

ASIAN BEACON

YOUR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE

Resilience

Pastor Raymond Koh's last words

- Epic Woman
- Your Vote Is Useless
- Thank God for Failures
- Safe To Speak
- Drowning In Depression
- Beauty, Brains & Obedience
- Fishing For Stars
- Is God On The Streets?
- Kampong Boy Makes
- Priest at Work
- Romancing The Cynics
- Global Impact

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Resilience

There's a Japanese proverb that says, "In time, even the strongest wind tires itself out, but the bamboo remains standing tall and still." Bamboos have the remarkable quality of resilience that can withstand the storm. They are strong and yet flexible, bending and swaying to the mighty forces, with their trunks firmly rooted in the ground below. That's why we've chosen them to grace our cover.

We dedicate this issue to the many resilient people who have and are still encountering storms in their lives and have remained standing, people like Susanna Koh and her children whose husband/father Pastor Raymond Koh was abducted a year ago and is still missing. Some, like Dr Timothy William, have even flourished from their failures.

Like them, we need to develop resilience if we are to face adversities without snapping, for disappointments, distress and difficulties are inevitable in life. May their stories encourage us to get rooted in God, His Word and His family, so that when the storm strikes, we will stand.

While on the subject of resilience, let's talk about depression, a "D" (dirty) word for some Christians. How can Christians get depressed?!! No, we should be living victorious Christian lives, filled with the joy of the Lord. Depression is for those without hope, people like Robin Williams, Linkin Park's Chester and SHINee's Jonghyun, all who committed suicide. Why would people who have everything take their lives?

I had a glimpse of depression when some years ago, I would awake every night from my fitful sleep feeling dark dread and ghastly gloom. I was on the verge of seeing a psychiatrist when my husband suggested talking to Hera first. So, one Sunday after the worship service, I pulled her aside and unloaded my mind on her. After hearing the long and short of it, she said, "Juat, you need to see a gynaecologist." Boom! The next day, I saw one and the birds have been chirping since. You see, my problem was a hormonal one and was more easily resolved. What about the others? Be sure to read Hera's take on this monstrous issue.

At the start of this new year, and to borrow the phrase from Star Wars, which must have copied the phrase from us, May the LORD be with you. We at *Asian Beacon* also wish you Happy Valentine's Day, Happy Chinese New Year and with the general election around the corner, Happy Voting. 🗳️

Juat

EDITOR

Ms Ong Juat Heng

ADVISORS

Pastor Dr Chew Weng Chee • Rev. Loh Soon Choy
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PERSAUDARAAN ASIAN BEACON MALAYSIA

19-C, Jalan SS22/19, Damansara Jaya,
47400 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia
Tel: (603) 7725 4109 • Fax: (603) 7726 1740 • Hp: 012-3931 453
Email: aboffice@asianbeacon.org

PERTH REPRESENTATIVE

Tek and Goldie Chong - Email: tekchong@iinet.net.au

DESIGN & LAYOUT

Jaqueline Yong
016-2030380

PRINTER

Thumbprints UTD SDN BHD
Lot 24 Jalan RP 3, Rawang Perdana, Industrial Estate,
48000 Rawang, Selangor.
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Missing Pastor Raymond



The Koh family: (from left) Jonathan, Elizabeth, Raymond, Susanna and Esther.



Loving couple... Susanna and Raymond doing a dance at Esther's wedding in September 2016.

By Ong Juat Heng

Come Valentine's Day, as lovers lavish each other with gifts and romantic meals, Susanna Liew will be feeling the palpable absence of her husband, Pastor Raymond Koh, who was abducted last year on the eve of Valentine's Day.

"Yes, Raymond is¹ a romantic person," Susanna replied to the question. "Every year, on our wedding anniversary, he will buy me a bunch of fresh roses. Once, on our 30th anniversary, he gave me 30 roses," she exclaimed.

She is still learning about the extent Raymond would go through to express his love for her. "Recently, a Christian leader told me that several years ago when Raymond was attending some meetings with the EFC mission leaders in Thailand, he suddenly remembered it was Valentine's Day the next day and insisted on going home by bus all the way (to Petaling Jaya) so that he could spend the evening with me, which he did. I didn't know that he had made such an effort and he didn't tell me either. I was so proud of him and so touched that I teared up when the leader told me."

In fact, "I love you" were Raymond's last words to Susanna just before his abduction. In an interview with *Asian Beacon*, Susanna recalled, with tears rolling down her cheek, that fateful morning when he uttered those words. "I was at my friend's apartment, helping to babysit her children. I called Raymond at around 9 a.m. to come and get some sambal belacan to pass to a friend he was going to meet later. He dropped in at around 9.30 a.m., took the sambal belacan and said, 'Bye. I love you'. That was the last time I saw him," Susanna said as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

Little did she know then that an hour later, Raymond would be swiftly abducted by at least five men wearing ski masks in a

scene that looked as if it came right out of a movie. Susanna was oblivious to the ordeal until 7.30 p.m. that night when her son, Jonathan, came home with her handphone, which she had left at their Harapan Komuniti office in Kelana Jaya, Petaling Jaya. (Harapan Komuniti was founded by Raymond in 2004 to help the poor and marginalised, especially HIV/AIDS patients and single mothers.)

THE NIGHTMARE BEGINS

There were many missed calls on Susanna's phone. She replied one and was told that Raymond had not turned up for a 4.00 p.m. meeting in Klang. Sensing something amiss, she called her friends, who advised her to make a police report.

Two hours later, she and Jonathan, 33, were at the Kelana Jaya police station where they were questioned about Raymond's activities and work in Harapan Komuniti. This lasted until 3.00 a.m. and they were back there again several hours later for more questioning. Frustrated, she told the police they should be looking for her husband and not interrogate her about his work.

Two days after the abduction, and still without a clue about Raymond's whereabouts, Susanna's daughter, Esther, and Jonathan decided to take things into their own hands. They had read from that morning's newspaper that the abduction had taken place on Jalan Bahagia. They drove there and found shattered glasses on the road.

An idea struck Jonathan to look for houses with CCTVs in the area. Brother and sister then walked door to door, explaining to the house owners what they were looking for. "We kept going back to the area and going house to house to ask for CCTV

videos,” said Esther. Their persistence paid off on Feb. 18, 2017, five days after Raymond was abducted, when they obtained from a house owner a CCTV video that captured the abduction.

Susanna was stunned when she saw the video². “I couldn’t breathe. It had never occurred to me that he could be abducted. Arrested yes, but not abducted,” she said. (Harapan Komuniti had received at least one death threat in the past.)

The video immediately went viral, viewed by many all over the world except Esther, who couldn’t bring herself to watch it until several months later.

DIVINE STRENGTH

Susanna maintained they are just ordinary folks but this is no ordinary event. At the time of their interview with *Asian Beacon*, Raymond had been missing for 296 days. How have they coped?

“Only by the Lord’s grace can we stand strong,” she replied and quoted 2 Cor. 12:9: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”. She admitted the first few weeks were hard and she felt lost and confused with the many different advices coming to her from all sides. “I didn’t know which way to go.”

In her confusion, she decided to go for a silent retreat in Thailand that she and Raymond had planned to go. The retreat, sponsored by a friend, was scheduled the year before. Instead, she went with their youngest daughter, Elizabeth, three weeks after the abduction. There in the serene silence and comforting solitude over the next seven days, she found the breakthrough she desperately needed.

“The retreat helped me to focus on God instead of my circumstance. Though it was overwhelming, I found strength in His word. Psalm 46:9-10 reminded me to be still and know that He is God. The story of Ruth and Naomi also ministered to me. They did not have a future but Boaz, their kinsman redeemer, gave them a future. Likewise, Jesus is my kinsman redeemer and I have hope, I have a future,” she shared.

One specific incident that lifted her during the retreat was when she walked through the labyrinth at the centre. In the middle of the labyrinth was a rock and there, Susanna knelt and laid her burdens. “When I got up, I had this assurance that He’s with me, He holds my tomorrow. The song, “Be still”, came to me and truly minis-

tered to me. Worshipping God in songs helped me focus on Him and not the problem.”

For the perky Elizabeth, 21, the initial months were the lowest point of her life as she was also dealing with some personal issues. “There was so much happening in my life then and I tried to remember what Dad had told me before,” she said.

“I remembered one sermon that he preached two years ago, about Jesus sleeping in the boat when the storm hit and His disciples were crying out to Him. Oh wait... I think it was the sermon on the Great Commission,” she said, to much laughter from us. “He preached a lot of sermons, so I can get them mixed up,” she continued.

“Whatever it is, they all boil down to the promises of God and our trust in Him no matter what happens. Putting the boat incident and the Great Commission together, it’s knowing that Jesus will be there for us to the very end of age. When I

*“When I got up,
I had this assurance that
He’s with me,
He holds my tomorrow.”*

“spiritually prepared” as he had been doing prayer walks and memorising chunks of Scripture passages. “We have come to accept the situation. At our counselling sessions, we were advised to do normal things, like go back to cooking and hobbies, and live as normally as possible.”

For Esther, the quieter one, she has learned to surrender everything to God after the initial months of pain when she kept crying out to God to save her father. Her breakthrough came one day as she was driving home. “I was listening to a song about oceans and crying out to God. I asked Him, ‘Is there hope?’” she said, and stopped to compose herself. “Then, something hit me. I felt God telling me, ‘All this while you’ve seen the way your dad lives when he helped the poor and needy. Did you see hope for them?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ God replied, ‘Then, there’s hope in this situation.’ At that moment, I felt His deep assurance.”



Emotional moment for Susanna at the interview.

think about my dad, that’s what he believes, that no matter what happens, God’s going to take care of him.”

During the first few months, Elizabeth felt “Jesus was sleeping” and there was no answer from Him. “But He was there in the boat all along and He eventually woke up. I was reassured that His promises will hold true.”

As the months passed, it became easier to cope with Raymond’s absence as Susanna continually laid her burden before God and surrendered the uncertainties to Him. Still, there were many days when she wondered how he’s doing. “Thank God he’s very healthy as he’s very particular about food. No salt, no oil, and he’s not on any medication. He’s 63 years old but he could play football with the teens.”

Susanna added that Raymond was

WHAT THEY SPECIFICALLY MISS ABOUT RAYMOND

For Susanna, it is his spiritual guidance and direction. “He’s the one who leads the family in spiritual matters, prayer, Bible reading, devotion. I miss his sharing about his prayer walks and the Bible passages he’d been memorising. I also miss seeing his enthusiasm for God and passion for people, especially the poor and the discriminated that no other organisation would want to take. Whenever the hospital called our centre (Harapan Komuniti) to ask if we could accept some HIV patients, he would take them in. He was always helping people, raising funds for them.”

Elizabeth chipped in, “One big thing I miss – his guitar playing every day. He got me a small classical guitar when I was 7 and it’s always lying in the living room.

1. The Koh family believes that Raymond is still alive. 2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjcxSZGS-8&t=10s>

After lunch or dinner, he would pick it up and play some random songs. He'd tell us, 'I've got this song,' and he'd show us."

On a more serious note, she said, "I think about all the time when he gave me the best advice – how to treat people, how to deal with difficult boyfriends or what to say to the teachers. He just knew how to connect with people. Because of his very poor background, he could empathise with people as he understood what it's like to feel pain, to have nothing."

He'll be proud of them when he's back and sees that everything is in order.

HAVE THEY EVER BEEN ANGRY WITH GOD FOR RAYMOND'S ABDUCTION?

"No, never. But I was angry with the police," Susanna said and quickly added she had to learn to forgive and also ask for forgiveness from the Investigating Officer. During the Suhakam inquiry last November into the disappearance of Raymond and three others, the Investigating Officer testified that the family was not cooperative. She couldn't sleep that night and the next day, God led her to a Scripture verse, "Be angry but sin not. Do not let the sun go down with your anger".

On the way to the inquiry that morning, her friend told her not to be angry with the police as they were just doing their job. "Another arrow on me," she said. When she saw the Investigating Officer later, she went up to him and apologised. "I'm glad I sorted that one out. It's also important for them to see how Christians behave, that we are able to ask for forgiveness," Susanna said.

STEPPING OUT

Since Raymond's disappearance, Susanna has had to step out of the shadow and take charge of Harapan Komuniti. "In our family, Raymond was the public speaker and I was just a housewife in the background. Suddenly, I found myself speaking in front of large crowds and making decisions for Harapan Komuniti. It's a steep learning curve but in a way, it

is good as it means I have to depend on God for help."

Esther, 33, and Jonathan, 34, are also stepping up to take on more work at Harapan Komuniti, while Elizabeth, 21, is going back to the US to continue her college education after taking a year's leave. As they wait patiently for Raymond's return, they will continue doing his work as he would have done. He'll be proud of them when he's back and sees that everything is in order. 🙏

(More information about Pastor Raymond Koh, updates and Harapan Komuniti is available at <https://findraymondkoh.com> and Facebook page, [everybodylovesraymondkoh](https://www.facebook.com/everybodylovesraymondkoh). The family has also set up the Raymond Koh Trust Fund where the money raised will go to the Harapan Komuniti work, their family welfare and advocacy for the other three people who are missing – social activist Amri Che Mat, Pastor Joshua Hilmi and his wife, Ruth Sitepu.)



Elizabeth (in black top) and Esther in a sombre mood as their mother relates the events at the Asian Beacon office.

BY THEIR SIDE

Through it all, the Koh family has been well supported by the family of God. During the first month after the abduction, they (except Esther, who's married) stayed with a friend who took care of them.

"We were busy running in and out and my friend would make sure we had nutritious food and always boiled nutritious soup for us. Another friend would bring breakfast and dinner and helped us write the chronology of the events. This came in helpful for the Suhakam inquiry and the submission to the United Nations Working Group For Enforced And Involuntary Disappearance," Susanna said.

Many churches and Christians showed support and Susanna singled out Pastor Daniel Ho of DUMC, who met with them several times and made sure they shared what's in their heart. Susanna is also grateful to their church leaders, Pastor Chan Ah Kee and his wife, Ah Poh, and their advisors, who include lawyers Philip Koh and Datuk Kenny Ng, Datuk Lee Hwa Beng and Sheryl Stothard, their communications strategist.

Beyond the faith community, God has brought many prominent individuals and organisations to support the Koh family in their case – the family lawyers who volunteered many hours representing them at the Suhakam Public Inquiry, such as Datuk Gerald Gomez, Prof. Guardia Singh, Steven Thiru and Ambiga Sreenivasan. "We are also thankful to observers like CAGED, Bar Council and EIAC, who gave their support with their presence and participation," Susanna said.

