

The Vine

For internal circulation only

February 2004

Vol. 2/2004

Editor's Views

In two consecutive weeks, both preachers talked about making choices. Richard Ting spoke about making the choice of following Christ and giving up the comfortable life while Wong Mui asked us to choose wisely or suffer the consequences of making the wrong choices.

Life is full of choices isn't it? You have the choice of

- ❖ coming to church or going to the golf course,
- ❖ worrying about tomorrow or trusting God,
- ❖ joining a Cell Group or watching TV,
- ❖ going for the Church Retreat or staying in Singapore.

What is your choice? In the past, I heard feedback about JCC giving last-minute notice about events or activities thus giving members no chance to arrange their schedules. Thus the poor turnout at events because members had already made prior arrangements. The feedback was valuable input, and leaders of the Church have responded. This year, JCC actually has drawn up a calendar with most of the important programs posted way in advance so that members can plan their schedules. However, the result is that the problem of "last-minute notice" is replaced by the problem of "too early notice". Basically, the problems are the same. Many members still cannot plan their schedules. For instance, one of the main reasons some people are not signing up for the Retreat so early is because they are keeping their time slots free for some unplanned events that may clash with the Retreat dates. We need to pray hard for the

Church leaders to strike the fine balance between a notice that is unacceptably late and one that is unacceptably early if it is impossible for members to make their plans around the church's programmes that are laid out in advance.

Our decisions often reflect our priorities and our standpoint on what is of utmost importance. Christians always say, "Give God the first choice and not what is left over". If we are determined to practise what we say but encounter difficulties, we can put our faith in what we sing: "God Will Make A Way." For members who are desirous of a good retreat time away from the busyness of life, but are still beset with concerns with "what ifs" that make them hesitate about signing up, I would encourage them to believe that "God will make a way" instead of getting mired in the negative thought of "no way." Why should one think that God will allow some important event to clash with the Retreat date? I hear that Covenant EFC is charging \$300 per person for their retreat and it is fully booked, with a long waiting list. There is something wrong with them that they don't realize that they should keep their dates free just in case something important crops up. Maybe not. Maybe it is something wrong with us for being lacking in faith?

So I urge you brothers and sisters, come and have your hearts touched by **Spiritual Delight**. May we all learn to put God first in our choices.

In this issue

1. Valentine's Day
by Tony Koh



2. Murder Most Fowl
by John Lee
3. Why Go For a Retreat
by Tan Swee Leong
4. Tidbits ... by Charlotte

Martin Cheah

LOVE in Many Dimensions



FEB 14.... VALENTINE DAY...and LOVE was in the AIR.... CG members of Bethany (Bukit Panjang) and Abundance (Jurong East) had a Romancing Dinner at Raffles Marina.

Food took second place as CG members tucked in the delectable love stories that they brought out to share with one another. Here, I would like to share with VINE Readers nuggets from the testimonies at the Romancing Dinner. I hope this sharing will extend the message that we love because God first loved us. I believe that you also have your unique and special love stories. If you wish, feel free to drop us a line or two. We certainly love to hear from you. God's love comes in many dimensions!

1 CORINTHIANS 13: 13

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

How LOVE struck:

- I. Rev. Martin and Betsy Yee – On our first date, we went for a documentary movie. It must sound the most 老土 (old-fashioned).
- II. Peter and Jessie (married more than 28 Years) – Love revolved around boxes of chocolates. The chocolates must be sweet with sugar and honey as important ingredients.
- III. Dr and Mrs Gary Choong – Seven long years of marathon courtship. How patience paid off with lasting love!
- IV. James and Susan Tan – Love, though sweet, had its ups and downs; but through it all, GOD blessed them with 3 lovely children for a highly treasured family life.
- V. Roy and Julia – Inter-Church Fellowship provided them a wonderful ground for love to strike. With God as their guide, love has grown with them as they brought forth another generation into life.
- VI. Soon Eong and Ewe Ewe – A beauty was drawn to a scholastic white knight as they spent campus time with each other in their sights.



