

The Vine

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Dear members and friends of JCC,

Shalom! My ministry has come full-circle at JCC when I returned on 1 February 2008 as its Senior Pastor. It has been a long 18-year 'break.' According to Ecclesiastes chapter 3, there is 'a time for everything.' I certainly believe it was time for me to 'come home.'



Homecoming for me has been an exciting one: it is exciting because I am returning to the fellowship which is close to my heart, I come with great anticipation to enjoy the fellowship; it is exciting because I believe God is going to do something great at this point of JCC's life.

I hope you are just as excited and anticipative as I am in this new development of JCC. Before any changes – good changes! – come about, we need to have a *mindset* or

attitude and an *inner spirit* commensurate with the change.

What mindset or attitude should you have as members? Mindset has to do with the way we SEE things, which affects the way we DO things. It means that we have to break from our old mould of operation. You need to be open to accept changes in the church and also in you as individuals. Emphasizing our theme 'Towards Kingdom Living', we expect some significant and, perhaps, drastic changes in our church and also in the lives of members as well. They are good changes that will align our life with God's will that we may live as *victorious children of God* and as *blessed citizens of God's kingdom*. A life, perhaps, far remote for some of us at this juncture. Let us strive forward in faith, in unity and in obedience toward what God has in store for you at JCC.

A right mindset and heart attitude only avail you for change. They do not actually bring about change. Real change comes when we *act in submission and obedience to God's will and leading*. For that you need COURAGE too! The inner spirit of a person is the strength of his soul or spirit. You need strength from within to drive you as you avail yourself for change. This inner strength turns a mountain into a mole hill, a problem into a project and it does not miss the promise for the plaque. That is where God begins any change in the individuals or the church.

The church has now put in place a church growth plan, quality and not quantity yet, to prepare us for spiritual growth. The tree must be strong before it can bear fruits. As your pastor, may I encourage you to start spending time, if you have not already done so, to pray for the Holy Spirit to prepare you individually for a mindset or heart attitude and inner spirit that is commensurate with the change God has set beforehand for JCC.

Objectively speaking, the *next step* towards our theme of 'Towards Kingdom Living' is to *attend the spiritual formation class (6 lessons)* which will be conducted fortnightly on Fridays, beginning 28 March. This is for the whole church: adults and youths. Some activities will cease so that you will have time to attend the lessons and attend them faithfully.

Finally, I thank God for the opportunity to be your shepherd again! Let God through us make things happen in us that will change us, and us the world. My family and I are deeply touched by the support and love we have been receiving since our return. Thank you! All Glory Be Unto God!

Towards kingdom living we come!

Dr William Chang
Senior Pastor

Oh! men and brethren, what would this heart feel if I could but believe that there were some among you who would go home and pray for a revival - men whose faith is large enough, and their love fiery enough to lead them from this moment to exercise unceasing intercessions that God would appear among us and do wondrous things here, as in the times of former generations.

- C.H. Spurgeon

“Retirement means Death”

Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew had this advice for his audience at Suntec Convention Centre in January, **“We have to educate those about to retire: Don’t retire, work. Retirement means death.”**

Remarkably, “Retirement means death” seemed to be the three words that got the attention of all the listeners and journalists, and they continue to ring in the minds of people long after the message. Obviously, MM Lee delivered it with a strong driving force, albeit with a laugh. On the problems of an aging society, he then raised much laughter with the comment, “Maybe if we had not started family planning, it would not have been so bad. But then we would not have (economic) growth.” (*Straits Times report*)

One of the thoughts that come to my mind about an aging population is that with the “mistake” of the family planning policy, we end up having insufficient manpower to fire the engine of economic growth, which is obviously of prime importance second to none. Such is the critical place of the economy in human psyche that even the reduction of pollutant emission (if any) from economic activity must be done in such a way that it is not at the expense of economic growth. (Hopefully, we can have our cake and eat it.)

Since we are a country so reliant on human resource, surely every person who retires from the workforce is a negative effect on national economic growth. Not only so, it is also a negative effect on our “personal economy”, as the cost of living keeps rising and our income flow stops once retirement sets in. Therefore, whether we want to think altruistically for the sake of the country’s economy or “self-centredly” for the sake of our private personal economy, economics has to be an issue close to our heart. The way economics work is the way we work – as we work harder and longer, the utilization of manpower resource is maximized for productivity (economic gain). Every unit of manpower put to retirement idleness is a waste that is disadvantageous to our wherewithal (personal economic survival) and, in the national aggregate, injurious to the country’s GDP. When the GDP shrinks, so will all the benefits that citizens will get to enjoy. Hence, never think of retirement. Instead,

everyone ought to think positively as being a long-lasting productive economic unit, a contributing asset rather than a dependent liability.

