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# Seasons of Life

Start Small, Start Real

Issue #02 | Nov 2024

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Seeing Jesus In Others  
Church Camp  
Timor Leste Mission Trip  
Nursing Home Stories  
Collection of stories of "small steps"  
Testimony

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All scripture quotations used are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise indicated.

## Start Small, Start Real

In this issue, we continue with the 2024 church theme, Radical Hospitality. What does it mean to be a church that extends welcome to all? What is it like to love and serve like Jesus? How radical must acts of hospitality be to count for something? How can I serve when I'm so busy with work and family commitments?

We attempt to answer these questions with the important reminder that we are all recipients of God's radical hospitality and grace through Jesus Christ. The article *Understanding Good Works* explains how we are all saved by grace for good works (Eph 2:8-10). Truly, when our lives have been touched by God's great love, we feel compelled to share this love with others through our words and actions.

Every one of us can be a blessing where we are; we can start small. One article describes small and practical things some SJSMers do, like keeping a room vacant to host anyone in need of a temporary place of rest or inviting migrant workers home for a meal. A mother with a special needs child recounts the impact children and teens in both Junior Church and Heartbeat have on her child's life by simply befriending her and being intentionally inclusive. A former foreign domestic worker shares how she saw the love of God in her employers' care for her and how it changed her life. *Small Actions, Great Impact*, as one article in this issue is aptly titled.

It also brings to my mind this quote by Mother Teresa:

"Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love."

May the articles in this issue inspire you to know that whatever season of life you find yourself in, you can be God's blessing to many. He is the One who motivates, sustains and brings about everlasting fruit for His Name's sake.

**Yeo Hem Joo**

On behalf of the SOL Editorial Team

## In Focus: Start Small, Start Real

Yeo Hem Joo

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An SJSM church member in his twenties said to me recently that if I were to ask any church member what the 2024 theme and direction of SJSM is, he was positive everyone would be able to give an immediate answer. Indeed, our theme of radical hospitality resonated with many right from the start. Throughout this year, it has been explained, expounded and emphasised consistently through the pulpit series on the Gospel of Luke followed by Acts of the Apostles.

As we draw close to the end of 2024, it might be timely to take stock and evaluate the impact it has had on our church community. At the leaders' gathering held at the end of August, many were heartened by the positive responses of different younger and older members who affirmed that it has made changes to how they serve and how they view hospitality. One leader who serves as an usher shared how he now has greater awareness and sensitivity in welcoming church members and newcomers into our midst through his words and actions.

Another shared that he now realises he has "plentiful harvest" opportunities in serving Dover residents.

If this direction has brought about a greater sense of "other-centredness" amongst us, that is, we consider the needs of others more and more, it is a positive and encouraging step towards spiritual maturity and Christlike servanthood. For Jesus, the One we follow, is a Servant King. While on earth, He exemplified servanthood perfectly, meeting the needs of different individuals with amazing grace and compassion.

**Start Small** - *"Do not despise these small beginnings..." (Zech 4:10a, NLT)*

Another response I have come across is that there is still so much more to be done and yet "the labourers are few". The same group of actively serving church members seems to be taking on more responsibilities than ever. How do we bring more hands on deck? In other words, how do we rally more church members to consider different avenues of service in SJSM Village?

I believe one way is to encourage everyone to “start small”.

<sup>1</sup>Pawfriends, an animal assisted activity at the Nursing Home, came about because a couple of the cell members felt that bringing their very well-behaved dogs to bring cheer to the residents was “doable”. No one really knew what to expect or felt very prepared when interacting with residents for the first time. By God’s grace, the pilot run with four dogs received a good response and has expanded to twice weekly sessions.

When I offered to play oldies on a digital keyboard at one of the wards weekly, I was doing it alone, simply falling back on some experience I had while volunteering elsewhere previously. A year later, the weekly Music Infusion activity has evolved to

include more than 10 music loving friends, some who are able to sing in English, Chinese and occasionally, bravely attempt Hokkien and Cantonese classics! And we have expanded to offer this at 4 wards. We are encouraged whenever we observe residents participating - like mouthing parts of the lyrics from memory, and being engaged during the sessions. I learnt that it is always good and motivating to serve with others. The principle holds true: Two are better than one (Eccl 4:9a).

**Start Real** - “...the branch cannot bear fruit by itself...” (John 15:4b)

One of the deepest impressions I had from the series of sermons on Luke was the Parable of the Good Samaritan. I knew it well but revisiting it once again in the context

<sup>1</sup>Pawfriends has been featured in an article (6 August 2024) on Salt & Light website. You can read more about it there.



of our church theme, I could not help but be struck by the radical hospitality and kindness of the Samaritan - an offensive character to the Jews - but who went over and beyond to help a naked and half dead robbery victim. At the risk of overstretching the parable, I realised that deep down I would not come close to the generosity and kindness of the Samaritan under similar circumstances.

The perception is, to be a neighbour like the Samaritan, one seems to require an exceptional level of compassion and kindness most of us have yet to possess. The true source of radical compassion, grace and love is found only in Jesus. He is radical; the gospel is radical. But I am not.

How then do I embrace and live out this call to extend hospitality like Jesus? A small group of us led by our cell pastor have been going through a book by Dr Tan Siang-Yang, *Full Service: Moving from Self-serve Christianity to Total Servanthood*. Each month we come together to discuss and share his insights on this subject of servanthood.

In Chapter 2 'Learning from the Master Servant', he writes that there was a widespread movement years ago that encouraged Christians to imitate Jesus by asking the WWJD question: What Would Jesus Do?

*"We cannot become more like Jesus by self-effort or sheer imitation of*

*Christ. We will fail. But we can follow another WWJD: Walking with Jesus Daily. We can, with the help and empowering of the Holy Spirit, walk with Jesus daily by spending time with Him in prayer, Bible reading and meditation, worship, solitude and silence, and other spiritual disciplines. As we abide to remain in Him in the sweet communion of His transforming friendship, He will change us and mould us to become more like Him. It is the Holy Spirit who will transform us"*

This is a reality check: I cannot serve like Jesus if I do not grow deep in Him. To "start real" is to know first of all who we are in Jesus Christ. He tells us to abide in Him and He in us (John 15:4).

What we do in Christ flows from the security of knowing what our fundamental core identity is - children of God, greatly loved by Him and saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Our service, however insignificant or radical in magnitude, is all in Christ - He guides and enables us through the Holy Spirit. Without walking closely with Him and encountering His presence regularly, we are in danger of serving others with our limited strength and wisdom. We will fail to produce fruit that lasts, nor will we please or honour God. To illustrate, we may either get easily discouraged when we are not appreciated or proud when we are praised by others.

And there is also the danger of burnout which occurs when one serves extended periods of time without regular spiritual nourishment and renewal.

**What we do in Christ flows from the security of knowing what our fundamental core identity is - children of God, greatly loved by Him and saved by faith in Jesus Christ.**

To conclude, yes, we desire to see more and more SJSMers come

along to serve in SJSM Village and we become this radically hospitable community. But perhaps the greater desire should be to see everyone in SJSM pursue God more and more, and grow deep in Him. We are transformed by the power of the gospel. Zaccheus, encountering the grace and hospitality of Jesus, was radically changed and gave away half his goods to the poor (Luke 19:8). Likewise, Saul, encountering Jesus on the way to Damascus (Acts 9), was radically changed and gave his life to preach the gospel.

When we are changed by Jesus, we serve like Jesus.





# SJSM Church Camp 2024: Immeasurably More

Yap Kai Heng

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Walking into the crowded lobby of Courtyard Melaka on the first day of Church Camp 2024, I did not have high hopes for the camp. I recognised many faces in the sea of people - young and old - but hardly anyone my age, apart from my sister walking behind me.

I felt out of place as a 26-year-old coming to church camp: too old to be considered a youth and yet too young to relate to young parents. I imagine this to be just a small taste of what Moses felt when he observed the Egyptians ruling over the Israelites. Neither Egyptian nor Jewish enough to be accepted by either camp, Moses would have been conflicted about his identity. He must have asked himself, "Who am I?" Likewise, looking out at the crowd, I could not help myself but ask, "What am I doing here?"

Thankfully, at the welcome dinner, I ran into Kai Yi and Song Yang, fellow 20-somethings. They were rounding up the oldest youths to the youngest adults to hang out. I had come

into this camp not expecting much, but this was already much more promising than what I had expected. Then came the sessions.

