

Jurong Christian Church

The Vine Committee

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# The Vine

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## EDITOR'S WORD

Next month is JCC Missions Month and the Mission Committee has laid out many exhibits, invited mission speakers and will be conducting training to try and generate an interest in the congregation for Missions.

Is there a need to generate interest? Shouldn't the people be self-motivated? Aren't they fearful of facing Jesus on the last day and saying to Him, "Sorry, we thought the Great Commission was optional."

Most people do not need to be encouraged to earn money but many have to be cajoled to give money. A brother shared with me that if he had a million dollars in the bank he would be able to rest secured. My financial adviser says the same thing to me. I cannot afford to retire without X dollars in my retirement fund. May I suggest to you that we have put our trust in money and we serve money instead of God.

When called to go for mission trips, what is the most common excuse, mine as well, "Sorry, cannot take leave from work." Most of us cannot take leave from Money work to do God's

work. So who are the ones who can go for missions? Obviously, the ones who are not working for money.

To be sensible, I must admit that we all have to work for a living. However in the papers recently, there was a minor issue raised about child care centers which do not open late enough so that parents can continue working late into the night and come pick up their children at some late hour. Have we lost our sense of balance? We work for the sake of the children which we do not have the time to spend with. My bosses would rather we work 24/7 if it were possible and without incurring overtime.

Has Mammon really got so much control over us that we cannot let go? Money is not just a means of exchange, it has a name. So choose you this day whom you would serve!

Consider my request that you pen down your personal testimony so that it may be shared with pre-Christians for the glory of God. Are you too busy to write a story that no one can write for you but yourself? What's occupying all your time?

*Martin Cheah*

# Why do Christians worry?

In my fellowship conversation with a fellow JCC member one recent Sunday after the Service, I was asked a rather perplexing but pertinent question “Why do many Christians still tend to worry a lot since they say they believe in an Almighty God who loves and cares for them?”

Is it due to lack of faith? Is it due to personality? Is it due to lack of understanding? Is it a sin to worry? What can be done about it? This brother confessed that he is one of those who worry a lot too. I salute him for his frankness. To be honest, I tend to worry a lot myself. Worry about the church, worry about finance, worry about health, worry about wife and children, worry about safety, and so on. In fact, one day when I was still pastoring JCC, this same member came up to me and said, “Pastor, why do you always seem to look so worried and with a long face, huh? How come we seldom see you with a smile?” I was jolted by his remark but it spoke volumes to me.

Firstly, I should say upfront that **it is not pleasing to God that we worry a lot**. There is an abundance of scriptures that exhorts us NOT to worry but to trust God – Philippians 4:4-9, Matthew 6:25-34, Romans 8. In Lutheran theology, sin is often said to be the lack of fear, trust and love of God. Worry is suggestive of a lack of trust in God, and is therefore considered sinful. Those of us who

worry a lot tend to rationalize by saying “we are born like that,” “it is in our disposition” or thinking deceptively that we are just more serious, intense and concerned, not like others who take things lightly, and so on. But at the end of the day, worry is never a right thing for a Christian to do. May I suggest that *Kiasuism* may be a manifestation of this worry mentality?

Secondly, when we worry a lot, it **reflects badly on our relationship with God and is a bad testimony as well**. One Christian brother related how he was stunned while out driving with his good friend who is an unbeliever. While in the car, his friend confessed to him the reason why he is still not a Christian, “It is because of you.” His friend knows that he has a lot of troubles in life and is always worried about all these things. So what difference does it make to believe in Jesus? Quite a stunner that was. Even Martin Luther one day had a nasty surprise when he went to his parish church sanctuary and saw a black draped coffin lying there. The story has it that it was planted there by his wife Katherine Von Bora. When he asked her why, she replied, “The way you behave, it looks as if God is dead.” Luther apparently got the point. My dear wife has on many occasions reminded me of this too.

Thirdly, we need to recognize that many of us who are sinful by nature

are **not immune to worry and need to do something about it**. Even the “Patriarch of faith”, Abraham, worried that when he journeyed through the land, the foreign king Abimelech would be eyeing his lovely wife Sarah and might get rid of him to lay his hands on her. In his undue worries he resorted to telling a lie that Sarah was his sister to save his own skin (Genesis 20). Sure enough it took place and Abraham was rebuked by the king who was warned and found out the truth from God Himself.

David, the man after God’s heart, in his worries once even feigned madness to avoid trouble with a pagan king, Achish of Gath (1 Samuel 21:12-14). Elijah the prophet fled for his life in the wilderness just after his victorious encounter with the false prophets of Baal. He was worried that the evil Jezebel would hunt him down like a rat. However, God fed him by the ravens and spoke to him in a small still voice amidst earth-shaking phenomena (1 Kings 17, 19). The twelve disciples of Jesus too had their fair share of worries. One day, while doing a head count, they realized, “Oops! We have more than five thousand people here but only five loaves of bread and two fish!” They started to worry, and Jesus had to teach them a lesson in faith through a miracle. (Luke 9:10-17).

What can be done about worry? As an antidote to worry, the Apostle Paul exhorts us to do two things:

1. To pray - *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* Philipians 4:6

2. To focus our mind more on the things from above than on the troubles below – *“whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.”* Philipians 4:8.

Jesus teaches us to *“... seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”* Matthew 6:33-34.

**So why do Christians worry?** The above offer some clues – **lack of trusting prayer, lack of thinking about what is good and failure to seek God’s kingdom and righteousness as first priorities in life**. The result is no peace; consequently, we worry.