Imagine that a large number of our silver-haired senior citizens (the majority in an aging population) decide to quit the workforce. The result would be that the national economy is at risk of faltering from the manpower withdrawal, and our private personal economy slides down too. National income and budget surpluses from economic activity will be knocked and the offshoot is that individually we will have less to gain as the economic growth goes slower or even reverses. We still have to pay medical bills (which is almost guaranteed to rise with time), have decent meals (food for the stomach is always unavoidable, so is the multiple percentage rise in price with every 1% GST increase), keep ourselves mobile to keep senility at bay (the punishing expense to move from one point to another will climb as transport infrastructure becomes overtaxed by a 5.5 million population) and incur all sorts of other necessary costs. (No free lunch!) ECONOMY means \$\$\$\$ in lay lingo. Think big on ECONOMY as a major factor that drives our life (or livelihood) and you will appreciate the benefits of working till old age.

However, though ECONOMY is important, it cannot be the be-all and end-all of our quest for life. To borrow the words of Mr Philip Yeo, Chairman of the Silver Industry Committee, **“If everything is measured in economic performance, big problems arise,”** (Straits Times 25th Jan, 2008) While Mr Yeo was talking about democracy and social values, the merit of his words is also applicable to the way we see ourselves living out our silver years meaningfully.

At age 85, MM Lee is an exemplar of active aging. He still works, travel internationally on official trips and exercises regularly. “With nothing to do, no purpose in life, you will just degrade, go to seed. The human being needs a challenge,” he said. Very true!

By an extreme illustration, a person who retires and take on a life of eat-and-sleep and being a couch potato will surely degrade and go to seed fast. On the opposite extreme, we have aged folks toiling on jobs just to eke out a living, taken advantage of by niggardly employers. This group of people will also go to seed quickly as a result of health deterioration. It is not the

kind of “working hard” to cheer. Instead, it is like working to death (not the same as “working until death”)!

Between the two extremes, there are silver-haired senior citizens engaging in active aging by their social and voluntary services to needy groups. They have retired from active employment for years and, by one definition, are “retirees without work.” Yet, they are hardly the type who will degrade and go to seed fast. They are like our MM Lee, eschewing a sedentary retirement and enjoying what they are doing, full of zip with likely many more years to spare. They do not look forward to death by retirement, but life after retirement. This group of active senior citizens who are high-spirited to enjoy their freedom to do the altruistic work benefiting society without their precious time being tied down by paymasters is also an exemplar to us. If we follow the paradigm of MM Lee (not retiring from work early), we benefit ourselves by benefiting the ECONOMY or otherwise. If we follow the paradigm of active aging through voluntary services to society, what we had been longing for but had no time while being busy with working for money income, retirement (from the economic workforce) is still very beneficial to ourselves and to the country. **Active aging (like anything else) needs not necessarily be measured in economic performance. It is measured by the challenge (of whatever form) that we take up to keep ourselves engaged in body and mind whereby we sprout new unencumbered vitality doing good instead of going to seed at speed.**

Certainly, our elder statesman’s advice against early retirement is good food for thought, “If the mindset is that 'I'll reach retirement age at 62, I'm old, I can't work anymore, now is the time I enjoy life,' I think you're making the biggest mistake of your life.” These are forceful and persuasive words, but I believe that he didn’t intend everyone to take “work” absolutely to mean an income-deriving job and nothing else. Neither is “enjoy life” intrinsically dreadful if it is not confined to drinking wine and playing golf and such laid-back leisureliness.

