

The Vine

2002

for internal circulation only
Sep
2002

Vol. 9/2002

Greetings to all the saints in Christ Jesus. The EGM (Extraordinary General Meeting) is just over and JCC is now poised to move forward, as Buzz Lightyear would say, "To infinity and beyond!" We have heard the Bishop's exhortation and we have caught the vision and now we are ready to take a small step forward to renovate the Fellowship Hall into a Multi-purpose Hall, trusting in our Lord Jesus, to provide the fishes.

On another front, JCC is about to launch the Cell Groups with a new paradigm shift, which emphasizes intentional discipleship and disciplemaking as a means of achieving growth, both spiritually and numerically.

Many months have passed quietly and JCC is now about to burst forth in a flurry of activity all the way to the end of the year. Are you excited? Are you ready? Then, "Let's roll!" However before we start out in our own strength, let us remember in whose strength we must go forward in. *Let us therefore not neglect to pray.*



'You can only forgive a person when the person wants to be forgiven.'

— Words of wisdom from MediaCorp actress Huang Biren (above)

Here is an interesting quotation from a MediaCorp star. It applies to most pre-Christians. Many of whom do not feel a need to be forgiven. May we pray for them that God will help us to draw them into His kingdom for the glory of His Name.

I have to limit myself to this one page because the other Vine writers have occupied all the other pages, thank God. We still need more writers to get a wider perspective of God's working in JCC. To God be the glory. Amen.

The Editor

THREE NEAR MISSES WITH DEATH

Karen Sob

First of all, I would like to thank God for His gracious protection towards my son, Nathaniel and I.

1st Miss (Early Aug 02): Since my son had begun walking quite steadily for some time now, my husband suggested that I should try walking him to the carpark instead of pushing him around in a pram (which involves going up slopes meant for cars coming downwards).

The first morning when this walking took place gave me a very bad fright. As we were walking past the block facing the carpark, a 'huat kueh' (a kind of cake used for Chinese prayer offerings) dropped from nowhere and missed both our heads by just a few inches (it did hit my right knee) and landed with a very loud thud on the ground.

I dread to imagine another similar 'Mabel Ang flower pot incident' could have actually happened to us.

2nd Miss (28/08/02): I usually stay back late on Wednesdays in my office because it is the only day that I do not need to attend class (I'm currently doing my Dip. in Early Childhood at NIE) to clear up as much backlog as possible.

On this fateful day, on my way back as I rushed to fetch my son home from Susan Tan's house, (I was held back by a Management Committee Meeting) I nearly collided into a car (opposite Bukit Batok ITE). The car turned out despite another car and mine were already a quarter into the junction box and cut into the right lane (where I was traveling).



I praise God for stopping my car in time (missed by 1ft only) else we would have crashed where my son was sitting and my life or limbs may have been gone too.

3rd Miss (30/8/02): I left my house earlier than usual (around 8.15am) this day because I needed to pick up a cheque from my HQ and

rush back to my office for Teachers' Day celebration.

As I was driving down from the carpark (my car was parked on the 3rd storey), I felt that my brakes were not right. (N.B. my son was with me.)

As I came out from the carpark, I heard this prompting, "Don't drive anymore."

Then when I turned onto the road, I was prompted, "Park your car in JCC".

I want to thank the Holy Spirit for the prompting and in helping me to obey. I also want to thank Him that there were not many cars on the road at that time. Hence it allowed me to make a sudden change in driving direction.

When my mechanic came to get the car for repairs, he told me, "Karen, luckily you didn't drive on because your brake hose had broken and you had 'kosong' brake fluid." (N.B. it was raining heavily the night before the incident. What could have happened if the brakes had failed then???) Imagine my joy and relief when I heard those words.

Indeed the Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. (Psa 145: 13b)

What faith boosters these 'misses' had been for my in-laws (as we shared with them) and my family.

Amidst all my worrying about my assignments, work and duties as a wife, mother and daughter, God has also shown me how helpless and wholly dependent we are on Him.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" - Mt 6: 25 & 27

Remember God is always with us, watching our every move (i.e. Like it or not the good as well as the bad) and He knows our every intention.

Having received such great blessings and assurances, I felt a strong conviction to pen this sharing down (did this at 1am) to give others a boost as well.

Happenings...



A lot of things have been happening to the Youth Fellowship in the past few months. Here is a bit on how the youth ministry came into being in the beginning.

The Youth Ministry was started about two years ago with a few youths meeting regularly for Bible study and fellowship at our former pastor Michael's house. The group began to grow until the place became cramped. Then a need was felt for an official Youth Committee to provide the ministry with better direction and focus. Initially, it was difficult as more commitment and responsibilities were expected of the youths. However, the commitment from the youths, especially the committee members, began to be seen through the struggles and frustrations at times. Such experiences built perseverance, endurance and a stronger sense of conviction to God's calling for the youth ministry. We developed a greater sense of need to put faith in God amidst the difficult circumstances.

Even now, there is a great need to pray for the youths to grow and desire after God's heart. This is especially so for some youths who have been brought up in Christian families and are coming to Church for the sake of doing so but with their hearts not close to God. Only God can touch their hearts and we need to be patient in praying for them to personally receive Jesus into their lives before they can truly live out a life of discipleship. I can relate with that because I too came from a Christian background and going to church became a ritual more than anything else. But I thank God for His grace and mercy in touching my heart when I was 13 to personally receive Him into my life. It took a lot of courage as I was a shy girl and for me to raise my hand to acknowledge God coming into my heart was beyond myself. (Many of

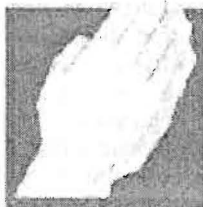
those who know me then can remember me as a quiet girl who always followed my big sister around.)