One cannot also help but notice that the disciples were at first generally a fearful lot. A lack of understanding of God’s will, and of faith and trust, was evident. Just like many of us. But

things changed later as recorded in Acts chapter 2 onwards when the Holy Spirit came upon them and they were transformed significantly (although not perfectly) – as shown by Peter’s rebuke by Paul for his hypocritical behavior in the Council at Jerusalem, compromising the gospel and letting the Judaizers have their way. (Galatians 2:11-12) He feared men rather than God. **The empowerment of the Holy Spirit** in their lives were however unmistakable. They generally became no longer a timid and fearful lot, but could even sing and rejoice in the Lord when beaten and confined in jail cells. So here may lie another key: We worry because we do not let ourselves be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

While we cannot see the Holy Spirit, we know that the Spirit is given to us when we believe in Christ (Eph 1:13-14, 1 Cor. 3:16). To be empowered means living the Christ-directed life, allowing the Holy Spirit unhindered control. Very often, Christians resist right actions and allow themselves to be controlled by sinful nature instead of by the Spirit even though the Spirit indwells them. (See Rom 8:9.) How can they be empowered then?\*

*(\*When we feel not empowered does not mean that there is no empowerment available to us. For example, a policeman with a gun is empowered to act to apprehend a*

*robber but he chooses to turn a blind eye to the robbery because of any reason best known to him. In like manner, we have the availability of empowerment by the Holy Spirit in us but the empowerment is absent because we pretend that He is non-existent or sear our conscience to become insensitive to His presence.)*

Jesus’ life is also instructive. He exhibits great trust in the Father and does not worry unnecessarily. This is because He walks very closely with the Father, prays often and always seeks to do the Father’s will in His life. **How closely we know and walk with God the Father and pray may have implications on why we tend to worry.**

May God help us to worry less and trust Him more. Further in-depth study, meditation and understanding of the Lutheran Theology of the Cross may also be helpful. From it we can learn how God reveals Himself to us even in sufferings, but His Gospel promises are available to us by grace through faith alone. We need to trust and not worry. If you have other helpful thoughts on this issue, please do write and give it to the editors of the Vine to share with all.

“Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Psalm 73:25-26. Amen.

***Pastor Martin Yee***

# THE GIRAFFE EXPERIENCE

By Samuel Tay

## **Before I went....**

My idea of the Giraffe before I went was that it would be a youth leaders' equipping programme. I was expecting the focus to be on ministry skills workshops and lecture-style teachings. I was also looking forward to the teachings on OT /NT and missions as these are areas I would like to gain more understanding.

It would also be a good time for me to take a break from the routines of a student and serving in the ministry in Singapore. I enjoy talking to people from another culture (knowing that there will be Indonesians and Aussies) and love to see the differences in perspectives due to the different upbringing and environment.

## **Giraffe for me...**

Giraffe is focused very much on community life and Christian living. A large part of the program is on personal growth and the Christian faith.

The teaching sessions are structured around discussions and reflections. I find that this style of learning appeals very much to me, unlike the Singapore type lecture-style. It allows me to think deeper, to debate with ideas and to hear from people with very different perspectives, sometimes due to cultural differences. And because of this learning style, the lesson drawn from it stays with me even after I came back from Singapore. It provides me a deeper motivation to challenge myself in my Christian walk. My personal challenges include personal character growth, faith steps, my relation to my "neighbours" and a few more others. It also provides me the stimulus for deeper objective questioning on areas of practical Christian living.

The opportunity to hear from different speakers in the camp also broadens my horizon. Many of the speakers and leaders come from different walks of life (pastor, counselor, social worker, historian, the jobless, etc). It is not so much their teaching of concepts that rubs onto me, but rather the way they seek to translate what they are teaching into their own lives. Many of them shared from personal experiences and they are not afraid to present their struggles.

The focus on community life also helps develop me into an all-rounded person. I am an introverted person and would normally not seek very much after being in a community. By living in togetherness and interacting with people from different cultures (even sleeping in the same cabin), I am confronted with the reality of

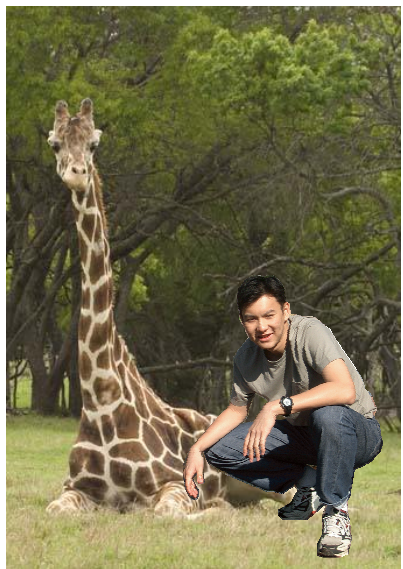
community life like that mentioned in the book of Acts. Not only do we learn together at teaching sessions, we have our meals, take the Lord's Supper, go for weekend outings, play games, sing songs and so much more together. We share with sincerity and openness in small groups and as prayer partners. Many deep friendships were made over the dinner table, in small groups, in discussions, in activities and outings over the 5 weeks.

For many of us from different cultures (Aussies, Indonesian, Singaporean), living together is a challenge. What we may at first find as interesting idiosyncrasies of another person may rebound on us as we get more familiar with each other. Learning how to serve and consider others better than ourselves become real when 3 very different cultures come together. Our concept of time, the way we handle work/assignments/duties, the way we eat, frequency of showering and even the way we wash dishes can be things that challenge our communication with each other. (Talk about communicating in our church, huh).

We grew, we learned, we laughed, we cried, we shared, we served.... The community of the Acts church was brought into my life.