"The family of God is so important. We really must stay connected to God's people," she stressed.

Indeed, as Raymond had counted the cost of serving Christ, he and his family can count on the family of God to walk with them.

HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW



Matthew 6:26

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

Matthew 10:29-31

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

REFLECTIONS

The hymn of faith, "His eye is on the sparrow", was inspired by the life of an afflicted couple – a bedridden wife with a wheelchair-bound crippled husband! Despite their medical conditions, they lived happy Christian lives because they knew that God, whose eye was on the sparrow, was watching over them. If God takes care of the birds in the air and lilies of the field, surely He would take care of His children who are of greater value! What have we to worry when we have God who cares about every detail of our life, even counts the hairs on our head! (Matthew 6:26) Indeed, as Romans 8:32 declares: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

PRAYER

O loving Father,
You who feed the birds of the air,
care for the little sparrows,
and even count the number of hairs on my head,
Forgive me for the times I worry too much and
doubt your love for me.
Help me to place my trust in you;
Help me not to be afraid and
Set me free from all bondage, worries and cares,
That I may sing praises to you,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit!
In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.



The above reflection and prayer are extracted from the book, Singing Through the Storms of Life. Re-print permission granted to Asian Beacon by the author, Mary Y.T. Gan, who can be contacted at maryganyt@gmail.com



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KAMPONG BOY MAKES GLOBAL IMPACT



Failed-again
Christian scientist
Dato' Dr Kim Tan.



By Goh Bee Lee and Ong Juat Heng

He calls himself a failed scientist, a failed philanthropist and a failed-again Christian. But to the world, Malaysian-born Dato' Dr Kim Tan is a huge success. This inventor of the sheep monoclonal antibodies* may be short in stature but there is nothing short about his achievements – his biodata runs into many pages and includes the UK's Beacon Award, which he received in May 2017 for his outstanding work on Impact Investment. Yes, he's a wizard scientist and social impact entrepreneur, but he's best described as a scholar and a failed-again follower of Jesus. He's a reluctant interviewee but *Asian Beacon* caught up with him at a forum where he was the speaker.

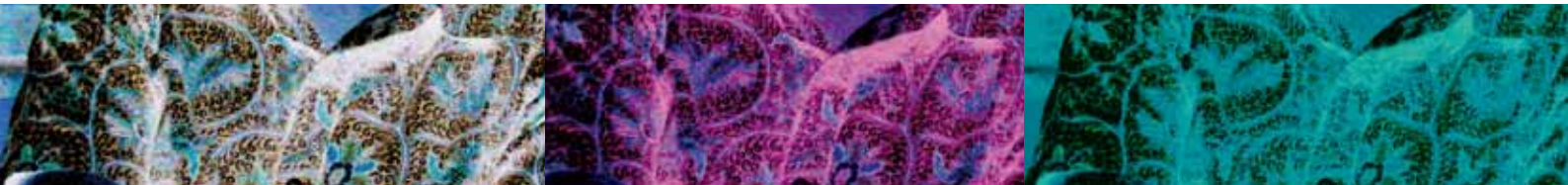
Born to poor Hokkien Eng Choon immigrant parents in a rural part of Seremban, he remembers with gratitude all the opportunities he had that made him what he is today. Everything that runs up to his present status – the education in the UK and various scholarships from the British government, even his parents' dogged determination to give their nine children the best education – he puts down plainly to the hand of God in his life.

Tan is well acquainted with hard, humble work; in his university years, he worked during summer holidays to earn extra income. "As students, we were allowed to work on the side. I used to clean stairs, wash toilets and also worked as a hospital porter."

It is this experience of poverty and his later encounter with Jesus the Messiah that have driven this scientist, social enterprise advocate and passionate social impact investor. "I came to faith reluctantly. I was an atheist, totally sold on Darwinism, which I still hold to. But I couldn't help being attracted to Jesus by how radical and anti-establishment He was. I was struck by the message of His gospel – to care for the poor."

LIFE IN COMMUNITY

Tan's life was transformed when as a young man, he and his wife, together with about 40 others, spent eight years living as a community in the spirit of the Acts church.



“We had all things in common, helping one another, sharing our lives and our resources. We made sacrifices. We even helped newly-married couples put down deposits for their first home.”

Those eight years were vital formative years. It helped the young Tan dig deep and become rooted in Scripture. It was also then that he learned to deal with materialism and choose a more frugal lifestyle.

“I was privileged to sit at the feet of great teachers like David Pawson, Alan Kreider and Roger Forster who taught me much. Addiction to materialism is very real. It is the idol of this age. Why, people throw away perfectly ok phones just to own the latest model!” he exclaims.

HARD CHOICES OF THE ENTREPRENEUR EXTRAORDINAIRE

After completing his undergraduate, postgraduate and post-doctoral studies in biochemistry at the University of Surrey, he decided he wasn't going to pursue a serious career as a scientist. It was then that he was starting to build a community in Guildford UK.

He learnt business the hard way with no real capital as he built his first start-up. When asked to name one role model in business, he mentioned the late Sir John Templeton of the John Templeton Foundation, who was a brilliant investor but his outstanding qualities were humility and frugality. But Tan learnt about business from his late father and saw the hard work and sacrifice that went in to build a successful business.

“Frugality is necessary as a quality for others to trust you. We are stewards of the investors. The money is not used to fund my lifestyle,” he muses.

Tan flies economy class, drives an 18-year-old Polo car and proudly declares that the batik shirt he is wearing was picked up from Parkson's in Seremban. He lives out what he firmly believes – that we should be

good stewards of God's gifts and resources.

Another choice he has purposed long ago is never to take short cuts or pay bribes. “No business ever happens quickly. Real business takes time. As Christian businessmen, we have to say out loud and often that we do not believe in backhanders.”

CHRISTIAN MANDATE

So what compels this champion of the poor?

Tan pulls out Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus came to fulfil (he terms it the “Nazareth mandate”).

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”

To Tan, the “good news” is simply the outworking of the gospel.

For the past two hundred years, the church has emphasised the Galilee mandate of the Great Commission – to go into all the world to preach the good news and make disciples. However, we

to.” The Great Commission has to go hand in hand with the Great Commandment to love our neighbour.

“There is an element of surprise in the gospel – the unexpected demonstration of love to the undeserving. When we show practical love to people who are total strangers or who do not deserve it, they will often ask, ‘Why are you doing this?’ That is when we have earned our right to speak,” he explains.

“The dilemma of the church today is that most of the time, its good news is confined within its four walls. As Bishop Newbiggin said, we have to remember that what Jesus left behind was not a book, nor a creed, nor a rule of life but a ‘visible community’. After Pentecost, the church grew so fast because when people saw this community and their practical love, they said, ‘Wow! I want to be part of this!’ It was a place where no one had any need.”

CATALYST OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

And so it has been for many years now that Tan's life has been consumed by an over-arching passion: impact investment for social transformation. This means that the champion against poverty spends lots of time travelling around the world as a catalyst for projects to help the poor.

“I spend one third of my time in Africa, a third in Asia and a third in the UK. There are of course sacrifices to make, of time, of health – those health jabs and diarrhoea – to reach the needy.”

Tan co-founded the Transformational Business Network (TBN) – a UK-based network of business people and organisations that uses enterprise to tackle global poverty. He is a partner and advisor of several social impact funds in

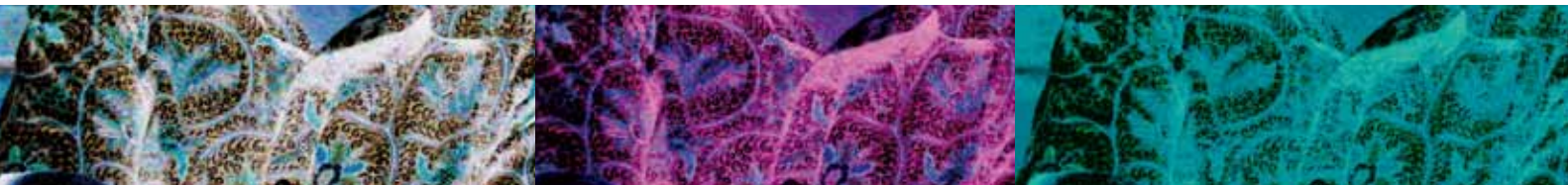
Africa and Asia, in the US, the UK and even in Singapore.

Some of their projects include the very successful Kuzuko Game Reserve in



The Kuzuko Game Reserve in South Africa is a 40,000-acre game reserve that has created 250 jobs for the local community. Prior to opening in 2007, this rural area experienced high unemployment, its wildlife was under threat and the environment had been degraded.

have neglected the Nazareth mandate. He also subscribes to what is usually attributed to St Francis of Assisi: “Preach Christ always. Use words when you have



South Africa and the Agape Call Centre in Changi Prison, Singapore**. Wherever they have projects, they provide employment, creation care and help set up schools for children who would otherwise never have the opportunity of an education.

A popular writer, Dato' Tan is the co-author of *Fighting Poverty Through Enterprise and Social Impact Investing: New Agenda In Fighting Poverty*, with Lord Brian Griffiths, the Vice-Chairman of Goldman Sachs. He also wrote *Jubilee Gospel*, which starts with the Old Testament institution of Jubilee and traces related themes through the rest of the Bible.

So, how does he wear so many hats and keep everything in balance?

"I have an amazingly supportive wife. Since our community days, she has been committed to our life goals. She knows my weaknesses best. We have a quiet home on a farm where I can come home to recharge my battery, and have space and time to think."

Tan also credits his fantastic partners in Africa and Asia who are people of the same vision. "They do the real work", he says.

Does he think it is easier to reach the poor?

"The Kingdom of God is for those who know their needs. Those who have no needs have difficulty entering. Indeed, Christianity is a religion for beggars," he says, borrowing the words of Bertrand Russell.

Tan is writing his sixth book (and hopefully his last) entitling it (not surprisingly) *Failed-again Christian*. "I believe Christianity is only for failures, not for the proud. None of the 'triumphalistic' Christianity for me. If Jesus, my Master, went through suffering and sacrifice, how should I expect any difference, being His follower? We fail but we have a God who keeps on forgiving."

So captivated is he with this thought that he plans to engrave on his tombstone, "A failed-again Christian".

THE FINAL QUESTION

If you were sitting for an exam and you already knew the question, wouldn't you be working hard to prepare to answer it? Tan knows the question and he works hard daily to face it.

"When I meet my Maker, He will only ask one question: 'And what have you done with all the gifts I gave you?' I want to be sure I can give a good answer to that. I would like to hear Him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant,'" he concludes. 🙏

**The sheep monoclonal antibodies are now widely used in blood tests for diseases. Tan also developed the first rapid tests for detecting salmonella used by the poultry industry.*

***Check out the inspiring story at <https://youtu.be/lQxfC2z7Jjk>*



Tan's latest book reflects his stance that "the poor need jobs, not aid".

ON THE GO

Dato' Dr Kim Tan vehemently believes that the poor is best helped when they are provided with opportunities and trained to make a living, instead of just being given "fish". His passion therefore lies in social impact investing in Africa and Asia. As co-founder of the Transformational Business Network (TBN), a UK charity with 85 social transformational projects that have created over 20,000 jobs in developing countries, he drives change by supporting projects that create jobs, empower the poor and transform communities.

One of Tan's pet ventures through TBN is the Kuzuko Game Reserve in South Africa, a 40,000-acre conservation and social transformation project that he founded to stimulate economic activities in that high unemployment area. The project has tremendously benefited the economic, social and environmental sectors in the country and is a model for how business can be a powerful force for transformation in deprived areas.

As if he's not occupied enough, he is also the Chairman of Spring-Hill Management, a private fund management company specialising in biotech and social venture capital investments; a partner of several social impact funds including Inqo Investments (South Africa), Springhill Equity Partners (US), Novastar Ventures (Kenya) and Garden Impact Investment (Singapore); and sits on the advisory board of several organisations including the John Templeton Foundation, the Johnson & Johnson Citizenship Trust and PovertyCure. He is a pro-Chancellor of Surrey University (UK).

A simple, modest man, he has one indulgence – rugby. He is a former director of Saracens Rugby Club, the Double European Champions.





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Epic WOMAN

By Dr Tan Gaik Cheng



The Oei brothers – John-Ian, John-Son and John-Hans – are fast becoming household names in Malaysia with their recent successes as social entrepreneurs. John-Son is CEO of EPIC, an award-winning social enterprise building homes for underprivileged communities, while John-Ian and John-Hans head Microbs, an environmentally friendly waste management solution-provider. Their widowed mother, Ooi Piek See, shares with *Asian Beacon* her journey of faith in bringing up three teen boys into the fine young men they are today.

Piek See's husband, Boon Hock, passed away in 2000 when the boys were 16, 13 and 11. Overnight, she was catapulted from her role as housewife to breadwinner, role model and 'father'. She recalls, "I asked God to give me the leadership to lead these three boys and whatever I needed to learn, to teach me first so I could teach them. Secondly, don't let me waste my sorrows but help me to work through the pain and anger positively. And finally, to bring more people to God in death than in life."

On the morning before Boon Hock passed away, God spoke reassuringly to Piek See through Jeremiah 29:11. She then told her husband not to be anxious about the future for she believed that God would honour His promises for His namesake to be the father to the fatherless and husband to the widows.

"Looking back, God has amazingly provided far beyond all we needed in these 17 years! I am humbled by how our families, both biological and spiritual, had extended much love, prayers, and physical and financial help we needed. The church family provided us with strong Christian mentors and role models, proving that every child is indeed raised by a 'village of believers,'" she testifies.

COUNTING WHAT COUNTS

Piek See is a firm believer in passing to her children what really counts from the perspective of eternity. She asserts, "Many Christian parents emphasize academic achievements, forgetting that what matter to God are character, attitude and a genuine faith in Him. Not everything you count counts and not everything that counts can be counted. We get hung up on the material inheritance we want to leave our children and forget what kind of legacy we want to pass on.

"I have three gifts to pass to my boys – the gifts of faith, hospitality and leadership." She then asks, "Are our God and faith attractive and real enough for our children to see and want to follow?"

In the words of one of her boys, "She was always more interested in the kind of men we would become than what jobs we were doing."