## The Message

Slavery - Promise - Liberation - Identity - Home. This was the heart of the camp message, based on the book of Exodus and delivered by our speaker Ps Andrew Gardener, a pastor of The Vine HK. It was a message about leaving fear and walking in faith, believing in a God that is immeasurably more than what could imagine (Eph 3:20, NIV).

Over the course of five sessions, we were challenged by Ps Andrew to have faith in a God who is mighty, who desires for us to be free and who can do immeasurably more than we can imagine.

## Slavery

Fear makes slaves of us all. It made slaves of the Israelites. The Israelites had no desire to be free from the



*Ps Andrew Gardener, our speaker, and Ps Raymond Sim who headed the Children's programme*

yoke of the Egyptians, even berating Moses for speaking out on their behalf. Even when they were being led out of Egypt, at the edge of the Red Sea, they longed to return to slavery. They preferred the certainty of slavery and death under their oppressors to the risks that came with freedom. Forget the pillar of cloud and fire before them, or the plagues that God had sent. They chose fear over faith the first time their faith was tested.

The power of fear to hold us back was not lost on Ps Andrew, who shared a story of how his thalassophobia (phobia of the sea) had ruined a miraculous scuba-diving moment. As a teen, his Jaws-induced fear of the water had caused him to notice that what appeared to be a shark had swum up close to his

scuba-diving group. In a panic, he surfaced immediately, only to hear the instructor ask the group, "Did you see that dolphin?"

Our fear transforms dolphins into sharks. Only God can transform us from slaves into a free people. But the process requires us to first be broken down, before we can be built back up. Are we ready to depart from the familiarity of slavery into the unknowns of freedom?

### **Promise**

The only way to start getting over our fear is to hold on to God's promise. We must believe that God is good and that His plans for us are good.

Moses' mother saw that her son was a 'fine' child. This adjective is

the same word translated as 'good' in the creation account, when God surveyed the work of His hands. This goodness did not depend on how the infant Moses looked or behaved. Baby Moses was simply 'good' because he was created by God. The infant was exactly what God had intended him to be: a Hebrew infant male, born at a time when Pharaoh wanted all such children dead. Though Pharaoh decreed that baby Moses had to be thrown into the Nile, Moses' mother, in faith, set him gently down that river in a basket instead. It was God that brought the basket to Pharaoh's daughter. Baby Moses had floated into the arms of the daughter of the one who sought to kill him, but God was with Moses and moved the heart of Pharaoh's daughter to not only save the infant, but also pay Moses' mother to nurse him.

That is God's promise to us: He will be faithful and look after us, if only we have the faith to release what is near and dear to our hearts to Him.



*What's a camp without some fun games?*

## **Liberation**

After killing the Egyptian slave driver, Moses spent 40 years in the desert, hiding his identity. There, in the middle of a mundane day, he met God, in a burning bush. Here was a man who had spent many years hiding - from the Egyptians, from himself and from God. Yet in that moment when God called to him, Moses declared, "Here I am". In Hebrew, Moses' response means that he is fully laid bare in front of God, his creator. When Satan brought sin into the world, Adam and Eve's first act was to cover themselves, physically and spiritually. In that moment, mankind no longer shared an intimate openness with God, instead becoming hidden, closed-off from the Maker. This was not how God intended His relationship with us to be. Moses, in a moment of faith and courage, chose to discard his sandals along with his hiddenness and be fully laid bare in front of God - physically, spiritually and emotionally. God then received Moses and fully restored him back to His fullness.

Moses had been liberated from the shadows of his past and restored to the openness that God had intended to share with mankind from the beginning.

Only God can liberate us from our past. His grace itself is sufficient for Himself to forgive us.

## Identity

Geographically speaking, going through the Red Sea was not the fastest nor the most direct route from Egypt to the promised land. Yet God, in His infinite wisdom, led them, as cloud and as fire, on a long detour. It was tough love. The Israelites needed that time to get over the 200 years of slavery that had etched itself into their psyche. Although they were physically free from slavery, their hearts and minds were still very much enslaved. They had fear in their hearts, not God.

Yet God wanted to be their God. He wants to be our God today. God is so committed to building a relationship with His people that He places us in positions to grow our faith, beyond fear and doubt.

## Home / Immeasurably More

At the end of the Israelites' time in the wilderness, God leads the Israelites to the promised land - their new home. They could not have imagined that God had intended something so wonderful when their forebears left Egypt.

To demonstrate how God had been 'immeasurably more' in his life, Ps Andrew shared his personal story of childlessness. I had expected the story to end on a triumphant note - that he and his wife had a child. However, God answered his prayer in a different way: they received a child via adoption.

It is tempting to look back at all the times we felt that God was not good enough: when our prayers were not answered; when we did not receive the things we pleaded for desperately. Consciously and unconsciously, we allow the failures and disappointments of our past to infect all our thoughts.

It is also tempting to look back to our good experiences and let them colour our view of God. We remember the times when God came through for us and gave us exactly what we wanted or needed.

But that is not truly God.

An understanding of God based solely on our past experiences does not fully capture who He is. Ps Andrew warned against worshipping a god of our own truth, rather than the God of the Truth. This is the same God who sent the plagues, parted the Red Sea and provided manna and quail for a hungry people. We do not worship a god that is 'not enough', nor do we worship a god that is 'just enough'. God is so much more; He is beyond the limits of our experiences and imagination.

## Concluding Thoughts

Isn't it great to be loved by such a wonderful God? To be honest, I had come to church camp expecting nothing more than five sermons interspersed with buffet food, but what I received was so much more. Immeasurably more.

**An understanding of God based solely on our past experiences does not fully capture who He is. Ps Andrew warned against worshipping a god of our own truth, rather than the God of the Truth.**

I made friends, ranging from the youth to the young adults. I went out to explore the cafes of Melaka. I had more fun than I thought I would when I looked out at that crowded lobby on the first day. Best of all, I

was treated to a moving message by a genuine and passionate pastor.

I had merely expected a good experience; God gave me a wondrous experience.

### **Thanksgiving**

This church camp would not have been possible without the hard work of the Camp Committee, the hospitality of the staff at both Courtyard and Pines Hotels and the SJSMers who embraced radical hospitality.

This church camp has truly been a blessing for me and I hope it has been for all campers as well!

*Happy campers waiting to board the bus home*





## Stories from SJSM Village: Small Actions, Great Impact

Eleanor Que

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*“So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Gal 6:10)*

Radical Hospitality has been the central mission for SJSM this year. While many of us may have faithfully recalibrated the postures of our hearts and embraced new initiatives, the sustainability of these endeavors is also an important consideration. How do we ensure that we don't eventually lose steam in our pursuit of extending hospitality?

The short answer is this. The word “radical” may bring to mind grand gestures, but more often than not, hospitality begins with us obeying a quiet nudge from the Spirit to approach someone, or recognising divine appointments when opportunities arise. Sometimes hospitality is simply stepping in to fill the gaps where practical help is needed, and these small acts of service are no less significant or impactful.

The lives touched at SJSM's Nursing Home are clear testaments to this.

### **Jack Suh, 57**

Following an exhausting season of caring for his aging parents till they both passed on in 2021, Jack felt God call him to retirement. However, as he was wondering how he would occupy himself in this new season, the church introduced the nursing home befriender programme at one of the services. He was drawn to it, and felt that the past 10 years of caregiving challenges was part of God's plan to equip him with the skills and empathy to be a befriender.

Jack signed up for the befriender training and wheelchair handling courses, and was subsequently assigned two nursing home residents who rarely had visitors. As a befriender, Jack's role is to spend an hour per week chatting with them.

*“This social engagement, albeit simple, can go a long way in making them feel valued, and meeting their social, emotional and even spiritual needs.”*

As many nursing home residents have reduced mental capacities (with some suffering from various stages of dementia), befrienders have to exercise patience and creativity when engaging them. Jack often prayed for divine guidance to have meaningful interactions with the residents.

One particular encounter with Mr HB, one of his assigned residents, stuck with him. Prior to his admission to the nursing home, Mr HB suffered a stroke that left him physically impaired and non-verbal. While praying for him one day, Jack felt led to bring his tablet during his next visit for Mr HB to type out his thoughts. This way, they could have a two-way conversation. To his surprise, Mr HB communicated through the tablet that he had been experiencing sporadic shooting pains in his hand at night but could not inform the nurses. Jack immediately alerted the nursing staff to his situation and appropriate treatment was arranged to manage Mr HB’s pain.

