

Pastor's Word

Dear Family of God,

As we meditate and walk through the Apostles' Creed in the preaching during the season of Lent, my prayer is that it will help our congregation come to an understanding and appreciation of what we do Sunday after Sunday, reciting the Creed.

The Apostles' Creed did not come directly from the apostles themselves. Nobody can confirm that the apostles pen down the Creed word for word. However it was called the Apostles' Creed because it is in accord with the Apostles' teachings.

The Creed was formulated out of the worship life of the church. During baptisms, the liturgy provides for the pastor to ask the baptismal candidates the following statements:

Q: What do you believe about the Father?

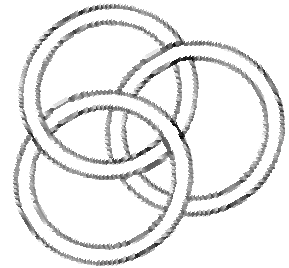
A: I believe...

Q: What do you believe about the Son?

A: I believe...

Q: What do you believe about the Holy Spirit?

A: I believe...



As the candidates for baptism answer according to each of the three parts, water is poured over them or they are immersed into the water; and the following are pronounced over them:

You are baptised in the name of the Father,

*You are baptised in the name of the Son,
You are baptised in the name of the Holy Spirit.*

Lutheran spirituality is best understood by taking part in the worship liturgy of the church as the liturgy expresses the theological understanding of the church towards the crucial events and happenings in a Christian's life.

Baptism is one of these important events and a mile-stone in a Christian's life. I pray that the church will come to see that Christian spirituality need not be something that only concerns the individual and personal dimension of life but it is also transmitted and formed in the life of believers through the act of public worship.

How we behave and live is a part of our spirituality, may it be in private or in the public eye. It is my hope that this Lent season will mean that we will give greater attention to the areas of our prayer, worship and missional life together.

Come, let us pray and worship the Lord.

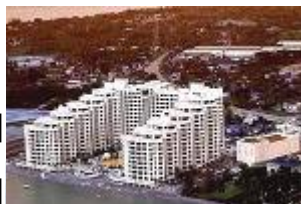
Pastor Samuel Wang

Upcoming Events

LCS Retreat at Riveria Bay Resort,
Malacca from 15 – 18 June 2006

JCC Mission Trip to Nias, Indonesia led
by Jim Lee from 3 – 8 June 2006

LCS Mongolia Mission Trip led by Pastor
Jimmy Khoo from 19 – 27 June 2006



Editor's Word

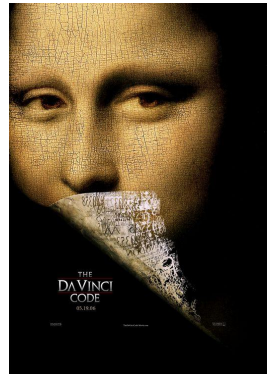
“Students cry foul over sexuality workshop that pushed these messages” (Sunday Times, Jan 29), reporter Jeremy Au Yong said a four-hour workshop of the Family Life Society irked some students. There were a number of letters to The Straits Times decrying the moral element in the sex education program.

However, nearly a month later, in the Feb 26 issue of The Straits Times, there was an article entitled: “Parents Must Address Lax Values”. This is in reference to the report that teens were filming themselves having sex. Another great feature of today’s handphones.

Dear Parents, have you ever wondered if you did not support the Family Life Society’s moral element in the sex education program, you would be accountable for the lax values of your teen? I am not recommending that you rush to pick up your teen’s handphone. Most likely, you would not know how to operate it anyway. However, if you kept quiet while the Family Life Society got a beating in the press then maybe you can be held accountable for your teen’s lax values.

Following all these is the new law to prevent youths below 16 years old from staying out after 11.00 pm. Do you think this law will ever work? Do you think bringing up children is easy? If anyone have expert advice, do write in to The Vine.

Another pair of contrasts in the news is the great debate on the freedom of speech and the Prophet cartoons. After the trouble erupted, many countries denounced the publication of the cartoons which tarnished the Muslim religion. Yet we can expect maybe a world premier of the film, The Da Vinci Code, on 19 May 2006. This film explicitly tarnishes the Christian religion but apparently, no one is objecting to it.



As far as I know, Christians are saying, “Bring it on, we will use this film to open a dialogue with non-Christians to evangelize them.” Two very different reactions from the world about us.

Are you ready then for the fight, not the marching in the streets, but prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have? (1 Peter 3:15) Be prepared my friends.

Martin Cheah

WHY?