My heart at times aches for some of the youths and much more for those parents out there! Let us be praying together and learning to surrender them to God's sovereign plan for them. It is difficult but absolutely necessary. But I also thank God for the youths who have a growing desire to know and love God. Some of them have even composed songs for God's glory and asked me many questions about the Bible verses than I myself ever asked. Indeed they are the ones who are teaching me! I thank God for them because they are a source of encouragement to me. I can see God working in their lives and it is very exciting. Many of them have testimonies to share about how God provided a way for them in the face of parental objection or personal struggles in life.

Through this ministry, God has taught me a lot of things about depending on Him for wisdom and how I must watch my tongue and my motives in whatever I do in this ministry. It is truly a challenging and exciting ministry and it requires hard work, patience and perseverance that only by God's grace and strength can we be His instruments for accomplishing His plan.

God appoints imperfect people to accomplish His perfect plan.

"Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain." (Ps 127:1)



Please pray together with us for the Youth Ministry!

Pei'en

FROM THE LAPTOP OF CHARLOTTE

CONTRACTED A BELIEF OR ...

As a pedestrian, have you ever been caught in the incessant bicycle traffic in Hanoi (or HCM City) or the slow but bumper-to-bumper traffic in Manila? Surprisingly, bicycles do not constitute the main cause to traffic accidents in Vietnam; and daylight robbery in Manila, are more common than accidents involving jaywalkers.

Would our children learn better without PowerPoint slides and the keyboard? As parents, many of us can testify to how our children have given us some of life's best anecdotes. Yet, they did not demonstrate their wisdom using technology or other sophisticated means.

Certainly with God's Word, we can take a cue or two from Moses. He was trained with the royals, yet he followed God's ways. By far, the Bible has been the most translated piece of literature, yet does it matter whether it is in print or in electronic form? So it is with the administering of God's Word. Our children are going to be as receptive as our eagerness in bringing the Word across to them.

I told Hwee Ping (my colleague) that each time when it comes to my turn to teach Sunday School, I have barely one week to prepare. With the hectic work schedule, I must honestly admit I spend an average of 4 hours or less preparing each assignment. I always like to see children break away from routine, just like how I show my relief whenever Ryan comes home to tell me he has no homework for the night! I figure out if the Little Lambs' kids only see Winston Neo's mother once every four weeks, they might as well enjoy her class, *right*? So, I try

not to use the curriculum materials provided ...

I still have fond memories of one particular Saturday night when I stayed up to complete a large print crossword puzzle for the following day's Little Lambs. The fact you did not see my dark eye rings that Sunday was not indicative of my fatigue. It was, however, very rewarding to have a very participative class – the puzzle was something different, it stimulated them and I believe that Sunday's lesson was well ingrained in their minds. I had good response even from the quieter kids in class; and of course *unusually* good response from the more boisterous ones. For that particular class, it took me some 7 hours to prepare, ... but I do not always have that much time to prepare every assignment.

... DISTRACTED FROM IT?

Children today are exposed to numerous teaching aids as part of their school education. Animation, softwares, etc. are modus operandi. In the name of interactivity – our children have befriended artificial intelligence. Soon many will (or already think) they can befriend God through the computer, and other artificial means. Welcome to the modern form of idolatry.

Christian web sites abound with e-Prayer options. While it is important that our children are trained to refrain from "unwholesome" web sites, it is ever more important that they be taught not to equate e-Prayer options as *the* channel to reach God.

E-Prayer is only a supplementary means that helps each individual to extend a prayer network but that should never replace the need for fellowship and

interacting with one's Church. An e-Prayer network can only get so big that there is inadequate follow-up and possibly result in more disgruntled believers. With borderless communication in the Internet age, an e-Prayer network is largely one-sided communication and can easily be seen as a convenient substitute to personal interaction with God Himself.

I also observe how my mother-in-law and my children's nephews and nieces put their hands together and "bai bai" at every temple they drive past.

Why do some people believe that the oath one makes by placing his hand on the Bible is far more superior than one uttered privately, and sincerely to God? The examples go on, but you get the idea ...

"All Judah had sworn it wholeheartedly. They sought God eagerly, and He was found by them.

So the Lord gave them rest on every side."

(2 Chronicles 16:15)

"But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do."

(1 Corinthians 8:7-8)

In the context of this article, an idol can be considered as anything we have granted permission to replace God as a focus in our daily lives. People go to the Church for a variety of reasons. I have colleagues who go to seek solace when they are down but go to pubs when they need to unwind! They say God is felt more in one Church and not another.

Beware, our misplaced beliefs. Beware, when we find excuses to substantiate those misplaced beliefs. Beware, when we cannot substantiate those beliefs using God's Word.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

(Matthew 11:29-30)

"but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

(Isaiah 40:31)

Beware, our kids are raised in our footsteps.