This incident helped cement their friendship, which gave Jack the chance to introduce the Alpha Course to Mr HB. From then on, Mr HB would eagerly signal for Jack to play him an episode during every visit. Unfortunately, midway through the series, he contracted pneumonia

suddenly and passed away.

Regardless, Jack felt very grateful to have been used by God to help Mr HB live out his final months more comfortably, and to share God’s love with him. He reiterates that there are many more like Mr HB residing at the nursing home who yearn for companionship and social interaction, and encourages more befrienders to step up.

*“Each befriending session is only an hour long and may not be consequential to us, but to a resident who does not have any other visitors, the impact of our visits is way beyond our imagination.”*

## **Esther, 50**



*Esther and her mother*

Esther’s mother has been a resident at SJSM’s Nursing Home since she fractured her hip bone in July 2022. The nursing home was the top choice for Esther’s family due to the proximity to where they live and the opportunity to experience chaplaincy work and attend Mandarin services during her stay.

In May 2024, Esther's aunt was admitted to a palliative ward. When Pastor Kim Chin (the chaplain in charge of her mother's ward) heard about this, she went the extra mile to set up a video call for them. Little did the family know, that would be the last contact between the sisters, as Esther's aunt went home to the Lord two days after. With gratitude, Esther recalled that the call brought her mother the closure she had sought.

Esther also spoke appreciatively of Pastor Kim Chin's supportive efforts to attend Mandarin/Hokkien sing-along sessions with her mother. "It's such a joy to see her interacting with the patients with such authenticity. We really feel the love of God and the unity of the doctors, nurses and staff working together in this nursing home. We can rest knowing that Mum is in good hands."

### **Kek Joo, 65**



*Kek Joo and her mother*

When Kek Joo needed to find a nursing home for her mother following her discharge from hospital, SJSJ's Nursing Home was her first choice.

She was enamored by the vision of an intergenerational village - older nursing home residents and kids from the preschool interacting, with church members serving as volunteers. As her mother was a very sociable person prior to her dementia, she pegged SJSJ Nursing Home as the ideal environment for her.

Unfortunately, there were no vacancies at the time. Kek Joo's mother had to settle for another nursing home and given the COVID-19 restrictions and suspension of visitations, she had an exceptionally difficult time adjusting to the new environment.

Nonetheless, Kek Joo tried again and by God's divine arrangement, there was eventually a spot open for her mother at SJSJ's Nursing Home. However, due to administrative lapses, the transfer process took longer than expected and the available bed was taken. Needless to say, Kek Joo was disappointed. She made a trip down to SJSJ where she met senior medical social worker June, who was extremely sympathetic and understanding. She was surprised and touched when June offered to pray together with her for a patient to be discharged so that her Mum could take their place. Exactly a month later, there was a new spot freed up for her.

Even post-admission, Kek Joo has been continually moved by the kindness of SJSJ's Nursing Home

staff, chaplaincy and volunteers. From small acts of thoughtfulness, like Krizza, the Senior Nurse, moving Kek Joo's mother to a brighter spot because she remembered that she disliked dark spaces, to the genuine friendships established with Pastor Kim Chin, Reverend Dino, Gina (her Mum's assigned befriender), Hannah, Chee Chun and Tea Terrace volunteers and befrienders, it is evident that SJSM's Nursing Home is a place filled with warmth. She hopes that moving forward, it will continue to thrive with volunteers and caregivers working hand-in-hand to fully realise the vision of an intergenerational SJSM village.

"In the midst of the busyness, demands and pressures to meet KPIs, I hope that we won't forget that each resident is special, unique and placed in the SJSM's Nursing Home by God for this season of their life. Be blessed by making a difference in the last stage of someone's life journey."

### **Jeremy Lee, 50**



*Jeremy and his grandmother*

Like Kek Joo, the idea of an intergenerational village appealed



greatly to Jeremy. As Jeremy had plans to adopt children, having a single location where he can simultaneously visit his grandmother and pick his kids up was something he took into consideration.

Beyond the specialised medical care that his grandmother received, Jeremy noted the spiritual and emotional care that the nursing home staff poured into her life. Even though Jeremy's grandmother suffers from dementia and is non-verbal, the volunteers at the weekly Tea Terrace sessions and Wednesday morning services have remembered, prayed for, and engaged her in conversations regardless.

"My grandmother may not be able to communicate her thoughts, but I know by looking at her expressions that she enjoyed these little interactions. The volunteers' willing and cheerful dispositions while serving are examples of God's unconditional love, and I am deeply appreciative of it."

He hopes that with COVID-19 restrictions out of the way, intergenerational programmes can now be fully implemented, and achieve their intended objectives of decreasing social isolation for the elderly and improving social and emotional skills of the younger ones.

## Better is One Day in His Courts

Missives from the mission field in Timor Leste

Yap Kai Xing

*Basic first aid training*

To say that this mission trip was full of the Lord's goodness would be an understatement. You know how there are times when God invites you into His presence simply to bless you? This was one of those moments.

The 2-week trip to support Heartfriends Centru Kristaun (HCK) in Manatuto, Timor Leste, was borne out of a conversation between its Director, the indomitable Janice (whom some may know from the years she worked as a church staff before becoming a full-time missionary), and her cell leaders, Andrew and Jacqueline. HCK provides job skills training to youths between 18 and 25 in Timor Leste. Janice shared that beyond job skills, the students in HCK needed greater health literacy. Andrew and Jacqueline, being doctors, rose to the occasion.

Putting together a group of ten youths, young adults, and the young-at-heart was an exercise in faith and patience. Yet slowly but surely, the Lord provided the open doors,

willing hearts, and favour with bosses (who approved leaves!) that allowed something resembling a team to coalesce. Our mission was to develop a 2-week health literacy module, comprising lessons on physical health (exercise, nutrition, infectious and non-infectious diseases), emotional health (mental health and cyber wellness), and spiritual and relational health (relationships, gender identity, men's and women's sexuality). We had our work cut out for us, but little did we know how deeply we would be blessed even as we gave.

### **The hospitality of God's workers**

The blessing began from the very moment we stepped off the plane, with Janice picking us up and whisking us off to attend Sunday service at Agape church in Dili, the capital of Timor Leste. There, Pastor Nilton, an SJSJ member who heads the church, warmly welcomed us by seating translators next to us, taking us on a tour of the church compound, and regaling us with



*A group photo to remember this trip!*

harrowing stories of his adventures advancing God's kingdom in the land. His wife, Raquel, and two sons, Asafe and Benjamin, opened their home and hearts to us. Later, Pastor Nilton would come all the way to HCK to pick us up and drive us back to the airport in Dili.

Janice was a wonderful host too, full of the sincerity and steel needed to navigate life as a missionary (and the traffic conditions!) in a foreign land. She went to great lengths to make sure we were settling in well – buying us bread every morning for breakfast, moving the roosters further from our rooms so that their loud morning “alarms” would not wake us up, organising a campfire on our first day and a barbecue on our last, and recounting story after story of God's faithfulness in Timor Leste. All this while running HCK!

Sam and Lyn, the wonderful married couple sent by our church to serve as HCK's operations manager and pastoral staff respectively, also

received us with great love and warmth. Sam quietly made sure we were well taken care of. He lit mosquito coils for us at night, brought us water in the morning, and even helped the girls on our team with a choked toilet on one of the days. Lyn was warm and motherly in her support of us as we sought to do God's work together. Her morning devotions to the students consistently hit the spiritual spot, setting a strong foundation for our module lessons later in the day.

### **The hospitality of the students**

The students opened up their hearts to us as well. Theirs was great joy – resounding in their loud singing of their favourite song, “Haksolok” (meaning “joy/happy”), during the campfire – but also deep sorrow – many shared difficult personal stories of painful experiences when they came up for prayer during ministry times. They were authentic and real in their interactions with us, giving us the gift of their true selves.

## The hospitality of the trainers

We also received much love from the trainers at the school. These were locals who themselves had been students at HCK. They lovingly served as translators for our lessons, and prayer partners during ministry times. In small ways and big, the trainers showed their love for us and the students by going above and beyond the call of their job. Rosalia delayed the start of her big job in the capital in order to serve with us. Sandra stayed up late into the night studying materials for the lesson she was translating the next day. Alberto gamely shared his testimony of overcoming addiction on short notice.



Geri

One particular trainer's story touched us deeply. Geri is a student in HCK who became a trainer. Wanting to better himself and contribute to his country, he travels to Dili on the weekend to study law on a part-time basis. On the weekdays, beyond his work at HCK, he teaches youths in his village basic English at his house for free.