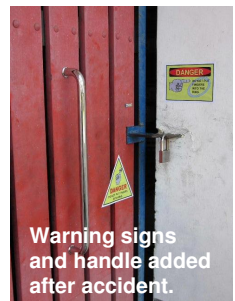


Almost every time I pass the door, two questions cross my mind, “Why was I so stupid?” and “Why did God allow it to happen?”

It all happened on 1st February 2006 at about 5.00 pm. I was on my way out when I met Sarpuan (a storekeeper) who highlighted to me that the production store door was open. He also mentioned that Lee Bin Chong (another storekeeper) was on leave. Since I had already passed by the Empties Store and noticed that it was dark, I assumed that Buang (the store supervisor) had already left and so there was no one to close the door.

A sense of responsibility overwhelmed me and so I decided to push the door shut. There was no handle on the door so I pulled on the ring. Suddenly the door started moving very fast and before I knew it, my finger was trapped between the door and the wall.

At first I thought it was only a flesh wound but when I looked carefully, the tip of the middle finger of my left hand was already hanging loose. I quickly rushed to the A&P store (where Sarpuan works) to get some first aid. They gave me some gauze and cotton wool. I decided I needed some emergency attention so I requested Lai Hwee (a temp staff) to drive me to Alexandra Hospital in my car. Why did I choose to go to Alexandra Hospital when NUH was slightly nearer? This is a story by itself. The day before, some of us from JCC went to visit Ah Pek at the Alexandra Hospital. I remember mentioning to Michelle that I have never been hospitalized before. She mentioned to me that the waiting time in NUH was much longer than at Alexandra. Somehow, this bit of information stuck to my mind and so I decided on Alexandra Hospital.



On the way, Lai Hwee suggested it was nearer to go to a clinic at Jurong West. Hence, we stopped over at W.K Koo & Associates. However, the doctor could not do much but give me a new dressing and a letter to Alexandra Hospital. We then proceeded via AYE to Alexandra Hospital and reached there at around 6.00 pm.

On the way, I prayed that there would not be any traffic jams which are common along this stretch of road and so the traffic was relative light.

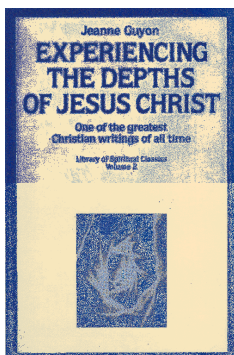
After a check up and getting through the X-Rays, I was finally warded at 8.30 pm. The orthopedic surgeon examined the wound and gave a very depressing opinion. He felt that the section should be amputated. However, I requested for it to be sewn back. I told the doctor I will leave it up to God for the healing. The doctor was also a Christian.

In the operating theatre a nurse asked me if I had anything valuable on me. I told her every part of me was valuable (I realized then that even a tiny part of my finger was valuable.) She laughed. I was awake during the operation and I kept praying that God would guide the surgeon's hands.

After the operation, I was taken back to my ward at about 11.00pm. Pastor Samuel, Joo See and her sister-in-law were there when I came out of the operating theatre and kept me company for some time. I wasn't really sleepy yet.

The next day, the senior doctor who was in charge of orthopedics came around together with my surgeon. Maybe it was just a courtesy call, but when I mentioned that I prayed that God would heal me, he sounded quite interested and wanted to see me 1 week later. He then gave me twenty days of MC as they had to review the reattached section to see if it is viable.

Before I checked out in the afternoon, another patient was wheeled into the bed next to mine. He was a younger man who had his left leg amputated below the knee, due to diabetes. This young man literally has one foot in the grave. As we shared our illnesses, he mentioned that he had a similar experience, a near amputation of his little finger, and it was sewn back successfully. As I compared myself to him, I realized I was in a much better position. I told Joo See that God must have put this young man here to console me and to encourage me about a healing.



In all, I only spend one night and half a day in hospital. With such a short stay, there was hardly enough time for anyone to visit me in hospital. I think James and Susan were the only ones able to visit me in hospital. Actually it was quite embarrassing to wear the paper underwear and baggy pajamas so thank God I was out of there so quickly.

Thus began my twenty days of medical leave. Swee Leong

lent me a book, “Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ” and CS Kong lent me about 10 books. To date, I have only finished reading 4 of the books. I was so slow that Swee Leong let me keep the book. It is an interesting book about a method of meditating and listening to God. In the beginning, I thought that within the 20 days of MC, I would be able to get connected to God in a more intimate relationship. I felt that this accident was a way God was trying to stop me from my busyness to spend time with Him. It is almost two months after my accident and I have still not really discovered why God allowed it to happen. I have still not reached the point where I can clearly hear from God what He wants to tell me. That’s why I asked Swee Leong to let me keep the book a little longer. If you had expected to find a super apostle in me after this incident, I must admit that I am still the struggling saint that I was before. The only thing I can liken myself to Paul is that now I have a thorn in the flesh.

