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FLOODGATES



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September to December 2023

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FROM THE EDITORIAL TEAM

We are living in an era of constant change, and we witness something new every day, to the point that we may be numb to it. Nothing surprises us anymore. With instantaneous information available through social media, and the constant bombardment of “news”, today’s generation can be overwhelmed by what used to be considered “unusual” or “shocking” in times before, and begin to believe that this is “acceptable” and “normal”. But it should not be “acceptable” nor “normal”.

Romans 12:2 tells us “Do not conform to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Floodgates was created to be a vessel, a platform where we can publish articles and testimonies to bless and inspire God’s people towards Godly renewal of the mind mentioned by the apostle Paul, and which will stand out from the daily bombardment of confusing and possibly unhelpful “information”.

In Floodgates, we, as a Church, the Body of Christ, can share stories and bear witness to God’s amazing grace and give Him the glory. Also, we can remind ourselves that we are nothing without Jesus, that we would just be part of a dying world and hopeless.

On the cover, “G” is at the centre of the title, Floodgates, just as we need to place God at the centre of our all. Our name Floodgates originates from Malachi 3:10 “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.”

Father God, may we all, children of God, be blessed when the “floodgates of heaven pour out...” and be reminded that the presence of God in our lives is the blessed life.



GROWING

DEEP PEOPLE

By Pastor Chris Kam, Senior Pastor

What is the mandate in Christian discipleship?

Colossians 1:28,29 ²⁸*He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.*

The call is clear: to present everyone fully mature in Christ. When we are fully mature, it means we are equipped to be effective and useful for the kingdom of God in the mutual edification of the body of believers, and evangelism (or being missional) to the unbelieving world. We make the mistake of ignoring this mandate because it is slow and laborious. Instead, we look for quick wins in ministry success without building up the people we are bringing into the kingdom. No wonder it is so hard to get people to serve or to evangelise because many do not understand the commitment and joy of being disciples of Jesus!

I reminded us in the last article not to focus on building ministries but on building lives. We can build “successful” ministries in terms of size and reputation but without building the people deep and missing the discipleship mandate all together. Clearly the Great Commission in **Matthew 28:18-20** is about making disciples and not just converts.

If we are not careful, we can build a consumeristic church that attracts people to what they can get out from church rather than what they can contribute to her. In other words, we are in danger of forming self-centred Christians. Worse still, we give people the God they want rather than the God Who is. We build up the flesh rather than the spirit and we are not even aware of the flesh-spirit conflict Apostle Paul wrote about in **Romans 7:14-25** which is part of our sanctification.

Romans 7:22-25 ²²*For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body*

that is subject to death? ²⁵Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

In religious consumerism, people fall in love with the preacher, pastor, platform, or programme rather than with Jesus. Creating more attractive church events and “better shows” becomes the focus rather than Jesus. God becomes a way to improve one's life and nothing more. Bible study is about personal wholeness, self-discovery with God, and individual development in spiritual life. Church activities become spiritual providers of spiritual goods and services for self-actualising individuals. These things are not wrong in themselves but is that the purpose of the church? Let us compare the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Technically, both are lakes. The Sea of Galilee is thriving with life because there is an outflow to the Jordan river which feeds into the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is dead because it has no outflow from the lake, instead accumulating minerals over the years from the Jordan River. Its salt content is ten times more than ordinary seawater. Nothing lives there. No wonder you find no life in many Christians because they are only receiving. God wants us to be like the Sea of Galilee with a powerful outflow from our lives, serving others, and not be like the Dead Sea keeping everything for ourselves.

Let me repeat the words of Richard Foster in his book *Celebration of Discipline*. *“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”*

Hence, I am now hearing pastors (including me) confessing that “We are a mile wide but an inch deep.” What a humble confession! In our humility, let us return to the basics of the Great Commission. Let us build disciples who are truly in love with Jesus.

One last thought is that I have just preached about the importance of right birthing for a

new Christian. You can refer to my three-sermon series on this subject on our YouTube channel. It is a reminder that some of us may have been birthed wrongly, and are hence suffering the consequences of this bad birth, or rushed birth, likened to the complications that may happen during delivery that can affect a person for the rest



of his life.

There are four things that must first happen for anyone who claims to be born again. This thought is well expounded in the book “The Normal Christian Birth” by David Pawson. I want to encourage you to read it. In this book, Pawson points us towards this passage:

Hebrews 6:1,2 *‘Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ²instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.*

These are elementary teachings, and if we do not grapple with them and set in these basic foundations for new believers, we would eventually have to deal with the consequences of this bad birthing reflected through their carnal fleshly way of life.