God showed me that the pen is mightier than the sword even for the

purpose of capturing one's love. My valentine Susan Koh was won over by me because I wrote and won a Valentine Essay contest in the Business Times in 1988 (See picture).



Valentine Day certainly means much to many couples. Although love is in every day, rather than just for a day in February, a special day set aside annually for people to celebrate love can serve to remind us of the value and wonders of the love that binds two persons. Marvel with thanksgiving to God for it is He who gives us LOVE!

Tony Koh

WHY GO FOR A RETREAT?

Each year the Church organizes a retreat for members? Why does it take all the trouble to do so? There must be compelling reasons not just for JCC but for churches to do so. The Bible records of Jesus himself taking time off from his busy activities to be alone with God – “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary

place, where he prayed” (Mark 1:35). In Luke 6:12 Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before He chose his disciples. It was during the time of prayer on the mountain that Jesus was transfigured. (Lk (9:28) After the last supper and before his arrest Jesus went to the garden in Gethsemane to be alone in prayer. (Mk 14:32-35) What these accounts speak of is Jesus retreating from the busy world to be alone with God. He went away for a retreat.

Ajith Fernando, in his recent book *Jesus Driven Ministry* shares some benefits of retreats:

Retreats affirm the priority of the spiritual

Retreats give us the opportunity to concentrate on God and His Word. It helps change our perspective of the world and make us aware that the things that consume our energies are not as important as we think. Retreats counter activism where we think that our fulfillment comes from activities rather than from God.

Retreats draw us away from our busy schedules and help orient our minds in the spiritual direction. Retreats are extended time when we can give totally to spiritual exercise and delight.

Retreats slow us down

During retreats it is easier for us to spend time in the presence of God. Often we are so rushed in our

busyness that we find it difficult to quiet down our minds and wait in the presence of God. The Psalmist reminds us, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10)

Sometimes our busyness is a result of our insecurity. We have drawn away from God and our busyness causes us to lose the security of walking closely with God. We keep ourselves busy to avoid honest self-examination. We occupy our free time with worldly pursuits and entertainment. How sad it is that when God wants to heal us and restore us but Satan stops us from retreating and finding spiritual delight in God. We need to be like David, when he retreated to God's presence and prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Ps 139:23-24)

Retreats help us to be receptive to God's voice

One way God ministers to us is to "test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Retreats open the door to God and guide us in evaluating our priority and examining our schedules. Are we living in keeping with God's calling for us?

Retreats help us escape the tyranny of busyness

We are often so rushed and busy that we do not think straight. This is

because we do not have time to think reflectively. The pressure and rush causes us to have a short temper, blow up unnecessarily and to feel frustrated within. We need to slow down. Retreats help us do that.

Adequate time given to solitude affects our life so much that it will influence our approach to life and ministry. We need to minister to people under the tyranny of busyness. We should be the "aroma of Christ" (2 Cor 2:15) that others can see the beauty of spirituality. We are to be agents in freeing those trapped in busyness, which is ruining their spiritual, emotional and family life. Henri Nouwen, in his book, *The Way of the Heart*, says "In a society in which entertainment and distraction are such important preoccupations, ministers are also tempted to join the ranks of those who consider it their primary task to keep other people busy." He adds, "Our task is the opposite of distraction. The question that must guide all organizing activities is not how to keep people busy, but how to keep them from being so busy that they can no longer hear the voice of God who speaks in silence."

A message for our youths.

Our aim must be to see our youths in touch with God. We can attract them with interesting programs but our task is not just giving youths programs to keep them busy and out of trouble. Indeed our program must be attractive and fun filled so that youths

realize that they do not need the sinful fun of the world. More than this, our programs must be aimed at making our youths saints who walk close to God and who acknowledge Him in all their decisions and all they do! Ajith Fernando states, “If we want to nurture youths who walk close to God, youth leaders need to be people who walk close to God and enjoy deep communion with Him. They must know what it is to seek God in silence and they must know how to teach young people to seek God and his way.”