The books CS Kong lent me were selected by myself from his library of books and these were mainly on the themes of why there are sickness and unanswered prayers. Some of the authors were actually undergoing their trials at the time of writing the books and were sharing their struggles and understanding of why there seems to be no answer from God. If I can summarize all their thoughts, one day I may write an article on this topic: “Why God does not heal me now”.

One week after my discharge from the hospital, I went back for the review. Before the doctor removed the bandages, he asked me if I had prayed a lot. I replied that I did. When he looked at the finger, he remarked that it looked fine and he began to remove the stitches although originally it was not meant to be removed so soon. I mentioned to him that I was very worried because the surgeon had recommended amputation. The doctor (the surgeon’s superior) said, “Doctors can be wrong sometimes.”

On the next visit, the doctor looked at the finger and decided that I did not have to see him again as the finger will heal by itself. However, he did have to see me again, when a few weeks later, my finger started to bleed under the fingernail. When I went there, he just extracted the nail like pulling a tooth, of course under local anesthesia. One thing I must thank God for is that throughout the whole time from the beginning to now, I had felt no pain. This in itself must be a miracle of God.



I could see God's Hand of Protection. It could have been worse. It could have been more fingers, or the fingers of my right hand instead of my left hand. He even prepared me for the hospital to visit, the encouragement from people who have faced similar amputations and recovered successfully, like Richard Lee, Alan Soh and the young man in hospital. So if there is a lesson He wants me to learn, I am desperate not to miss it. Is He asking me to back down so that others may rise up, to release my grasp on some of the hats I am wearing so that others will have a chance? To change to an auto transmission car? To forgo the idea of going on missions because my left hand is now not able to carry weight or get dirty? To be more empathetic to others who are undergoing illness? To experience what it is like to stay in hospital? To wait patiently for a full recovery?



Pastor Samuel have been preaching lately about the suffering Christian versus the successful Christian. He calls it the Theology of the Cross versus the Theology of Glory. Sure, I too know that the Christian life is no bed of roses but what is fearful is to be punished and not know it. God does punish, especially His children. What if I am being punished and I keep thinking God is trying to teach me a great spiritual lesson? Wouldn't it be embarrassing when the day comes when I meet Him with all my questions thinking how righteous I am, like Job? I might say, "God what was the lesson You were trying to teach me?" and God answers, "It was just a punishment for sins and you can thank Me, it wasn't worse."

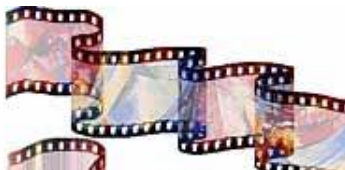
Whatever the lesson, I still haven't put my finger on it. However I have learnt to hold things more lightly (have to, because cannot exert pressure on finger), if the door is open, so be it. Legal entities are more concerned about accident-free statistics, loss of work hours, cost of medical expenses and less concerned about the door being opened. Only friends are concerned about your finger.

Incidentally, this is my 25th year with the company. Is God giving me this as a reminder, even as the company gave me a 25th year Long Service Award?

Do continue to pray for me that my finger nail will grow back properly and that the finger will be fully functional. Pray also for wisdom to understand what is the lesson to learn, if there is one.

Martin Cheah

SEX VIDEO IN THE CITY



“Student In Sex video.... I have done nothing wrong. Everyone does it”, the headlines screamed. The eye-catching headline was the topic of much news coverage and reaction. In the news was Tammy (as she is called on the Net, not her real name) a 17 year old Nanyang Polytechnic student who filmed herself and her boyfriend engaged in the sexual act. She lost her handphone and the video meant for her private viewing was posted on the Net, stirring strong interest and reaction.

“I don’t know why people are making such a big fuss about it everyone does it, even my friends.” Tammy was quoted in response (Straits Times Feb 24 2006). Teachers in other schools say that many teens use phones to capture nude photos and sex clips. (ST Feb. 21, 2006). The Straits Times reported that “many teenagers –girls and buys have been caught in schools with pictures and video clips showing themselves and their partners naked or having sex. The boys were even showing them off to their friends.” Girls were not ashamed of their picture being circulated. One was quoted as being quite proud of it saying, “It was artistic.”