I knew a Church elder who was once a VP of Citibank in the US. He was very, very busy as a corporate high-flier, Church elder and husband and father – in this order. After 20 years, while he thanked God for his overcharged batteries and supportive family, he realised he had been keeping up appearances to fulfil the expectations of his employer, congregation and family – in this order. If you are reading this, you are astute to realise his relationship with God was very shallow indeed. It took him 20 years to realise that – and it is never too late. Instead of chalking up frequent flier mileage and clocking in the hours at Church, he quit his job, went full time with the Church and spent more time with his family members by taking them on evangelistic missions (1 Timothy 3:4-5). It was a true step to a Christ-centered life and mission.

LET OTHERS SERVE IN JOY

"Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."

(2 Corinthians 11:28)

Hwee Ping is still exploring God's will for her mission and ministry to Cambodia. She is contemplating going part-time or full-time. She is considering her options. Whatever it is, the handful of the Church population that got wind of her inclination has somewhat turned this into a relatively embarrassing, widespread "flattering" talk of her becoming a "missionary" (as she is being endearingly addressed these days). This is clouding her judgement and she certainly does not want to be pressured into becoming one without hearing God properly.

We both think people need to remember that Church pastors, though called unto the "highest calling" in their own Church, may draw half the pay of a secular job, and yet have more than double the responsibilities of the secular job.

People who receive and act on the special calling of God are burdened enough. Whatever calling they receive, they are tasked with saving of lives, literally. As fellow supporters of their ministries or missions, we can at least try and identify with what they face (especially temptations), pray for them; and not expect more of them just because of that "special" calling they have received. They are individually accountable to God for their calling at the end of the day. They do not have to live up to our expectations or be pressured to do so. Each of us has our own accountability to God – so each of us will attend to our own spiritual turf first, ok?

EVEN THE LITTLE PIGS STAY RELEVANT

I read this book on ten little pigs, I think (definitely not just three)? The story revolves around how a wolf auntie was engaged to baby-sit the little pigs one

evening when Papa and Mama Pig went out to a party. The wolf auntie tried to distract the little pigs to get them to bed altogether. The wolf auntie then tried to lure one of the fattest ones to the oven to make a roast.

The story goes on and of course that fat little pig was spared when Papa and Mama got back in the nick of time to help the other pigs put a stop to the wicked acts of the wolf auntie. The ending of the story goes something like this:

The Pig family never employed a babysitter or maid again.

The word "maid" was definitely in the story's conclusion. Wow, talk about relevance to today's generation, the modern society.

Talk about the much-publicised "modern" Churches you read in the Sunday newspapers recently. (To be fair, journalism does sensationalise things a bit, too.) I actually went to check out one of the Churches' web site. Wow -- Flash, frames, Java-enabled stuff, one can even pay tithes electronically, etc. The common thread to these Churches is to stay relevant. To keep pace with the society, the lifestyle and its pursuits. It is all about making God's Word relevant to today's generation and busy executives. Why don't we turn the tables around? Why don't we make today's generation and busy executives see the relevance of God's Word and His ways? If Jesus Christ were editor of a newspaper, do you think he would print even a quarter page or column on the testimonials of slimming centre beneficiaries?

You and I are going to teach relevance to our kids. In return for my story about the 3 little pigs (the original version), Ryan

and Winston will have to tell me about the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7:24-27. ☺

THE LITTLE PRINCE

Well, if you enjoy parables in the Bible, you may enjoy the little prince's account of all his encounters with people of different professions. Like the parables, his encounters build on perspectives. You must read *The Little Prince*. There is nothing political or religious about the book. Just a fresh perspective each time I read it.

2 CORINTHIANS 8:13-15

"... He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."(v.15)

Consider these:

- Someone else as qualified as I am *always* gets the fairer deal.
- All men are equal, but some are more equal than others.
- How come that Christian is better off?

I actually encourage you to read the entire Chapter 8. And YES, read with Judges 9:7-15. Arm yourself with a good commentary or concordance. Read and re-read these 2 passages. May the Lord speak to you. He will, if you allow Him to. God speaks to me as I write. I hope God speaks to you with what I write. You benefit more from your own writing. So, join me and my fellow Vine writers.

EPILOGUE

BAD HAIR DAY – HAVE YOUR SAY

My boss is in a caustic mood. She is not necessarily in a bad mood. She just *occasionally* (this is a "politically correct" term ☺) goes into overdrive and feels that many people fall short of her standards. Today it happens to be *me* (I mean,

again). She sends an email to tell me that I produce shoddy work after all the meetings I have attended (and I took the minutes, you know) and today is *not* my first day at work. My face is saved this time because the last time she gave me similar music before multiple pairs of eyes. ☺

Outcome: The same paper gets re-worked for the umpteenth time.

Deadline: Tomorrow. (what is new?)

The same night, my old man packs the small circus into our blue Hyundai Accent. 9pm and we are still on the road – "to bring Mama home after work", as the circus would say. Ryan, my older boy, kicks a fuss when his wish to turn on the cabin lights was not granted.

Me : Why?

Ryan : Just turn on.

Dad : Why?

Me : He's looking for the ring from the drinking can (Ryan is presently pre-occupied with this "ring" collection). No, it will obstruct Papa's judgement when he is driving.

Ryan : BAD MAMA! (ouch!)

(uh-oh ... the rest of the conversation is any disciplinarian's guess ☺)

Ah well. I hope you enjoy reading my recollections as much as I enjoy putting them together for you. I used to keep daily journals until my mum started reading them – much to my vehement objections! Parents, beware! Ha ha ha ha ...