Interestingly, the Bible does carry a rule on retirement, “The LORD also instructed Moses, ‘This is the rule the Levites must follow: They must begin serving in the Tabernacle at the age of twenty-five, and they must retire at the age of fifty. After retirement they may assist their fellow

Levites by serving as guards at the Tabernacle, but they may not officiate in the service. This is how you must assign duties to the Levites.” (Numbers 8:23-26 NLT)

The word “retirement” clearly does not imply a complete stoppage from useful labour to recede into idleness. It ought to connect with a broader definition of ‘work’ as we draw the key point from the Scriptural reference that we should continue to keep ourselves useful by, for example, getting into a second vocation with a change in the intensity of the work as befits our energy level. In this sense, faithful Christians need never ‘retire’; they may just move on to a refreshing opportunity to enjoy life in active, fulfilling and undistracted good works as the Lord’s “Grey Army”. This is one of the choices for all greying-haired in the church to contemplate. A new-found spiritual uplifting freed from money-centred toil may just be the meaning of a meaningful retirement for this group. ☺

John Lee

**Dialect Ministry
CNY Fellowship Fun
16 Feb 2008**

The dialect gathering had a good attendance of 52, with more than half of them senior citizens. They listened to a message delivered by Peter Cheong in Hokkien and translated by Jennifer Chee into Cantonese. Then they had good fun and laughter playing



a few interesting games conducted by Peggy Lee before tucking into a sumptuous spread of high-tea buffet.

Thank God for His blessing that the dialect ministry is growing. Starting 2nd March 2008, we shall be inaugurating our Sunday dialect worship service in church at 5 p.m. This will be a great opportunity for church members to bring their dialect-comfortable kith and kin to listen to the Good News of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

Man Plays God

You should have heard about the chimera research – scientists researching on combining human and animal genes to produce a new living organism called a chimera. Proponents of the research highlight the potential benefits of discovering therapies for as yet untreatable medical conditions. Opponents raise grim ethical and risk issues. Do the pros outweigh the cons, or vice versa? The jury is out. Britain has approved the application by two universities to proceed with the research on a one-year licence. According to the Straits Times report (19th Jan), “researchers want to produce hybrids that are 99.9% human and 0.1% animal. Will Singapore be jumping on the bandwagon? The Bioethics Advisory Committee of Singapore has launched an e-consultation paper to gather views for the research in Singapore. (<http://www.bioethics-singapore.org/>)

Cloning, once abhorred with fiery moral debates, has become plain-vanilla. The cloning of pets is now quite accessible to anyone with the money. A California woman is willing to pay US\$150000 to have her dead pit bull cloned by a firm run by the Seoul National University team that first cloned a dog in 2005. Hitherto, bulls, race horses and cats have been cloned by scientists in different parts of the world. On cloning, Anh Tuan Nuyen, a philosopher from NUS and a member of the Bioethics Advisory Committee said, “I see no ethical reason not to allow this kind of work.” (*Straits Times Feb 21 REVIEW article by Senior Writer Andy Ho*) The *REVIEW* article further raised an interesting question with a thought-provoking answer: **“Should Singapore pursue pet cloning? The answer might be ‘yes’ – if the economic benefits were considerable. But as yet, they are not.”**

Now, chimera research may well be a hotter topic for concerned people to chew over. Probably, it won’t be long before it becomes as plain-vanilla as cloning. Another Andy Ho’s article (“Beware of chimera technology” - ST Jan 12) cautioned, “The problem is this: If chimeras can be created with varying degrees of human cells, from 5 to 95 per cent, clearly at some point, they may transcend being merely part-human or quasi-human. At some point, chimeras could logically become persons. How will we deal with this?”

The moral issues and the dangers should have already been aired a lot in world debate; but is anyone of consequence listening? No matter how one

argues for extreme caution, scientists who have their minds already made up will brook no interference from ethicists and laws. They will surely find ways to sidestep whatever barriers to their ambition, with polishing here (to smoothen objections) and ‘compromise’ there to make believe conciliation with public fears.

In reality, plant hybrids and animal hybrids already exist. Of the latter, hybrid offsprings include the mule (male ass + female horse), hinny (female ass + male horse), liger (lion + tigress), tigon (tiger + lioness), etc. Although none of these involves a human parent, it is not beyond imagination the possibility of undiscovered cases existing in the wild, not by research attempt but due to unpublicized bestial acts. Have you heard about Oliver, the bipedal chimp (walking upright like humans)? It was once theorized as a man-chimp hybrid, but was later “proven” by genetic tests to have 48 chromosomes as is normal for a chimpanzee. I have my doubt about the reliability of the genetic interpretation after actually seeing how close to human it looked in a National Geographic documentary. Even granted that Oliver is fully chimp, its chromosome number of 48 compared to human 46 is a small gap that did not prevent the animal from skipping ape-like traits to take on some resemblance to human behaviour; and I am just comparing chromosome numbers, not gene numbers or gene features.