In reaction to the ongoing debate, one writer, a post-graduate theatre studies student responded asking, “Why is something as simple as an amateur sex video such a big deal?” He then labelled Singapore as a seriously sexually repressed country. He finds it “incredible that we are so darn kaypoh (nosy) in this day about two young unmarried people having heterosexual intercourse.” He ends his letter by asking “Maybe, just maybe we will ask ourselves why we are so kaypoh when it comes to sex.”

The debate is centred on the rightness or wrongness of recording the sexual act. “It was just for fun – we didn’t intend to be porn stars.... Every one is doing it” Tammy was quoted as saying. The issue of whether it was morally right for two young unmarried people to be engaged in sex was glossed over. One writer even said, “What many had a problem with was not the fact that she engaged in sexual behaviour but rather the fact that she took a video clip of it.” Is this the real problem or is it just a sad reflection of the state of our thinking about pre-marital sex. It is OK so long as nobody finds out.

From the news coverage, it is apparent that making of sex video is pervasive if not fashionable. Some have attributed this to the easy accessibility and affordability of video recording. I think this is missing the root of the problem. The tool in this case the hand phone is neutral, it can be abused. The issue is the underlying value. The question to ask is why are teens engaging in promiscuous and illicit

sex? Whether they record it or not is secondary though it does reflect a kind of warped voyeurism.

Some point to parents and teachers not teaching and instilling right moral values in their children. We are already on this slippery slope. The blogging community with its thirst for scandal and sex is not helping. The media glamorises loose



morals and sexual liberties – the second series of “Desperate Housewives” an American sitcom was advertised in its trailer as being “more sinful than the first series.” Can you imagine the selling point was the fact that it was more sinful? Doesn’t it remind you of Sodom and Gomorrah? “Brokeback

Mountain” which won numerous awards essentially glamorises homosexuality – two grown man hugging and intimately kissing each other. Critics call what is lewd artistic. Where there is a loss of morals, there is a loss of shame. People can even pride themselves in acts that they should be ashamed of.



The Christian response

The Bible teaches that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 3:16). We are instructed to “offer our body as a living sacrifice.” (Rom 12:1). We must remember that we are created in the image of God (Imago Dei). The body is part of this Imago Dei – the vehicle for us to reflect the image and likeness of God.

What about our sexuality? It is part of God’s design. Sex is a good gift; God did not mean for man and woman to be alone but created them so that they could engage soul to soul and flesh to flesh. The word of God states, “A man will leave his father and mother and will be united with his wife and they will become one flesh.” (Gen 2:24). The “one flesh” union is reserved for the man and his wife. Our sexuality helps us respond to our incompleteness as human beings and find fuller meaning in intimacy. How unfortunate it would be if the sexual union is just to fulfill an urge for sexual release. We would be deprived of the greater satisfaction and deep emotional connection. Marriage is the most holy place for sexual union. Why? The permanence of a covenant commitment establishes a solid foundation for the most intimate of relationship. In marriage one has the profound ability to share themselves – the focus of love is mutual, enabling the writer to exclaim, “I am my beloved and my beloved is mine” (Song of Songs). There is a mutual giving and receiving, the married couple open up to each other emotionally and physically.

Having established that sexuality is to be exercised within the context of covenant –an unconditional commitment to a personal relationship, this good gift of sexuality can be perverted giving rise to a false expression of sexual behaviour. In the Bible the word “porneia” translated “fornication” or “immorality” has been interpreted as sex outside marriage. Fornication has been defined as “depersonalised body centred sex.”

In today’s society people of all ages are bombarded daily with explicit sexual stimuli – the media often espousing pre-marital sex. The Biblical instruction calls for abstinence – i.e. to sex outside of marriage. Paul warns, “*Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,* ¹⁰ *nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*” (1 Cor 6:9). Fornicators mentioned together with idolaters, thieves and swindlers – the sin is serious. In the ensuing passage, 1 Cor 6: 12- 20, Paul emphasizes that the body is the Lord ending with this reminder in v 20.– “*For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*”

Let us be wise to heed the word of God, sex outside of marriage is indeed a big deal.

Some words from a Counsellor

Carol Balhetchet, a teen counselor, offers the following advice:

Loving yourself means taking better care and respecting your most important asset you have your heart and your body.

Taking naked photos of yourself may get attention from your friends but what sort of friends are you hoping to find?

Boys may think you are cheap
Girls may think that you are a tramp

If you are looking for fame – is this how you want to be known? Celebrity status is when others look up to you and want to be like you and respect your talent or special skill. You call this talent?