Affirm God's help amidst life challenges

Every Christian who desires to please God and minister to people will inevitably face serious crises. In such situations what do we do?

Let's look at the Bible and see what God's servants did. Jeremiah cried out to God, “Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them” (Jer 9:2). Jeremiah was facing severe challenge in his life and he wanted to quit. God did not grant him his request. God instead told him that things would get worse. Jeremiah could not run away from God's call. He could only run to God for strength and comfort. The answer to Jeremiah was to retreat to the desert to be strengthened in order to live amidst the conflict that would come when we are serving people.

Psalm 46 opens with, “God is our

refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” This Psalm was written in the midst of turmoil. The Psalm speaks of mountains quaking and falling, nations in uproar, desolation and wars. The Psalmist invites the reader to “Come and see the works of the LORD.” How can we seek God's work in the midst of such turmoil or when one is overwhelmed by problems? God's answer is in v 10, “Be still, and know that I am God.” When we come into God's presence, rather than trying to solve our own problems, we begin to look at things from God's perspective, and in so doing our perspective changes.

In times of crisis and amidst life challenges, we need to develop the discipline of retreating to God's presence to receive strength from Him.

Retreat – time of Spiritual delight. We need it for the nourishment of our souls and our life in Christ. It is indeed a time for spiritual refreshment that those retreat regulars can testify to. Let's resolve not to let the world squeeze us into its mould, but for God to do his transforming work. Retreats are certainly one way for us to build our spirituality, our growing in Christ-likeness, our sensitivity to the work of the Spirit. Let's heed the call of the Psalmist: “Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Ps 37:4)

Tan Swee Leong



Murder Most Fowl

If the fowl can speak, they would be crying out in alarm over the current murderous rage of man. It is a pity that they are suffering a double attack against which they are not equipped with any defence – the viral strike and, if this fails to kill, human beings are ready to ‘help’ with their coup de grace by stomping, suffocating, drowning, etc. To the fowl, we humans are scary killing machines indeed.

A Straits Times’ forum writer lamented, “We should stop blaming other species for our woes. If only we had been less indulgent in our gastronomic pleasures, more compassionate in the farming of animals, and less arrogant and not think that we are the masters of this fragile planet, then perhaps there is still hope for this earthly home we share with other living beings.” (Dr Tan Chek Wee, ST 3 Feb)

Defenders of the human act of cruelty to the fowl may say that the fowl are going to be slaughtered anyway for food if they are spared the current killing frenzy. Perhaps, by this logic, man can have his culpability for “Murder Most Fowl” reduced to a charge of “fowlslaughter not amounting to murder”. A mitigating factor is that we are only killing “Most”, not killing “All”, and thus sparing the fowl species from extinction. Should the fowl thank us for our kind thoughts? Or should we thank ourselves for the presence of mind not to exterminate them “All” so that we still have some left for food on the table when our present emotional whirl calms down?

The spectacle of man furiously killing chickens, civet cats, cows, pigs, ... (in ways that would probably make all societies for cruelties to animals cringe) because “there is no other way” to save ourselves speaks volumes about man’s helplessness oft-times no matter how intelligent the homo sapiens species is supposed to be. Come a day when birds, cows and pigs are all decimated (not because we want to wipe them out; but blame it on avian flu, bovine madness and Nipah virus), we will all turn to fishes and vegetables as our staple diet. Just keep fingers crossed that we won’t hear of carcinogens or high mercury levels in seafood and too much pesticide in vegetables, courtesy of human acts of sea pollution and farming indiscretions. Otherwise, we just have to scale down our appetites for food variety.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen 1:1) God let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky. (v. 1:20) God also gave for our food every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. (v. 1:29) Was it Beautiful Earth or Fragile Earth? Man was created in God’s image, in His likeness, to populate the Earth and to rule over every living creature in the water, on land and in the air. (v.1:26-28) In other words, man was given power over God’s Earth to subdue it.