### **Since I am back....**

As I come back from Giraffe, I have been seeking to translate what I have experienced into my normal life. I have been questioning myself on what it means for me to be a Christian and follow Christ, and challenging myself to live in the shoes of Jesus. The struggle to live our lives as followers of Christ will always be a challenge. Jesus mentioned the cost of following him in the Scriptures. I am thankful that I still have encouragements from my Giraffe friends thru emails, internet messaging, phone calls. Each of us is striving to follow Jesus in a radically ordinary way that we might be little change agents in our community. I see Giraffe



becoming a framework, a paradigm in my life, where I keep repainting and redefining what Jesus means to me, embracing Christianity becoming more and more relevant to me. And I hope as I walk on in this area, my life may rub off onto my peers and to those young people with whom I am serving in church.

## LOVE IS

*(A portrait that I saw in Riyala)*

*Written in faith and love for those who would bother to take a few moments of their time to listen to my story...*



## WELCOME TO THE WORLD OF GIRAFFE

By Mervyn Lee

“Welcome to the World of Giraffe.”

A safe world that is shut off from the harsh realities of the outside world. An environment that is away from the hustle and bustle of city life – a lush paradise hidden in the outback of Australian soil. A perfect community (or almost) where brothers and sisters in Christ **LOVE** and serve each other with the love of our Lord, all for the purpose of preparing Christians to engage with “the wilderness of the savanna” – the real world.

### THE GIRAFFE EXPERIENCE

Here's in point form the definition of the essence of Giraffe by our community leaders:

- Community Journeying together to develop God's people for His ministry
- Develop individual's relationship with God, others and self
- Train leaders (with innate qualities, not just positional ones) in serving Jesus with the one's own gifting

### WHAT MADE GIRAFFE UNIQUE

More in point form to describe what made Giraffe special:

- Large financial, material, moral and prayer support from the hosting country
- Dedicated community leaders who are willing to pour out their time and love
- Small, safe and close-knitted community living together
- Inter-cultural exchange

- Environment that encourages creative, artistic and free-form use of expressions
- **LOVE**

### **TRANSFORMING LIVES, SHAPING DESTINIES**

RE speaks everything about the time spent in Giraffe. I would choose to RE-live that experience if I had a chance. RElationships were formed. Minds were REnewed. Guilt and shame were REMoved. Peace and Joy were REinstated. Precious memories would REMain and be REMembered.

Three REs would be a summary of what I've learned and been convicted. Three REs would be what shapes my plans. Three REs will REsult in what I am about to do.

### **REDEFINE**

One meaning of the word “define” is to describe the nature or essential qualities of an object or subject. Thus, to “redefine” would be to reexamine the basic characteristics of the object or subject. To put it in a standard less favorable to Oxford but highly comprehensible to the masses (which would have done Martin Luther proud), to redefine is to learn and relearn, to explore and re-explore, to discover and re-discover. To question isn't sufficient, but to question objectively is the key that leads to renewing of the mind.

The Christian faith tradition is filled with change and growth and transformation. Jesus took part in this process by calling people to rethink faith and the Bible and hope and love and everything else, and by inviting them into the endless process of working out how to live as God created us to live. (Extract from “Velvet Elvis” by Rob Bell)

I guess Martin Luther would have been an advocate of this cause, being a role model himself. He would not sit back and enjoy his priesthood or high position quietly. On the contrary, he put his life at risk to challenge the Catholic Church of his time. He sought to stand upon the truth – God's Word. So Martin Luther led the revolution through raising a series of questions, which led to the most important thing – thousands and thousands of people connecting with God in ways they had not before. We as Christians need to be relevant to today's world, to today's people, by standing on the truth like what Martin Luther did.

“We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.” – 1 Corinthians 8:1-3. In our questioning, let us not destroy our brothers by our knowledge. In most cases, I find the most difficult thing to do is to forgo knowledge for love, which has been the most humble act of love for me, even if it is a struggle. Back to the point, there is a need to re-examine all about ourselves out of **LOVE** and in faith (Proverbs 3:3).



## **RESTORE**

Jesus came to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 2:18, 19).

Freedom. Justice. Mercy. These are what the world cries out for today. These are what Jesus came to do. And He did so through a very realistic and definite approach.

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

"Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"

Then, we will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets of Dwellings. (Isaiah 58:12)

"It is one thing to be forgiven; it is another thing to become more and more and more and more the person God made us to be... Salvation is the entire universe being brought back into harmony with its maker." (Extract from "Velvet Elvis" by Rob Bell)

The point is not about us; it's God. God desires to restore all things. Wealth, fortune, health, peace, nature and all created things. People.

God through the word of His prophets had always been promising to restore Israel. (Isaiah 49)

God even promised to restore the fortunes of Israel's enemies. (Jeremiah 49)

God has promised to restore those who suffered for Christ's sake. (1 Peter 5:10)

He does so out of His **LOVE**.

## **RECONCILE**

And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. – Colossians 1:20

"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." Those were the words of Jacob after God's revelation to him through a dream (Genesis 28:15).

God is at work today. We believe that He works for Christians and non-Christians-alike (Romans 2:11). However, the difference lies in the acknowledgement of

God's sovereignty and reality in our common life. We do not have to prove or convince people about the Gospel, for God's Word is able to do so itself (Isaiah 55:11), and that would be the work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26).

### **"TO AN UNKNOWN GOD"**

The apostle Paul himself did so. In Athens, Paul's response to the citizens wasn't "You brood of vipers" nor was it "A deceitful generation". (In fact, Jesus spoke this of the Jews.) Instead, he calls them "very religious". He reconciled them to the God they had not known. In fact, I find this as such a key message we carry. I must put Paul's whole proclamation down, as a reminder and to set an example to myself.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. **God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.** As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." – Acts 17:24-31

We know how God has reconciled the world to Himself:

For God so **LOVED** the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

### **HAPPILY EVER AFTER...**

In all fairy tales, the hero or heroine will end up victorious and live happily ever after. Jesus' earthly life may have reflected a terrible way to end a story to the people of his time. So did the disciples. People always have their own way of saying things, voicing their opinions. My story may not end well, but I know whom I have believed, and am convinced He is able to guard what I entrusted to Him (2 Timothy 1:12).