Carol advises “Girl, it is not cool”

Tan Swee Leong

FIRST, The Bible Code; NOW, The Da Vinci Code

FIRST, there was *The Bible Code*, written by Michael Drosnin. It became a number-one best seller as the world was caught up in frenzy by its claim about the existence of “a Bible beneath the Bible”, based on a world-shaking “scientific discovery” of *Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis* published in a U.S. scholarly journal, *Statistical Science*. Here is one particular statement in the book:

*“The predictions in the Bible code seem to fulfill the open prophecy of the Bible, and the horror is now given a face and a time and a place – a nuclear war, **perhaps** by the year 2000 or 2006, the real Armageddon, **perhaps** within a decade.” – emphases mine.*

The nuclear war did not happen in 2000 – blame not the author because he only claimed a possibility (“perhaps”). If it did occur, one might credit him for his prescience.

Will the nuclear war happen this year? **Perhaps**. In the event of it happening, thanks to Drosnin for having warned us; if it doesn’t materialize, no fault ought to lie at his feet since he was honest enough to qualify his ‘prediction’ with the possibility of non-happening. Actually, he was as smart as ordinary fortune tellers who always launch their predictions with plentiful caveats of “*If ... otherwise ...*” or “*If not ... then ...*” – fail-safe! Of course, they make money out of those who choose to believe the fortune telling. Similarly, Drosnin was able to laugh his way to the bank for the great sale of his revelation!

If you were one of those who were agitated much by *The Bible Code*, I believe that your fever should have subsided. After all, the scientific journal that published the *ELS* paper has now published a new and very detailed paper debunking thoroughly the Bible Code claims. (<http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/StatSci/>) So with the fading of the Bible Code, we have to move on to something else (another Code) to whet our appetite for thrills.

NOW, we have the *Da Vinci Code*, written by Dan Brown. It is a book very much thicker than Drosnin’s book. A blurb on its back cover reads:

'Wow ... Blockbuster perfection ... An exhilaratingly brainy thriller. Not since the advent of Harry Potter has an author so flagrantly delighted in leading readers on a breathless chase'

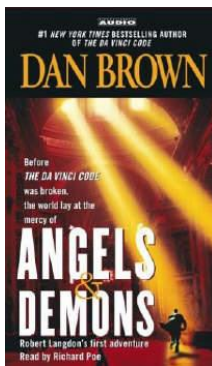
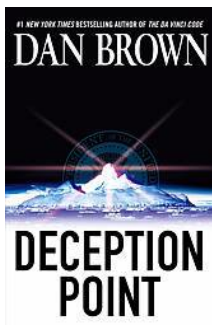
NEW YORK TIMES

Exhilarating? Possibly, to any fiction junkie who survives on a regular diet of intrigue, mystery and make-believe. Brainy? It is in fact a no-brainer for any fiction writer to attempt putting in such standard ingredients of thrill (conspiracy, whodunit's, fantasy, etc.) to capture imaginations – only that while many other wannabe writers failed, Dan Brown succeeded in his storybook effort.

If the book is just fiction, and held by readers as such, so be it. However, this particular book has raised much ire in the Christian community because it has stirred up much interest and controversy over the factual basis that it has been claimed to possess. If the claim of factual basis is maintained by the author, then I would say that the book is flagrantly delighting readers with flagrant inaccuracies – or simply ignorant errors as regards the author's knowledge of Christian and Jewish historical facts. He wasn't even able to get his date right on the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls. He was also glaringly mistaken in ascribing Christian records to these scrolls, which were incontrovertibly documents belonging to the Jewish (pre-Christian) era. Since the Internet is overflowing with criticisms of the book's blunders, I need not point out one by one all the errors that flagrantly show up the author's lack of learning on Christianity facts – or simply his lack of diligence to get his facts right before rushing off his manuscript to the publisher. You should have no problem searching the Internet to be enlightened. You may surf to www.jesusdecoded.com, a website launched by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to read about the “riot of laughable errors and serious misstatements” page after page in the *Da Vinci Code*.

Regarding any factual basis, I need help to clear my confusion. What does a fictional work based on fact mean? Does it mean that the resulting work is part fact and part fiction? How is the reader to separate the two? Would it be more relevant for it to be called a work of facts based on fiction? Or would Brown be so helpful as to stand out to clarify for readers' sake which are the claims in his book for readers to interpret as truth and which as invented story? Or do we interpret that Brown himself is unsure and confused, and hence he presents for the world to see all his bumbles with the mix-up of fact and fiction? Maybe it is his intention to create the blur and court a controversy as a strategy to heat up demand for the novel. In the words of Robert Crais in another blurb on the back cover of the book, “Dan Brown has built a world that is rich in fascinating detail.” (Note that he “has built” – the whole *Da Vinci Code* is a resourceful construction!) To me,

the world Brown has built is very much an image of the world we live in, where truth and falsehood (fact and fiction) are all jumbled to become a blur, and people who dwell in the world argue over controversies of what is right and what is wrong. Unfortunately for Brown, his thrilling novel has not only stirred a controversy over its conspiracy theory claim, but also raised a plagiarism controversy that is now before a court in London (Straits Times, 9th March).