This is a lighter ending to some very heavy stuff I have written in this issue. ☺

Charlotte Sam

The tale-bearing raven in *Animal Farm*

Food, yummy food! Hmm... When I think of an animal farm, images of roast suckling pigs, steamed white chickens, salted duck eggs and other delightful animal cuisines float across my mind. Although the classic *Animal Farm* owned by George Orwell was never intended to produce anything for the dinner table, I am not a person to miss out on any chance of food even if its aroma is only faintly detectable. Orwell might not be aware, but the farm operations that he directed certainly offer me a hint of food available – not for my tummy though, but for some healthful gain spiritually. In August Vine, Sis. Charlotte introduced the *Animal Farm* as an interesting read, and she even spiced her recommendation of it as “food for thought” with a tempting hint of a raven in the farm. I cannot help looking forward to eating the raven as food too.



In Secondary School, I studied *Lady Precious Stream* and *The Good Earth*, so I do not know much about *Animal Farm* except for some leisure encounters with its satirical story as my son studied it. Therefore what I am going to share about it is just worth at most two cents and other Vine readers may contribute additional insights on the story's dig at the Church.

Well, as everyone who studies George Orwell knows that the raven, a religious figure in the story, is a tale-bearer and a clever talker, though apparently tame and harmless, we know how much credence we ought to give it for what it says. Noting this, I see the raven as indeed harmless and unconvincing to today's readers of its exploits among its animal companions. Indeed, from my current vantage position looking back into the raven's time, I see the silliness of the black creature's propaganda with it having too much time on its hands (or rather, clawed feet) because it does not do any work, unless you deem the spreading of tales as work. Even if the raven is correct in its message of a utopian resting place, it is out of beam in using religion merely in the service of its animal master (the bossy pig) to keep the latter's subjects under restraints. In today's world, do we see the raven's equivalents who are the devil's messengers, full of activity in the wrong way that serves only to discredit the Church not by their denial of heaven but by their propagation of wrong teachings of heaven and hell? We know that the existence of heaven and hell is real. We know that our Christian faith is based on the reality of the Creation and we serve God because He exists and our service is in sync with His masterplan, and eternal hope is a part of the whole picture rather than an end in itself for people to flock to religion. So out with the raven's self-serving 'theology' of Sugarcandy Mountain! Out with any misguided reason for belief!

Nevertheless, George Orwell deserves a bit of credit for his prescience that even if the communist dictatorship could use the Church as a tool to serve its selfish purpose, it could not wish the Church away according to its whims. Foolish of anyone to believe that the Church comes and goes according to human authorities! No matter what, God always reigns supreme above human powers to manipulate His Church! Of past and present, *Animal Farm* speaks loudly about creatures' ravenousness for powers and their cunning use of religion in disreputable ways to serve their ulterior objectives instead of telling religious facts with veracity. Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. It is a lesson I learn from reading *Animal Farm* that human powers count for nothing in the end. The spiritual dimension of this is that I should focus more on God and eternity rather than expend energy chasing after some hazy transient glory of being a human power holder at any level.

John Lee

A Brief Reflection

from the LCS Pastors' Study Trip to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria

by Soh Guan Keng

Perhaps many of us think of our Lutheran heritage as just some relic of the past that has no relevance for us today, or worse even, a hindrance to being "with the times." After this study trip to Germany to get what was literally a feel of our heritage, I realize that nothing could be further from the truth. Our heritage as a Lutheran church is one of history and courageous faith. Real men and women sought to teach, preach, write, sing, draw and sacrifice for what they knew to be God's true Gospel. Far from being an irrelevant liability to "being with the times", our heritage is an endowment of encouragement that gives us a firm foothold to face the future. I am privileged and proud to belong to the Lutheran family of Christians.

I recently heard a radio programme where the presenter shared about her visit to Graceland, the home of Elvis Presley. She is an Elvis fan, and she described what a memorable experience it was for her to finally see how he lived, see his many awards, experience his home and see his grave. But while Elvis entertained the world with his singing, Luther enlightened it with his preaching of the Gospel. To see the actual places of his birth and death, the living conditions of his monastic life, the room where he translated the New Testament into German, the actual spot where he nailed the 95 theses, the church where he preached hundreds of sermons, and many more - to see and touch these places was to experience a small taste of the power of Luther's convictions and the living reality of our faith. You really need to be there, to stand just two meters above where Luther still lies today, to feel it reverberate, in your heart and mind.

One thought particularly enthralled me. In a society that was still largely illiterate, art was a masterful teaching tool. Art was used in such a way that a single art piece could portray biblical themes within it's

particular social and political context. The artists of the day painted their own towns, townspeople, and religious and political leaders right into the artists' renditions of biblical themes. So for example, in a portrayal of the resurrection, it could be Luther and the towns people portrayed as the disciples and the people of faith, and the Pope and other ill-regarded leaders of that time portrayed as the unbelieving Jews and Pharisees!