As we look back at the past, at the history of man’s desires, greed, self-indulgence ... all sorts of sinfulness, what do we recognize? Instead of ruling over the Earth kindly and subduing it, man has abused his power, destroyed the beauty of the Earth, and finally become subdued by all the mishaps that are brought forth. It is

no wonder that instead of being beautiful, the Earth has become to us a fragile globe.

I recall the punishment meted out when Cain murdered Abel. God hauled Cain over the coals, “What have you done? ... Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground ... When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on earth.” (Gen 4:10-12) Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth...” (v. 4:13)

In the Bible, God has warned of pestilences (diseases that kill, fast and furious) and fearful events as signs of the End of the Age (Lk 21:11) Punishments for man’s disobedience to God can also be found in Lev 26:14-29. So we know why God does not stop all sufferings and pain. Before Adam and Even sinned, it was a beautiful Garden in Eden where one would envision no sufferings and pain. The sufferings and pain that we often experience today are signs and punishments to wise us up.

God is good. (Lk 18:19) God is love. (1 Jn 4:8) Man should not persist in his waywardness. There is hope when man returns to God’s fold as obedient children. Let us pray that people in the world hear God’s message. Otherwise, come the day when we work the ground but the ground produces no crop, when we go fishing but return with no catch, or when we celebrate a battle won against a virus but its hardier cousin (the prion, like the malformed protein in Mad Cow Disease) comes against us, we will learn things the fatal way. Do our human minds, no

matter how intelligent, have all answers to all threats to our survival? When Earth becomes inhospitable, will we have the option of moving home to Mars that we spend \$billions now to explore? As you crack your head on this question, allow me to rush off to have my fill of chicken rice before the chickens start their disappearing acts from the stalls.

John Lee



What is a Sabbatical?

Congregational sabbaticals focus on the total person the minister's physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs. It offers a minister the chance to break the routine of daily ministry and do something very different.

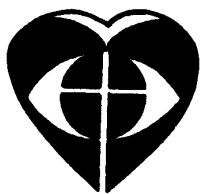
It creates space for creativity, rest, and renewal. It gives the minister the marvelous gift of time to use totally as the minister chooses. A sabbatical leave is a way for a congregation to express how much it values the minister.

The concept of sabbatical is grounded on the biblical idea of Sabbath rest. The example of Jesus, who frequently sought out a quiet place where he could meditate and pray, away from the constant demands of the crowds, is a strong model for a sabbatical.

Sabbaticals offer ministers a chance to step away from the long hours of work, to find healing and rest, and then to return to their place of call equipped and refreshed to inaugurate new ways of being in ministry.

Sabbaticals are offered after the minister completes six years of continuous service in one place.

<http://www.elca.org/lp/sabplan.html>



Gospel Mission To The Blind Ltd

~~No. 46 Mackerrow Road Singapore 1335 Tel. 2891824~~

Jurong Christian Church
2 Tah Ching Road
Singapore 618744

Greetings in Jesus name!

We thank and praise the Lord for seeing us through a very eventful 2003. ~~In spite of the SARS~~ outbreak during the 2nd quarter of last year, and the breakdown of our van during the last quarter of 2003, the Lord had enabled us to continue to minister to the blind people. We thank the Lord for all our supporters, prayer partners and volunteers who have been making it possible for GMB to continue to reach out to the blind people in spite of tough time.

We thank and praise the Lord that in 2003 we had 2 baptisms (Yoke Sin and King Hon) and 3 new converts (Alice Neo, Hare Lim and Dickson) who are growing very well.

The Lord has answered our prayer for some one to come and help reach out to the youth. On 2nd January this year, Valerie Lim, who is partially blind, has started working in GMB. Please pray that she will find favour with the youth, and that the Lord will bless her with wisdom and ideas to develop the youth ministry in GMB.