On our last night, he invited us to his house. He showed us his open porch that doubled up as a classroom. There, a whiteboard was affixed, scrawled with markings from the previous class he taught. He invited us into his room and pointed out the candle he used to burn literal midnight oil for studying after work. We saw in Geri a willingness to give of himself and to open up his home as a place where others can receive.

**This trip to Timor Leste was just our way of pulling the chair out to invite our Timorese brothers and sisters to sit beside us at His table and feast together on His goodness. In the process, our own cups were filled to overflowing.**

## The hospitality of God

Yet above all, we experienced the hospitality of God. Before the trip, we sensed that the Lord had given us Psalm 84:10a – better is one day in His courts than a thousand elsewhere. We knew that we had been invited into His temple and called to be gatekeepers that beckoned others in.

True enough, the presence of the Lord was so real throughout the trip. We saw Him in the vibrant sunsets and magnificent night skies. We saw Him in the moments of laughter and camaraderie with the students and within our team. We saw Him in the lessons we taught, during which we had the privilege to declare His truth – that the students are loved, chosen, forgiven, redeemed and adopted; that their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit; that God has a plan and a future for them; that their sins can be forgiven and lives restored when they turn to God in repentance and faith. Most of all, we saw Him in the moments of ministry that we had with the students. As we prayed for and with the students, we had the privilege to witness the divine exchange and transaction between each of them and the Lord. We saw them give Him their hurt, pain,

brokenness, and repentance; and receive in return the great gifts of love, acceptance, forgiveness, and restoration.

### **Better is One Day**

The Lord is the host and we are His guests. He gives us a seat at the table and lavishes a feast on us. He invites us to partake of the living Bread and drink deep from living waters.

This trip to Timor Leste was just our way of pulling the chair out to invite our Timorese brothers and sisters to sit beside us at His table and feast together on His goodness. In the process, our own cups were filled to overflowing.

All glory to God, who gives us immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.



*The team with Ps Nilton's family, Sam and Lyn*

## Practical, Radical Hospitality

Prisca Ang

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Going the extra mile – it’s often said this is what we should do when showing hospitality to others. Even so, some of us might feel exhausted when we think about the journey of the extra mile. How can we rely on the Holy Spirit and show hospitality to others in a way that is within our reach?

Seasons of Life (SOL) speaks to a few SJSMers about what radical hospitality looks like in their lives. The team has chosen to use pseudonyms in this article, to shine a spotlight on people’s actions instead of their identities.

A recurring theme among those SOL spoke to is the importance of community, as it takes a village to truly make someone feel at home. Here are their stories:

### The vacant room

A spare room can be a means of rental income but Anne, 40, has chosen to keep the space empty after

her friend, who was also her tenant, moved back to Malaysia.

She received the keys to her four-room flat in the west in 2020. Although she lived alone, she wanted a larger place she could use to host others.

“There’s sometimes that tension of whether to rent it out or to keep it as an open space that anyone can come to.”

Since 2022, Anne has welcomed visitors such as her friend and her missionary husband, as well as two Thai university students on an English language immersion programme.

She enjoyed the opportunity to talk with the students and introduce them to local food. “It’s really just about sharing life, because when you’re together in a four-room flat, you can’t run anywhere.”

“As much as we feel like we are showing them hospitality, a lot of times, on their end, the guest also has to have quite a bit of courage to step

into our home and be open to sharing about their lives.”

Anne hopes to host more missionaries in future as she senses that these individuals need a place to rest. “A lot of their work deals with people and ministering. I feel that when they come back or have a sabbatical, they may want a space that is quieter.”

What is the essential ingredient in hospitality? To Anne, community is key.

“Even though I hosted the two university students, the youth took them for the day. I had two other friends who also enjoyed hosting but they were not able to, so we were a tag team – one of them went to fetch the girls, and the other ferried them in the car.

“It was really a community reaching out to the girls. If you can find like-minded friends to do something together, it makes it so much richer.”

### **Finding God in the mundane**

During her daily commutes, Elle often crossed paths with Uncle K who sold tissues near her workplace.

“I started to buy tissues from him on certain days. This gave me the opportunity to get to know him and over time, we became good friends,” said Elle, who is in her late 20s. She invited him to Saturday Evening

Service (SES), and now accompanies him every week at service together with her husband Dan.

It isn’t easy to journey alongside someone regularly, said Elle. “But we have learnt that we need to partner God more intentionally in prayer, and be patient and faithful as we wait for the seed of faith to germinate.”

“We have learnt that hospitality is shown even more powerfully in a community – when we see fellow members of our church and cell coming up to welcome Uncle, we believe he truly feels the warmth and love of God’s family.”

Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Elle and Dan also befriended two migrant workers whom they often noticed cleaning their neighbourhood.

Elle recalled how the brothers turned up with huge bags of 10 different types of fruits, when she and Dan invited the men over for dinner.

“We were in complete shock as the last thing we wanted them to do was to spend money to bless us. However, we soon realised that this was part of their hospitality culture in their home countries and in receiving their gifts, we are also honouring them in the process,” she said.

An important part of building any relationship is a genuine desire to understand someone as a precious

and unique individual, she added.

“We are so blessed that these migrant brothers are even more hospitable in being willing to share about their lives with us, even in vulnerable ways. However, as they are also of different cultures and religions, the challenge we had was to be mindful and sensitive in our interactions with them.”

From these experiences, Elle has learned to pray for her heart to be broken for the things that matter to God. “We need to partner God because apart from Him, we can do nothing that will bear fruit of eternal value. We also need to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit for courage in enabling us to step out of our comfort zones as we welcome others.”  
 “Even in the seemingly mundane day to day, our Almighty God is working.”

### **Cell takes prime time**

Ben and Claire have been hosting cell gatherings for 15 years and seen God’s hand at work each time they’ve moved house.

Their second home was a landed property near Pasir Panjang Road.



Their cell had more than 50 members then, and having a large home meant there was ample space for fellowship, worship and discussions in smaller groups.

But there was limited parking for cell members who drove. Thankfully, a church in the same street let these cell members park on its premises for free, after learning of the situation.

Besides meeting practical needs, God also charted a clear path for their cell.

The location of their third home – an apartment near Dhoby Ghaut – drew new members to their cell, including university students and people working in the central business district.

As the cell’s numbers grew, the core team prayerfully decided to split everyone into smaller cells, which allowed them to take in more young adults.

Ben said: “God gave us a vision to reach out to the lost generation – those in their 20s, for example, who used to be from Heartbeat and have since left church.”

He and Claire serve as mentors in the Marriage Preparation Course (MPC), so they also invited young couples who were not attending a cell to join them.

“Season in, season out, we were really blessed to see how God

changed the dynamics of the cell. We realised it's so important to have an intergen cell, from the very young to the very old, so that we can learn from one another," said Ben.

There are a few lessons they have learnt about hospitality – the most important is to show hospitality to God by setting aside time for communion with Him, said Claire.

**“We need to partner God because apart from Him, we can do nothing that will bear fruit of eternal value. We also need to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit for courage in enabling us to step out of our comfort zones as we welcome others.”**

**“Even in the seemingly mundane day to day, our Almighty God is working.”**

Also, it's easy to love those whom we like, but challenging when it comes to those who are different from us. In these relationships, it takes intentional effort to be vulnerable in

our conversations, she added.

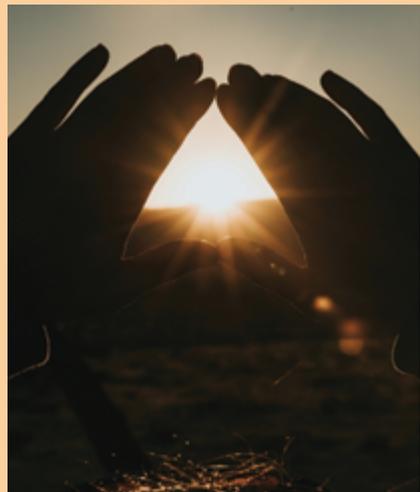
Claire and Ben, who are in their late 40s, now live in an apartment near Holland Road together with their three teenage children.

Getting the whole cell involved is important to prevent burnout, they said. Over the years, cell members have taken turns to lead cell and worship, host gatherings and bring food.

It hasn't always been easy. Their cell often meets late into the night, bonding over supper after studying the Bible.

The fellowship is enjoyable, but it also means that Ben and Claire, as well as their children, are unable to sleep early, go out, or work or study on Friday evenings.