The potential of experimental accidents with a chimera becoming a Frankenstein¹ may no longer be confined to the realm of fiction. The zoo-bred liger turned out to be infertile and much bigger in size than either of its parents. Thankfully, it is harmless. However, a Frankenstein with catastrophic killing potential may just take the form of micro escapes from the lab.

Chimera research may be a greater thrill than cloning; but, before the moral debate is settled, scientists are already into more electrifying brain waves on playing God to create “an artificial life form based entirely on a man-made DNA genome.” (weekend TODAY, 26-27 Jan 2008) Once just

¹ *Frankenstein*: The title character of a novel; a mad scientist who creates a monster that kills him. The word is presently used to refer to a horrifying creation that brings down its creator.

within the province of sci-fi writers, it has now become a very real likelihood with the published success of American scientists in producing the first synthetic organism by unnaturally copying the DNA of a bacterium.

The F1 race is coming to Singapore. It is ok if this is restricted to vehicles thundering past ecstatic spectators. However, if the F1 means *Filial 1*² and Singapore goes into the race to be foremost within the global scientific community for the honour of producing the first filial generation of chimera offspring,

then all ethical bystanders would surely feel disconcerted by the moral

direction

of the

country and

the latent risk

of unforeseen

phenomena in

future when

world opens up new

frontiers of research into F2 chimera³ and what

will come after that. Granted there are benefits, will these be outweighed

by the hazards of yet unseen dark sides of biotechnology? The

“conservative” 99.9%:0.1% animal:human mix in the genetic composition

of a chimera as proposed by some scientists today can definitely be

toppled by future scientists seeking higher adventures. Even if there is

assurance that whatever offspring will be destroyed before maturity (never

mind the morality of taking life), the potential of experimenters with

extreme ideas taking flight from the norm of responsible behaviour cannot

be absolutely ruled out. Inadvertently, space may also be opened up to

bacteria and viruses to develop into mutant strains in the process of their

natural interactions with man’s creations. Chilling thoughts!



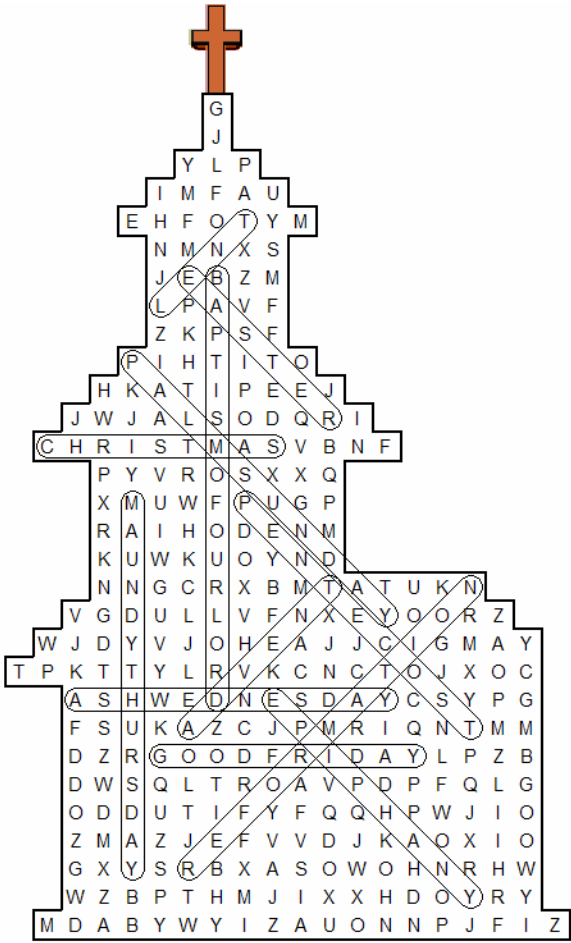
² *Filial 1*, a term in classical genetics, means the first generation offspring of two individuals that are distinctly different types.

³ Experiments involving crossing F1 animals to produce F2 offsprings are already commonplace to advance scientific knowledge.

With man so clever as God, will it also happen that one day traditional marriage (man + woman) for procreation becomes obsolete and replaced by same-sex parenting as designer babies by artificial parthenogenesis⁴ or cloning (just like pets) can be ordered at one's bidding? Will this be the development 50 years down the road in sync with the rise of campaigns for the acceptance of gay unions?

Pray hard that wisdom will prevail, with the consequences of playing God well understood!