When the boys were of marriageable age, Piek See brought them on what she called "a value holiday", where they worked through the values and belief system that their family stood for and

they could agree upon. She told them that through this values and belief system, "when the right girl comes along with the same values, then you will know that is the right girl for you". All three boys are happily married today.

"NOT EVERYTHING YOU COUNT COUNTS AND NOT EVERYTHING THAT COUNTS CAN BE COUNTED."

LEADING BY DOING

"We do not teach our children with mere words but by demonstrating the truth in our lives. My father-in-law was terminally ill in 2004 and I undertook to care for him although my husband had already passed away, rather than putting him in a nursing home. This involved having to care for his physical needs, sometimes having to clean him up in the wee hours of the morning. I believe the boys would have learnt compassion through this experience far more effectively than through mere words," she shares.

"They don't need a thousand sermons but an example to follow. Once when I got home late, John-Son wanted to talk (all teens chat after midnight) but I did not entertain him. He said, 'Mum, you go out and motivate others but come back home and demotivate your



The epic family (from left): Charmaine Kon, John-Hans Oei, Piek See, John-Son Oei, Jayne Kennedy, John-Ian Oei, Yam Hui Min.

children'. I had to apologise and ask him to pray for me and start again.

"They learn grace and mercy when they see me fail in my role and responsibility as a mum," she says. She quotes Vincent Peale, "The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be raised by praise than saved by criticism," emphasising that the biggest hurdle to leading our children is to change ourselves first.

CELEBRATING FAILURE

Piek See speaks passionately about celebrating failure, something most of us who prefer not to see our children suffer setbacks and negative experiences will squirm over. She has been teaching her boys to celebrate failure and speaks about it at various seminars and leadership conferences as she feels that many young people lack inner strength and character, resulting in the inability to handle failure and learn from it.

She recalls, "When John-Son tried unsuccessfully to enter college with his forecast SPM results, I told him, 'Let's celebrate'. He was baffled and told me that most mums would have killed their child in the same situation! Of course,

internally I did feel like killing him! I shared with him my maxim – failures are not fatal and successes are not forever.

"Children often learn far more through failures; they learn to listen to the Holy Spirit and walk in obedience through these painful defining moments. I believe my boys now enjoy a personal walk with God rather than lean on their parents' faith."

This story takes on significance when we hear of John-Son's recent successes reflected in the numerous awards for his work in EPIC – the Dedication Award at the Annual Muhammad Ali Humanitarian Awards 2017, The Edge Inspiring Young Leaders Awards 2017 and Forbes 30 under 30 Asia 2017 for Social Entrepreneurs Award.

TAKING THE HARDER ROAD

Learning to trust God is an ongoing life experience for the Oeis. Four years ago, at the young age of 22 years, John-Hans was already the general manager of an international hotel. He gave up several other high-paying international offers to come home to co-start Microbs, buying

into the concept of a green, economical and comprehensive solution to waste management.

His mother says, "The going is still tough and it would be easier for him to have continued in a high-flying career in the hotel industry. But I love it because just as with EPIC, when things get rough and money runs out, the boys have to cry out to God and learn to trust Him. I encourage them to always look to our God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills and who can supply all that we need."

Piek See is herself the Executive Director of Centenary Million Singapore/Malaysia and a Director of EPIC DNA. She also has a Million Leaders Mandate certification and, with a wealth of life experience, is well positioned to teach on leadership. In 2001, together with like-minded believers, she started "Marketplace Leadership Centre", a marketplace fellowship that eventually grew into Grace Life Church. In recent years, she has subscribed to Neil Cole's organic church 3.0, believing in the importance of being church in the world and fully integrating both her faith and work. Her vision is to grow leaders for nation transformation as she aspires to be a courageous and decisive trailblazer for the Kingdom of God.

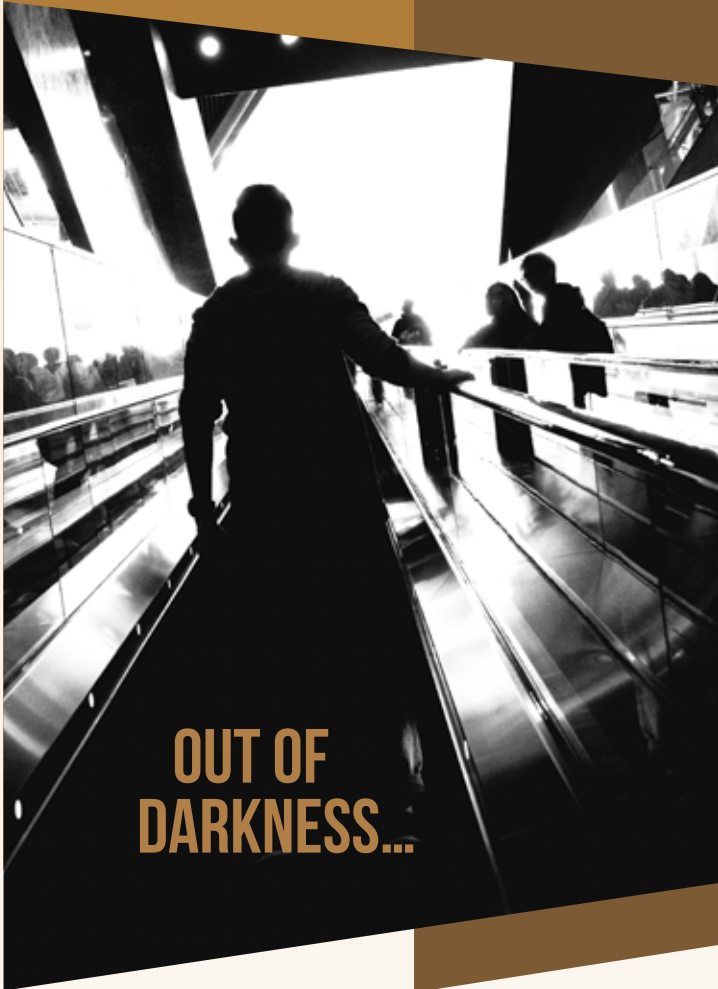
As if that is not enough, she is the primary caregiver to her 95-year-old mother, rising daily at 6 a.m. to attend to her needs before heading to office for meetings or training at weekends. It is no wonder that she has been called "Superwoman" and that her sons speak glowingly of her.

Indeed "her children arise and call her blessed... for this is a woman who fears the Lord and is to be praised." (Proverbs 31:28a, 30b) ✨

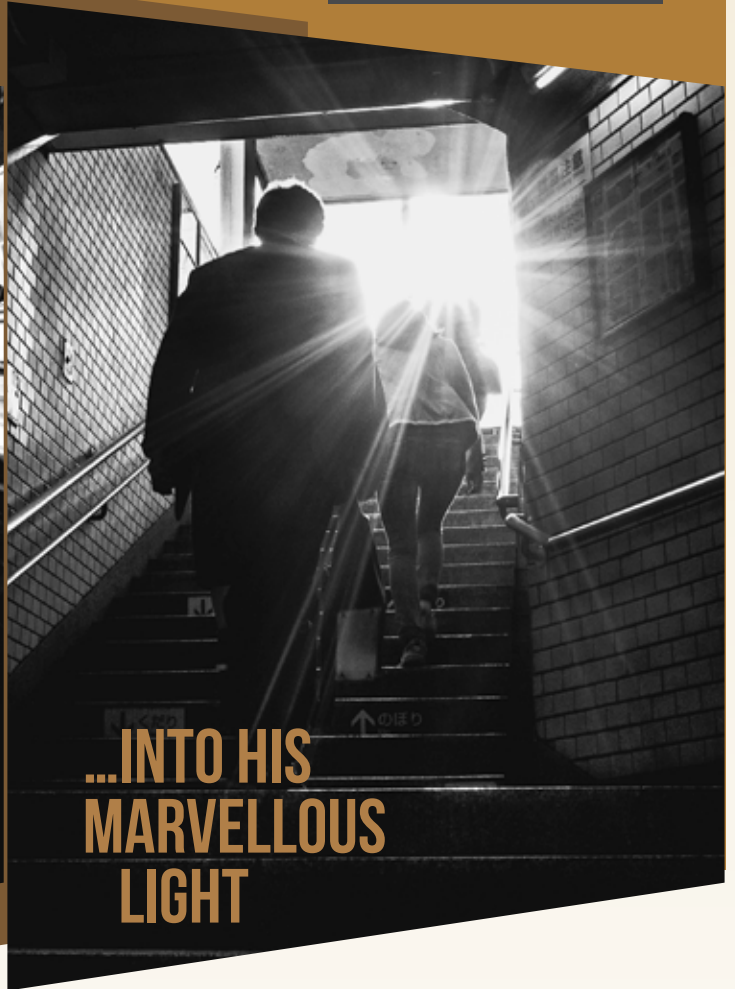
"THEY DON'T NEED A THOUSAND SERMONS BUT AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW."

BROKEN DREAMS COME ALIVE

By Chew Sue Lee



OUT OF
DARKNESS...



...INTO HIS
MARVELLOUS
LIGHT

Lydia Ho is an accomplished street photographer, whose work has won many awards and is recognised by photography magazines and countless websites. And to think that she started her hobby in photography only four years ago.

From designing jewellery and bags to drawing, sewing her own dresses as a child and finally teaching music, one could say that Lydia Ho, 52, has creativity flowing in her blood. “God has given me this gift of creativity and it has made a difference in my life,” she says.

As a 12-year-old growing up in Ipoh, she dreamed of becoming a fashion designer. She browsed through fashion books and started designing and sewing her own dresses, using fabric from old pillowcases. Her mother, a teacher, told her if she wanted to become a fashion designer, she might as well quit school and become a tailor. Even then, Lydia knew the importance of education and the difference between a tailor and a designer. So she continued school and

finished secondary school top of her class.

She had hoped to study graphic design at the Malaysian Institute of Art, but ditched the idea as she did not have the necessary finances. Furthermore, her mother dissuaded her. Instead, she accepted a place at the teacher’s training college because it was free and assured her of a job upon completion. She graduated with distinction as a school music teacher.

Before her first teaching job, she married John, her husband for the past 27 years. As with most married couples that marry young, money was tight. “My artistic talent was my asset and I wanted to do something that required little capital.” So she began offering music lessons to earn extra income. Later on, she started designing and creating

costume jewellery with copper and stainless steel wires, painstakingly crafting hundreds by hand and often working late into the night only to return to school a few hours later.

She was a pioneer in the jewellery making business, and her novel idea took off, allowing her to sell her creations at various department stores. “The income was enough to support my husband to begin his business that he is still doing today, and to make the down payment for our first home.” After five years of teaching, she quit as she felt creative work was better suited for her.

When her jewellery business began to decline due to copycats, Lydia switched to designing and manufacturing bags. As with her previous business, God blessed the work of her hands. “He opened doors. I ran a one-woman show



Dream on... one of Lydia's favourite photos

"We parents are stewards of our kids. If God shows us that our child is good at something, it is our job to help to bring out that talent."

To young people who have a creative spark and dream within them, Lydia urges, "Pray and ask God to be your partner. Make whatever you do a partnership with God and ask Him to help you be better. I believe God wants us to enjoy what we are doing, but we need to be consistent and persevere. We can't work hard for two weeks and then decide to take a one-year break. There are many talented people out there but character and attitude make a difference. Have good attitude and don't give up."

and had no formal training, just God's given talent," she shares humbly.

DIFFERENT SEASONS

With the birth of her only son in 1997, Lydia stopped working to care for him. It was also when China's manufacturing market started to boom. Hence, again in God's perfect timing, it was time for her to move on to a different season in life.

"There is a season for everything: If it is the season to care for our kids, then we give it our best," she says. Not one to just stay at home as a full-time mother, she kept busy outside the home with various volunteer work. Stay-home mothers should care for themselves by pursuing their passions because when they are contented, the family benefits, she says.

Lydia highlights that she is blessed to have a husband who supports and encourages her to pursue her various passions.

WINNING SPREE

Lydia's life is a testament that one should never stop trying new things no matter the age. In 2013 when she was 47, she was introduced to street photography by a friend, and thus began a new chapter in her life as a street photographer. As one who loved going on holidays, Lydia found that unknowingly, she had been taking photos that were categorised as street photography all along. She curated her past photographs and submitted them to online photography sites to test the water. When her photos were selected for awards, she pursued photography and soon, she was gaining recognition through Facebook too.

In February 2014, she won the first prize for a work she submitted to Photovogue Vogue Italia. Since then, she has had her work featured in magazines, China



"The greatest thing that has ever happened in my life is that He called me out of darkness into His marvelous light. He remembers my every dream even when I forgot to dream on during those difficult times in my life... surely His goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life."

Press Malaysia, and even won first prize at a Discover Hong Kong contest by the Hong Kong Tourism Board. Big companies such as Ricoh, Pentax and Leica have also sponsored her travels to various cities to test and promote their cameras.

In May 2017, she held a solo exhibition called Urban Rhapsody, Japan Series at Isetan KL, in collaboration with Leica Camera – no small feat for one relatively new to the scene.

Despite all her achievements, Lydia remains humble and is reluctant to spell out all her accolades. Instead she gives praise to her Father, saying, "God sped up my talent. He has given me many 'God-moments' that help me capture many of my photos."

CREATIVE PEOPLE ALSO HAVE 'GOD'S FAVOUR'

As one who was discouraged by her parents to pursue the creative line, Lydia is saddened to hear parents lament that their child is "lacking in God's favour" because he or she is artistically inclined and not academically so. She urges parents to see their children's potential beyond academics, and embrace and nurture their God-given talents and passions.

SO WHAT'S NEXT FOR LYDIA?

Never one to make plans, Lydia lives for the moment and is open to where God leads her in life. Ultimately, she seeks to give her best in whatever task He has set before her. "God has encouraged me down this path and given me the chance to meet new people," she says.

She is open to mentoring budding photographers and with that, the possibility of discipleship. "I want to make a positive impact on the people around me."

One of Lydia's favourite photos is titled Dream On. In it, she captures a tired foreign worker in Hong Kong, resting against a colourful wall with rubbish and empty boxes beside him. "No matter the person and what kind of situation he finds himself in, he has a dream," she explains.

Growing up poor, Lydia didn't have the luxury to realise her dream. "But God never forgot," she says, "He made my broken dreams come alive." ✨

Check out Lydia's photos on her website at www.lydiaohphotography.com or follow her on FB or Twitter.