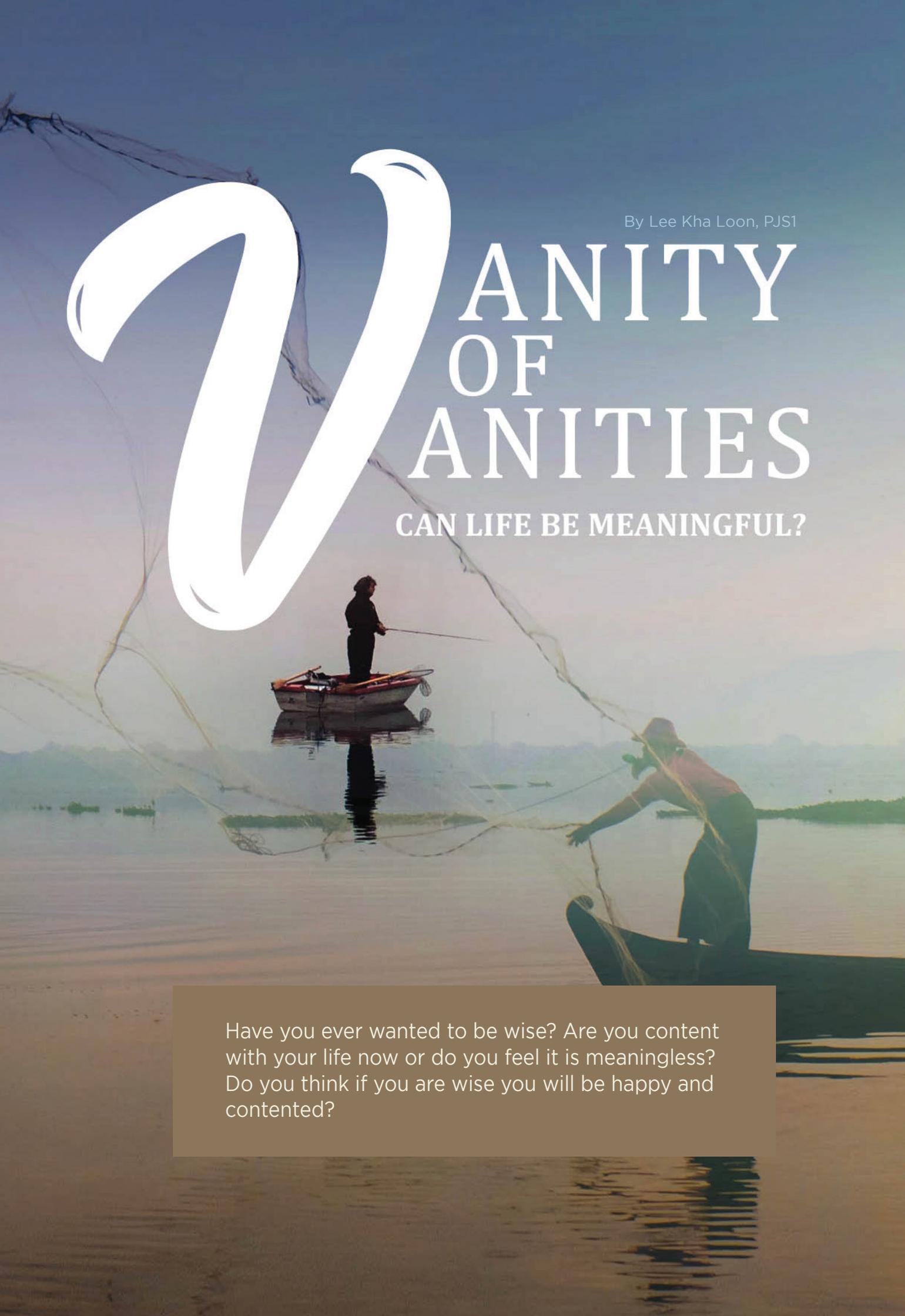
In a nutshell, the four things are:

- 1. Repent towards the Father.**
- 2. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.**
- 3. Baptised in Water.**
- 4. Receive the Holy Spirit.**

Firstly, there are Christians who do not live a life of repentance. They continue living out their sinful lifestyle even after their conversion. They are serving two masters. Secondly, they must also know who, what and why they believe. They must be taught the basics of the Christian belief so that they are anchored securely in their salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Thirdly, they must then be baptised in water as an outward expression of their inward reality of conversion and regeneration. This water baptism is not just symbolic but a powerful testimonial of an outward commitment of one’s faith in Jesus: that the old person has died and is buried, and now he is to rise up again as a new man in the Lord. It serves as a reminder of his pledge of commitment and devotion to Christ for the rest of his life. Lastly, he must continue to receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit for empowerment to live the Christian life.

