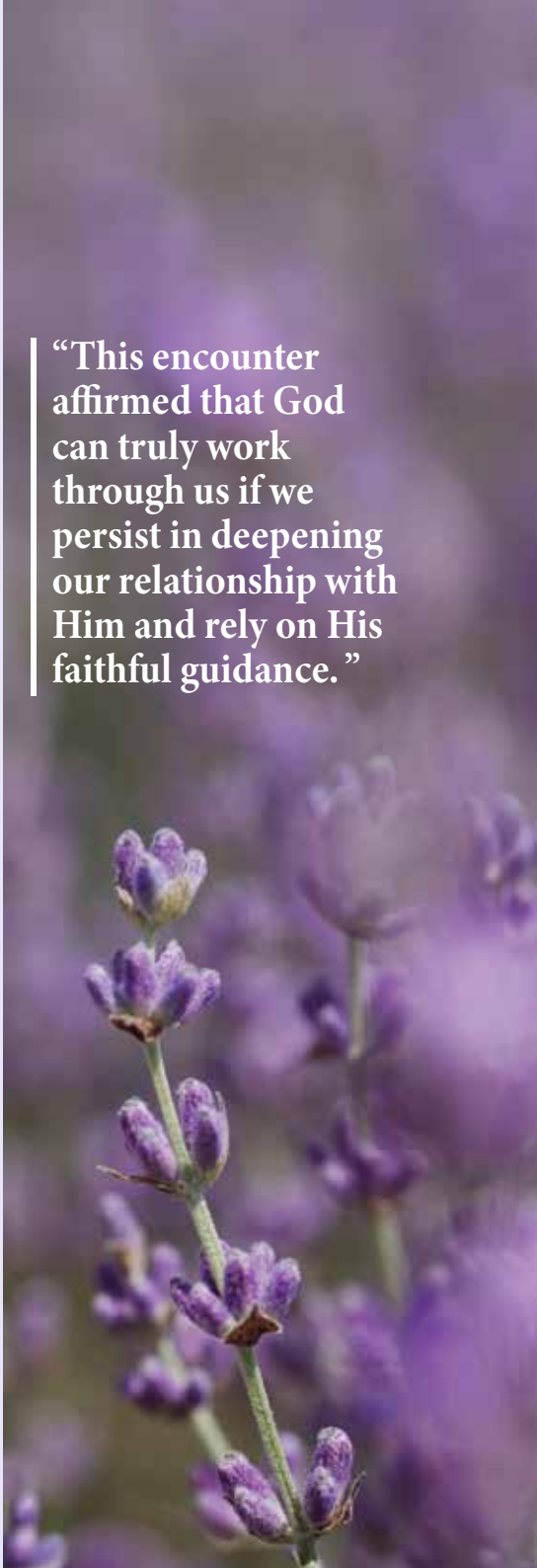
Each team learnt that missions are more than just geographical endeavours – they are discipleship journeys, sculpted by faith, obedience, and the Word of God. As disciples, we bear the responsibility of creating a support network. Even if we aren’t

personally called to overseas missions, our role as 'senders' is paramount. Engaging in fervent prayer, extending care to missionaries, providing financial support, and cultivating friendships through regular check-ins all contribute to fortifying the missions ministry.

Let's also remember that the Great Commission isn't confined to geographical boundaries. Our mission field encompasses our workplaces, schools, families, and our local church, right here in SJSM. The essence of discipleship remains universal – building relationships, sharing the Gospel, and nurturing spiritual growth in a manner that models after Christ's love.

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“This encounter affirmed that God can truly work through us if we persist in deepening our relationship with Him and rely on His faithful guidance.”

Just As I Have Loved You...

Allen Lim

Just as I have loved you...

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

(John 13:34-35)

These words are certainly well known to many. They are so familiar that many Christians would have memorised them. But as with many biblical texts, there are depths to be plumbed so that we can deepen our understanding, and challenge ourselves to put the command into practice.

A new commandment...

The text begins with Jesus' declaration that he is giving his disciples "a new commandment." This should strike us as rather odd because the command to love one another is certainly not a new one – indeed, when Jesus was asked about the greatest

commandment, He called on Jews to love God utterly and he highlighted the necessity of loving our neighbours as ourselves (itself a citation of Lev 19:18).

That said, the "newness" of this command comes not from the call to love one another, but from the premise on which the command was given: "Just as I have loved you." And it is from this premise that we can identify three things that are "new": a new motivation, a new model and a new mission.

A new motivation. It goes without saying that the call to love others as Jesus loved us is a difficult one. It is hard because all of us are selfish creatures; we want to protect our own interests instead of caring about the interests of others. It is also hard because some people can be difficult to love. And it is even harder because of the extent of love that we are called to give.