God's story in Jesus is completed (John 19:30). That is when His story for us begins. My story is beginning.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38, 39)

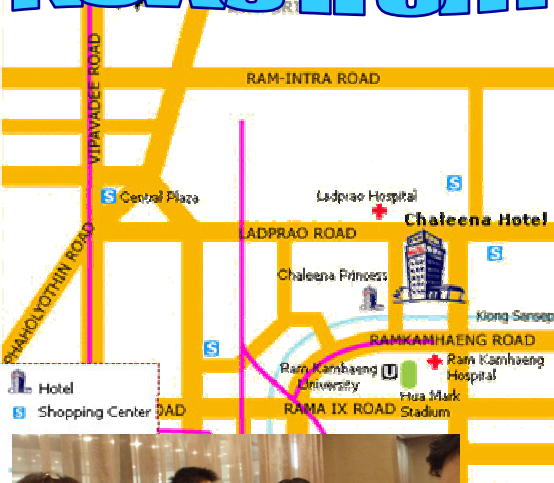
“Jesus **LOVES** me.”

We are therefore Christ’s Ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. – 2 Corinthians 5:20

*Acknowledgement to Becca for her quote, “Redefine. Restore. Reconcile.” and her recommendation of the book “Velvet Elvis” by Rob Bell. God bless you my sister.*



# News from Thailand



## ROSANNA COMES TO TOWN

Rosanna who works with the Lutheran Diakonia Department in the slums near Ladprao, Bangkok was in town recently and was invited to preach at JCC on 27 August.

After lunch with the Mission Committee and some others, she was ushered into a meeting with the Mission Committee to give feedback on how JCC can be involved with her work in Thailand. She was quite keen

about the possibility of JCC coming to teach the people to be self-sufficient through the Vision Network schemes of Faith Garden, Cooking Oil to Diesel and others. She also welcomed help from JCC to teach English in the schools at Ladprao and surrounding areas.



## God's Calling To Full Time Ministry

Recently, in our care group's discussion on the study on vocation, the issue of God's calling to "full time ministry" was brought up. The concern arose out of the current church context where many of our second generation Christian youths are growing up, and among them some said that they feel God's calling to enter "full time ministry". Their parents are often concerned and may raise serious questions on the timing and nature of their children's calling. This can be misinterpreted by other church members and youths, that such parents are hindrances, lacking faith or "stumbling blocks" to their zealous children who are all out to "serve God full time". A lot of misunderstanding and ill-feeling can be generated.

As a parent with teenage children myself, I can feel the dilemma of such parents. On one hand we are delighted that our children wish to give their life to God; on the other hand, we are concerned whether our children really have God's specific calling or are just being impulsive and rushing into something they are ill-prepared or gifted for and may eventually drop out of. Some parents may also feel that they have invested so much in their child's tertiary education and up-bringing that it would be unseemly of them to forsake a career and income even before they can earn a decent living for themselves. I remember when I told my mother my decision to go "full time", she cried over the phone. Furthermore, prospective full-timers normally train for a few years in a Bible college or are placed under internship in a para-church organisation, surviving on a minimal basic allowance by the graciousness of supporters or the church. Many Christian parents are perplexed and ask, "How can we be sure it is really God's calling for him/her? If we are sure, we don't mind giving our blessings and support, but then how to be sure? Maybe he/she should at least work first and get some real experience in life, then consider going into full time ministry later when they are more mature?" And so contentiousness may develop.

### **What is actually Christian Calling?**

Firstly, let us be clear what is meant by "calling" in the first place among Evangelical Christians. We understand vocation and calling as being the same thing. The English word "vocation" is from the Latin word "*vocatio*" which means "calling".

Secondly, when talking about "calling", we need to bear in mind that we are referring to someone who calls us. It is not an individual's desire to be somebody or take up a certain role. Of course the candidate should normally have a strong

desire or feel the burden on his/her heart to serve. But the person should have a right understanding that the call is from God. While a burden for service is a necessary pre-requisite, it is not the be-all and end-all of evidence pointing to a calling.

Thirdly, the word “call” in the Bible is used for the invitation to salvation. So it is important to note that our “calling” is first and foremost to be a Christian, a disciple of Christ. All Christians are called. All are called as the Church. The call belongs to God, to become persons who have their identity as children of God and members of His household.

Fourthly, we are also called to live as Christians in all aspects of life. Dr John Strelan a professor at Australian Lutheran College once came to teach LCS pastors in Singapore. He taught us on Christian Vocation as well. He drew a large circle which represents our Christian Vocation (calling). Then inside the circle he inscribed the three estates in which we live out that Vocation: (i) domestic (*L. domestica*) (ii) civil (*L. politica*) (iii) church vocation (*L. ecclesiastica*). He emphasized that our view of Christian calling needs to be holistic and multi-faceted. Each of these estates is equally important. A Christian should live (i) as a good family member, (ii) as a good citizen as a cobbler, a policeman or teacher or NS reservist, etc. (iii) and also as a faithful servant of God in church. So we should not think, for example, that our ministry in church or our job in the office is more important than to be a good husband at home and vice versa. A believer is called to be a Christian in whatever situation he or she finds himself/herself. Therefore we must also NOT equate vocation with our occupation. CHRISTIAN CALLING ≠ WORK, JOB, or OCCUPATION. We live out our calling/vocation in our occupation.