The process of acquiring a new van was not smooth. We were unsuccessful in our application for the COE to be waived. Our new van arrived on 30th December 2003, but the LTA did not approve the registration of the van. And in early January 2004 we still could not use the van because they had not given us the road tax.

The GMB family wish you a very ~~blessed~~ 2004 and a ~~happy~~ Chinese New Year. May ~~the Lord~~ open the windows of heaveh and pour upon you and your family all the supplies that you need.

George Lee

On behalf of GMB
30 January 2004

CHRIST THE SAVIOR IS BORN

*Letter from
Rev. & Mrs
Ralph F.
Kusserrow,
former pastor
of JCC*

Dear Family and Friends,

Advent 2003

At Christmas time we take joy in greeting one another and sharing important happenings from the past year. As we greet you this year, we want to share what we feel is one of the richest blessings that we have had, the opportunity to come to Tucson to help Carol's sister, Beverly, take care of their mother. She has been bedridden for two years. Unlike many elderly people (she is 102!) her mind is clear and she is very cooperative. She is a good role model, showing us how to grow old gracefully.

Another blessing was the opportunity to attend a reunion for former missionaries to Malaysia and Singapore. We enjoyed very much being with those we lived and worked with and also meeting other missionaries who were not in Malaysia and Singapore when we were.

During the year we had good visits with all three sons and their families, all five sisters, nieces and nephews.

By God's grace our circle of friends is widening as we come to know more people in Tucson. One delightful new friend is Faustino, a Mexican, who comes to us to learn to speak English more correctly. He hopes to improve his English to the point that he can return to his family in Mexico City and get a good job to support them.

One highlight of the year was receiving news of a small village congregation that we served in Tanzania. When we were in Dar es Salaam, the pastor who was the president of the district that we were in, told of the congregation in Yongwe, a village not far from Dar. He reported that the congregation was struggling and needed encouragement. We soon found out that in fact the congregation had died. With the help of the district president, I arranged to start services there again. At the first service, held under the cashew nut tree that served as their church, six people were present. But the congregation grew and they built a mud-wall church. Then we had to come back home early because of health problems, leaving that church before adequately training the leaders they needed to keep on going. We often wondered about them and only recently heard that they have torn down the mud church and built a sturdy church of concrete blocks. They continue to grow. And they continue to tell others of the Savior, whose birth we remember again this Christmas.

The angel tells us anew: "I have good news for you which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10-11 (Contemporary English Version) At the end of another year we remember with joy that our Savior has been watching over our family and friends. He has been watching over the little church in Yongwe. We rejoice in celebrating His birth again and greeting you again at this blessed time.

Pastor Kusserrow and Carol

Dear friends at Turong Christian Church,

Thank you very much for the Christmas card!

Tidbits for the Month of the Valentines

We.

When humankind deems itself the invincible, unfazed at every competition its own kind brings, and in the name of innovation, we have creation after creation, improved and built on top of what others have achieved. Product and systems development life cycle have shortened tremendously – all because someone else has blazed the trail, and there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Learning curves, as they say, have also become steeper. New business entrants bear higher risks to enter the competition to ensure their copies turn out far superior and sooner.



Ok, I am writing marketing speak here, the sort you'd find in the Ries & Trout and Tom Peters books.

Japan as a strong industrialized nation did not happen by chance. Likewise Korea and Taiwan. Although they are where they are through different means, they share something in common: they started off by copying shamelessly, literally. Obviously this is not the place to discuss at length the economics and policies behind this copycat business. Please come to me unoffended if you would like to defend the countries that I have mentioned. ☺

I have extracted the following from another article on ... yup, marketing. Read on.

"Draw a dog."

By Sean D'Souza

Those were the commands of the art teacher to a bunch of five year olds. They didn't know it just then, but they were part of a psychological experiment.

The command reverberated through the room with a varying effect.

Some kids furrowed their eyebrows. Some scoured their brains for inspiration. Others chewed on their crayons uneasily.