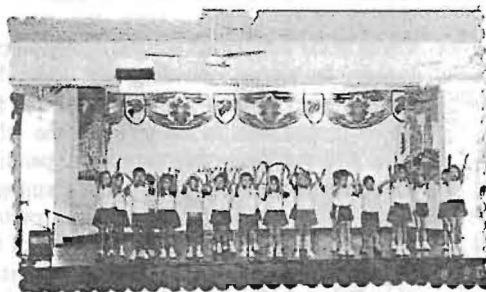
The art piece that struck me the most was the Cranach Altar in the City Church of St. Mary where Luther preached the most during his active ministry. This piece by the father and son team of Lucas Cranach the Elder and Younger was influenced by Luther. Here, the cross of Christ is the foundation and the center piece - Luther is shown standing on one side preaching and pointing to the cross, and the towns people look to the cross on the other side. And resting on this part of the painting are three more paintings (all four forming a single Altar painting). These three portray baptism, communion and the wielding of the keys of the kingdom that is the forgiveness of sins. This painting struck me as a masterpiece portrayal of the central themes of Scripture made real to the people of the day - the cross is the foundation faith and the focus of preaching, baptism and communion the means of grace, the keys of the kingdom is our authority and witness. Each one of us is called to these truths. We can paint ourselves into that picture, and it should be our desire that all the peoples of the world should be painted into that picture. Our faith is simple, yet powerful and relevant to all people. May the Lord grant that we will bring Him glory by painting ourselves and others into such a picture, and present each other upon the Altar of God! To God be the glory! Amen!

JCCK

National Day 2002

730 adults and children gathered at the multi-purpose hall to celebrate our country 37th National Day. Together we sang 'Majulah Singapura' and, led by the principal, all Singaporeans recited the pledge. With only standing space for the adults, the parents, grandparents, kinsmen, helpmates and their friends cheered and clapped as our K1 and K2 children, some in their ethnic costumes, presented items depicting Singapore's history and national ideology.

We thank Pastors Anthony Loh, How Chin Yong, Lee Kah Heng and JCC members for their attendance and assistance. It was an



From our Citizens of tomorrow :-
"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (Psalm 150)
for He has bless SINGAPORE with Peace, Harmony among
the races, AND Freedom to worship our God.



Our Teacher, Miss Grace Tiang (back to camera) -
"We must follow God's law and learn about His ways.
We must sing songs, and praise Him all our days."

Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world (Singapore)
Red, Yellow, Black and White
All come into His arms with delight.

opportune moment for them to interact with the adults, get to know them and perhaps even to share the gospel.

JCKK's outreach programme such as the National Day celebration is only a 'little drop' of water in the ocean of the outreach ministry. The great commission (Acts 1:8) can only be fulfilled by the Church of Christ, not an individual, organisation or a nation. Therefore, we welcome and look forward to more helpers in our year-end event in our effort to provide an avenue for parents and their kinsmen to walk into the church premise. See you then!

Miss Grace Tuang & Deborah Pay



We, the citizens of Singapore — stand up for Singapore

Doing Right brings honour to a nation — Proverbs 14:34

Reflections on Work and Calling

by Tan Swee Leong

Work - what is it all about?

In the throes of this rapidly changing world, Christians are caught up with the secularisation of thinking in regard to work. We view it as a chore, a burdensome task, a necessary evil to enable us to maintain a decent lifestyle. What we really want as Christians is the spiritual, to live and love God, to be with His people and engage in His work and if it is at all possible to leave the secular and be engaged with the sacred and spiritual.

Has such thinking Biblical foundation or is it based on our misguided thinking and unfulfilled ideals?

What does the Bible say of work. The Bible says, "Work is good", how so? It is good because it is God's mandate to man - "*The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*" (Gen 2:15). This mandate was given prior to the fall. Work is a gift from God. Only after the fall in Gen 3 did work became painful toil, and the ground cursed.

As Christians our goal is to recover the meaning and joy of work as God's original gift to us. Every good gift is from God and as I reflect on it, this would include work. We are in this world as co-agents with God in His work of re-creation, therefore our work is of value and significance to God.

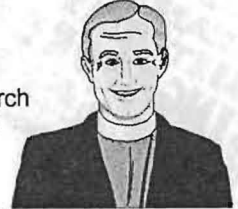
The prophet Isaiah writes poetically in Isa 65 of the new heaven and new earth and in v 21, speaks of God's people and that "*They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*" We will work in heaven as part of our glorified participation in the

new Kingdom, and v 23 of the same chapter says, "*They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.*" Work is redeemed and it is no longer toil. How then do we respond as we look forward to this heavenly promise? Paul instructs, "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,*" (Col 3:23).

Lest we be carried away with work being what God desires of us in the present and to eternity, God in His divine wisdom has called us to regularly re-establish our identity in God through the Sabbath rest. We set aside work for leisure, recreation, worship and fellowship each week as we go to the Father's house as His children.

Vocation

The early church divided work into the secular and the sacred. One has to leave the



secular - active engagement in the world to enter into the spiritual - a life of prayer, study and ministry. Calvin and Luther were instrumental in calling for a spirituality where all callings irrespective of our station and engagements in life is sacred. This is more appropriately referred to as vocation. A vocation is a call to serve God. God's calling is for his people engaged in all sectors of society and human activity, in the market place, church and home. The Kingdom of God is not only in the spiritual realm but it is the establishment of the whole of creation under God's divine authority. We are agents of the

Kingdom in all spheres of life and activity, through our words and deeds accomplishing the establishment of God's Kingdom. We need to use our gifts in responding with creativity and strength the opportunities God has given us in our calling.

This perspective places upon us "new lenses" through which we look at where we are engaged with the world – it is not just a function to fulfill but a calling to accomplish what God intended for the "re-creation" of the world, the fulfillment of His purpose for the whole creation.

Calling

What is the calling of God, this can be seen a three levels:

- We are called as Christians, to love God and our neighbor, to live by faith and trust and obey Him and participate in the reconciliation of the world
- Our calling in our daily lives to tasks and responsibilities that requires our immediate attention, responding to the needs of family, friends and those around us
- Our calling as vocation, the means by which I fulfill what it means to be a Christian in the world.