### **Calling to “Full Time” Ministry**

If we understand the “priesthood of all believers” concept properly, it is NOT mandatory to ascertain that a person must receive a special secondary call from God as a prerequisite to enter “full time ministry” although in some cases such call did occur as some would testify.

The “priesthood of all believers” emphasizes that all Christians have a calling from God to do God’s work, to enter God’s service to both the Church and the world, and to proclaim the Gospel. This involves using our gifts, talents, ministries, mission endeavors and so on. So returning to one of the earlier questions, it is nothing wrong to pray and ask God for special signs to be sure of the calling to “full time ministry”. However, it is not a must that a special manifestation, voice or dream occurs to confirm it. At times such things do occur. At times they may not. It is noteworthy that in the criteria list enumerated in 1

Timothy 3 and Titus 1 for deacons and pastors, nothing is mentioned about the candidate having a confirmation sign or special calling by God. The lists mainly highlight the character of the persons.

### **The Ordained Ministry in Lutheran Church in Singapore**

The Lutheran Church believes that the Holy Spirit "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (Small Catechism, Article III). It is the Spirit that provides the church with those persons who are enabled by God to lead the church in carrying out the ministry and mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe the office of ordained ministry, "the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments" (Augsburg Confession, Article V), has been instituted by God. Individuals are ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament because they have been called by God. This church believes that the call comes to individuals from God both personally and through the church. Persons experience the call to ordained ministry through a variety of ways. Fundamental to each is the personal experience of God's justifying act in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the awareness of the gospel in one's life, and the response to that gospel, that lead some to seek to serve in the public ministry of the church. This call may include the example and encouragement of others, the personal assessment of an individual's own interests and abilities, and response to the needs of the world. In whatever way the call to seek ordination may come to an individual, we believe that such a sense of call must be tested over a period of time, shaped by theological study, and finally confirmed in the church's call to serve as a pastor. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the church to discern a person's gifts and abilities for ordained ministry. The LCS prepares and approves candidates for the ordained ministry by setting standards, by providing for theological education through the seminaries approved by this church, and by evaluating a person's qualifications for service by the LCS Ministerium and Examination Committee. Upon approval and the rite of ordination, a person is eligible to serve in the ordained ministry of this church.

Differences and relationship between "Priesthood of all believers" and the Office of Ministry

We need to understand the differences and relationship between the two.

The relationship – the Office of Ministry does not mean that the pastor stands over the church, or operates independently from the church. In fact, he is in every way a member of the church.

The differences – However, the Office of the Ministry needs to be distinguished from the priesthood of believers:

- ❑ First, in our Lutheran Confessional understanding, even though the keys are given by Christ corporately to the whole church and each congregation, Christ exercises the keys publicly in the Service through those who are Ordained Ministers of the Word (Augsburg Confession XXVIII,5,21)
- ❑ Second, the spiritual functions of the Apostolate are continued only in the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. The authority of both the apostles and pastors depend on the Word of God. Like the apostles, pastors receive their ministry from the Lord, even if they are conferred on them by other pastors.
- ❑ Third, their roles in the Service are distinguished and intertwined. The pastors are responsible for the sacramental aspects of the Service, by which God comes to the faithful and graciously enacts the Gospel for them. Sacramentally, they offer and convey the means of grace from God to the congregation. The priesthood of believers is responsible for the sacrificial aspects of the Service. The pastors as part of this priesthood stand together with the congregation before God, sacrificially, in confession, prayer, praise and offering.

With an understanding of the differences of our station in the “Priesthood of all believers” and the station of God’s servants in the Office of the Keys, I hope that we can be more perceptive of God’s distinctive calling for us. May God help us.

***Pastor Martin Yee.***

## Thinking Aloud

I read in the Straits Times not too long ago that there was an organization which undertook to teach English to the China Study Mamas who accompany their children to Singapore.

Are we missing the opportunity by traveling all the way to Thailand, Cambodia or Mongolia to teach English? Why not start practicing at our very doorsteps? Once we have enough experience, we can export our expertise to all those faraway places more effectively.

*MC*

# God's Calling – My Experience

What Pastor Yee has written on the issue of calling to full-time ministry makes me recall myself as a young Christian over 20 years ago. As I think of it, I am half bemused and half wondering whether I had done wrong to attempt going into full time ministry, or that my pastor at that time in a Pentecostal church had shortchanged me by telling me that I was not ready for it. If it was I who was in the wrong for being impetuous, I believe God has long forgiven me. If it was the pastor who “did me wrong” and, by the way, denied the church of a potential full-time minister, our omniscient God must have foreknown that outcome. It would never be to His loss – I suppose. His will was fully done even if I could not understand. That being the case, how could the pastor have been wrong?

Let me tell you (and laugh heartily if you wish to) that at that time when I told the pastor my feeling of wanting to go full-time, I was still a young Christian not more than a few years in the faith. Now, have another chuckle as I tell you that as a young Christian still feeding on milk, so to speak, I even attempted to do a “translation” of the Book of Amos into an “easier-to-understand” style from the KJV. (I still have a portion of that work, which I did not complete, lying somewhere in the house.) Note that at that time, Internet was non-existent and the only typing machine was the humble typewriter, which I did not even possess. What made me do all those? I don't have the answer, but I started serving God proudly in the Billy Graham Crusade (1978) as an usher when I was six months' old (spiritually) and was baptized shortly after the Crusade. In that time, I was already writing a lot (rambling along, if you like this expression better).