Actually, Dan Brown is an awesome writer of the thriller genre, very skilled with the pen in bringing fiction to life. *DECEPTION POINT* and *Angels & Demons* are two other exciting novels by the same author:

- *DECEPTION POINT* is about scientific trickery, with NASA and the U.S. President being drawn into the plot. About the characters in the book fleeing for their lives, a blurb behind the book says, “The truth, they will learn, is the most

shocking deception of all.” It is an attestation to the author’s excellence in veiling truth and deception in the build-up to a climax so that readers’ suspense is as thoroughly raised as the plot’s characters are confused about what to believe.

- *Angels & Demons* is about an ancient secret brotherhood and a plot to bomb the Vatican with anti-matter. An advertisement for the book reads, “Before the *Da Vinci Code* was broken, the world lay at the mercy of Angels & Demons ...”

You get the idea what there is about the astute storyteller that draws his fans to his books and the kind of imaginations that he milks fully to fulfill his profession as a thriller author. With his impressive grasp of readers’ psychology to give them the kicks that they look for, the *Da Vinci Code* is merely one of the number of his novels of the genre meant to sell. Certainly, all the heat generated by the *Da Vinci Code* is helpful to sale but will one day subside, just like the Bible Code had its chance to mesmerize the world for a season. If you are agitated by the *Da Vinci Code* now as the heat wave is on the high, as you were by the other *Code*, just tell yourself that you don’t have to be hypnotized by it. Just treat it as pulp fiction.

John Lee

Vocal on vocation

by Charlotte Sam

Feminism has seen fairer days over the last decade.

I remember the days when I was a rookie programmer. I had to make tea and kopi for the team leader who was balding at 28. He was nicknamed “spud”. Many years on, I have moved on to a profession dominated by women. I have also joined a growing group of working moms who play an active part to ensure their school-going children have a fighting chance with their educators.

Many schools thrive on an active parent support group or PSG. However, most PSG activities are run during school hours and I cannot make meaningful contribution. Through Ryan and his schoolmates, as well as a small public relations industry, I became acquainted with some working moms and started our own monthly fellowship. It is only coincidental that most of us moms work for the media, one way or another.

Power in vocation

I have set the context for you so you will also understand that the media is a powerful channel. It can make or wreck a person’s credibility. If used willfully, it can work to one’s gains and another’s losses. Either way, this can be helped by having the correct connections, such as familiarity with powerful government servants.

Let me tell you one drama that happened to one my kids. A school teacher was taken to task when her command of English fell short of what was expected of the profession. Though we all agreed that the teacher was problematic, only one mother took upon herself to capture all evidence (with scans, photos) in writing. This was sent to all relevant heads of the school and the Education Ministry. In the mother’s words: “They know who I work for, so they should respond before this gets out to the media.” The mother is a very senior newsmaker.

Alas, the complaint fell on deaf ears for 10 days. The mother took care to send a reminder to all original email recipients, but this time, she included the dear Minister.

This is not a gossip column and I will not disclose the full details of the outcome. All I can say is it did not serve the teacher any good. She had been done in, and the school was certainly monitored more closely than before. Although I had my brushes with this teacher who had an attitude problem, I felt very sorry for what had happened to her and her vocation as a teacher.

While the other mothers were ranting on the fate of the teacher, I felt it was a case of abusing the power of our vocation. In the name of standing up for what is right, the mother has broken someone in the process. A Christian’s vocation is to build,

not to run down. Of course I do not advocate the support of drug lords and similar vocations (or are they??)

Ephesians 4: 25

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold. 28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, **that he may have something to share with those in need.**

A vocation, a vineyard

On first look, the passage below looks irrelevant to the rest of the article. I read this one morning but felt a great deal for it.

Deuteronomy 20:

5 The officers shall say to the army: "Has anyone built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it. **6 Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it.** 7 Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her." 8 Then the officers shall add, "Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too." 9 When the officers have finished speaking to the army, they shall appoint commanders over it.