But for those who have had an experience of being deeply and



unreservedly loved by God, we now have a new motivation born out of gratitude to God: a new confidence to love others, not fearing that our own needs and wants will be overlooked. Indeed, we love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

A new model. Even as we think about loving others, the inevitable question is the extent of love that we are to show to others. Here it is worth considering how Jesus loved and cared for his disciples. Their journey with Jesus began as Jesus initiated and called various men to follow him – most of whom were arguably unworthy of such a call. In the time they followed him, they often failed to understand what he taught, they clamoured for power and position among themselves, with all of them eventually running away and abandoning Jesus when he was arrested.

But despite their many failings, Jesus persisted in patiently teaching them.

Where they clamoured for power, Jesus served them as he washed their feet, and when they abandoned him, Jesus' love persisted when he made his way to the cross for them. In doing so, Jesus modelled a selfless love that was fully committed to the well-being of those he loved, even at the cost of his own life.

A new mission. Some may wonder why such radical love is needed. Here, the context of John 13 provides an answer. When Jesus walked on the earth, one of the things that he did was to help us to understand what the Father was like by living among us, revealing the person and character of God to us. Through his life and actions, Jesus perfectly exemplified the Father to the extent that Jesus would assert that "those who know him know the Father" (John 14:7).

But now in John 13:31 Judas had just left to betray Jesus, and Jesus knew that his time on earth was coming

to a close (Jn 13:33), after which he would no longer be physically present in the world to reveal the Father. And so, Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another so that all people could see that they were his disciples – demonstrating selfless love to one another, and in so doing, revealing the selfless love and goodness of the Father to the world around us.

“Even as we think about loving others, the inevitable question is the extent of love that we are to show to others. Here it is worth considering how Jesus loved and cared for his disciples.”

With this new mission in mind, the importance of Jesus’ command cannot be understated. For here Jesus connects our acts of loving and caring for one another with the Great Commission. Indeed, when the world sees Christians loving one another the way Jesus loves us, it irrefutably brings his love to those who have never experienced such love.

Growing in loving one another

But is it possible for ordinary Christians to love as Jesus loves? The answer to this is both yes and no. We

cannot do this perfectly because we are broken and sinful creatures. And as such, we may never perfectly emulate the love of Christ in our love for one another. But while our love may never be as perfect as Christ’s, this must not stop us from growing in our willingness to love one another.

To do so, there are three areas which we should consider. Firstly, we remember the great commandment to love God and to love others. Loving God must always take priority over loving others. And in the context of John 13:34, this importance cannot be understated, because the basis of our attempts to love others stems from our understanding and experience of God’s love for us. If we want to grow in loving others, we must continue to grow in our love for God through our own personal relationship with our heavenly Father.

Secondly, we live in a world and a culture that constantly emphasise the importance of personal rights and the meeting of personal needs. Such self-love or preservation is not wrong in and of itself. However, Philippians 2:3-4 asserts that self-love needs to be balanced with love for our fellow men.

How did Jesus do this? Philippians 2:5-8 tells us that it involves humility, surrender, and obedience. This means that if we want to grow in our ability to love others, we need to grow in our ability to lay down our rights and needs for the sake of God,



and for the sake of others. This could be expressed in so many ways: for example, taking time out of busy schedules to sit and listen to a brother in pain, stepping out and serving in places where we feel uncomfortable, or using our money to bless others who are in need. The fact is, opportunities will always present themselves for us to demonstrate love for one another. We can grow and do better in these areas as we gradually learn how to lay down our lives for the sake of others.

Thirdly, because serving one another is a tangible expression of our love for one another, Christians should grow in our service to one another. As a minimum, what this means is that Christians should learn to put aside any sense of entitlement that demands that they be served. More importantly, it suggests that Christians need to be keenly aware of the many areas of need around us, and what the Spirit might be saying

to us so that we may discern if we are being called to serve in new areas, or perhaps in greater capacities, thereby growing in our service to one another.

In short, the Christian who truly wants to love as Jesus loves, can grow in his ability to do so by growing in his relationship with God, by growing in his ability to deny himself, and by growing in his acts of service to others. None of these individual actions may seem to be that significant. But when the Church collectively takes up this mandate it will be nothing less than earth-shaking – for we will indeed be a powerful witness to the world around us, helping people to see not only the love of God, but the God of love who loves them.

“We live in a world and a culture that constantly emphasise the importance of personal rights and the meeting of personal needs. Such self-love or preservation is not wrong in and of itself. However, Philippians 2:3-4 asserts that self-love needs to be balanced with love for our fellow men.”



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