John Lee



Church
Seasons

*Solution to Puzzle
published in January
Vine*

⁴ *Parthenogenesis*: reproduction involving a gamete (sex cell) without fertilization

The Editor's Comments

What has Vanessa Hudgens and Gillian Chung have in common? They are both teen singing idols. Their on screen image is that of sweet innocence. Yet in recent times, both have proven to be lesser role models for impressionable teenage girls.

In our modern society, where certain Biblical terms have been renamed, we tend to think that the Holy Bible does not have a teaching on the matter. Fornication, is referred to as "pre-marital sex" and adultery is now called "extra-marital sex," while homosexuality has gradually been softened from serious perversion through "deviation" to "gay variation."

The Biblical condemnation of sexual relations outside marriage is abundantly clear. Adultery between married women or married men and someone other than their marital partners, is condemned as a serious sin. Not only is adultery forbidden (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18), but it was also punishable by death in ancient Israel: "If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death" (Lev 20:10; cf. 18:20; Deut 22:22-24). The same punishment was meted out to a man or a woman who engaged in pre-marital sex (Deut 22:13-21, 23-27).

Paul helps us to see why the Bible strongly condemns sex outside marriage. Sex represents the most intimate of all interpersonal relationships, expressing a "one-flesh" unity of total commitment. Sexual immorality is serious because it affects the individual more deeply and permanently than any other sin. Paul describes it as a sin committed inside the body: "Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body" (1 Cor 6:18).

We are now living in a time where the very thought of putting Edison Chen to death sounds barbaric. Why is that so? I think it is because Jesus said, "'If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone...'" (John 8:7) Jesus emphasized that to entertain lustful desires toward a person of the opposite sex outside marriage means to be guilty of adultery (Matt 5:27-28). Can any of us claim – not guilty? Remember Jesus is writing your sins in the sand. He is willing to wipe it away.

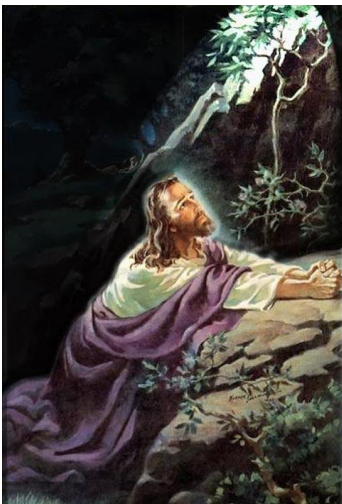
What then is the proper punishment for Edison? If he were living in a Muslim country, the old Mosaic Law may still apply but in the society we live in today, he may not even have committed a crime. Jesus said to his

disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. (Luke 17:1-3)

Before we go around saying "Woe" to Edison, remember Luke 17 is actually the "Forgiveness" chapter. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:4)

Maybe like the apostles, we have to say to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5) We need to believe that we will be forgiven even if we commit sins seven times a day. If Jesus expects His followers to forgive every time a person repents, surely He Himself will forgive all who repents. So I say to Edison, repent and receive the forgiveness for your sins. However, we may not be able to escape the consequences of our sins.

So for role models I suggest we do not take Hollywood, Bollywood, Hong Kong or even Singapore stars as the ideal. Here I can safely say, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) We will surely be disappointed by their personal behavior. Most are just more discreet than Edison and so their indiscretions do not surface.



Even the role models in Hebrews chapter 11 were less than perfect, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Samson, David, etc.

Instead let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:2-3)

Martin Cheah

DISCOVER YOUR HUMAN SIDE - READ CHINESE!

Long in the corporate communications world has always been this recognition that the English-language media has a rational/business-like focus while the non-English media has a human focus. Since I only read and write Chinese (other than English), I can only reaffirm this for the Chinese-language media. This has always accounted for how the public relations profession makes its pitches to the media - based on editorial interests in the different language media.

I just want to qualify - to discover your human side may quite often uncover your weaknesses. Read on if you remain unfazed.

My sons belong to this generation where English and European languages are viewed as premium whereas Chinese as "lame". In what they would have labeled as an evil move, my spouse and I switched our subscription from The Straits/Sunday Times to the Lianhe Zaobao. This took effect a month ago and while we have not made converts of our sons, my spouse and I relished in the "humanized" approach in the news coverage and towards features and stories in Lianhe Zaobao's annexe, zbNOW.

Today I read a post entitled "明知故犯", meaning to commit a crime knowingly. It related how most of us have lived with unseen traffic lights in our hearts. We grew up following the rules and, take for instance, would stop at the traffic lights with our kids but jay-walk when our kids are not in sight. Those unseen traffic lights have given way to our recalcitrance, a trait which we have traditionally associated with our formative years.