Ben said: “It's always a reminder to ourselves to give our Friday night prime time to God as we head into the weekend. When we do so, our soul is refreshed.”



## Seeing Jesus in Others

Yeo Hem Joo

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Five-year-old Adriel was getting restless and clamouring for his mother's attention. No wonder—I had spent more than an hour chatting with Erlina, listening to her personal life story, and the little one was tired of roaming the church grounds with his father. His face brightened up when I made it up to him by getting him some snacks from the nearby vending machine.

I marvelled at the story that Erlina had shared with me. Her life journey was an unusual one, and in our conversation, she emphasised more than once that it all began with the kindness and hospitality shown to her by God's people.

"I first met Jesus through His people, through my employers...and I want to be like them: in whatever I say and do, I want to reflect the light of my Lord Jesus to other people."



## Receiving kindness

Erlina set foot in Singapore at the age of 22 to become a migrant domestic worker. Coming from a big family with four sisters and two brothers, she needed to earn money to support them after her father passed away. While she had hoped that her employers would be kind and reasonable, she did not quite expect that this first family she worked for and remained in service for 12 years would make such a huge impact on her and changed the course of her life—from working as a domestic help to eventually answering God's call to serve in Kalimantan.

She recounted that Jack and Alvina, both members of SJSJ, treated her well. In fact, other helpers who became her friends envied her, commenting that her employers were 'very good to her' and not demanding. They helped carry heavy bags of groceries after trips to the supermarket; they brought her to see a doctor when she was unwell

and let her rest to recover; she ate at the same table with the family. She found them to be humble and kind. Unsurprisingly, she became very attached to the family, especially their two young daughters, Sarah and Celestine.

In her fourth year at work, her family back home arranged for her to be married to the son of a village headman. It was a good match in financial terms but was called off after Erlina requested to stay on one more year in Singapore. She loved the two girls as her own and could not bear to leave them, as they were still very young. Unfortunately, her family were furious with her and cut off ties.



*Erlina with 2 of the foster kids*

In that same year, she was at a church service taking care of Celestine while a visiting preacher ministered to the

congregation with healing and other miraculous signs. Stirred within, she could not stop the tears that flowed, thinking about the broken ties with her family. Jack and Alvina found out about it, prayed for her, and shared the gospel with her, but she was not ready to receive Jesus there and then. Strangely, after this incident, she was disturbed by uneasy dreams at night.

“Actually, I used to be fearful of death and what will happen to me when I die,” she admitted.

Alvina prayed with her every night. Subsequently, Erlina sensed the presence of God with her while she went about her daily household chores; it was a good and peaceful feeling. She even had a dream of blue skies, dazzling sun, and Jesus smiling at her!

Eventually, one night, when Jack and Alvina prayed with her, Erlina made the decision to receive Jesus into her life. She attributed a large part of it to seeing Christ in them. Their kindness to her had made a difference. They also had this genuine faith, joy, and peace that she longed for. Up to that point, she felt that there was only anger, disappointment, and resentment building up inside her. She prayed for reconciliation with her mother. A few months later, her heart leapt for joy when she received an unexpected phone call from her mother saying that she missed her! God had answered her prayer.



*Erlina's family together with Alvina*

## **Finding love**

Following her decision to become a Christian, Erlina started attending SJSM's Indonesian Fellowship. Jack and Alvina encouraged her spiritual growth, allowing her to go on a short mission trip to Batam, where the team visited a bible school and distributed groceries to needy families. It was there that she met Firman, who was the assigned guide to the group, and she was immediately attracted to this earnest young man studying at the bible school, training to become a pastor. Love blossomed between them and they got married in 2007. Erlina stayed on in Singapore to finish her two-year contract. During this period of time, she was given weekends off and extra days to spend time with her husband. Occasionally, Firman was invited over to Singapore to speak at the Indonesian Fellowship meetings. He was then serving as a youth pastor in a church in Batam.

## **God's call**

One night as she was going to sleep in Celestine's room, Erlina saw a calendar on her table. She was drawn to the picture of some pitiful, starving children with distended bellies. Compassion welled up within her and she was moved to tears.

She knelt down and told God that she 'wanted to go and feed those children'. It was the call of God upon her life. This birthed the desire to leave for Batam in 2010 to begin theological studies at a bible school. It was time to equip herself to serve God together with her husband. Jack and Alvina gave their blessings and the church gave some financial support.

In Batam, the couple ministered to the poor in the slums and built houses for the people. Then the door opened for them to go to a village in Kalimantan

to oversee a church and run a children's home. God had answered Erlina's prayer to care for needy children. However, all this meant that she took a long time to complete her studies. She had to shuttle between Batam and Kalimantan. It took a toll on her and when she developed some major health issues, she was forced to take a break. It was a challenging season but God was faithful and gave her perseverance.

"I cried a lot when I finally graduated in 2019, because it was not easy studying while taking care of the children in the home and pastoring the church."

Today, as a family of three, they continue to faithfully minister to the unreached in the eastern part of Kalimantan. With God's blessings, they have planted three other churches. In the children's home, they take in 15 children of varying ages, who come from abusive and troubled backgrounds. Some of the children have been with them for a long time, the oldest being 26. It is Erlina's desire to see these children grow up

to know and worship God. Together, they run a weekly programme to feed other less fortunate children. In this way, she is teaching them to be a blessing to others.

**She knelt down and told God that she 'wanted to go and feed those children'. It was the call of God upon her life.**

At the end of our conversation, I learnt that Alvina and Erlina were going to Bintan to do some ministry work together. It was lovely to see the enduring relationship between Alvina and Erlina: no longer employer and employee but fellow sisters in Christ Jesus! Erlina's life is testament to the goodness of God. It's also a great reminder of how sowing seeds of God's kindness and hospitality in others can reap a harvest of righteousness and joy!



## A Mother's Journey

Roszana Chu

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I was an immature Christian when I gave birth to a daughter, Hannah, with special needs. I had prayed for a healthy and normal baby during my second pregnancy but it was not so. It was hard to accept that my child with a genetic disorder would have to grapple with many other medical complications as well as an intellectual disability. There was a lot of anxiety: I worried about her future, the family situation, financial security, to name a few.

I felt trapped with no end in sight. In my loneliness, my faith felt like it was hanging by a thread. We went to healing rallies one after another. Sometimes I was told that only my faith could heal my child; sometimes I was presented with lists of curses or sins. Despite the good intentions, these encounters made me feel condemned. Even in church, there were instances where I experienced a lack of empathy or understanding. It was all very tiring and depressing.

The turning point came when one day I read this verse: "I praise you,

for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well." (Ps 139:14). I asked God, "How is this creation wonderful?" At that point, I felt the Holy Spirit challenging me to believe in the truth of these words.

Next, the Lord also challenged me to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thes 5:16-17 NIV). Through tears, I told God that I would give thanks for the beauty of His creation around me, for what I could do for my child and even for the things I didn't see yet as blessings. The strange thing was that my spiritual eyes began to open and gradually I became more aware and grateful for the works of my Father in me and my child's life.

### **Blessings from God: Special Needs Programme**

God led my pastor from Queenstown Baptist Church to connect me with the special needs Saturday programme



*The four youths who assisted Hannah at her baptism*

at SJSM. There were both typical children and children with different conditions mingling and interacting together. Hannah enjoyed herself and I was touched to see the children experiencing God through songs, bible stories and craft activities. They might not have the capacity to fully understand the lessons but they felt very welcomed and were always eager to meet together. The volunteers who facilitated the sessions loved the children and fostered an atmosphere of grace and acceptance.

Through Hannah, I got to know more believers who were family members, teachers or therapists of children with special needs; some simply had a heart for persons with special needs. They showed love through their actions: when Hannah underwent a

major operation in 2018 they prayed with us, visited us in the hospital to bring joy and comfort to Hannah, brought me food and offered to provide respite care.

### **Integration into Junior Church**

A few years later, the special needs ministry was merged with Junior Church. By this time we had settled down in SJSM. I was encouraged to see how the younger children were able to accept, empathise and share space with children (who were older than them) with special needs. Due to Hannah's mobility issues at Junior Church, she initially felt left out when the kids ran around and played by themselves. A sociable child, she yearned to be a part of them. One day, she plucked up the courage to

speak to Kerine, the staff in charge, about it. To me, it was a big step and I was very grateful how Kerine facilitated social interactions between the children and things worked out well during her time at Junior Church.