There needs to be clarity between vocation and career, job and occupation. Vocation can be fulfilled through an occupation, as in Christian ministry just as it can be fulfilled outside it as in being a homemaker. Our job and career may change, but not our vocation, as it is our fundamental identity, our being. It is our calling from God.

As called people we need to discern how God would have us fulfill our vocation in this complex and broken world. This discernment is derived from looking at ourselves and seeking congruence with three key issues –

Who are we?

Who has God made us to be?

How has God gifted me?

The Biblical instruction is found in Rom 12, where in v3 Paul reminds us "*not to conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind*" This speaks of moral integrity, looking to God for congruence in our life and character.

In Rom 12:v3 –8, Paul instructs us to look at ourselves with sober judgment, examine ourselves carefully and live a life congruent with who we are and who we have been called to be, this is vocational integrity. This involves responding to the question, "What is God calling me to do with my life specifically at this time of my life?" Implicit in Paul's teaching are two instructions, firstly, to know yourselves and secondly, to be true to yourself. These are not just questions to be answered but ongoing commands to be lived out.

How do we know ourselves? Individually, by taking an honest critical look at ourselves to discern, whom am I, what makes me unique and what has God called me to? We are unique in the way God has gifted and enabled us. We are called to make a difference where God has placed us. We are to humbly accept the gifts and capabilities given to us. Knowing oneself is important to knowing how to serve,

giving of our best in the use of our gifts and abilities.

Knowing self, based upon a humble honest self appraisal requires that we be true to ourselves and in doing so be true to God. God's calling is consistent with who we are and whom he has created us to be.

We need also to consider the desires of our heart, that which brings us joy. Though our desires are warped by sinfulness, we should seek that which is consistent with His call and causes us to be at peace with Him. When we align our desires with that of God's calling and purposes we experience joy.

In developing self-knowledge, we need to recognize the world's needs. We need to align our vocation, identity and calling to make a difference to the needy and broken world.

The next essential element in developing self-knowledge is in appreciating our unique personality and temperament. This enables us to accept our identity and vocation.

This discovery of self should be made in the context of the community. For it is in community that we can find full expression and realization of our gifts, desires and unique personality.

Knowing self is but one half of the equation we need to be true to ourselves. The challenge is to be true in a way congruent with who we are and how God has uniquely made us. We need to embrace wholeheartedly whom God has made us to be and what He has called us to. In so doing, we are true to our identity and calling. Our

identity in God does not change. Circumstances may change and we will change as we move along our spiritual journey. These changes should enable us to grow in our capacity to live in a manner congruent to our identity. We need to be clear of our identity and vocation so as not to be swayed to meet needs as we see them and in so doing engage in that which is not congruent with what God made and called us to.

The qualities of vocational integrity are embodied in excellence, truth diligence and generosity. Paul instructs Timothy, *"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."* This is a call to give of our best, a fundamental commitment to excellence. We are called to do our work as unto the Lord. We seek to do our best to please God, based on the conviction that God deserves our best. Excellence should not be misconstrued as perfection, which is the misguided self-pursuit of excellence as an end in itself. This pursuit is never joyful as the perfectionist is never satisfied and perpetuate an attitude that is demanding and uncompromising, incapable of accepting the mistakes of others. Genuine excellence is rooted in the desire to serve well.

Vocational integrity is founded on truth when we focus on truth and are loyal to truth. Whatever vocation we are in, our work must be offered in the service of truth. Our work must be truthful in the sense that it is consistent in integrity and fundamental honesty. The Biblical instruction is founding Paul's advice to Timothy to do his best in the service of truth, in explaining the word of truth (2

Tim 2:15). Our focus on truth should not blind us to the perspective of others or cause us not to have a gracious, humble, teachable spirit. When our pursuit of truth causes us to be a bigot, we violate the very essence of integrity we are seeking.

The next quality of vocation integrity, diligence refers to doing our work with care and commitment in a persistent and thorough manner. This is exemplified in accomplished musicians, sportsmen and workers in any field. Their achievement is a result of diligence. Diligence is not hectic activity or overwork. It is not anxious toil that consumes us. The Biblical instruction is in Paul's call to Timothy to *"endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."* (2 Tim 4:5).

Generosity, is a quality in vocational integrity derived from seeing those we serve as God's creation with incomparable self worth and significance. Generous service is offered freely for the sake of others in contrast to calculated service, which counts the cost and consider the return, rewards, position or power. Our work is unto the Lord. Generous service empowers those we serve to grow, allowing them to mature and eventually to serve each other with generosity. In redeeming generosity in service, we must be wary of trying to serve all people and all needs. Misguided generosity seeks to do more than what God is calling us to. This could be a reflection of our need for affirmation and appreciation. Work in such a context is not related to the calling of God, for He does not call us to do more than what can be done. We need to fulfill our

calling with generosity but also giving due regard to our priorities and limitations.

These qualities of vocational integrity should not become an end in itself. Work is not the whole of who we are – we are relational beings. God in His divine wisdom has instituted a pattern of work and renewal. God provided the Sabbath for necessary rest and recreation through worship, leisure, prayer and fellowship. The Sabbath is a reminder that we are not just "workers" but God's people and are called to delight in God, His creation and in community.

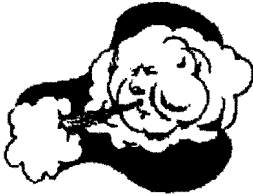
Having this perspective changes the way I engage with others and the world. My identity does not rest on what others perceive me to be but is in how God sees me. This spurs me to recover my true identity and to renew myself to be conformed to His likeness.