IS GOD ON THE STREETS?

By Ong Kay Ti

No home but plenty of stories to tell.

The first rule at Street Feeders of KL (SFKL) is you must befriend the street friends. "If you dunno what to say, come to me, I help you initiate the conversation. I don't want to see any of you guys NOT talking to street friends!" said Auntie Rubian, a leader at SFKL, at one of our briefings.

A usual Wednesday at SFKL usually starts like this: volunteers meet at a designated spot in Kuala Lumpur, introductory speech by someone from SFKL, take group photo and then, we split up to go to different parts of KL for the food distribution.

At our first stop, there are usually 15-20 street friends gathered at the sidewalk. We start distributing food and water. Some are sleeping on the floor; some just aren't in the mood to talk. But there are those who smile at us warmly and greet us. Once we are done, we sit down with these people and begin to talk to them for the rest of the time.

In our initial months, my friends and I covered the route from Masjid Jamek to Masjid India. During my first few street feeding sessions, I shadowed my friends and tried to participate in the conversation but my Malay is so hilariously weak that I ended up just listening to their stories. I learned that there are many street friends who came to KL in hopes of getting better jobs only to end up on the streets because they were cheated by their employers.

I once saw an old man sleeping on a dirty mattress. He's a retired prison warden, a street friend told us. But he'd gone a bit crazy since his lover left him. No one knew where he'd come from, or if he had any family left and they couldn't find out because his IC was missing. He had become a ghost in our system.

Over the next few months, I met many other friends. There was a middle-aged

lady, so shy and gentle. I gave her water and in exchange, she talked to me and told me a bit of her story. She worked at a mamak shop just down the street and a few other jobs in Cheras. For every four hours of dishwashing, she was only paid RM10. Despite all she'd faced, she always had that kind smile on her face every time I saw her.

At another route on another day, my friend and I went up to a man in his 30s and gave him a container of warm *chap fan* (mixed rice). We asked him how the food was and that set him off. He started ranting in rapid Cantonese that I barely understood. He went on about a soup kitchen in KL that would regularly distribute rotten food. "Even monkeys won't eat the food they serve!" he bellowed.

WHERE IS GOD?

All these faces have stories. Life hasn't been easy on them, to say the least. And I wonder, where is God in all of these? Where is He in all the suffering and chaos? I see the world falling apart. Everything is a mess and I feel so helpless, just a useless bystander.

In Sunday School, I was told of stories of our great and mighty God, how He moved mountains and parted seas. So where is He now? I don't know. But I know He put you and me here for a reason. I know that He created us to do good things. Maybe I'm not changing the world, but I'll try my hardest to make my community a better place with what little I can offer.

It's a little discouraging sometimes, but



When night falls, the doorways are their beds.

my friend once told me that when you build the kingdom of God, God is building you. So I will continue going on Wednesday nights and find more ways to help. I think that's my own way of seeking God in this mess. I can only hope that slowly, through listening to His people and their stories, through these experiences, God will reveal Himself to me. 🙏

(Ong Kay Ti is 17 and worships at PJEFC. Photos by Gary Ng.)



Kay Ti (2nd from left) with her church friends on their street feeding mission.



Thank God FOR FAILURES

If Dr Timothy William had not failed, he might not have won the highly coveted 2017 Merdeka Award, one of the most, if not the most, prestigious awards in the country.

By Dr Timothy Cheng and Ong Juat Heng

During his schooling and undergraduate years, Timothy, 48, often came out tops. However, specialist qualification exams dodged him and he encountered repeated failures, causing him to be discouraged and demotivated.

These failures became financial constraints that led him to make major decision changes to his place of work and he ended up working in Darwin Hospital in Australia. Little did he know that this was the very place that he would meet the people who would lead him to his research in tropical/infectious disease and his eventual achievement.

Was it luck? Or the hand of God painting a beautiful canvas of Timothy's life? "In retro-

spect, it is God's timing that is far superior to all our planning and strategising for our future," he said. Had he passed his specialist exams in one attempt, he might not have received the Merdeka Award and there would not have been press articles written about him, where he unashamedly proclaimed his Christian faith and even quoted Bible verses.

In his interviews with the local newspapers after receiving the award, he quoted (and it was published in the newspapers) Philippians 4:13 as his favourite verse since childhood. He said the verse reminded him that it was God's strength that had enabled him to do so much more than he's able to, and according to His will, not his.

In his case, God's will had encompassed failures, and he promptly pronounced, "You must fail to succeed."

WORK FOR GOD

"Work not for the money but for God's glory," Timothy told *Asian Beacon*. "Our work must therefore be at the highest level of professionalism and integrity."



Simple joys are spending time with his children, having a cup coffee with his wife and reading a good novel. Clockwise from top left: Daniel, Aida, Timothy, Andrew, Joshua and Laura

It is this attitude of excellence, premised on his desire for God's glory to be manifested, that helped earn him the Merdeka Award. Timothy's win was all the more outstanding considering that he was the youngest of the six recipients of the award, launched in 2007 in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the country's independence. The award recognises individuals or organisations that have left a lasting imprint on the lives of Malaysians.

Timothy won the award in the Health, Science and Technology category for his work and research in the effective treatment of a new strain of malaria, called Plasmodium Knowlesi. The findings of the extensive research by him and his team contributed greatly to the World Health Organisation's guidelines for Plasmodium Knowlesi

malaria, and changed the way this infection is managed globally.

GODLY HERITAGE

As a dedicated doctor, Timothy's core principle at work has always been "patient first, no matter what". As a committed Christian, he is convinced that his Christian values and principles at work, though not always accepted and popular, will eventually gain the respect of colleagues and superiors and eventually make a difference.

Timothy's values were shaped by the Bible and his father, whom he proudly called his role model. "He was a school headmaster that was not only passionate about teaching but also impacting the lives of students under him," said the father of four, who hails from Banting, Selangor.

During his growing up years, Timothy saw his father actively serving in various church ministries, despite his hectic headmaster schedule. This serving attitude spilled over to Timothy, who is now a regular speaker and actively involved in the youth ministry in Grace Chapel in Luyang, Sabah.

But Christians should not just "stay in church", he said. "Christians should go out and be involved in the marketplace. Excel in science, in the arts. Be a good influence and expand your Christian influence far and wide in society."

This Infectious Diseases Physician is certainly casting his godly Christian influence as the President of the Infectious Diseases Society of Kota Kinabalu and at his workplace at the Jesselton Medical Centre, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

How does a Selangor son end up on Sabah soil? After graduating from the University of Malaya in 1995 as a young

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Beauty, Brains & Obedience

By Joanna Lee



God's will supersedes my will... Cheryl Lee

...from page 19.

doctor, Timothy was posted to Tambunan, in the interior of Sabah, where he met the love of his life and future wife, Aida. He then went on to work in Hospital Queen Elizabeth, Sabah, and trained as an internal medicine specialist there. His interest in tropical medicine and infectious disease led him to a sub specialty training in Infectious Diseases and he spent three years in Hospital Kuala Lumpur and one year in Darwin Hospital before returning to Sabah to serve his country.

Reflecting on his Merdeka Award achievement, a national honour that celebrates the spirit of independence, Timothy said, "I hope and pray that Malaysia will always have her freedom of worship and religion, and that leaders of integrity and wisdom will rise up to lead her." 🙏

"Even before you were formed in your mother's womb, the Lord has created you for beauty." This was a prophetic word spoken over Cheryl Lee, the managing director of Sothys Malaysia.

Cheryl's steady climb up the corporate ladder, beginning as a marketer for the distributor of a cosmetics brand to becoming a shareholder of Sothys Malaysia, was therefore no sheer coincidence.

Since young, she has been attracted to the beauty business – fashion to jewelry, interior design and anything related to the aesthetics. When she was working part time in college, she heard about Sothys at a home party and her heart was set to work for them. "I wanted to be attached to a brand that not just promises beauty and is superficial but one that really delivers results," the charismatic Cheryl said.

CALLED IN HER TEENS

As the eldest daughter, Cheryl had to prepare the altar for the family's worship but she had doubts about the religion as she had been told that if she misbehaved, the goddess will cut off her ears. I asked myself, 'If

"...IT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE FOR BUSINESSES TO DEVELOP TALENTS AND RELEASE THEM."

God is God, why would He do this to me? I'm just a child," she said.

"One day, I looked up into the sky and said, 'If there's really a God and you're really true, I really want to know who You are'."

Soon after that, her aunt shared the gospel with her family. "It was one ear in, one ear out," Cheryl laughed. "But she planted the seed."

One day, she went to church. "I can't remember what happened, but I felt the nudge to go up when they gave the altar call. I went up and there, I felt God's presence. It was so real to me... I knew He is God and I accepted Jesus as my Saviour," she shared.

As she was leaving the church, she heard God saying to her, "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you." She didn't even know it was a verse from the Bible, but it resolved all her deep worries about

“WHAT GOD TELLS US, WE DO. IT’S NOT ABOUT DOING EVERYTHING.”

life. “At that moment, I told myself that God is in control.”

Cheryl attended church but when she started work, she backslid. “Everything was about my career. God was in my life, but He was shoved aside for 17 years,” Cheryl sighed.

GOD-CENTRED BUSINESS

Twelve years ago, the wandering sheep returned to the Father’s side. And things began to ‘move’ at her workplace. From 2006 to 2010, Sothys’ bottomline grew 10 times.

When she returned to God in 2006, the first thing God did was send her to the School of Acts, a training and equipping school for working adults. There, the Lord told her, ‘You shall ‘super delegate,’” she recalled. Cheryl obeyed and relinquished much of her work to colleagues and managers, although she was accustomed to long hours, even charting 120,000km on her car every two years for her business. During that time, as she obeyed God to ‘super delegate’, her business grew 10 times.

PAINFUL LESSON

“One day in 2012, the Lord spoke to me and gave four directives. One was to build character within my organisation and develop relationships within my sphere of influence. He also spoke clearly about managing the business according to biblical principles and finally, He said, ‘Develop My people.’”

Just when she thought she could rest, God told her that her business would increase six times. Cheryl didn’t think it was possible, especially after the 10-fold growth, and this seemed to be confirmed when her company faced turmoil instead.

“I almost lost my entire team to a key competitor. Three managers from the four or five outlets and one department head walked out. They were headhunted by my number one key competitor,” she said.

So, instead of growth, her company was shaken by the ‘betrayal’. “But I guess through that journey, God taught me a lot about forgiveness, about not allowing all

these to stop me,” she reflected. The experience taught Cheryl that character is foundational – the first instruction in the four directives by God, which led her to implementing the Character First Education programme in the company as part of the staff’s development. “The programme has 49 characteristics, all based on biblical principles but there’s a marketplace version which Sothys has adopted,” Cheryl said.

Next, she was led to a book called *Business by the Book* by her current mentors, her cell leaders at DUMC (her church), who are also the national directors of Fellowship of Companies for Christ International (FCCI). The book explored key topics on ownership and purpose, leadership, finance, human resource, organisation and marketing and planning.

Her company also conducted the MoneyLife programme to teach the staff about financial stewardship. Seeing her business as a platform, much like a ‘pulpit’, Cheryl also started a workplace Alpha programme in her company.

OFFICE HARVEST

In two years, about six of Cheryl’s colleagues became Christians. “Some became believers in the process, some were lukewarm believers who had stopped attending church. Today, all are attending church and have also joined cell groups. Also, most of their kids are attending the Children’s Church programme,” Cheryl enthused.

Does her major shareholder, Sothys France, have any issue with how she runs the company? “No. I guess it’s because we’ve been running the business pretty well and we’ve been showing results,” she replied.

As she obeyed God’s directive for her to build relationships, she realised that God has shown her a new business model of turning their dealers into business licensee partners. Through this, Cheryl has been able to form deeper relationships with her dealer-

partners, getting to know their personal strug-

gles and even sharing the gospel with and praying for them.

Although she struggled with the slow progress of the promised six-time growth, Cheryl realised that “in God’s perspective, it’s actually all about people. It’s not just the business, the numbers. Firstly, it’s about the lives of His people.”

DEVELOP AND RELEASE

“One day, God spoke to me. He said, ‘Develop My people and let them go,’” she shared.

She struggled hard with God’s instruction as it didn’t make sense for businesses to develop talents and release them. God then told her, “They are not your people. They are MY people.”

Soon after, she attended an FCCI conference and to her amazement, the speaker uttered the exact same words. “Again, it was a confirmation that we’re God’s stewards,” she said. “And it’s really about God’s will for the person, not mine. God’s will supersedes my will. It’s the same with church planting. You don’t disciple and keep them within; you send them out.”

When it comes to dealing with office politics, Cheryl admitted that she is “not good at it” due to her upfront, direct approaches. “So I said to God, ‘All these fiery darts that come my way, You take charge.’ I’m sure there are (darts) but we’ve been well-shielded,” she laughed.

How does Cheryl balance all her priorities? She takes a leaf from Jesus’ example in only doing what His Father tells Him.

“What God tells us, we do. It’s not about doing everything. Even in channeling resources, there’s so much need in this world, but it is really hearing from God and channelling it accordingly because unless God builds the house, we build in vain. That’s how we balance time and also manage and steward His resources.” 🙏

SAFE TO SPEAK

By Chew Sue Lee

Sometimes, we Christians can be so opinionated about our views that we can't discuss issues calmly. Enter Safespace, a lively video talk show that have Christians with opposing views peacefully debating hot issues confronting our Malaysian society. This is truly a SAFE SPACE to discuss burning issues.

The monthly talk show is hosted by Safespace co-founder Pastor Alexa Ho of Petaling Jaya Evangelical Free Church and is the brainchild of the founder, Debbie Loh, a training programme administrator at a local church. Ultimately, Safespace aims to give a Malaysian Christian perspective and response to the burning issues. Debbie and Alexa share with us the story behind Safespace.



Helping to grow more gracious Christians...
(from left) Alexa, Leon, Celine, Eugene and Debbie

"I hope that Safespace can provide an alternative to Christians backbiting each other from our theological corners, calling other denominations 'heretical'."

How did the idea for Safespace come about?

Debbie: Safespace started as a podcast idea focusing on theology for our local and regional context. I was seeking Christian answers for issues in Malaysia when I realised that we were facing a drought in local theological discussions, which was evidenced by our lack of ownership over local issues. Back in 2015 or 2016, the only such content-rich media platforms were from the United States, which obviously would respond to their issues in their own way. This resulted in a void of responses to our own issues back home and worse, trying to answer local issues by "copying and pasting" outside sources without proper reflection.