### Stepping into Heartbeat

Hannah was encouraged to join Heartbeat when she turned 16. It took a year before she agreed to the move. I had my concerns too, about the transition. She was at that time happily settled at Junior Church. What if she could not fit in with the youths when she moved over? What if she got hurt, became discouraged and disappointed or worse, developed anxiety and low self esteem? I prayed hard about this move.



*Mother and daughter*

When it took place eventually, Hannah's first day at Heartbeat service went beyond my expectations. The appointed cell leader went to her and two other persons also approached her to sit and pray with her. They kept it up the following weeks. I was thankful to God for this and really appreciated the kindness

extended by the leaders and her new cell friends who helped her to adjust quickly and happily to the new environment.

**As a mother, I constantly remind myself to declare that Hannah is a blessed child, now and always. I do not waste time thinking otherwise or dwell on the negative "what ifs".**

This year, on 24 August, Hannah was baptised. She had refused previously but it changed when she witnessed many of the youths getting baptised and they shared with her its significance. Her desire was to be baptised by immersion, not sprinkling. By God's grace, she managed to attend all her baptism classes and on the day of her baptism, four youths helped carry the wheelchair up the stage to the edge of the pool. It was a day of rejoicing!

A week before her baptism, I was amazed that Hannah shared the gospel with a classmate from Rainbow Centre (a school for children with special needs) and led him in prayer to receive Christ into his life! He came at her invitation to witness her baptism and enjoyed his first ever church service.

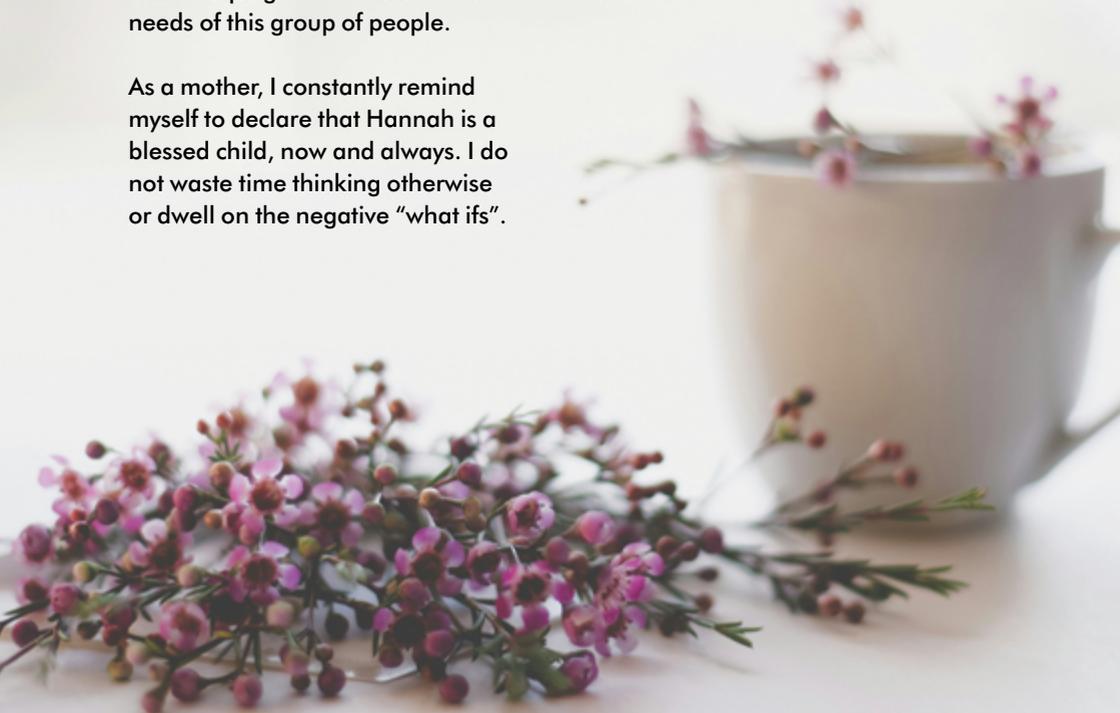
I have learnt that the kindness and hospitality of God's people has a great impact, especially on those with special needs. I have seen my own daughter's growth journey when she joined Junior Church and then Heartbeat. She feels accepted and looks up to these brothers and sisters in Christ who make an effort to befriend her and include her in their activities. It is not always easy for them but I trust that God equips them when they avail themselves. Right now, she is motivated to read and memorise a bible verse every night and talks to God before she sleeps. There are of course still gaps and areas for improvement with regard to extending hospitality to those with special needs. I personally hope that more can be done to help the entire church community be more accepting, withhold judgement and consider the needs of this group of people.

As a mother, I constantly remind myself to declare that Hannah is a blessed child, now and always. I do not waste time thinking otherwise or dwell on the negative "what ifs".

There is a long road ahead but I do whatever I can to keep my spirits up: be thankful, worship God, listen regularly to sermons and testimonies. All these things build my faith and I desire to be used by God to bless others.

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Phil 4:8-9)

My daily prayer for Hannah is that she will have God's love, peace, and joy all the days of her life and that she will always be surrounded by people who accept and love her.



## 5 Questions with Zone Pastor George Tan

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Seriously, is there any long-time SJSMer who doesn't know who George Tan is? He joined as a member way back in 1986 and has served actively in various capacities over the years. In fact, while he was working full time in the legal profession, besides serving in church, he still found time to engage in para-church and Diocesan activities. It begs the question how he managed to juggle all his different roles then!

One of his earliest church ministries was the cell ministry which was in its infancy at that time, and now, at 68, he is no less passionate about seeing cell groups flourish and growing potential leaders, serving as the honorary staff overseeing zone 4.



*George and his family*

George is married to Ai Tiang. Their three children, Clara, Mark and Lionel, live and work overseas – Australia and Canada. They make regular trips to visit the children and their two grandchildren, and there was even a period of a few years when they lived in Vancouver. But once back in Singapore, George finds himself stepping right back into serving the church, whether briefly as staff or as a lay member. Occasionally, he still takes on the appointment as legal adjudicator or arbitrator.

Seasons of Life takes this opportunity to pose 5 questions to get to know him more personally.

### **1. Do share with us a little known fact about yourself.**

For a long time, my favourite books have been science fiction. They have a way of challenging my imagination and stretching my mind by sending me off to strange worlds, imagined cultures and unexpected outcomes.

I guess, during those years when I was actively litigating in court and arbitration, it was my favourite escape from the harsh reality of an adversarial system. Later, as I don't always have the patience to sit and read a book, my interest shifted to watching science fiction movies and series. Recently, in view of the zone ministry I have taken up, there's not much time to indulge in either. There are a lot of practical things that require my attention, aside from the need to keep myself current on pastoral practices and important theological issues.

## **2. Describe one or two major encounters with God that changed your life.**

I had a health scare while I was in the middle of theological studies at Regent College. In 2009, after a routine medical screening, I discovered I had prostate cancer. It was an aggressive type of cancer but fortunately it was discovered early. Together with Ai Tiang, I went through a lot of soul-searching, with many questions for God, including the key question of why He needed to send me to Regent just for me to get cancer. To cut a long story short, even though I experienced disillusionment before and after my surgery to remove my prostate, I came out the other side more determined than ever to scale down my legal practice and ask the Lord to pave a way for me to get into some pastoral ministry.

A key lesson I learnt was that for too long, I saw life as a series of stages of self-improvement. At each stage, I depended on myself and if necessary, got there by pushing my way forward. I used to love Bible stories like the one involving God's blessings being poured out on His people, like Abraham, Jacob and the rest. The Bible passages I had to acknowledge but did not like so much were those where we are told to turn the other cheek or be meek and submissive. The painful lesson taught to me was that I must depend on God: my own strength or insights can only bring me forward to the point where they fail, and fail they will.



*George, Ai Tiang with their 2 grandsons*

### **3. What led to the decision to leave your job and go to Vancouver for theological studies?**

Looking back, I guess I was going through a period when I questioned the value and meaning of what I was doing in my day to day practicing law. I felt there was a lot of unnecessary acrimony and aggression in what I did that was changing me as a person. My witnessing life as a Christian was close to zero and I was starting to see a growing disconnect between what I was doing during the week and during the weekends. In 2007, I decided to put an end to all hesitation and applied to go to Regent College. At that time, there were no plans for any future pastoral role. I just wanted some time away from what I was doing and I thought going to Regent would help me get re-acquainted with the fundamentals of my faith. My children had some difficulty adapting initially but managed to fit into school life there quite well. Overall, we had a much better family time together and going through a very different environment brought us closer.