Subconsciously, we probably feel guilty but always hoped for a second chance to do it right/better the next time; and more often than not, even before the act takes place, we already brace thought of doing it right/better after we have done it.

So what if you are a Christian?

Just because we committed our lives to God and chose to carry that Cross everyday for the rest of our lives does not immunize us against rebellion towards the unseen traffic lights in us! We know that our sins are forgiven once and for all by Christ's crucifixion; we also know that He continues to

forgive the many sins we commit thereafter. We are feeble mankind, with a willing spirit but a weak flesh.

Unfortunately as Christians, many have decided to fall asleep or take a spiritual vacation. They have decided that since it is so hard to keep up with bearing the cross and that guilt, they might as well join the world!

My Christian friend, if you are reading this, and no matter how far away you think you have drifted away from God, I plead with you to come back. Come back to the cross and there is no melodrama to all these.

In all likelihood, you may have forgotten that God is in control of your life and has allowed you to stray. Even for Satan to tempt you, God has to allow that to happen, you know?

God being in control of your life means that He is perfect, and is not expecting you to be so. It is OK for us to be imperfect and while we can continue to drive and make things happen, we need to commit the outcomes to God. The intent and process is more important than the doing itself.

Other religions tell you to be at peace with yourself and the world around you tells you to grow up and own the outcomes. All these lead you to become self-contained and you think you have achieved nirvana when you seem to have things perfectly in control and under your control.

God created rest too!

For most of use, you have heard lots about how God created the world, but do you realise REST is part of that creation too? This explains why Christians obey the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy, and we rest from work on Sundays. If you happen to be a student, remember to put in your utmost best from Monday to Saturday, as Sabbath applies to you too!

God had intended rest so that we can:

1. Devote time to worship Him.
2. Fellowship with our Church friends and just as importantly, our loved ones, even if they are pre-believers.

3. Recharge - and we do this by remembering to relinquish control and rest in God and connect with him to be recharged by Him.

In today's fast-paced society that we live in, it is so hard for the control-freak in us to relinquish control. It is not about the unseen traffic lights in us - those lights only serve to remind us how imperfect we are and we choose to run away from what we cannot control by doing the complete opposite. We "break the rule" in a feeble attempt to regain control, to feel that we have a final say in our own lives.

Conclusion - we need traffic lights

We need them. They are there to help keep things in control, to guide us, to make our paths fit for travel. Those traffic lights are not there to make us less than who we think we are.



Charlotte

As Christians, the Bible is our set of traffic lights.

Is it time to turn to God and review what those traffic lights tell us? Which are the areas that say GO or WAIT or NO GO?

As traffic lights do change their signals, be heartened if the current answer to your prayer is: WAIT.

Your attitude determines your altitude.

Keep your face to the sunshine and you cannot see the shadow.

— Helen Keller (Deaf and blind her whole life!)

**The man who deals in sunshine
Is the man who gets the crowds.
He does a lot more business
Than the man who peddles clouds.**

**All through life, my brother,
If you'd be a happy soul,
Keep your eye upon the doughnut
And not upon the hole.**

Bethel The Gift of Christmas

22 Dec 2007, Bethel CG's 2007 Christmas Outreach was targeted at our family members who are yet to accept Christ. As there had been previous fellowship gatherings with this group, we planned to strengthen this further during the Christmas season. The event was an afternoon tea at my place. We thank God that Young Kwang's elder brother came. We are also very pleased to have Nick Wong's mum join us for the first time. On top of that we had my other brother Charlie and his family with us too.



Thomas and Jim (on the guitar) led the group with some singing in Hokkien. It was a joyous sound. To share the message of Christ, we took on Sister Esther's idea of singing a Mandarin song entitled "A Gift" or "Yi Jian Li Wu". The message was about Jesus Christ being a very special gift for each of us, why not take it? To reinforce the message in the song, we had a little activity where our guests were asked to pick out a card each from a pre-prepared deck. They were to seek out the other person with a same card as their own and exchange gifts with each other. This created an opportunity for some inter-mingling and exchange of blessings.



Of course we ended with a sumptuous tea with dim sums and other delicacies. The afternoon ended well with much conversation and getting to know each other.

We also plan to do Chinese New Year visits to these special friends. **CNY is another good opportunity to build bridges** and share God's goodness to us all.

IRIS