In fact, I started writing before my conversion; the only difference in my writings pre-conversion and post-conversion was in their character – transformed from disapproval to approval of the Christian faith. My spiritual life continued to have its highs and lows, but there was no turning back once I accepted Christ. As a small proof of the wonderful way God led me in His service, I was given permission by the Council of Bedok Lutheran Church to initiate a newsletter ministry. When I was the editor of the newsletter's inaugural issue (March 1982) I was not fully 4 years as a Christian and I was not even a member of BLC. (I became a member of BLC only 5 months later, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of August 1982.) I continued my involvement in this kind of ministry after joining JCC. Even before I started the BLC newsletter, I contributed articles to *Koinonia*, the newsletter of Queenstown Lutheran Church. I even took upon myself to write a long rebuttal of a book by a female author that I felt did not speak fair about women's role in leadership. I assume that what I wrote was not too bad because a spiritual senior and also an editorial member in the SAF Christian Fellowship offered to send it to the book's author for her comments on my opinion. As a young chap at that time, I felt cool to think that what I had written was at least not trashed at first sight.



Why do I tell you all the above about my past? No, it is not because I want to boast. Rather, I would like to give the background to provide you with at least an inkling why at a young spiritual age I was so “impatient” to suggest my interest in going full-time. If I was young while involved in the Bedok ministry, I was certainly much younger in my church before I came to know BLC. On the basis that I was so young, maybe it would be a no-brainer for you to conclude that the pastor I approached at that time was right in deciding my absence yet of such a calling to full-time work. However, if you are aware of my fervour for service, you would probably understand my enthusiasm. I was simply active and restless in feeling a call to be engaged in the Lord’s work, to argue for Christ as His newborn with the same vehemence as my old self had when I debated against Christians.

Oh, you are wrong again if you are conceiving the thought that I am blaming that pastor for a “lost opportunity.” No, there are no grounds for me to lay the blame. In all these years of my faith (despite being such a sinner in so many ways and with so many areas of weaknesses), I realize that if God intended me to serve Him, the intention needed not automatically translate into a call to full-time ministry by conventional understanding. In truth, a full-time minister is never equipped to serve really full-time in the sense of 24/7 without time off. While those called to “full time ministry” might treasure the call, the flip side is that there are many encumbrances and untold agonies that we, the “part-timers”, are fortunate to be spared with. In fact, we the “part-timers” in the laity have the greater ease to take time off for a siesta or a furlough to recharge and return with new vigour to serve better, a luxury many “full-timers” can only admire from a distance. Furthermore, if we lay servants make blunders in the course of our spiritual service, members of the church tend to be more forgiving. I know that many full-time workers do work very hard, even on overdrive because of their burning passion. Unfortunately, the passion does burn out at times.

So what is the purpose of God’s call? The purpose is to benefit His Kingdom on Earth. Must this call necessarily be one way or other by human wisdom? A person senses that she wants to be an engineer and so she goes all the way sweating through university for that precious degree, but ends up being a great performance artiste and enjoys every bit of her career. Is this type of encounter uncommon? Only recently, it was in the news: A man and pre-school teaching-award winner who found his calling in teaching children only after he had gone part of his way through Catholic seminary training.

A person who discerns a “call” to full-time ministry but has the “call” unfulfilled may simply be a classic example of someone facing up to a false call. He/She then

takes on a “part-timing” vocation in the same business of helping the Lord tend to His sheep. By the way that the Holy Spirit leads, there may be little difference in the outcome. The real measure of quality of outcome for Kingdom’s purpose is not based on the number of hours of work put in, but on the missions served by us (ordained or un-ordained) in discharging our talents in the most productive and profitable manners, willingly with love rather than grudgingly obliging ourselves. If a person is keen to serve and his talents are in the music ministry (say, playing instruments) and in teaching kids, he may serve Kingdom’s end best by spending a part of his time in the related ministries than if he were to go full-time as an ordained minister to find himself with arms and legs stretching across multiple departments in the church.

I suppose we can ask all the pastors whether they find it always enjoyable in their high-calling vocation. Likewise, all the pastors can ask all the lay workers whether they find it always enjoyable in their “lower callings”. I believe that the answers will be the same – sometimes ok sometimes not ok. So what difference is there really between serving full-time and serving part-time? In my secular vocation, I am often fascinated when people ask me whether I am a full-time private tutor or a part-time private tutor. I can really answer the question either way, because the same amount of work I do qualifies for both. By extension to my vocation in Christian service, I do not know whether there is really any difference if you see me as a full-timer or part-timer, whether I would be more useful serving in the alternative way. (Maybe I am full time teaching and part time serving the Church; maybe, full time serving the Church and part-time teaching – let your preference decide. 😊)

The final vocation we settle in (as an ordained minister or as a lay worker) can be initially unclear for us to accept as God’s calling because it is never packaged with bold letters proclaiming His will. It is the way it is, to serve His plan. When God is at work, Satan is also at work. When we are not circumspect, or are not receptive to qualified counsel, and are too quick to respond with anticipation, we risk going off course on a lost trip. Interestingly, if it is God’s call, whatever in His plan will be fulfilled even if we (church members or church leaders) resist. If it is not God’s call, but we think it is, God’s plan will still be fulfilled. Do we then need to fret over whatever outcome when God does not worry? Also, whether it is God’s calling or not, there will be obstacles to overcome. This is part and parcel of God’s plan to prepare us for our spiritual walk in service and testimony. **If we cannot bear the preparatory obstacles, why should we opine ourselves highly that we would be able to bear the journey ahead?**

Finally, let me say that it is God's call for me to be in the Vine ministry as a part-timing vocation. That is why, by His grace, He has in all these years sustained me with the wonderful partnership of brother Martin Cheah. I appreciate God's blessings.

How about our dear Pastor Samuel? When I was in Bedok, I saw him as a small-built primary schoolboy, hardly the stuff my myopic eyes would see as a future full-time shepherd in Jurong Christian Church, under whose care God would place me. I believe he also appreciates God's blessings for the calling that is so different from the way I have been called to serve.