### **4. What do you say to those who are retired and feel that their season to serve God is over?**

The season to serve God should have no connection to one's day job. However, there may be financial implications involved in retirement and these have to be managed well in order to have the freedom to respond

quickly to any call to action by the Lord. This aside, I find that retirement can have a negative impact on our overall confidence in making pivotal decisions, especially if our identities are entwined with our jobs.

I suppose the first thing one must do on retirement is to move on and detach oneself mentally from what is in the past and then find or re-discover our centre in the Lord. That way, retirement can be seen as a new beginning, allowing us the mental liberty to go wherever the Lord leads. A lot of things in any ministry require the availability of time. Time can be what one has in abundance in retirement and it should not be wasted entirely on leisure.

To be fair, a lifetime of work does justify the retiree taking a back seat in many things that used to stress one out. However, a deeper involvement in the Christian community must not be regarded as one of them. Getting more involved in the lives of others, which is what Christian ministry is really about, can often be challenging but it is always fulfilling to attempt to walk in Jesus' footsteps.

### **5. Can you share a couple of challenges as well as the joy of being a Zone Pastor?**

The role sometimes comes with sadness and pain especially in encountering bereavement, illness and injury. There is no avoiding them as long as you are involved in the

lives of people. I've been advised by pastors, who have been in the ministry longer than me (not from SJSM) to maintain a professional distance emotionally to avoid burnout. However, I just find myself unable to do that as many of the people at SJSM are friends that share the journey of faith through many ups and downs over the years.

Not everything in pastoral ministry is about crisis, loss or emergencies. The ministry also brings much joy in seeing lives changed, people encouraged, fractured relationships being healed and many other experiences that would never have happened had the Lord not been in the centre.

Moreover, knowing that the leaders and members of my zone are often behind me, praying for me and lending a hand in emergencies, contributes to

my deeper understanding of what it means to be in the bonds of love. Over the years, I've grown to appreciate the kindness and care of SJSMeers, but witnessing it firsthand in many pastoral situations in the zone, is really a privilege that I am thankful for.

**To be fair, a lifetime of work does justify the retiree taking a back seat in many things that used to stress one out. However, a deeper involvement in the Christian community must not be regarded as one of them.**

## Lessons in Life: Pilgrims on a Journey

Leong Mei Yong

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In May, I went on a pilgrimage walk in Ireland with a group of friends from SJSM. Over the course of five days, we walked a portion of The Western Way, beginning in Oughterard and ending in Westport, covering between 12 and 17 kilometres each day.

The ten of us did not always feel up to the arduous journey. One had had two knee replacements in as many years, another had rheumatoid arthritis, and others came with an assortment of weak knees, wobbly ankles, and stiff joints. Armed with a large dose of optimism, a sense of adventure, and a pledge to help one another, we set off, excited at the prospect of hearing God (and not just our own panting!) as we traversed the bens and glens of Ireland.

Each day's walk was bookended by morning and evening prayers. We had songs, verses, poems, and readings, chosen based on the theme for the day. We carried these in our heads and hearts, mulling them over as we walked, worshipped, and

wrestled with God. The morning segments of the walk were devoted to silence and contemplation. It was in the afternoons that we walked together in small groups, swapping stories, sharing our history, and surfacing questions and thoughts.

As aptly described by Stan who organised and led the walk, a pilgrimage is akin to a retreat taken outdoors. And what an outdoors! The vastness and beauty of nature, raw, unspoilt, and untamed, were balm to our souls. We were encouraged not only to be attentive and to notice, but to go beyond our awe of creation to behold the Creator Himself, the One who dresses the hills and adorns the fields. More than that, we were to behold our triune God: Father, Saviour, Friend.

By going at the speed of our feet and attending to the physical landscape without and the soulscape within, we were served lessons from the sure-footedness of the black-faced sheep atop high slopes; the unquestioning,



*The beautiful Irish landscape*

unwavering trust of the lambs; the fences that enclose and keep out; the saplings that thrive in the most unlikely of places; the unknowns beyond the river bend; the soothing sounds of hidden streams and the wind against our backs.

One thing I observed was that owners marked the wool of their sheep with paint of different colours to distinguish between flocks. Do I bear the distinguishing marks of my Master too?

It was also curious that something as mundane as the profusion of sheep droppings provided varied object lessons for the group! I reflected that there was only dung because sheep had previously passed that way. Do I leave traces of Christ, like a sweet

lingering fragrance, in the places I go and in the lives of the people I meet? (Acts 4:13)

Another thought I held close as I trudged the paths was that all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness (Psalm 25:10), and that I ought to let that shape how I live.

The Christian life is a pilgrimage. What a gift it is to have these reminders for our earthly sojourn. We adopt a pilgrim's mindset when we ready ourselves to step out when God calls — out of the safety of our comforts and attachments, and into the unfamiliar, and the unknown. We walk a pilgrim's path when we slow down in the midst of a busy life and a noisy world, in order to be attentive to the ways in which God is speaking and working.

A pilgrim's journey is rarely walked alone, although there are some roads which no one but God can walk with us. More often, we walk in the company of fellow pilgrims, holding out the light and hope of Christ, bearing one another's burdens, and slowing down to walk together at

the "speed of love" (Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile An Hour God*). This is much like our pilgrimage walk in Ireland, where we experienced the joy, grace, and comfort of walking alone with God, as well as together with friends.



The 'pilgrims'



## Youth Speak: Empowering a New Generation: Insights from the Men's Breakthrough Weekend

Andrea Hau

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*"In my years of ministry, I haven't come across a place as safe as the Men's Breakthrough Weekend."*  
(Calvin Yeo)

SJSM's Men's Breakthrough Weekend (MBTW) is a time when men of the church are encouraged to take time off their busy schedules to seek God as a band of brothers. During the weekend, they are encouraged and challenged to grow deeper in their relationships with God and fellow brothers through testimony sharings, plenary sessions and small group discussions. And while there are a number of other retreats that take place in SJSM, what separates MBTW from them is the emphasis on providing men with a S.A.F.E space to:

- S - Share authentically and humbly
- A - Accept one another
- F - Fix not thy brother
- E - Encourage one another

Through this, participants can be completely vulnerable with one another, opening up about the

various struggles that they may face eg. lust, greed, work and relationship issues etc. In a world where men have been taught to always put up a strong and confident front, MBTW allows for them to shed inhibitions and share their weaknesses before God and other men, trusting that in their weakness, God's power is made perfect (2 Cor 12:9).

Last year's SJSM Men's Breakthrough Weekend (MBTW) was held in September at Forest City Johor and what distinguished it from the past ones was the participation of nine younger men (below 30) for the first time.

Prior to last year's MBTW, the absence of youth signups seemed to stem from certain common misconceptions:

**"Older men can relate to us meh?"**

Due to the age difference, many youths assume that the older adults cannot relate to their present day

struggles. Some admitted that this perceived generation gap sometimes hindered them from seeking counsel.

However, through the MBTW, they found that this gap is bridged by their common faith in Christ. Although both groups of men at different life stages may encounter different struggles, there is the same need to surrender to God and seek Him for a breakthrough. It allows both young and old to speak biblical truths into each other's lives at the MBTW and encourage one another to be true disciples of Jesus.

### **“Other men can't relate to me personally”**

Those who do not conform to male stereotypes and who have often found it hard to relate to other men in terms of interests or personality, hesitate to sign up for a men's retreat. Yet for those who attended, they have testified that at the MBTW, there is a corporate initiative of putting aside individual personal interests and backgrounds to centre their lives around the cross. Everyone is made to feel accepted and welcomed.

### **“MBTW won't be fun; it seems too serious”**

Many men who attended last year's MBTW would disagree with this statement, claiming there was an equal balance of both ministry and fun. There were light-hearted

exchanges and conversations which helped break the ice, as well as intense ministry times where seeking hearts encountered God.

Between sessions, some brothers went out hunting for good food together, enjoying each other's company and getting to know one another better. As some youths said jokingly, “Uncle banter is guaranteed.”

Out of the nine young adults who attended, three shared with Seasons of Life their experiences and takeaways.

### **Jared Tan (23) :**

*“For every Moses there was a Joshua, for every Paul there was a Timothy”*

Looking back on his own spiritual life, Jared realised there was never a mentor or father figure that disciplined him during his journey as a Christian. Through MBTW, he saw the importance of a father-ing process within the church. Although the majority of the youths grew up in church, there are many who struggle with an orphan spirit, and are in dire need to be ministered to in a safe space such as the MBTW. Going for MBTW opened his eyes to see so many adults who were present and ready to speak into his life, and the lives of the other young men in SJSM.