We all seek meaning and significance in our work. We want to make a difference and be engaged in work that is rewarding and which pleases God. Beyond vocational integrity, we have to know that what we are doing comes from God. Ecc 2:24 proclaims *"A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God."* We can take pride and joy knowing that our work is from God. Paul instructs us in Col 3:23, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."*

We need to sense that what we are doing is to the Lord. This Biblical instruction is life changing; our work is from God and is offered back to God.

Winds Of Change

- Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever -
Hebrews 13: 8



Lots of changes have been sweeping over Singapore and the world. Good changes will please people such as a new source of water (Newater) & Singapore shares. Unfortunately, there are also bad news such as increase in bus fares, coming increase in hospital charges, etc. There are also major changes such as the Remaking of Singapore plus the emphasis on Life

Science. All these changes have caused anxiety in the hearts of the people.

How can we cope with these changes? We can mentally assuage ourselves by noting that the only thing that is constant in life is change. Learn to cope with it or quit. (Stayer or Quitter?) The best alternative is to turn to God for assistance to cope with changes. God has promised in Hebrew 13:5-6: Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Beng Chin

"What Makes A Great Church"

1. How Important Is Size?

The average person, when he thinks of a great church is likely to think in terms of SIZE. How many members are there? If there is a long list of names, it must be a great church. Well, it may or may not be. This congregation is larger than the average church of Christ, but it is by no means to be numbered among the largest. It thrills me on Sunday morning to see the building nearly full. Yet I would not say that this is evidence of greatness. There is strength in numbers, but that does not necessarily mean that a church is great. I suppose that we all know that there are more Moslems in the world than professed believers in Christ. If numbers were the primary thing, Muhammadanism would be greater than Christianity. But size is not primary. If one wants to study the subject of numbers he has ample material in the scriptures. Remember the story of Gideon? Thirty-two thousand men rallied to his call to fight against the Midianites. God said it was too many, and by various means reduced the number until only three hundred real men, men of courage and strength and devotion, went out against the Midianites. The enemy melted at the presence of the three hundred. The Lord has often used a few to conquer the many. He believes in numbers only because he wants all men to be saved. In and of themselves numbers do not spell greatness.

2. How Important Is Wealth?

There are those who think of greatness in terms of WEALTH. If a church is wealthy it is a great church. Again, the answer is wrong. The early church was not wealthy. The New Testament church was generous, but a generous church is not necessarily a wealthy church. Generosity may be a quality of greatness. It is fine when both of these things go together, but wealth by itself does not mean greatness. As I am impressed and encouraged by the number that come here to worship, I am also encouraged by the generosity of those who come. More than \$_____ was put into the collection baskets on the fifty-two Sundays of last year. This is all the more impressive because there were no high-pressure drives, or levies, or pledging systems. It was simply free-will giving. It might be interesting to you to know how much we gave per person last year. I think you will find it to be about \$_____ per member of the congregation per Sunday. That is usually considered in this day and time very good. I'm sure that it could and probably should be higher. But we are thankful for the generosity of this congregation, yet it is not money that makes a church great. The Lord is not interested in money but he is interested in a lot of other things. Wealth does not make a great church.

3. How Important Are Buildings?

In thinking of a great church many people think it in terms of big BUILDINGS, but fine buildings do not necessarily mean great churches. In the early days when the church began there were no buildings at all, yet the Jerusalem church was one of the greatest that ever existed. Buildings may accompany a fine church but strength does not necessarily lie in marble or brick or stone. The church is the people.

4. How Important Is History?

There are others who think that a long and glorious HISTORY makes a church great. When one visits the city of London, inevitably on the visit lists is the old Westminster Abbey. There is a religious building steeped in history. They tell you with pride about who is buried beneath the floor. They tell you how it began to be built in the eleventh century. It has a long and notable history. You cross a few blocks and see St. Paul's. That, too, is a great building, second in size only to St. Peter's in Rome. They tell you that it was finished in 1710, and that it was the work of Sir Christopher Wren, one of the greatest designers and builders of all time. For nearly two hundred, fifty years that building has been in active service. It is not how long a congregation has existed, however, or how old and how glorious its history. What counts is what it is now.

5. How Important is Prestige?

There are many who think that PRESTIGE makes a church great. How many big names of the community are enrolled on the church roster? How many presidents of banks, how many men of high position are among its members? But just as the Lord does not measure a church by its marble, neither does he measure a church by the opulence of the society in which its members operate.

What Makes A Church Great?

Let me suggest some positive things, some things which are essential to greatness.

1. The Necessity of Knowing God's Will

The first absolutely necessary characteristic of a great church is KNOWLEDGE OF THE WILL OF GOD. A Church begins to be great when its members know the truth of God and when they can distinguish it from error. The apostle Paul paid a fine tribute to the Christians at Berea, "Now these were more noble than those at Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11). He laid further emphasis upon the study of God's word when he said, "Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth." (2 Tim. 2:15). Size, wealth, fine buildings and prestige mean nothing unless the church knows and obeys God's will.

2. The Necessity of Faith

A second very vital thing is a deep, abiding faith in God. In Hebrews 11:6, the writer says, "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul shows more fully the kind of faith that is needed, "For I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day." The faith that is needed by the Christian is more than mere belief in the existence of God. It is a deep trust in God.