Yours truly,  
by His grace that I am enabled to share this,  
*John Lee*

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## **Sticking to the Vine – Staying in His Service**

*(A Quiet-Time Reflection from the past)*

John 15:2 “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”

John 15:5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

### Message

Jesus Christ is the Vine; His followers are the branches; those which do not produce fruit are taken away. The fact that I still stick to the vine, however, is not an indication that all is well; for I am still subjected to the purging and pruning in order to bear more fruit.

### Application

Despite the pains there be, I should accept as a matter of fact the purging and pruning in my life as I stay in His service. There are burdens of love to carry, but these are never too heavy if only I abide in Christ always and not depend on my own strength for fruit bearing.

“Oft we shrink from the purging and pruning  
Forgetting the Husbandman knows  
That the deeper the cutting and pruning  
The richer the cluster that grows.” – *Our Daily Bread 17<sup>th</sup> Jan 76*

*John Lee* (Written on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1982)

# SOUL CARE

*by Tan Swee Leong*

Discipleship involves the renewal of the inner person according to the riches of God. What is this inner man? It is our soul. What is the soul? The soul is the hidden spiritual side of the person - it embodies his thoughts, feeling, will (heart) with its intents and choices, his bodily life and social relations. The inner person is the source of outward life and totally determine what effects for good or evil our activities as ministers will have.

We need to care for our souls. The secret of soul care is how we work with God in all the dimensions of self which makes up the life of the whole person.

Think of it as a tree. Jesus said the good tree bears good fruit (Matt 7:17). If we take care of the tree the fruit will take care of itself. The soul - the inner life is referred to in the Great Commandment, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Lk 10:27)

The Command does not tell us what we must do as much as it tells us to cultivate – the care of our souls.

Our obedience to this command can only find adequate support in a personhood saturated with God's love – agape love.

## **What is agape love?**

This love is in the words of Jesus, 'a spring of water gushing up to eternal life' (Jn 4:14). and from those possessed by this divine love, there flows "rivers of living water" for the thirsty world. We are only able to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind when our

entire inner person is saturated with God's love.

People may forget the words that we say but they will find it hard to forget the kind of person we are and how we have touched them for good or for ill.

So we must realise that the most important thing happening at every moment in the midst of all our service and discipleship is the kind of person we are becoming.

God is greatly concerned with the quality of character we are building – his desire is that our live should be a manifestation of the fruit of the spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" Notice it is one fruit with 9 character – someone calls it aptly a portrait of Christlikeness.

God has made abundant provisions of his dwelling in our lives in the here and now. Appropriate attention to the care of our soul through his empowerment will yield the inner spiritual fruit and deliver us from the deeds of the flesh listed in Gal 5:19 : "sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like."

We then can be channels of grace of the risen Christ through our activity of speaking, praying, caring, serving; he can minister to others through us.

## **Secret to soul care**

The first and most basic thing we can and must do for the care of our souls is to keep God before our minds. David knew this secret and wrote:

*I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*

*Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure (Ps 16:8-9).*

This is the fundamental secret to soul care. Our part in practicing the presence of God is to direct and re-direct our minds constantly to Him. Initially in our practice we may be challenged by our burdensome habit of dwelling on things other than God. But habits can be broken. A new grace filled habit will replace our former habits as we take intentional steps towards keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of the compass constantly return to the north no matter which position it is turned.

If God is the great longing of our souls, he will become the compass of our inner lives. We practice the presence of God by offering our consciousness to Him and directing our attention towards him. The practice of the presence of God means that we intentionally keep scenes and words of Scripture before our minds, carefully remembering and recalling them. We memorize them, we review them in our words and imaginations as we rise in the morning and as we move through the events of the day and when we lie down at night. We talk to him moment by moment, with the one who promised to be with us always.

As a start, we can choose to practice constantly returning our minds to God in Christ. Just decide to do it and do your best without harassing yourself. At the end of each day review how you did and think of ways you could do it better the next day. As we continue this practice gently but persistently, we soon find that the person

of Christ and his words begin to increasingly and automatically occupying our minds instead of the clutter and noise of this world.

Our concentration on God will be strengthened by memorizing the great passages (not just verses) of the Bible. Passage such as : the Beatitudes(Matt 5), Jesus high priestly prayer (Jn 17), the great love passage (1 Cor 13), Psalms (1, 23 and others), the great theological treatises (Roms 5, Rom 8, Eph 1, Phil 2) the benedictions, the great promises, or any passages that God has used or deeply impressed upon you.

The practice of memorization of scriptures fill our minds with these great passages from the Word of God and have them available for our meditation and quiet time before God.

God's instruction and great promise to Joshua before he went into the Promised land was "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." (Josh 1:8). Psalms 1 demonstrates that meditation on God and his word must become an integral part of our live. How do we not let the Word depart from our mouth? - by memorization, this become an essential part of how we think and what our minds dwell upon. The things that come before us during the day will come in the presence of God illuminating word. The word of God which is light (Ps 119:105) enable us to see things of life in the right way, "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light" so declares the Psalmist (Ps 36:9).

### **In God's Presence We Worship**

As the Word occupies our minds we come to love God more and more because we can see more clearly and constantly how real and lovely He is – this is spiritual delight. Through this we enter into a life, not just a time of worship. The Word will be constant presence in our inner being. Worship becomes the constant tone of our life. It restores our being to God, informs, guides and sustains us in spontaneous worship. This is the power of the indwelling Christ flowing from us. Remember, we are not trying to worship. Worship is not another task we have to do. It is the gift of 'living water' that spring up to eternal life (Jn 7:34, 4:14). When the love of God flows from our lives as we walk constantly with God our lives become one of constant worship of God. Even our feelings and emotions are affected and transformed to characterize those living in the presence of God. Our bitter and angry feelings that characterize life in the flesh are displaced by those that are of life in the

Spirit. When we abide with Christ, he promises that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (Jn 15:10-11). This joy is not just a feeling of pleasure, or a mere sensation, but a pervasive and constant sense of well being. This sense of well being bring about peace as we rest in God's goodness and grace, being assured of His presence.