*“It's difficult to create such an atmosphere during usual church*

services, but MBTW allows that space for wounds, healing and brokenness, letting God piece our hearts back together.

If you've got time, then why not just go? You will meet God at MBTW!"



Jared (R) and Chia Qin (L)

### **Chia Qin (23) :**

*"I made brothers, not uncles"*

Currently studying in university, Chia was pleasantly surprised to find friendship with adults who shared the same struggles, despite having 20 more years of life experience. He was especially moved during a segment when the adults and the youth apologised to each other for their shortcomings. Watching men, both young and old, humble themselves to understand and love one another made Chia realise that some battles are not meant to be fought alone. Although the struggles of life don't stop right after MBTW, he finds comfort in knowing there are other brothers he can approach for fellowship and guidance whenever the need arises.

*"Don't be afraid of signing up for MBTW. If you're struggling, don't struggle alone."*

### **Lee Song Yang (25) :**

*"Three days and two nights is too short..."*

Upon returning from his exchange programme in the United States, Song Yang found himself facing tough circumstances and going through a dry patch in his spiritual life. Eager to adapt back into the community at home, he signed up for MBTW expecting to see God move powerfully. Song Yang attended MBTW with his father, and he considers it his privilege to witness his dad serve God with all his heart. God also brought to mind memories of his father's past efforts to show him love, which Song Yang hadn't recognised or appreciated at the time. This revealed to him just how deeply his father truly loves him.



Song Yang and his dad, Paul

*need for certain communities or ministries; the truth is we all need breakthroughs. God always desires to transform us if we allow Him to, so sign up for MBTW to bask in His presence and journey alongside other brothers!”*

As our church seeks to encourage and facilitate more opportunities for intergenerational interactions and discipleship, the MBTW is one good vehicle to achieve this goal. The younger male participants were impacted by the testimonies of older men who shared humbly and honestly about mistakes in life, about the power of God to redeem, about their personal breakthroughs, among other things.

This positive experience has encouraged other young men to make time to attend MBTW. The 2024 MBTW concluded with 19 men who are aged 30 and below, about one-third of the total number of men who attended.

To conclude, MBTW Spiritual Director, Calvin Yeo, shares that we are all work-in-progress and God’s shaping of Christlikeness in us is a lifelong process. He quoted men4men Chair, Paul Lee’s comment that MBTW is likened to an “annual servicing for men, like cars”, a time set aside each year to deal with life’s struggles head-on in the company of men encouraging one another. Furthermore, the good mix of younger and older men from age 18 to 67 in MBTW 2024 provided wonderful intergenerational bonding and potential discipling relationships. And it’s through men being authentic and not judgmental that they experience God’s agape love, leading to deep genuine relationships where the younger and older men are a blessing to one another. The friendships formed between brothers outlasts the MBTWs, working towards building a stronger community of men in SJSM, growing spiritually to be better sons, brothers, husbands, fathers, servants and leaders in all spheres of life.



The Group at this year’s MBTW

## From The Word: Understanding Good Works

Khaw Siew Ping

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We begin by recapitulating what has been shared thus far in this issue. We learnt how volunteers, staff and chaplains in SJSM's nursing home, through hospitality, are bringing people to the Gospel. We read how Jack and Alvina's kindness and hospitality to Erlina brought her to saving faith in Jesus, a faith that is still bearing fruit in Erlina's ministry. We saw hospitality extended from the students, the trainers and God Himself to the SJSM missions team in Timor Leste.

We could respond in one of two ways. The first would be to infer from Romans 12 that we might not have been given the "gift of hospitality." That, in fact, would be a common misreading: Paul in v13 urges the Roman Christians to "seek to show hospitality" in the same breath as he encourages them to "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." In short, hospitality is the mark of a true Christian, not a spiritual gift.

The second response would be to ask ourselves: How can I grow into the sort of Christian who can exercise such hospitality? Here is where we look to the word of God, specifically Ephesians 2:1-10, to help us.

**Our good works, including those pertaining to hospitality, therefore occur solely as a response to the saving grace of God through Christ.**

### Saved by grace

In Eph 2, Paul explains to the Ephesians the dynamics of salvation. Because of humanity's fallen nature (v3), all of it, Paul included, was spiritually dead. Mankind followed the triumvirate of the world, the devil

and sin (v1), and was destined for destruction because of God's wrath (v3).

V4 begins with the crucial reversal "But God", signalling that salvation is entirely God's initiative and accomplishment. Where active verbs were used ("once walked", "once lived", "following", "carrying out the desires") to describe humans' rebellious past, passive verbs are now used to depict what has happened to them because of God's grace. He made [them] alive together with Christ – by grace [they] have been saved! (v5) The Ephesian believers are the passive recipients of the beneficence of God, who "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (v6)

The contrast is heightened in the parallel sentence structures: where the Ephesians and the rest of mankind were "by nature children of wrath" (v3), now "by grace [they] have been saved" (v5). In v8, Paul summarises the main thrust of this section: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

### **Saved for good works**

How were the Ephesians to respond to this undeserved grace? They were to lean into their destiny in Christ: Where they used to walk in sin, they were now to walk in good works. This was in fact what believers were

created for, Paul says. Not only have we been created with the capacity for good works (what "workmanship" connotes), these works have been "prepared beforehand" by God (v10) for us to live out. British pastor and theologian John Stott conveys this reality most bracingly: "Salvation is creation, re-creation, new creation."

And lest good works become cause for pride, Paul clarifies that the grace given to us is "not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (v9) Even our faith should not be a cause for pride (v8). Stott cautions that "we must never think of salvation as a kind of transaction between God and us in which he contributes grace and we contribute faith."

But what about the good works that the Ephesians – or we, in fact – might have performed before knowing the Lord? Even if they do not count towards salvation, surely they must please God?

Here is where the 39 Articles of Faith, part of our Anglican heritage, has something definitive to say. Article 13 on "Works Before Justification" spells out that

**Works done before the grace of Christ, and the Inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ; neither do they make men meet to receive grace, or (as the School-authors say) deserve grace of congruity: yea rather, for that they**

are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin.

In short, all the good works that we had done before we came to Christ are tainted with sin. They are not acceptable to God. How could it be otherwise, lest some of us begin to think that, all things being equal, people who did good works prior to salvation were better placed to qualify for God's grace?

Our good works, including those pertaining to hospitality, therefore occur solely as a response to the saving grace of God through Christ. Commenting on the early Christians, church historian Amy Oden writes:

For early Christians, then, the practice of hospitality has a divine analogy, whereby our practice of hospitality is always in response to God's gracious offering of hospitality. While our hospitality is not proportional to God's, nevertheless

it is characterised by reciprocity and gratitude. (And You Welcomed Me)

This is why Christian hospitality is possible only when "we are overwhelmed with the power of God's hospitable grace in our lives and cannot do otherwise." (Oden) Hospitality is also, therefore, not only about (?) what we do, but an expression of who we are. The more we grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, the more we are freed to live hospitably. "In many ways, then," notes theologian Elizabeth Newman, "our challenge today as Christians is to become reenchanting with the Christian story." (Untamed Hospitality)

And while we cooperate with the Spirit of God to grow our reenchantment, the practice of hospitality has to begin somewhere. We exercise those puny muscles of hospitality in small ways. We begin by responding to needs that do not require that much of a leap of faith.



So we start by meeting the needs of those we know.

As God shows His faithfulness by blessing our little mustard seeds of faith, our muscles strengthen, and we find the courage and faith to do more. Slowly we entrust to God our fear of the unknown as we meet the needs of those we do not know.

And that would be what the biblical definition of Hospitality means – “Love of Strangers”.

By the grace of God, SJSMers are not unused to hosting strangers who live in and around Dover, the people among whom SJSM has been physically placed. For many years

Auntie Mary Kwee and Auntie Mary Ong led seniors in and around Dover to our church grounds for exercise and dance. Dover Celebrates Christmas has seen numerous iterations since the 1990s. In recent years, God has seen fit to allow SJSM to show hospitality to even more people on our grounds, in the nursing home and childcare.

As we enter a new season in which we are called to show hospitality to other believers outside of SJSM, may we continue to obey God. May our understanding of God’s mercy, great love (Eph 2:4) and grace (v5) in the gift of Jesus for our salvation always be our reason for obedience. Amen.





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