This came to a head during the last U.S. elections when almost the entire world, myself included, became fixed on the debate on Donald Trump. It was divisive and showed the ugly side of the American Church. I realised that the divide had always been there; it just took the Trump issue to make the polarisation publicly evident.

And so the podcast idea evolved from being just a place where local concerns were discussed to where mutual respect and gracious hospitality between Christians of opposing views could be found. I felt that with our diverse Malaysian culture, the Malaysian Church has the ability to hold multiple views hospitably.

When I met Alexa in October 2016, my dream turned into reality. I pitched the idea for her to host. Because she has a strong stage presence, it became viable for Safespace to be in video format, and that is how the podcast idea transformed into a video talk show.

Who is your target audience?

Alexa: Our vodcast is suitable for Christians who want to keep in step with current issues and hear how they can be theologically thought through in a safe environment. It is especially suitable for pastors and Christian leaders who are looking for a resource to tackle issues from a Malaysian Christian perspective.

Who are the people behind Safespace?

Alexa: For now, we're all volunteers as we have full-time

jobs. That's why we can only do an episode a month. Debbie drives us in meeting our deadlines, and the rest of us help in various areas – IT, creative design, production, video editing, etc. Behind us is our advisor, Rev. Dr Sivin Kit.

Do you think the Malaysian Church has done a sufficient job in addressing these life questions with their members?

Debbie: I think our Church has done a great job at addressing certain "life questions", such as relationship concerns, marketplace, personal disciplines, etc. But I believe that's not all that life is about. Unfortunately, we have adopted the Western dichotomy between what's "private" and what's "public", that is, we think our private matters are what life is all about. Nancy Pearcey in her book, *Total Truth*, expresses that way of thinking so well. When this dichotomy happens, then our response to public matters, such as our political, social, economic and environmental spheres, becomes severely muted or underdeveloped. In reality, what we believe privately has implications publicly, and vice versa.

Your website describes Safespace as "where life questions are talked about from Christian perspectives". So far, your first two episodes seem to be theological debates rather than discussions on life questions, or "questions that confront us living in Malaysia today".

Debbie: Our first episode was a tribute to the 500th year of the Reformation, but instead of producing yet another content featuring a dispute or celebrating how right Protestants were, we wanted to shed light and celebrate the fact that Catholics and Lutherans are making amends today. We felt the need for a respectful conversation where both define the Reformation together and highlight the challenges moving forward together. Episode 2 was based on similar polemics on the ground between Christians who supported Calvinist and Arminian theology.

Earlier, you said that most Christian resources available to us are from a Western perspective. Why do you think the Christian Malaysian perspective on issues is equally, if not more, important?

Debbie: Western Christianity speaks in a post-Christian setting, so there's a lot of talk about returning to the traditions laid by their founding fathers. Even so, Western Christianity is a majority religion in the West, and many cathedrals and Christian symbols pepper the landscape. In fact, Christianity has become intertwined with the Western culture, especially in key life events such as death, marriage and burials. Western Christianity also operates from a certain level of political power.

With development and globalisation, Malaysian Christians do face similar trends in certain pockets of urban areas. However, our world is different in terms of our culture,

religion, politics, socio-economy and even the environment. We have brothers and sisters in Sarawak whose lands are being taken away, we have huge language and cultural barriers to cross, we have deep-seated prejudices felt by pockets of communities, and we are simply disconnected from our neighbours.

How do we answer these questions if our expression of Christianity is primarily in English that plays to Enlightenment-modern thinking, and we have not carefully considered the repercussions of Western consumerism on our poorer neighbours and the environment? If we are serious about loving God and loving our neighbour, we need to know and be connected with our neighbours. This requires theological reflection.

Malaysia has a strong and solid pool of local scholars and theologians. There is certainly an opportunity to give voice to

our own people through content-rich media. Our challenge at Safespace would be to build public confidence in Malaysia's leaders vis-a-vis our more dominant and media savvy Western counterparts.

In the long run, what do you hope to achieve through Safespace?

Alexa: Our desire is to provide a space to safely discuss life questions without

fear, judgment or prejudice – a space where all well thought-out opinions matter. Through Safespace, we hope to promote a sense of humility, inclusivity and openness to others.

Debbie: I pray that we will be able to bring out key issues of concern felt by Christians and the world around us for our theologians and scholars to comment and discuss. At the same time, I hope that Safespace can bring about mutual respect and reconciliation in areas where Christians might differ. For example, it is one thing to believe that speaking in tongues is unbiblical, and it is another thing to lambast people harshly behind their backs. I hope Safespace can provide an alternative to Christians backbiting one another from our theological corners, calling other denominations "heretical". We want to promote a culture that listens and seeks to understand the other's contexts; and provide food for thought to guide conviction and enrich contemplation.

What kind of support do you need from the local churches to make Safespace a success?

Debbie: Alexa and I would love to visit local churches or para-churches to share our work and ministry. It would be great to have more people join the conversation by subscribing and responding to our shows. In terms of overheads, we do need as much financial help as possible to keep the show running. 🙏

"I hope that Safespace can bring about mutual respect and reconciliation in areas where Christians might differ."



Once Upon A Time...

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

"Why do you go around telling stories?" is one of the most asked questions in this season of my life. My reply: "Because Jesus went about telling stories when He was with us on earth."

God has been opening doors for me to walk into local communities in small towns all over the country to do storytelling. I stand in front of curious crowds who find storytelling a foreign, yet refreshing idea in today's era. And I tell them stories.

There is nothing new about storytelling as it has been in our blood for generations. Back when television, radio and the Internet didn't exist, storytelling was a major way of entertaining and sharing information. Storytellers would sit under a tree or at the porch of their homes and people would come to them in the evenings before the sun went down to listen to stories. Then, storytelling was one of the most effective ways to reach out to people.

"Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable." (Matt. 13:34). The Bible shows that storytelling was Jesus' preferred approach to speaking to crowds. I resonate with this for I have seen and experienced how people respond better to stories compared with speeches.

Here are some reasons why I believe storytelling is powerful.

STORIES ATTRACT PEOPLE. Start your speech with greetings and information, and you might lose the attention of your listeners within the first few minutes.

By Gina Yap Lai Yoong

Begin with a story and you would have drawn them in to linger a while longer. Stories have the power to engage because they are relatable, which carve access to one's heart and keep them interested.

STORIES STIR EMOTIONS. When we feel for something, we pay more attention. We want to understand why we feel the way we feel about things. It invites us to explore our heart and mind, and encourages self-discovery as we delve deeper into our spirit in search of answers.

STORIES TRANSFORM. More than informing, stories inspire thinking. Drawn into a situation that we are both familiar and stranger to, we can comfortably explore possibilities of how to react to the stories, which create a platform for new mindsets and beliefs to be formed.

STORIES HELP US REMEMBER. We may forget facts and messages, but we will never forget how we feel about things. Whether it is a sad or happy story, a tale that angers us or a parable that provokes thoughts, stories leave an emotional footprint in our heart. That's how stories help us remember.

Often, we remember sermons not for the lessons but the stories that illustrate the message. For example, Jesus could have simply told us, "Be kind to everyone." Instead, He told us the parable of the Good Samaritan because he knows we will be able to relate and remember a story better than a one-liner command.

It's also interesting to note how Jesus used metaphors involving salt, light, trees and lamp in His parables. These are everyday objects that everyone can relate to. By using familiar elements, He draws us into an unknown yet comfortable territory, and challenges us to explore new ideas and develop new mindsets.

Louie Giglio once said, "The world doesn't need a lecture. The world needs a picture." We all know that every picture paints a story and stories are powerful ways to engage people. As we are called to be His salt and light on earth, let us engage others through stories to inspire them to discover the great God we serve.

Each of us is a storyteller, made in the image of God who is the first and master storyteller. ✝



Gina Yap Lai Yoong is a published writer with six books available in major local bookstores. When she is not writing, she travels to do storytelling. She is also a creative writing coach and mentor, a speaker at literary festivals as well as festival organiser. Gina is currently President of the Malaysian Writers' Society. More info about her at www.ginayaplaiyoong.com



Romancing the Cynics

By Ong Kay Jen

ROMANTICS VS CYNICS

The first are the hopeless romantics who go all out on Feb. 14 to shower their significant others with expensive gifts and/or flowers, and the rest of us with disturbing public displays of affection (henceforth known as PDA).

The second group are the cynics who think like my father. "Silly commercialism" and "cheesy" are their common remarks about VDay. "It's not just a romantic celebration for couples," one says grimly, "but an irritating day for singles. It's Valentine's Day, and it's Singles Awareness Day."

From where I stand at this point in life, I can relate to both groups. I like special occasions, and I like romance. When you put the two together and give me a day in the year to celebrate this, I won't complain! On the other hand, some might ask why we need to limit celebrating our relationship to one day in a year. Shouldn't it be an ongoing thing, throughout the year?

And yet, who has the energy for that? And yet, don't all relationships take energy? Back and forth the arguments bounce. Frankly, I'm bored of the bickering over this abused day. To me, the real problem lies much deeper than that. It is a problem of romance.

Yes, I say the problem is romance because, if you think about it, romance is

really what's causing all the fuss, isn't it? Too much of it and you become an irritating sop with a bad case of PDA. Have you ever been a third wheel (or 'lamp post') to one of these cringe-inducing couples I've described? Then you know what I mean. On the other hand, too little of it and you're in danger of being boring, ignorant, and cynical. And trust me, it's not the cynics who have fun.

Romance isn't a bad thing. It brings life to a relationship. It's the expression of the joy of being in a human relationship, and of appreciation to the other person for simply *being*. And of course, it keeps things interesting. I don't believe romance is just for the young. Sure, after 25 years of marriage, I don't expect a couple to be as shiny-eyed and self-absorbed as they were when they dated (although if you are, good for you).

The chemicals that gave them those head-spinning, stomach-churning, light-hearted feelings would have perhaps fizzled out after many years of living together and seeing each other's flaws. Sure, it's much easier for the young, infatuated kids to let sparks fly, but don't expect the sparks to last forever.

Yet, I've seen an old man holding his wife's hand firmly while guiding her through a crowded place. I've seen my father going out of his way to make Mum laugh when she was feeling down. I've seen my parents huddled over their coffee together, praying for their children. Isn't that romance?

FANNING THE FLAME

To me, romance means making effort. Yeah, fancy Italian restaurants are nice,



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DROWNING

By Dr Hera Lukman

Depression is common in the Church but why are many reluctant to seek help? Depression is a common mental ill-health. The debilitating effects of depression on health and functionality have robbed many from living life to the full and indeed, of life itself. In 2015, World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that 322 million people in the world (an equivalent of 4.4 % of the world population) have depression.

In Malaysia, 3.8% of the population (more than one million) suffer from depression. Given that many with depressive symptoms may not have disclosed their condition, the figures are conservative estimates of the actual number of people struggling with depression.

DEPRESSION AFFECTS MORE PEOPLE THAN WE KNOW

The Christian community is not immune to depression and depressive symptoms. Depression consumes even the lives of faithful servants of God such as Matthew Warren (Rick Warren's son), Pastor Phil Lineberger and more recently Pastor Bill Lenz whose journeys with depression have become public knowledge. The 2016 Schaeffer Institute study on the welfare of 8,150 evangelical and Reformed ministers in the US found that about one third of them battle depressive symptoms.

In Malaysia, the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia reported in their 2006 Spiritual Formation Survey that depression is one of the main crises facing Christians from various evangelical churches. Clearly, depression is a prevalent condition and it does not discriminate. It afflicts anyone regardless of faith status.

Although depression is a condition that is treatable and manageable, WHO noted that approximately 50% of sufferers do not seek or get the necessary help. This unfortunate situation is due to lack of access to care and more importantly, the fear of being stigmatised. Consequently, a substantial number is suffering in silence and isolation. Based on various anecdotal observations and empirical studies relating to church health, the reluctance to seek help is also evident within Christian communities.

URGENT NEED FOR A SAFE COMMUNITY IN CHURCH

As depression is closely related to suicide, the reluctance to seek help needs to be urgently addressed. In October 2016, WHO started a global campaign entitled "Depression: Let's Talk". This initiative aims to reduce mental health-related stigma and to encourage affected individuals to seek help. The gist of the campaign is to create a safe space in as many communities as possible to talk about depression. If sufferers can share their struggles with another without fear of being judged, despised and rejected, the journey with depression will not be so isolating and hopeless. In dialogues, many unhelpful myths leading to prejudice and exacerbation of suffering can also be addressed. Talking about depression is a crucial step towards recovery.

I believe this is a long-overdue initiative that the Church should proactively support, not only within Christian communities but also in any community the Church is represented. If social justice, compassion and ministering to the marginalised are essential criteria of a missional Church, we must do more than preaching against stigma and prejudice of mental ill-health over the pulpit. The body of Christ must proactively make Church a place where those affected by mental ill-health can find a safe community. How might that look like in practical terms? May I suggest three starters.

The body of Christ must proactively make Church a place where those affected by mental ill-health can find a safe community.

...from page 25.

but I don't know any girl who would complain if her boyfriend made her a simple, home-cooked dinner. Expensive roses are sweet, but I wouldn't pick them over a handmade card like the one Dad gave Mum so many years ago.

Investing your energy into the other person's life tells him/her that he/she is worth that trouble to you. Effort is like the oil that keeps the cogs of any human relationship turning – if you stop applying it, the wheels are going to get jammed eventually. How much more this is with lovers. When one or both parties stop trying, the relationship gets stuck.

Maybe people my age could take a leaf out of my dad's book. Being romantic doesn't necessarily mean lavishing your significant other with gifts on one day out of the entire year. It doesn't have to be exorbitant gifts, expensive flowers, or carefully constructed sweet nothings.

Romance can mean humble, yet heartfelt, tokens of appreciation. It can be found in simple, meaningful gestures throughout the course of the relationship. Maybe a cynical old man had it right after all. 🌸

(This article was first published in the February-March 2012 Asian Beacon issue when the writer was a college student. She now works as a copywriter in a major advertising agency.)

IN DEPRESSION

We need to recognise that suffering is an inevitable mark of being a Christian and that God can be glorified in our suffering because "His strength is made perfect in our weakness".

1

REEVALUATE THE ROBUSTNESS OF OUR THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING

First, let's examine why Christians are reluctant to talk about suffering.