Folks, have you worked too hard lately trying to make more and achieve more? Has something been missed or left behind? Have memories of you faded because of your absence? Have those who once needed you gradually lessened their dependence on you? This passage is not about smelling the roses, it is about setting priorities. Do not you're your priorities preside over you. That having said, the "vineyard" could well refer to your career that you have spent a good time and bulldozed your way to make it happen. Have you overlooked other vineyards that need equal tending (if not more)? It's all relative. In pure economics, who will get to enjoy your various vineyards when you return to dust?

If you believe that a vocation is not restricted to your official nine-to-five calling, you will realize that you hold different vocations 24x7, depending on your places of calling. You have been taken to task – to multi-task. It becomes even more important that you do not become overcome by your priorities.

Till the next time ... and thank you for kind souls who remind me month after month to complete my piece for this space.Ω

Living a full life in our vocations

When news of the demise of Mr S. Rajaratnam came, I wasn't surprised. Prior to that, I had already known that he had been waving a long goodbye to his life for some years because of Alzheimer's disease. In those years, he was not able to recognize anybody and needed help even for feeding. I had felt awful at the thought of how, by a condition beyond human control, a person famed for his eloquence in speech and writing could descend to the state of speechlessness and total dependency on 24h care in just a few years after altruistically retiring from his political career to give way to new blood. He had given most of his life in selfless service as a founding father of Singapore. He was the one who penned our national pledge ("We the citizens of Singapore ... regardless of race, language or religion ...") and with personal heartfelt conviction laid the foundation of our peaceful multiracialism – the envy of many countries that frequently face ethnic strife.

Like Mr Goh Keng Swee and Mr Toh Chin Chye, Mr Rajaratnam retired from politics honorably and altruistically in giving way to new blood as was right in the interest of the nation. Instead of retiring, he could have served some years more. Unfortunately, only after his death did our younger generation come to know him and his legacy. I do not know what Mr Goh Keng Swee and Mr Toh Chin Chye have been doing after their own retirement, but I do know them as the nation's founding fathers too who contributed a great lot selflessly, together with our distinguished MM Lee Kuan Yew. Without these people, we would not have the Singapore of today. They deserve Singaporeans' great tribute any time. However, as is the usual practice, they will be eulogized only after they have fully spent their life.

Eulogies are good in reminding us of the worthy examples of those who have run before us, irrespective of whether they had led an illustrious or average life. Service to the country, faithfulness to the family, resilience in tribulations, equanimity when under stress, ... We do from time to time hear eulogies about ordinary and not-so-ordinary people. Do we imbibe useful lessons or just let them go into one ear and come out of another?

One of the messages I get from eulogies is that although life in this world is short, those who have lived out their finite existence usefully, meaningfully and fully not for themselves but for their neighbours (family, colleagues, associates, people around them) have not lived their life in vain. This is a valid statement from the Christian standpoint too, for the Bible tells us that the neighbour is

always more important than the self, for all commandments of God are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Rom. 13:9)

“God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.” (Mk 12:32-33)

We can love only when we are living, not after that. So while we are now living, what do we do to live out our lives well in the different vocations that God has placed us in? (Remember the lessons on the Doctrine of Vocation that we are learning in our CGs?)

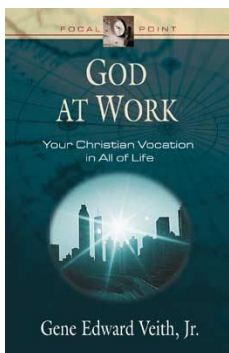
God bestows vocations on different people – whether they are God-believers or not – so that their different capacities combine to serve humanity. The word “vocation” comes from a Latin word that means “calling”. Just as God “gives food to every creature,” so He bestows blessings upon all people, who then serve as channels of His love that endures forever. (Ps 136:25) In other words, all men regardless of their professed faiths are equal in having their unique capacities to be useful in the service of mankind through the complex web of human beings playing their parts in nations’ economic, political (governing) and social systems. Likewise, it is regardless of the state of our faith in God that we have a lot to learn from fellow beings’ good examples in their discharge of their vocations of marriage, parenthood, career, volunteer work, etc.