Yet three kids seemed unmistakably unperturbed

Whipping out their crayons, they seemed to sport an air of flamboyance, even haughtiness. With practiced deft strokes, they went about rendering a piece of art many adults would have been proud to call their own.

Barring the three obviously talented ones, the rest of the class seemed to produce nothing but chaos.

Let me not stop here. For our experiment was only half done.

To complete the experiment, we changed things a bit. The kids were then given a command to draw a cat.

Except this time around, the teacher led the kids through the process. She drew a stroke. They copied it. She embellished the stroke, and so did the kids. Whiskers, tails, noses and eyes appeared magically on every sheet.

Not surprisingly, the excitement levels started peaking rapidly. In under fifteen minutes every child in the room had drawn a cat of their own.

Huh? How could that be the case?

Just fifteen minutes ago, most of these kids had written off their art abilities forever. Now suddenly they were budding Picassos. What had changed?
It's called imitation.



Copycat - the business of imitation, the greatest form of flattery to the originator!

Look at you. Look at the one beside you. We look far better than cats. We are created in the likeness of His image. God needs no flattery. Funny then that the gods of others are created to satisfy their rich imagination; and continue to fuel the operation of traditional yet simple supply business for religious idols.

God created mankind, while humans continue to create their own gods of the physical or figurative kind. Creation = Humans created in God's likeness. Idolatry = Gods shaped after humans' lusts. Christians are taught to be a man/woman after our creator's own heart; while the rest of the world is taught to go after what their hands have shaped from the desires of their very own hearts.

Think of what every idol means each time you walk past that religious

supplies store. Each idol is carefully crafted to what the believers expect of each and every god the idol represents. Kuan-Im niang-niang is supposed to look gracious (and graceful?); Cai-shen-ye looks every bit what the believer expects it to bring. Of course I find it just as distasteful to see a boy image being used to signify Christ brought to earth for an RC Church mass.

Like it or not, and of course we can attribute it to our education, we are all visual people. WYSIWYG¹ is a familiar term to many geeks (hey! No offence!) and techies out there. The very WYSIWIG culture feeds the WIIFM² trait that fits the Pavlov³ stimulation profile. The simple advertiser rule is to show you what you will get for instant gratification. It ain't an ad till there is a call for desire that generates quick action on your part. Small wonder why many still substitute imagery and idols for the real God.

Clueless.

Matthew 11

28"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Do you know how? I only know when I am weary and burdened. I know Jesus will give me rest.

¹ What You See Is What You Get

² What's In It For Me

³ The famous salivating dog experiment

²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

I just do not know how to take His yoke upon myself.

Jesus is not even asking me to bear that cross, He is asking me to bear His easy yoke and light burden.

In my most bewildered moments, I ask these questions.

Right now I am asking again.

The ugly part:

I am less the mother I want to be.

I see less of them – all the kids in the house, young and old.

I see more of my bosses and peers online late into the night. Since last November, I knew things weren't getting better when I logged off 3-30 on the same morning as Day 1 of the combined children's Church camp.

I lost my favourite pair of glasses in my favourite casing right after I logged off!

"God Bless This Mess!" - Just don't drop by my house unsolicited!

I see more wrinkles in the last few weeks than in the last few years. I am looking more like my age than before! Soon I will be looking older for my age.

My husband tells me our family is better off with 2 incomes (so I can't exercise a particular option!)

The good part:

I finally have two school-going children. (just 2, and she makes such a big deal, you say) The kids know they are fortunate when we don't send them to tuition classes (!) The kids know the sight of their mother *is* precious. They still think she is cute.

Ryan packed *my* bags for the children's Church camp and had in place everything (and more!) I needed. I didn't even have to ask!

Ryan taught Winston Maths. Both are tearless – God at work indeed!!

At least my office space is spick and span. I wish I could replicate this at home.

Despite the longer hours and more intensive work environment I've had since last October, I am happier. At least some degree of integrity is valued in the new workplace.