In my opinion, this may be due to the common assumption that "a good testimony for God" or "a life blessed by God" should not include failures, defeats and ill health. Such theological perspective not only lacks validity, it can create a severe sense of shame, rejection, disillusionment and alienation among Christians who find their lives falling short of being "exemplary" or "blessed".

In fact, suffering among God's people is evident throughout the Biblical text. For example, depressive symptoms are common experiences of faith giants such as David, Job, Jeremiah, Elijah and Paul. Even our Lord Jesus wrestled with despair and anguish prior to the cross. Should we therefore conclude that their lives had been dishonoring to God because they expressed weakness? As far as I understand, there is no Biblical support for such a perspective.

God did not disapprove of their sufferings nor did He miraculously remove despair from His people. Rather, God consistently provided for their needs and enabled them to accomplish the purpose He had for them despite their struggles. We need to recognise that suffering is an inevitable mark of being a Christian and that God can be glorified in our suffering because "His strength is made perfect in our weakness". A robust theology of suffering is necessary if "communal lamentation" is to be endorsed within the body of Christ.

2

ADVOCATE EVIDENCE-BASED ADVICE AND SUPPORT

It is widely known that the cause of depression is multifactorial. Depression develops and is maintained by a complex interaction of physical, psychological, social and spiritual problems. As such, the successful management of depression requires a multidisciplinary approach. While spiritual issues can contribute to depressive symptoms, spiritual discipline such as prayer, fasting and reading the Bible are not the panacea for every case of depression. The Church must avoid making simplistic conclusions regarding what causes and what can eliminate a person's depressive symptoms. An erroneous assumption can have devastating implications for the welfare of the sufferer.

For example, other than psychological disorders, depressive symptoms can result from physical conditions such as diabetes, thyroid diseases, cancer or even hormonal imbalance after pregnancy and during menopause. In many cases, depressive symptoms are successfully alleviated with medication coupled with psychotherapy, but not all individuals experiencing symptoms need to be medicated.

A thorough assessment by qualified health professionals is paramount in making an informed decision for treatment. An advice to avoid conventional medical attention in favour of exclusive spiritual intervention is not only presumptuous, it is an irresponsible counsel. As a Church, we need to collaborate with health professionals to provide evidence-based advice and support for individuals with depression.

3

ENGAGE IN PERSPECTIVE TAKING

The world of a depressed individual is difficult to comprehend. Those with depression often perceive the world through dark tinted lenses while we see the world in all its colours. This explains why things are often perceived in shades of grey in the world of those with depression. It is important to understand that they do not choose to live in a constantly gloomy existence as some may erroneously assume! If we were to see the world through the same dark tinted lenses, our world will also carry the same shades of grey.

Perspective taking is crucial if we want to support individuals with depression. Dismissing, denying or debating their perceived reality serves little to comfort the depressed. We must recognise, acknowledge and legitimise feelings because they are real. Only when we have done that can we offer an alternative perspective they can adopt, e.g. while feelings are real they are not necessarily reliable assessment of reality.

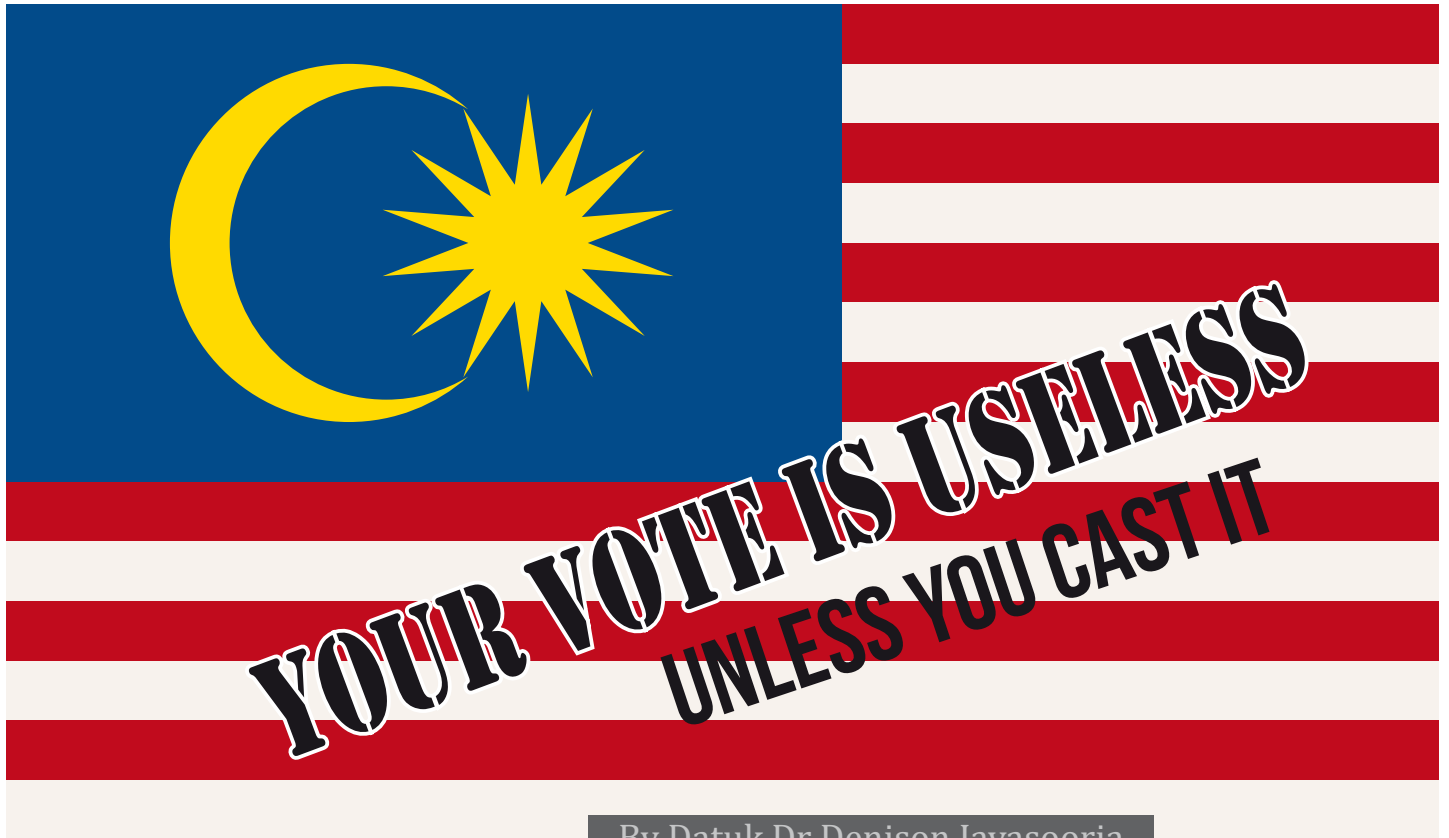
An advice to avoid conventional medical attention in favour of exclusive spiritual intervention is not only presumptuous, it is an irresponsible counsel.

Church, we must talk more about depression in our community. The three suggestions noted above are practical steps the Church can do to provide a safe and informed community for those who are in despair. Anyone can take the first step. Indeed, it is everyone's responsibility.

May the LORD work in and through His Church as we mourn with those who mourn and as we communicate His hope to the hopeless. 🙏



Dr Hera Lukman is the Head of Psychology and Learning Centre at Methodist College Kuala Lumpur.



By Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria

There have been loud hints that General Election (GE) 14 will be held after Chinese New Year. Since 1957, we've had 13 general elections. GE 12 in 2008 is noted as the most critical one where the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) party lost its two-third majority. At GE 13 in 2013, BN lost the popular vote. However, BN continues to rule at the national level.

"Dear Lord, please give us a good government who cares for everyone, especially the poor, who is fair to all and does not steal our money and is wise too. And I pray everyone will not lose hope but will go and vote."



WILL MY VOTE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

You might think your one vote won't make a difference. In the 2008 and 2013 general elections, many of the seats were closely fought among the candidates and therefore, every vote was precious. Your one vote at the elections could have an impact on the popular vote too. Therefore, exercising your citizen's right to vote is very important.

However, the election is only the first step; we must continue to actively engage our leaders to carry out their election promises to make Malaysia a better place for all Malaysians.

IS VOTING CONSISTENT WITH THE CHRISTIAN FAITH?

The Bible clearly teaches us that that we must pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:2). We are called to pray for those leading the nation and are responsible for governance. To do this, we must know some key matters pertaining to the affairs of the government and society.

Like Paul, we can claim our citizenship rights and exercise them (Acts 16:37 & 22:25). Paul was an apostle, church planter and evangelist but when he was arrested, he made his claim as a Roman citizen, and called for proper conduct of the soldiers and for fair trial under the Roman judicial system.

Likewise, we must know our rights and exercise them responsibly. If this means paying our taxes (Rom. 13:6), then we must do so; and if it is to do good unto others (Gal. 6:10), then we must also do so. The government likewise is called as God's servant to do good (Rom. 13:4) and therefore, must conduct itself for the good of society and not abuse its powers.

We must therefore not shrink from carrying out our responsibility in service to humanity and the nation through our good works.

Next, who do I vote for? Do I look at the candidate or the party?

WHAT DO WE LOOK FOR IN A CANDIDATE?

From nomination date, you will have the list of the candidates contesting in the Parliamentary and State seats in the constituency you are registered in. Find out as much as you can about the candidates – their character, background and what they have done (their professional work and contribution to society).

Candidates will issue their profile and often distribute it to the homes or postal address. You can also check them out on social media to see what has been written about them, and trace their Facebook postings to note the kind of things they have been championing.

Explore all candidates irrespective of their race, religion and gender. What matter are their character and track record. Have they championed any cause? Are they ideologically right wing or extreme in their public views (this might contradict your views on public and national matters)?

Make your decision based on informed choice. Will the candidate take up your concern or the concerns of the poor and marginalised communities in parliament and speak up for all communities or would he/she be very self-focused? What about the candidate's position on human rights and corruption (most critical). Is he/she willing to declare his/her assets? Many join politics for the wrong reasons and therefore, we must not compromise on the higher ethical and moral requirements that we place on all candidates and potential public officials.

You might not know for sure what kind of person the candidate is but if you've done your background search, you'll at least have an idea.

THE LEAST WE CAN DO FOR OUR COUNTRY

Making a stand via the ballot box indicates our political awareness and commitment to ensure that the leaders who are entrusted with the responsibility to govern are men and women of good character and uphold high moral values. Likewise, their political parties must be pro human rights, pro good governance and pro accountability.

Let us exercise our right to vote and continue to serve our land so that Malaysia will be a better place for all. And above all, let's pray for God's sovereign rule over GE 14 and commit the outcome to Him.



REGISTERED TO VOTE?

In order to exercise this constitutional right to vote, Malaysian citizens must be registered to vote when they turn 21 years old.

The Election Commission encourages everyone that has yet to register as a voter to register immediately instead of waiting until the last minute. If you have not registered to vote, you can do so at the nearest post office. Just present your IC and fill in the relevant form. You can check your voting status by accessing the Suruhanjaya Pilihan Raya's website at <http://www.spr.gov.my/>



Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria is the Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnic Studies, UKM. He and his wife, Rose Cheng Jayasooria, worship at DUMC in Petaling Jaya where he serves as the coordinator of the Citizens' Network For A Better Malaysia.

WHAT DO WE LOOK FOR IN THE POLITICAL PARTY?

In Malaysia, political parties are very important because they try to get their elected members to toe the party line, which might not be the wishes of their constituency. Therefore, it's necessary to study the election manifesto of the political parties.

Take time to read and understand the party's position on key issues such as religious freedom, education, equal opportunities, minority rights, gender and separation of powers based on the Federal Constitution. Check out their business, investment and employment strategies to address income and rising inequalities and thereby, improving the quality of life of all the people.

Another key consideration is the party's position on democratic freedom and tolerance for diversity of views and opinions. Good governance – such as declaration of assets and the willingness to be held publicly accountable – must be the hallmark of the party. In this context, most of the major political parties have been around for some time and therefore, you can determine their track record and assess their consistency.

In summary, review the political parties, their election manifesto, what they have done for the people over the past five to 10 years, who their party leaders are and how the parties have been managed since their founding. Choose the party based on your political conviction and social views. Most of us are not members of any political party but we still need to note which party could represent our concerns in the public areas, in the government and in parliament.

So, be informed and you'll make an intelligent decision.

Fishing For Stars[★]



This is the way we go to school.



Giving their best years to the Lord... the writer (in red top) with Deb and Terence and their children.

By Victoria Wong (as told to Anna Teoh)

Deborah Chan saw the World Trade Centre crumble before her eyes like a deck of cards. It was Sept. 11, 2001, and fresh out of college, she had just arrived in New York to work as a volunteer for a Sunday school ministry in the ghettos there. The 9/11 event would later become a defining moment for the rest of her life. Recalling that horror, she said: “It etched a memory deep in the recesses of my soul and left an indelible mark in my young life, changing the way I perceived life, purpose and passion.”

Now in her late 30s, Deborah, or Deb as she’s fondly called, is a missionary in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. Together with her family – husband Terence and children Seth and Enya – they serve with Starfish Malaysia Foundation (Starfish), which is run in partnership with the Protestant Church of Sabah.

I got to know Deb and Terence when I lived with them during my short mission adventure as a teacher with Starfish. The lovely family shared their home and hearts, speaking openly about their dreams and challenges in their ministry. Before moving to Sabah from the Klang Valley, Terence and Deb had served as missionaries in the countryside of Battambang, Cambodia, for two years where they helped build schools, trained local pastors and teachers, and set up a volunteers’ missions programme.

During my short stay with them, I was inspired by their many stories – the simple life and lessons gleaned on the mission field, and learning to say ‘Yes’ to God daily, starting with the small decisions. What struck me most was their unconventional attitude towards serving God. Unlike most of us, they simply “want to give the best years of our lives to God”.





Marigold Solimpodon hostel for the secondary school students.

TEACHING CHILDREN TO FISH

Starfish's mission is to raise the literacy level of the marginalised communities in Sabah by providing accommodation to and looking after the indigenous children so that they can continue going to school. Terence and Deb oversee several hostels while equipping and training the wardens (a.k.a. house parents) to run and operate the hostels well as well as plan and organise holistic programmes to develop the children. The children are given nutritious and balanced meals and they receive extra tuition sessions to boost their academic score. With an environment conducive for them to thrive in their studies, the children will have a chance of a brighter future.