3. The necessity of Consecration.

A third very vital quality is a deep, genuine CONSECRATION to the Lord. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness." (Matthew 6:33). The apostle Paul possessed this quality in great measure as shown in his statement, Philippians 3:12-14, "Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." NASB

The trouble with so much of the religious world today is that so many professed believers hold the faith in Christ so casually. It has such a fragmentary hold on their lives. The Lord would rather have "ten who are stout-hearted men" than a thousand who are lukewarm like those of Laodicea. Emphasizing this theme, William Fraser McDowell once wrote, "Wealth can be matched with equal or larger wealth; splendor of plant can be equaled or surpassed, elaborate organizations can be met and overcome in kind. The enemy of the ministry is very rich, very fertile, very enterprising and resourceful in all these ways ... But one thing he cannot imitate, nor duplicate, nor match, nor conquer is a Christlike personality." It is only when men commit themselves body and soul to the Lord that they begin to be worth something in building up a great church. It is only then that they are real Christians whose destiny is heaven.

4. The Necessity of Work

Still another essential of greatness is WORK. No church can become great until it begins to carry out the work that God intends for his children to do. James 1:27 "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." NASB The Lord intends for his disciples to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the poor, encourage the disheartened, and lift up the fallen. He intends for his followers to carry the message of a better life and a better world to all men. There is no place in his church for the lazy or indolent. It is not a matter of knowing or believing only, but also of doing. Jesus closed his great sermon on the mount with the words, Matthew 7:21-27, "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall." [NASB].

5. The Necessity of Fellowship

Finally, it is imperative that there be a warm and continuing fellowship among the members of a congregation if the church is to be great. The members must love each other. They must not be divided by jealousy or factionalism. Christ said in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." [NASB]. Paul emphasized the importance of unity in Ephesians 4:3 when he spoke of the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Christians must work together and worship together because they love each other.

CONCLUSION:

Before a church is great there must be a thorough understanding of God's will. There must be a deep consecration, a giving of ourselves to the Lord. There must be a willingness to work. These go far toward making a church great. Along with these qualities there must be love of the brethren or fellowship. There must be real Christian unity. You cannot work if you pull against each other. When you have told the story in these terms then you have spelled out greatness. It is not size, it is not wealth; it is not fine buildings; it is not a long and illustrious history; it is not prestige. Rather it is a knowledge of God's will which leads to a commitment of all that one has to the Lord. This leads one to work for the Lord in unity with other brethren. This makes a church great.

-- Sermon by Batsell Barrett Baxter

<http://fly.hiwaay.net:8000/~wgann/sermons/greatch.htm>

Jerry, Jenny, Jedididah & Jeswyn LAM
24 Lebuah Cloud Estate, Off Jalan
Green, 93150 Kuching, Sarawak.
Tel : 019-8261024; 82-234426(O)
Fax : 082-421827
Email: jerrylam@tm.net.my

Lam's Latest

Dear cherished partners,

Yes, the kids are growing up fast and we thank God that they are seeing HIM as part of their lives. They continue to enjoy reading the Bible and praying. Pray with us that they will continue to keep His Word in their hearts so that they will keep their way pure.

Since our last news, Jenny's dad had been re-admitted to the hospital twice, May & June before he was called to the Lord on 21/6/2002. We feel the loss but we know he is in a better place now. The Lord has graciously extended his life – he has diabetes for nearly 30 years and he has not been bed-ridden except for his last few weeks. Dad worked hard to provide enough for the family but he never strove to be extravagantly rich. He was not one of those dads who worked extra jobs, at the expense of family and ministry time to get that little extra cash! He was contented with what God had given him. Pray for Jenny's mum who is adjusting to the loss – who wouldn't when they would have celebrated their 47th wedding anniversary this December.

Jerry had planned to visit our North African field in May / June but when Jenny's dad was hospitalised in May, we were unsure but then decided that he should go ahead with the plan. As it turned out, Jenny's dad was discharged the day before Jerry left and was re-admitted just the day before Jerry came back. – how perfect is God's timing. We anticipate a change next year in our family life, where we are anticipating to move in with Jenny's mum. Jenny's brother and family who have been staying with them will be moving to another town due to a job project. Pray for us that God will use us to be an encouragement to her.

This year Jerry has traveled alone more. He was in KL in mid-July. In August the family went to Miri for the weekend with Jerry and the kids were excited about that. He stayed on for more work and drove back alone. He will be away again end of Aug till mid-September bringing a team from West Malaysia for mission exposure trip to the longhouses. Meanwhile, Jenny holds the fort and the kids too are used to the idea that daddy is away travelling. Pray for God's protection during Jerry's travel and also for Jenny and the kids at home. After much prayer & surveys, we'll see an initial team coming to this land for 6 months to help the rural churches this October.

We had and will have a few people coming over to visit us and for ministry which helps us in building up the work. We thank God for all that He is doing in this land and also in our lives. These IT advanced days we are handling more enquiries through email than the phone. We also have been spending time with a family who had finished their 2 years in the North Africa. After a 3 months furlough they are going back there. PTL for people who are willing to go. We are also presently going through the application process of another family who is hoping to go to another land of vast needs. We need to pray for God's workers in all these lands.

Right now, the dry season is here and hotspots nearby have caused a haze in Sarawak. This is not conducive for Jenny's asthmatic condition. Pray for God's protection and healing.

Together with you,
Jerry, Jenny, Jedidiah & Jeswyn