After 2 balanced lists of the good and bad, I am still overwhelmed. The culprit is my work. It is mounting and I just do not know where to begin. Countless pitches, proposals, copy, etc. so much to do just to get any small task going in a *timely* fashion.

In fact, today I took leave. I took leave so I can spend a couple of hours

to pray and do my QT. When I told my boss I was taking leave, her first and only response was not why but get that report out and I want it before 2pm.

Today I read Exodus 35-37. It's probably one of the earliest accounts of God using Moses to instruct people how to build His tabernacle. It's evident that many are new to the tasks, but God enabled the willing with His Spirit, skill, ability and knowledge; and empowered others to teach (35:31-35). Yet for some others, God made specialists out of them (36:8; 37:29). In whatever each was entrusted to do, the end goal was to deliver "the tabernacle (as) a unit" (36:13, 18).

If I want to view life in a complicated way, I can only say everything He made me go through is intended to hold some big picture together. If I stay away from my view of life and go back to the Bible, the closest New Testament equivalent of these 3 chapters in Exodus would be 1 Corinthians 12. Maybe it is good for you and I to ask God to help us see our talents the way God wants to use them, rather than to see them the way we'd like to be used.

I have been pondering over a few options in the past months. Every quarter when I teach in Kids' Church (for a month), I can't help but think the piano in Room 4/5 is so underutilized. Poor Kim Keong cannot go on MC on Sundays because our a cappella worship will

turn to a din. I have stopped playing the piano for nearly 20 years. If the children are not too critical, I suppose I can practice hard enough before each worship session. I'm just looking for a good patient music teacher to offer refresher's course for my sight-reading is like shorthand gotten longer.

I have a secret that will no longer be one. My buddy, Hwee Ping, thinks it's off the beaten track but worth exploring. You have heard and watched the Wedding Singer. I am talking about the funeral service translator. Hwee Ping can't help me here because her Cambodian (needed for her missions) is better than her Mandarin. I think funeral services (at the wake or just before cremation) need not be just a ritual to the deceased family members and friends. Chances are many of them are non-English speaking. God's word and hymns is administered for ministering, so language should not be the barrier. Well, at least my Mandarin is more polished than my piano skills.

I got that report out at 6pm, knowing full well there will be a major round of rework. Tomorrow I have to answer to the fact that I did not answer multiple mobile phone calls today. I knew this would happen, so I am going to leave it to God. What else can I do?

By the time you read this, it's probably 3 or 4 weeks after this has happened. ☺

Charlotte Sam

Solitude & Silence

*Summary of Dr Gary Choong's sermon
in Nov 2003 by Leong Kok Hwa*

1. Dr Gary stressed the importance of spending time in Solitude and Silence alone before God.
2. He said attending bible study classes, listening to sermons, even reading the Bible or Daily Bread in MRT are excellent but not enough.
3. Only by spending time in the two 'S' can we know more about God, and allow Him to show us our actual spiritual condition and to grow spiritually. (The two S means spending quiet time frequently in prayer and meditating on/studying His Word, alone with God).
4. He asked if the congregation is willing to spend time in Solitude and Silence before God, in order to grow spiritually.
5. Or instead spend time doing things that pagans usually do.
6. Bear in mind that our Pastor, Cell group leaders and Ministry leaders do not owe any Christian a duty in his own spiritual growth, he said. The primary responsibility rests with each and every Christian alone.
7. Hence, Dr Gary warned the congregation (yes, he spoke with conviction and boldness) that a Christian who tends to rely on pastors or other Christians to help him grow spiritually, as if this is not his own business, and worse, thinks that he can have the best of both Worlds – one hand holding a passport to heaven, the eternal world, and at the same time living his life like a pagan in the present world –

may find in the end that he is not actually owned by God, but by his house, his family, his children and his car.

8. He said Christians must guard their hearts above all else in living their lives, for they are but stewards of God's possessions as His servants, not owners. Christians must be clear who he is when asking the question – am I a steward, a servant, or owner?