During my stay there, I had the opportunity to visit two hostels, which were located some three hours away from Kota Kinabalu by car. As we traveled along the winding road that turned into dirt pathways, I was struck by the reality of life there – the limited access to provisions and amenities that we take for granted.

My first visit was to Jasmine Talantang, a hostel housing primary school students. As the children trickled in after school, they flashed shy smiles at me. They were well-behaved and knew their duties for the day – mealtime, prayer and cleaning up. At night, I taught them phonics using a reading programme developed by my friends in Teach for Malaysia. When night fell, the girls came to my room. We played games and then they cuddled up in one single bed, giggling and asking me questions

before falling asleep.

The next morning, I walked them to school. We had to cross a bridge and unfortunately, I wore a dress! I was terrified of falling into the very shallow river and it didn't help that the children kept jumping on the bridge and shaking it just to see my horrified look.

The next hostel I visited was Marigold Solimpodon for secondary school students. Terence and Deborah showed me a man-made lake, which they had



Never too young to learn... at the Jasmine Talantang hostel.

helped dig. They hoped to rear fishes in it for consumption. There was also a small farm in the compound.

The students here were also well disciplined and took turns to serve one another. I noticed that many were not yet reading or writing at their level, but as I taught them, I saw their hunger to learn. With the right assistance, they could go far in life. In the late evening, the girls and I played "lompat tali" (jump rope), while the boys played football behind the hostel.

LIVE TO LAST

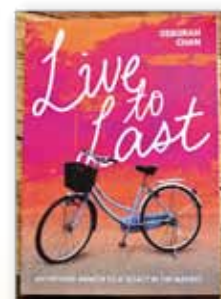
Heeding the Lord's call to be uprooted from their comfortable career-climbing lives in the Klang Valley to Cambodia and then to Sabah, Terence and Deb's journey with the Lord has been and still is an exciting one. In my short stay with them, my heart was stirred to live more intentionally and to be mindful of the stories I collect, the people I serve and the legacy I will leave behind.

I've been blessed by their faith, their love for each other and for the children in the hostels, their values of investing in the Kingdom of God and how this has influenced the way they raise their children. Which is why I am pleased that Deborah has written a book chronicling her journey of faith.

On the flight home, reading Deb's *Live to Last* challenged me to re-examine my own life. At the core of her bite-sized stories is a timeless message for people of all ages: Life is more than just me, I and myself; you are called for a greater purpose; the world needs you.

In her book, she says: "Life is a journey and we will never know how long it will take until we reach the finish line. Some are given the privilege of living a hundred years while others only have a few short years, some only a few minutes. However, regardless of the span of time we are granted, our life is marked by what we make of it."

Truly, Deb and Terence are marking their lives distinctly by giving their best years to the Master. ✨



(To purchase a copy of the book or to know more about the short-term missions with Starfish, go to <http://www.livetolastbook.com/>. *Live to Last* is also available at MPH, Times Bookstore, Canaanland Bookstore and other Christian bookstores, and proceeds will help support the family's mission work in Sabah.)

Dear Goldie,

PRIEST AT WORK

Dear Goldie,

Recently while surfing the net, I came across a puzzling teaching by a pastor who said all Christians should be priests. He said Martin Luther taught this "Priesthood of all Believers". I am just a salesman in a departmental store, so how can I be a priest? I have no Bible school training.

M.K.

Dear M.K,

When Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation, he advocated three major issues: Sola Scriptura – sole authority of Scripture; Sola Fide – justification by faith alone; and the "priesthood of all believers". In the Old Testament, designated special people were priests (to bring the people to God and to bring God to the people) but in the New Testament, every believer is to be a priest: "... you are royal priests... show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9

We are priests to bring God to the people and bring the people to God. We need not go to Bible school nor do we need to stand behind a pulpit. We can easily do it wherever we are. Of course it would be good if we have some training to be more effective.

Walk and talk

Years ago when I was operating a beauty shop in Melaka, a client saw a book I was reading, called *God's Smuggler*. "What an interesting title," she remarked. "Would you like to read it?" I offered. She did and from then on, she came to church, eventually becoming a Christian. She brought her husband and her children to the Lord too. Today, about 40 years later, her family is still faithfully worshipping God. Connecting people to God can be as simple as recommending a book to stir their interest.

Another regular client also became a Christian and from the support of our church, her family, including her elderly mother-in-law, husband and children became Christians (see her story in www.deargoldie.com Nov.#35). Where

ever you are, whatever job you do, pray for those in your circle of influence; build a relationship with them and when you see the opportunity, do the work of a priest – connect them to God.

Opportunities

Have you thought about your foreign domestic helper, who misses home, have no friends and have to adjust to a different culture? Can you fulfil her spiritual needs? Recently, we employed a Filipina helper. I happened to meet a mature Christian who lived in the same housing area, who was willing to visit her weekly to study the Bible and pray. What a bonus for her, who is confined to the house, to have this regular, faithful visit. So, be a priest and pray about connecting someone to God in your neighbourhood or right in your own home.

Reputation

When I was a teenager, I suddenly felt I was missing something in life. I had everything – good family, good grades, money, friends, etc. But I still felt empty. I didn't know what I was looking for but somehow I thought maybe I should go to church. Knowing my classmate Sophie was a Christian, I asked her to take me to church and there, I gave my life to Jesus. Just by being known as a Christian, you may be approached to connect someone to God.

Widen your circle of influence

A reader of *Asian Beacon* introduced me to his aunt who lives in Perth. Although I didn't know him or his aunt, we got connected. She lives very far from me

but she goes for check-ups regularly at a hospital near me, so we always make it a point to meet there to pray and fellowship. So, whether near or far, we can connect each other to God and connect God to each other.

Intentional

You can be a priest, whoever and wherever you are. But it must be intentional, planned, prayed over and practised. If you find a good restaurant, wouldn't you want to tell your friends to try? Similarly, recommend your God to them, telling them how good He has been to you and ask them to try Him. Make the connection for them to "taste and see that the Lord is good". Psalm 34:8 🙏



Goldie

Goldie has her own blog www.deargoldie.com

Do you have an issue you need advice on?

Write to *Asian Beacon's* Goldie Chong at aboffice@asianbeacon.org for her godly counsel.

Selected questions may be featured in this column. If you leave an email address, you will have your question answered, whether it's published or not.



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RESTORING OUR WORSHIP IDENTITY IT IS TIME!

“We must uncover and unleash the flavour of Asian worship.” I made this statement nine years ago when I released my third album. I had sensed that Christians in Asia, and particularly Malaysia, needed to discover our very own rhythms and sounds in our worship. This unwavering conviction led to my organising R.O.W.I 2017 (Restoring Our Worship Identity) under the auspices of Malaysian Gospel Music (MGM), which champions local Christian music.

God’s plans for Malaysia include raising many Malaysian Christian songwriters, born at a specific time and place in accordance to Acts 17:26. He is pouring out His spirit in these last days and we – worshippers, worship leaders and songwriters – need to discern, understand and align with what the Holy Spirit is saying concerning Malaysia. Then, songs from and for our nation will be birthed through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to help us in our intercession for our nation. This is what R.O.W.I is all about.

WORSHIP INTERCESSION

There is a distinct difference between worship and worship intercession. The common understanding of worship directs praise to God and God alone. Meanwhile, worship intercession is an enhancement of worship that leads

MALAYSIA'S *Got Talent*

By Patrick Leong

worshippers into deep intercession. Along the way, God releases melodies, rhythms and lyrics as our cries for Malaysia and the condition of our land. These new songs embody the worship identity of our intercession.

This worship intercession was displayed magnificently at R.O.W.I 2017 by the 13 churches who came and presented 14 original compositions. Many others from different churches also came in their personal capacity to engage in the passionate worship to God and intercession for our nation.

SPLENDID SHOWCASE OF MALAYSIAN TALENTS

Pastor Nicholas Wu of MGM gave the welcome address and sermonette, followed by Esther and KW Mui, Ivan Sia and Daniel Liew who led the worship session with original songs, *Psalm 91* and *Psalm 63*, written by Esther Mui and based on the same Scripture passages.

Reuben Gen and his worship team from Harvest Christian Assembly opened the R.O.W.I 2017 showcase with his original composition, *Won't You Come?* – an appropriate introduction as it invited people to come worship Him. Calvary Church was represented by songwriter Nicole Ong, who sang *Sing Hallelujah* with her singing partner, Darren.

Veteran singer songwriter Jenny

Liew from Georgetown Baptist flew in from Penang and rendered *HanyaMu* (Only You), a lively song with a lovely melody and in the language of our land. Asked why she wrote the song in Malay, she replied, “I write what the Holy Spirit tells me to write.”

Worthy compositions of intimate worship were delivered by several teams. Breakthrough Worship Community Church (BWCC) moved the participants with their song, *MilikMu* (*Duniaku*); Joe Loy from HTBB sang his title album song, *All The Nations*; Benedict Weerasena from SIBKL, groomed by Lucy Loo of S.A.N.D (Saved for A New Destiny), sang his masterpiece, *King Of Ages* inspired by Revelations 15:3; and Lourdes Dass passionately belted out *Destiny*.

A group of graduates from the School Of Ministry 2015, Tung Ling Seminary – Nicky Yeoh, Suraj Sundaraj, Adeline Hong and Roger Teo – wrote the song, *Higher*, which was rendered by the FGT Sri Damansara worship team.

Pastor Ng Wah Lok from Tung Ling Seminary took the stage and gave a visual presentation about Tan Min Ser, a handsome young man who succumbed to leukemia at the age of 32 years,



Joe Loy from HTBB calling All The Nations to worship Him.

Full Gospel Tabernacle worship team pays tribute to the late Tan Min Ser.



Veteran singer songwriter Jenny Liew rendering Hanya Mu.



Rev. Eduan Bah Chimpok and team from the Semai tribe basking in God's love with their original Semai composition, Haknuk Jen Tuhan (Your Love, God).



Presenting Malaysian sounds... a splendid showcase of Malaysian songwriting talent.

leaving behind a young child. Min Ser had written a song, *Our God*, which was presented by the Full Gospel Tabernacle worship team. The heartrending piece moved many in the audience to tears.

ETHEREAL SOUNDS FROM THE ORANG ASLI

Towards the end of R.O.W.I, there was a shift in spiritual momentum when Rev. Eduan Bah Chimpok and his team from the Semai tribe from Gereja EPAC Kampar sang their original composition in Semai, titled *Haknuk Jen Tuhan* (Your Love, God). This was followed by another Orang Asli group from the Temiar tribe from Immanuel Church Tapah, who sang their composition, *Kanik Bersyukur*, with hair-raising purity. The song was birthed during a worship and songwriting workshop I conducted in the middle of last year for the Orang Asli Christians in a northern peninsular state.

I had been told by some Orang Asli groups, both in East and Peninsular Malaysia, that their challenge was their own native language with its limited vocabulary. Hence, when they wrote songs, they had to first write in Malay and then translate them into their native language or a combination of both.

At the workshop, I challenged them to wait on the Holy Spirit as I truly believed He would grant them words in their native language. And that He did! When they sang their own compositions

at R.O.W.I 2017, it was as if they, the rightful owner of the land (being the first people here), had opened the spiritual portal above and cleared the passage for us to offer our worship to God.

I believe that the worship of all the Orang Asli who have come to faith in Jesus Christ carries the identity of the sounds and songs of our land, and will penetrate the spiritual realm in Malaysia.

ROUSING FINALE

At the closing, Neil Batiancila and Kelvin Lim of One Accord from Every Nation Malaysia flawlessly rendered their composition, *Ku Cinta Pada Mu*.

Kelvin Ooi and Karen Cheah from Grace Assembly PJ sang a majestic piece, titled *The Journey*, which was written during their Worship Ministry retreat earlier in 2017. This was a song that renowned worship leader Bob Fitts was pleased to have been part of and appears in Grace Assembly's third album, *Victory Cometh*.

Cray Maxwell (DUMC Bahasa Malaysia) from Kota Belud introduced his song, *Terlalu Besar Kasih Mu* (Your Love Is Too Great). The song came about when he was facing hard times and he testified that he kept hearing the Lord telling him to "just keep on worshipping Me". The anointed masterpiece was presented by the awesome DUMC

Bahasa worship team led by worship leader Walter Samat.

And finally it was a wrap for R.O.W.I 2017 with *Tiada Nama* (No Other Name), written by the Anglican Diocesan Youth Council (ADYC) of Kuching, Sarawak together with singer songwriter Alejandro Tingzon Jr Jun from Sabah and me. The song proudly proclaims His name and no other in a corporate worship pronouncement.

The Malaysian worship platform needs to integrate local compositions with the indigenous sounds and songs, interwoven with modern and current tunes. Beyond the integration, we must also be open to heed the calling to align our worship through our distinct sound and culture that is uniquely Malaysian.

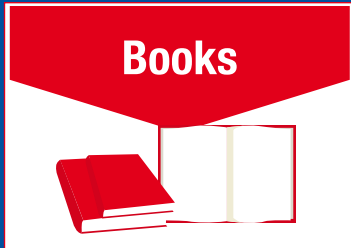
Worship must never lead to commercialism but inspires community worship. As Malaysians, let us bring our unique songs of worship to God who makes all the nations and peoples. ✝

A big shout out to all who came to R.O.W.I 2017, Asian Beacon, 24-7 Prayer and Dream Centre for hosting the event.

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ROOFTOP PRINCIPLE

Don't even go there!

By Pastor Chris Kam

Our Christian life is constantly challenged. Taking personal responsibility for our own lives is a call to remain steadfast, disciplined and resilient in our faith. There are too many careless Christians who allow themselves to be tempted to a disastrous outcome.

I coined the Rooftop Principle while studying and teaching from the life of King David in 2 Samuel 11. Up to that point, David had reached the height of his glory as a king. He ruled over a vast empire and accumulated much spoils of war in his capital. In the midst of all these successes, he fell into the sin of adultery, which set off a chain of events that caused him to break almost all the Ten Commandments.