In practicing the presence of God we become present to His presence. More than that we bring His presence into the routines and encounters of life, in conversation, in thoughts, even mundane and ordinary moments can be permeated with God's presence.

How are you caring for your soul? Is your tree like the one in Psalm 1, planted by stream of living water bearing fruits in due season and whose leaves do not wither and is whatever you do prospering? If not we need to look deeply and ask, “Is it well with my soul?”

## **Knowing God's presence through breath prayers**

Knowing God's presence involves active back and forth communication with God. How can we do this when our minds are pre-occupied with many things to do?

One of the proven ways is through “breath prayer”

What is breath prayer? It is a short familiar prayer that has great meaning which we can use repeatedly during the course of the day. We could use verses from the Bible that we have memorised:

My soul longs after you (Ps 42:1)  
Lord have mercy  
Fill me with your peace(Phil 4:7)  
Into your hands “**into your hands I** commit my spirit.” [ Psalm 31:5]” (Lk 23:46)

Breath prayers uses the prayer language of intimacy. They are prayers of the heart.... simple whispered words, helping us turn to God in times of uncertainty, fear, anguish and our desire to control:

I am afraid of the upcoming surgery -  
“Into your hands”

I do not know how to handle this problem –  
“Into your hands”  
I find this person difficult to love –  
“Into your hands”  
This encounter/situation is affecting me -  
“Into your hands”

Breath prayers are so simple, yet they are needed in a world where we use much words and verbosity. Breath prayer is the prayer of the heart. We can say these prayers over and over until they become interwoven with our thoughts and can even transform our attitudes.

Here are some practical ways breath prayers can help us:

### ***Turning this person heart towards you***

We can pray for God's will in the person's life. It may be someone who we are concerned about. It may be their attitude, a difficult situation they are facing, an unpleasant encounter.

Breath prayer helps us lift our hearts and come to God with a loving attitude toward the person. We could pray: “Help this person come to know you and our will”

### ***Do I need to change?***

When confronted with disturbing situation difficult people or where things do not turn out the way we want, we can pray asking “do I need to change?”

### ***Teach me through this negative attitude***

We may have acted inappropriately, or reacted badly, or someone may have responded negatively to our action or words. Rather than focusing on our own inadequacies or those of others, we can focus on how is God at work to transform us. Pray “teach me through this negative behavior”

### ***Thank you for this person***

When we think of people who have made positive impact we can thank them. Even when we think of people who have hurt us, cause us grief and offended us, we can thank them. The Bible teaches us to give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thess 5:18). There is a place for grace and a belief that God has a purpose which we may not presently see or be aware of.

### ***Bringing God's presence***

Even as we become aware of God's presence with us we can in our encounters bring Christ's presence with us. Paul tell us that we are “to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing” (2 Cor 2:15). As we encounter people we can knowingly pray in our hearts at the same time when we are talking to them.

Our conversation with God can remove negative self talk. Conversing with God can become part of the rhythm of our lives where our hearts can become our private chapel.

## **Amazing Grace...our 2 in 1 Testimony...**

Susan and Tony Koh

### One FAITH, and One GOD, One LORD, Despite different Family Background and Upbringing

Coming from a Family where all brothers and cousins are all educated in the Chinese Stream, Susan essentially was introduced to the Christian Faith via: the Successful Living Course in English after her secondary school years. During her secondary school years, her Principal did give her an English Bible but she did not really understand the Holy Book, so did not dwell on it until she was reintroduce to the Bible through the Successful Living Course in Neighborhood Baptist Church, attending the course together with her 2 Brothers.



With proper introduction to the Christian Faith and wanting to be “Successful” and have a “Meaningful” Life, after finishing the Course and hearing the Good News of the LORD JESUS CHRIST dying for our sins, Susan accepted the LORD and SAVIOUR and as she progress in her Christian walk, with the encouragement and help from her two brothers who also accepted LORD into their lives, all 3 were baptized by immersion in the Baptist Church and with their newfound faith....they shared and introduced their faith to her mum, and my mother-in-law is now also a faithful believer in the Lord.

After tying the knot with me in a Lutheran Church, we attended QLC for a while before I took the plunge and went to NBC Baptist Church for about 2 years, before moving back to the Lutheran fold in JCC some 9 years ago.

I accepted the CHRISTIAN Faith through the persistent query of where and who GOD is through my secondary school science teacher, with some resistance from my Buddhist parents. But being accepted by the Boys Brigade as a nobody in the ECA activities of the school, I finally ended up in the 26 BB Singapore Company and worked up from a plain private right to my involvement (about a good 15 years) in the BB Movements, till I handed up my epaulette as LTA of the 26 BB Coy. (The Most Memorable days were pioneering our Company to win the National Colors for the 3 Major challenges, Bible Quiz, Drill and Hike Competition and also took a few weeks stint as Ag.Captain..that was Cloud 9 feeling....)

Today maturing in our doctrinal grounding both of us are thankful that we are called and predestined in our regenerated faith, and we prayerfully hope that our children will be called and predestined in their regenerated faith too. We pray that they have accepted the LORD when hearing the GOOD NEWS, through the Kids Camp, we also pray that they will go through the Confirmation of Faith in spite of being through the renewal of Water Baptism.

Again we are thankful to the AMAZING GRACE.... bestowed upon us that once we were blind but now we see...