*Same sermon as summarised by
Thomas Tan*

Dr. Gary Choong's sermon was indeed very encouraging and challenging. He preached from Proverbs 4:23. Topic: **Guarding Our Hearts**. He challenged us to take stock of our relationship with God as we journey our life to be more Christlike. Why guard our heart? How can we guard our heart at moments when we are down with depression, financial, relationship, health, etc? Where do we get the wisdom?

In verse 4:5-7, if you want wisdom, you must decide to go after it. It takes resolve and determination not to abandon the search once you begin no matter how difficult the road may become. This is not a once-a-lifetime step, but a daily process of choosing between two paths – the wicked (4:14-17) and the good (4:18,19). He pointed out in Proverbs 27:19, a mirror reflects a man's face, but what he is really like is shown by the kind of friends he chooses. In the NT in Mk 7:18,20-23. Do we worry more about what is in our diets than what is in our hearts and minds? Jesus pointed out that

sin actually begins in the attitudes and intentions of the inner person. It is not what goes into our body but what comes out from our mouths. We are not pure because of outward acts -- we become pure on the inside as Christ renews our minds and makes us over in his image.

In v20 he added it is the thought life that pollutes. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts. Our thoughts can pollute us into sin. Allowing our thoughts to dwell on lust, envy, hate, or revenge will lead to evil actions. Don't be made unfit for God. Instead, "think about things that are pure and lovely, and dwell on the fine good things in others.

Think about all you can praise God for and be glad about." (Philippines 4:8) The number one thing is to guard our hearts.

Our affections, our feelings of love and desire dictate to a great extent how we love, because we always find time to do what we enjoy. Solomon tells us to guard our affections, making sure we concentrate on those desires that will keep us on the right path. Make sure your affections are pushing you in the right direction. Wanting to guard our hearts? Do we take time to be still and silent before God? Asking Him to nurture your soul and spirit. V23: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD

A group of students were asked to list what they thought were the present "Seven Wonders of the World". Though there were some disagreements, the following received the most votes:

1. Egypt's Great Pyramids
2. Taj Mahal
3. Grand Canyon
4. Panama Canal
5. Empire State Building
6. St. Peter's Basilica
7. China's Great Wall

While gathering the votes, the teacher noted that one student had not finished her paper yet. So she asked the girl if she was having trouble with her list. The girl replied, "Yes, a little. I couldn't quite make up my mind because there were so many."

The teacher said, "Well, tell us what you have, and maybe we can help."

The girl hesitated, then read, "I think the 'Seven Wonders of the World' are:

- 1. to see**
- 2. to hear**
- 3. to touch**
- 4. to taste**
- 5. to feel**
- 6. to laugh**
- 7. to love."**

The room was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop. The things we overlook as simple and ordinary and that we take for granted are truly wondrous!

January in Pictures

Jan 31 – Poolside gathering at Peter's place. It was a great fellowship time for three cell groups – Abundance, Bethany and Jurong West – to meet and celebrate the Chinese New Year.

Informal get-togethers are now becoming a common feature among brothers and sisters as the church is continuing to engage resources and energy to develop the cell ministries. If you do not yet belong to any cell group, why not make haste to join one?



TOMORROW'S HOPE
Nias Missions

Spiritual Delight

Sign up now and make a decision to seek Solitude and Silence at Port Dickson. There is much space for you to Wander and Wonder. There's also a good speaker and many activities to help you with your spirituality.



For the past year or so, our brother Michael Christian has been traveling in and out of Nias every 2 months or so. From this year onwards, he is able to obtain a visa for a whole year. Come end Feb 2004, he and his family will be going back to Nias and this time will remain there until maybe the end of this year.

For those of you who wish to keep in touch with them, there is but a short time left to do so. Do uphold them in your prayers.



Do you have any testimony that you would like to share with bros. and sis. in Christ? If so, write to: The Editor, The Vine. Emails can be sent to:

mart5003@hotmail.com
mart5003@yahoo.com
jpbislee@starhub.net.sg