Here's a man purported to be a man after God's heart (1 Sam. 13:14, Acts 13:22) and yet, in a simple careless act, he compromised his entire future. He forfeited his own personal right to build the Temple of God (2 Sam. 7:12-13, 1 Chron. 22:7-8). The privilege went instead to his son, Solomon. From 2 Sam. 12:7-12, we notice that to David, there was the withholding of financial blessings (v.8), the doors were opened to a spirit of violence (v.10), it brought about a curse (v.11), he was exposed to public shame (v.11-12) and a spirit of infirmity and death came upon the family (v.14-15). On top of that, he experienced the heart-break of rape and murder within his own family. He even lost his throne to his own son, Absalom, for a brief moment as well.

If you trace these tragedies to their

"NO COMMITTED CHRISTIAN SEEKS TO SIN DELIBERATELY BUT THROUGH AN UNGUARDED MOMENT, WE CAN COMPROMISE OURSELVES."

"WE MAY NOT BE LOOKING FOR TEMPTATION BUT OFTEN, IT FINDS US AT OUR UNGUARDED MOMENTS."

very root, it came about from 2 Sam. 11:1-2. When kings were supposed to go to war during spring, David decided to take a holiday. An innocent thought no doubt, but it was disastrous to the very core in its outcome. After siesta one evening, he walked on the rooftop of his palace, enjoying the cooling effects of a day coming to an end. We may not be looking for temptation but often it finds us at our unguarded moments.

David saw a beautiful woman bathing and sent someone to find out about her. Curiosity and lust got the best of him in spite of finding out that Bathsheba is Uriah's wife. An unwanted pregnancy followed this adulterous affair. Hoping to cover his track, he invited Uriah back from the frontline in the pretense of finding out how the war

was going. He then sent him back home hoping that he would sleep with his wife, thus covering up the source of the pregnancy. Uriah, being a man of honour, refused to go back and instead slept at the servants' quarters. David's second attempt by making him drunk yielded the same result. What a man who held his honour even when he is drunk!

With that failure, David set in motion plan B by writing a letter to General Joab to send Uriah to the frontline where the fighting was the fiercest. Uriah carried his own death sentence in his hand and after the mourning period, David married Bathsheba.

ON GUARD

As I reflected upon this story, I can't help but go back to the palace rooftop. What if David had not gone to the rooftop? Often, we can place ourselves unwittingly on the rooftops of our lives, where we are most unguarded spiritually because everything seems to be going well.

This reminded me of my early career years as a sales engineer. Being one of the top performers, we were regularly sent on incentive trips to places catering to a man's sexual fancies. At international conferences, men would disperse to 'tourist spots' after dinner and I knew I had to proactively do something to prevent myself from even going near these places.

Christians would often naively say that they can go to some of these places to identify with their non-Christian friends but they need not indulge in sinful activities. How one draws that moral line defies my logic. I know how wicked my heart can be and I don't trust it. Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

So I fled. I prayed for a Christian friend to fellowship with and God gave me a fellow engineer from Singapore,

“AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES, MEN WOULD DISPERSE TO ‘TOURIST SPOTS’ AFTER DINNER AND I KNEW I HAD TO PROACTIVELY DO SOMETHING TO PREVENT MYSELF FROM EVEN GOING NEAR THESE PLACES.”

whom I caught up with each time after dinner during these conferences. I suppose you can say we saved each other from our rooftops!

Being careful with our lives is not only about starting well, but finishing well too. A single careless and foolish act can cost us everything. No committed Christian seeks to sin deliberately but through an unguarded moment, we can compromise ourselves.

There are relationships we should not be careless about, business deals and career promotions we should not take. Be very harsh and disciplined with yourselves. It's not worth the pain and heartache to you and your loved ones.

What or where are these potential rooftops of your life? Don't go there or near them! That's wisdom in life! 📌



Pastor Chris Kam

Chris Kam is the Senior Pastor of Damansara Utama Methodist Church and was instrumental in the transitioning and development of the church as a cell church. Married to Stella, they have three sons: Ian, Shaun and Ashton. An electrical engineer by profession, Pastor Chris is passionate about training people to achieve their potential in life.

Winning a battle does not necessarily rest on a nation's sophisticated war machine, which in ancient times meant many well-armed men, horses and chariots. If God holds the keys of victory, the side which enjoys His favour is the victor.

Here are three Old Testament accounts that reveal how God caused His people to triumph over their enemies against tremendous odds. For the battle belongs to the Lord.

Hopefully, whenever we face life's challenges – whether it is cancer, retrenchment, marital discord or a delinquent child – these precious truths can be applied in our lives.

FOREIGN INVASION REPELLED

When King Jehoshaphat faced a huge army, he was dismayed. A great military alliance was preparing to invade his nation, Judah. In despair, he cried out to God. Firstly, he began with adoration. He extolled the greatness and might of God. Then, he placed his fears and worries before God, reminding Him how He had once driven out their enemies.

The king called upon the whole nation of Judah to pray for God's mercy to be upon them. Then, Jahaziel, the prophet, proclaimed God's comforting word to the whole nation: “Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's” (2 Chronicles 20:15).

Acting upon the prophetic word, the king confidently arranged a worship team to go before his army. As they went into battle, they praised God, as if the Almighty had already defeated their enemies. “Praise the Lord, For His mercy endures forever” (2 Chronicles 20:21).

The battle was truly a walkover in favour of Judah. God caused their enemies to fight against one another; Judah did not even have to fight against them.

The spoils of war were so abundant that it took three days to collect them. On the fourth day, the victors gathered at the Valley of Beracah (blessing) to bless God for His favour upon them. Truly the battle was not theirs, but the Lord's.

PARTING OF THE RED SEA

In the exodus account, the Israelites were fearful because

LET GO
& LET

they were locked in a tight situation. The Red Sea lay ahead of them, rendering escape impossible. Behind them, the army of Pharaoh – with their horses and chariots – was closing in on them, relentless in hot pursuit.

Terrified, they cried out to Moses: “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die?” (Exodus 14:11).

It was true that Pharaoh’s army was behind them and the Red Sea was before them but they had forgotten one thing: God was above them.

Moses, demonstrating great faith, calmed them, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exodus 14: 13-14).

And, as they say, the rest is history. As Moses lifted his rod over the sea as if to “divide it”, in obedience to God’s command, a miracle happened. Moses’ symbolic act was instrumental in the unfolding of God’s deliverance of His people. He was God’s co-worker. The sea parted and the people of Israel were able to pass through it as if it were dry ground. When the soldiers tried to cross the sea, the walls of water on either side collapsed on them and they were drowned.

WHEN CITY WALLS TUMBLED DOWN

After crossing the river Jordan, Joshua prepared the people to invade Canaan, the Promised Land. The males had to be circumcised as a mark of sanctification before the conquest.

Now Jericho, the first city that stood in the way of their conquest of Canaan, seemed like an impregnable fortress. In some places, its walls were heavily fortified, even up to 25 feet high and 20 feet thick.

God had already told Joshua exactly how to capture Jericho. Every day for six days, they were to march around the city once. On the seventh day, however, they were to march around it seven times. Then, seven priests will blow their trumpets made from rams’ horns, everyone would shout and the walls would crumble (Joshua 6:2-5).

When God’s people obeyed these instructions, a miracle happened. The walls of Jericho collapsed and they charged straight into the city.

The conquest of Jericho illustrates the fact that the believer’s weapons of warfare are not carnal but spiritual. Repeated marching, shouting and blowing trumpets by priests may seem silly in the eyes of any military strategist, but the foolishness of God is better any day than the strength and wisdom of man.

AS WE BATTLE OUR WAY THROUGH LIFE’S MANY CHALLENGES, WE HAVE TO TRUST GOD. HE WILL FIGHT FOR US.

HOW TO TRIUMPH

For victorious living, what must we do? What does God require from us? He wants us to listen to His instructions, trust and obey.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God (Psalm 20:7).

The horses are prepared for battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD (Proverbs 21:31).

His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love (Psalm 147:10-11). And what is the other requirement?

Holiness. Notice that the Israelites failed to conquer the next city in their push into the

Promised Land, Ai, because of one man’s disobedience (Joshua 7:1).

It is natural for us to fear, like Elisha’s servant who was dismayed when a great Syrian army came to capture his master. But once Elisha prayed to God for his servant’s eyes to be opened, the young man was comforted by the sight of an overwhelmingly superior army of horses and chariots sent by God to protect them (2 Kings 6:15-17).

Aren’t we inspired by the above passages – that whatever challenge we might be facing is not too big for God to handle? God is bigger than any of our problems. If we lay aside our fears and worries, and commit them to God, He will help us overcome our difficulties. He may even bless us abundantly beyond what we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

Victory without strife does not mean doing nothing and letting God do everything for us. On the contrary, we need to pray, seek Him, humble ourselves, listen to His instructions and obey, make the move at the opportune time and leave the results to Him.

When we face various challenges in life, we often forget that God is in control and that the keys of victory are in His hand. So let’s cease striving and start trusting Him. For the battle belongs to the Lord. ✝



Dr Lim Poh Ann

Dr Lim Poh Ann is a medical practitioner. He is the former editor of Asian Beacon magazine (Dec. 2008-Oct. 2011). He can be reached at his Facebook page, www.facebook.com/AskDrLim and blog, Porridge for the Soul: <http://bit.ly/1ijiXHp>

GOD

By Dr Lim Poh Ann

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BOLSTER

By Rajen Devadason

Here's a serious question: Does it seem to you that every passing year grows more and more challenging?

I ask you this because that's the way life appears to me.

From loved ones and friends passing away suddenly or after an illness to personal health scares to career or business setbacks, none of us is immune to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (to borrow a cool phrase from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*)¹.

We all know that into every life, a little rain must fall. Sometimes, though, it's a veritable deluge.

So, in case the stresses and strains of 21st century life have been eroding your strength, be thankful God's Word, His Bible, is replete with great advice and guidance for everyone, non-Christians and Christians alike, concerning this life and the next.

The principles found in its many pages are treasures buried inside its 66 books, 1,189 chapters and 31,102 verses.

A FLASH

When I was a cash-strapped student in England in my early 20s, I remember reading a few pages of my battered Bible at a friend's home in Kent while on term break.

I was pursuing my BSc (Honours) in Physics and Computing at King's College, University of London, and frankly the distraction from electromagnetism, quantum mechanics, quantitative techniques and computer programming was both needed and appreciated.

Now, on this day as I studied my Bible, a flash of insight struck. It was worth remembering, so I jotted down that thought in the margin of the page I was reading.

That seed of insight lodged itself in my brain and has taken root over these ensuing 30 years:

The wisest use of my mental and spiritual faculties is to deeply and consistently study the Bible to discover what God says about life, and what His infallible Word teaches us concerning eternal principles.

Needless to say that in the three decades since then, I have been sinful, senseless, stupid and stubborn enough to make monumental mistakes that contravene the Bible's guidelines, suggestions and commands. Not surprisingly, I have found that circumstances tended to get messy and sometimes uncomfortable whenever I strayed too far from biblical precepts.

However, even when we do nothing wrong, life has a way of getting complicated, chaotic and challenging. That's just the nature of existence on this mortal coil.

Jesus Christ, God the Son, said so in the New Testament when He pointed out that experiencing troubles and woes is

YOUR STRENGTH, BOOST YOUR COURAGE

normal². But Jesus also promised to care for us in this world and the next. He even enlisted God the Father to do the same³.

That utmost level of divine care, guidance and protection is something all of us can use at every stage and in every facet of life.

The Bible never claims that we will always escape trouble. Empirically, I would say sometimes we do and sometimes we don't. From my limited perspective it seems somewhat random.

But even when we go through tough times of emotional duress, health challenges or social stresses, God promises to be there with us; furthermore His Word is able to function as a perpetual laser beacon to show us what to do and to guide us where to go⁴.

FOUNDATION FOR FINANCIAL FORTITUDE

That intimate level of guidance is available even for something as mundane as personal finance. And that's wonderful because the world of money grows more complex and confusing each day. A plethora of new products surfaces every month from every major financial centre.

In such a tumultuous environment, both non-Christians and Christians can profit from biblical advice to help us stay alert to dangers; keep bold yet calm in accepting intelligent levels of investment risk; be determined and enthusiastic about facing the future, and unswerving in our resolve to stay grateful for the bounty and abundance God showers across our planet⁵.

The Bible teaches us to draw strength from God, who energises and enables us to maintain courage over the long haul. If we do so, we will beef up our internal fortitude and thus grow more resilient.

For instance, in the realm of financial planning, if we manage our money very well, as opposed to very badly, we will

derive a semblance of strength and courage from the rising tide of wealth as measured by our increase in net worth (the value of total assets minus total liabilities).

That expanding net worth is most often reflected in ballooning bank accounts and expanding savings and investment portfolios.

However, there is also an odd, potentially dangerous phenomenon at work here. The Bible teaches us that if we follow God's rules for prosperity, we will open a channel for Him to bless us in exceptional ways; however, only the crass and naive would assume such blessings are restricted to financial bounty.

In a world where too many people are ill, weak, sad, lonely and anxious, God knows what we require better than, and before, we do. His blessings therefore, include health, strength, joy, companionship and confidence. But they also, often but not always, include economic and demographic uplift in tandem with escalating wealth.

When that happens, Christian communities on aggregate tend to grow wealthier over the centuries. Unfortunately, people being people, we are in constant danger of inverting the value of the gift over the worth of the Giver.

OUR REAL PROTECTOR

Too often we end up assuming our money is a strong and mighty defensive tower against those slings and arrows of outrageous fortune I referenced earlier.

That would be an unwise assumption.

The last thing we should do is confuse the supply for the SOURCE! God is our source of all things good. The pinnacle of human wisdom is to never forget that truth.

Therefore, to bolster our strength, to boost our courage, and to beef up our

resilience we would be wise to supercharge the quality of our daily walk with God by talking to Him and reading His Word every day. That profound truth is already known to children in Sunday School when each of them is urged through the song to Read your Bible and pray every day!

I should keep doing so to nurture my relationship with Jesus to stay resilient against the rising storms of life.

What about you? 🌟

References:

- 1 The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark Act 3, Scene 1 by William Shakespeare.
- 2 NIV John 16:33b, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
- 3 NIV John 17:11, "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your Name, the Name You gave Me, so that they may be one as We are one."
- 4 NIV Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."
- 5 NIV Matthew 5:45b, "He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

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Rajen Devadason, CFP, is a Securities Commission-licensed financial planner, professional speaker and author. Read his free articles at www.FreeCoolArticles.com; he may be connected with on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rajendevadason>, email at rajen@RajenDevadason.com and at Twitter @ [RajenDevadason](https://twitter.com/RajenDevadason)

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