Life is short. It is sooner or later that we have to meet our Maker. So, if death is a constant that everybody has to face, what is there to fear it? A chorus we often sing reminds us, “I don’t know about tomorrow, I just live from day to day ...” As we live from day to day, we sometimes forget what is important and what is not. We work for our own sake (earn a living or just satisfy interests), we chase dreams (building castles in the air), we play politics at work and anywhere (to play others out and in the end play ourselves into corners) and so on. Do any of these that we do earn us future credits in heaven? Do the ways that we deal with our busyness in life reflect on our understanding of the doctrine of vocation whereby we seek to avail ourselves not for ourselves but to fulfill God’s purpose for us to be the means for delivering his blessings to fellow beings? From cradle to grave ... from grave to beyond ... if we see death as just a point along a journey, we ought to be able to face it squarely without fear if we have lived the preceding part of our life fully in our positive engagement with our vocations. (Not merely jobs and duties, but what God does through us.) Understanding this

of course means that we understand God at work and we maintain the right relationship with Him.

We can experience “God with us” through our vocations. Each vocation is, as what Martin Luther terms, “a mask of God”. Apart from God using us as channels for his love to permeate the human race, our bodies are nothing but dust from the ground, to where we will return. (Gen. 3:19) Yet, God has breathed into us life (Gen. 2:7) and by the doctrine of vocation, He is with us all the time and everywhere. God does not want us to live in fear of death. He wants us to understand that He was there when we were dust, He is with us when we are breathing life, and He will forever be with us when it is time for us to go where He will take us to.

Daily, we read news of deaths. Likely, one day, our own death will be in the news or the obituary. There is nothing morbid about this statement. It is just a fact of life; or rather, a fact of death. Whether we die young or old, our life compared to eternity is just a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (James 4:14) If God can breathe life into dust, surely He can take it away; but we cannot predict the time when He declares, “Well, good child, you have fulfilled my purpose well in your vocations. It is time for me to usher you into one of the many mansions I have prepared for you in my house.” The question for us to ask is not “When?” but “Am I ready all the time, anytime?”



John Lee

*P.S. – If you who want to learn more about the Doctrine of Vocation, you should faithfully attend your regular CG meetings. The CGs are presently using the book **GOD AT WORK Your Christian Vocation in All of Life** by Gene Edward Veith, Jr. You may order a copy through your shepherd.*

Eulogy:

On January 12, Jack McAlister was finally given the opportunity to meet the many souls saved through the ministry he founded, now called Every Home for Christ. Jack passed into the presence of the Lord.....

Like Raja and Jack, are you willing to make the sacrifice so that your life may be counted as worth the living?

Bible Study

Haggai 1:

²This is what the LORD Almighty says: "These people say, 'The time has not yet come for the LORD's house to be built.'"

³ Then the word of the LORD came through the prophet Haggai: ⁴ "Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?"

⁵ Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁶ You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it."

⁷ This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Give careful thought to your ways. ⁸ Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored," says the LORD. ⁹ "You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?" declares the LORD Almighty. "Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house."

I was reading Haggai chapter 1 yesterday and I thought I would share this with you because not many people read Haggai. This book has only 2 chapters and they are sub-titled:

1. A Call to Build the House of the Lord
2. The Promised Glory of the New House

The notes to my Bible say that when the people give priority to God and his house, they are blessed rather than cursed.

Lessons from Haggai

- The work of the Lord should never be procrastinated (1:2)
- Misplaced priorities hinder the work of God (1:4,9)
- The goal of God's work is His glory and pleasure. (1:8)
- God sometimes uses natural disasters for spiritual discipline (1:6)

Are there any commands to obey? Any promises to claim? Let the Word of God speak to your heart. Give careful thought to the verses above.

Dear Praying friends,

Greetings to you.

Jer. 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."



We praise the Lord that in spite of blindness, He still have wonderful plans for us, and we can put our hope in Him and trust that He will give us a future. I thank God that He did not have just one plan for us to experience blindness, but He has many good plans for our lives.

On 25 Feb. David Chan came to our fellowship meeting and received salvation. Please pray that he will be diligent to seek the Lord with all his heart, and discover the plans that the Lord has for him.

Please pray for Keong Hoe, who has recently lost his sight, that he too will be willing to join us in seeking the Lord and believe that in Christ, he can still have a hope and a future.

We would like to bring some young people for an outing on 1st April. Please pray that the Lord will bless us with fine weather and send us the help we need. Pray also for the Lord's protection upon all the participants.

We will be organizing a youth camp for the youngsters at the end of May. Please pray for the Lord's provision and blessing upon our planning.

Last year we had a small deficit of \$15,392.82. Our budget for this year is \$250,000.00. Please pray with us that the Lord will supply all our financial needs.

Finally, we thank you for your support and partnership. May the Lord prosper you.

Your sister in the Lord

Cheong Cheng Choo
Gospel Mission to the Blind Ltd
8 Lorong 27A Geylang
#02-06 Guilin Building,
Singapore 388106
Tel: 67486371/67414490