At the point of conversion, one receives the in-dwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the Promised One sent by Jesus as a seal of ownership on us guaranteeing our future salvation. **(2 Cor 1:21,22)**. The Scriptures talk about the ongoing need to be filled with the Holy Spirit as we live the Christian life. In fact, we cannot live our Christian life without the Holy Spirit’s enabling. Hence the exhortation: **Galatians 5:25** *“Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”* The commandment of **Ephesians 5:18b** *“Be filled with the Spirit”* should rightly be translated as *“Go on being filled with the Spirit”* because the verb is in the present continuous tense.

Let us commit ourselves to growing deep people. This will only come about when we are prepared to invest into lives intentionally. It will be hard work but certainly rewarding because deep people in God do amazing things for God, not because they have to, but because they want to. They are compelled by their love for Christ. **(2 Corinthians 5:14)** A church filled with disciplined and mature believers will be an amazing missional church.



By Lee Kha Loon, PJS1

VANITY OF VANITIES

CAN LIFE BE MEANINGFUL?

Have you ever wanted to be wise? Are you content with your life now or do you feel it is meaningless? Do you think if you are wise you will be happy and contented?

In mid-October a group of men from the MenAlive ministry ventured to Ipoh for their annual retreat and the theme this year was “Find your purpose, live your legacy”. Pastor Daniel encouraged us to discover who we truly are and to have a clear vision in life. That requires wisdom.

What is wisdom? The Oxford dictionary defines it as “experience and knowledge together with the power of applying them critically or practically”. Welcome to the book of Ecclesiastes, the book that Solomon, king of Israel, wrote as he struggled to find wisdom and meaning in life.

At the outset, the author outlined the one quest in his life; **ch1:2-3**:

*Meaningless! Meaningless! says the Teacher
Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.*

*What do people gain from all their labours at
which they toil under the sun?*

This opening phrase can be summarized into three questions. What is the point of work, what is the meaning of life and how do we know life is meaningful? The book of Ecclesiastes is a profound book that contains many wise sayings and good advice for us to practise today. However, the continuous use of the phrases like vanity of vanities, under the sun, seize the day (carpe diem), eat, drink and be satisfied, creates a cloud as to whether the author views life from a human viewpoint or God’s perspective. The purpose of this article is to share my personal perspective on how to read and understand this book and reflections on my life (67 years) in the light of the many observations and wisdom offered by the author.

Let us begin with understanding the word “meaningless” translated from the Hebrew word, hebel (pronounced as hevel) used 38 times in the book. It can mean vapour, breath, air or steam, something you can feel but not control, mostly temporary, ephemeral, delusive or unreliable. Qohelet used hebel to describe the fleeting nature of life (**6:12, 7:15, 9:9**); our youth, success, failures do not last forever. Hence, life is vanity but not a lack of purpose.¹

The author called himself, Qohelet, (Hebrew), which is translated in English as Preacher (KJV, RSV and NASB), Speaker (NEB), Philosopher, TEV and Teacher (NIV). In Greek, the word is Ekklesiastes, we will just use Qohelet in this article.

I. WHAT IS THE THEOLOGY OF QOHELET, THE AUTHOR OF ECCLESIASTES?

I started seriously reading Ecclesiastes in 2018, and since then have spent at least a few weeks each year to digest this complicated book. We are all familiar with reading the well-structured letters of Paul, and the historical books of Samuel and Kings which tend to follow a story line. However, I had difficulty finding a structure here as the author seems to repeat the same themes over and over, and the chapters are patchy with many random proverbs and thoughts expressed. After much thought, rather than start with the structure, I ask myself, what is the theology of Qohelet? What is his view of God?

Creation and Time.

Qohelet began his book with a poem on creation and time (**chapter 1:3-18**).

1:7 All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from, there they return again.

Qohelet believed men live in a world (earth) that is created by God, and there is an order in the heavens and earth by observing the pattern of movements of the sun, the winds and the streams. God has created an orderly world where He is in control of the sun, the winds and the rain which give life to plants, animals and man to cultivate and live. Old Testament wisdom begins with acknowledging God as Creator and His kingly and sovereign rule over heaven and earth.² Man, the created being, is described as living ‘under the sun’, and ‘under the heavens’ in the book to reflect this truth.

¹ *All things are wearisome, more than one can say.*

The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.

1. Seow Choon-Leong, Ecclesiastes, Anchor Bible Commentary, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997), 112
2. Tremper Longman III, Ecclesiastes, NICOT, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids), 1998, 50

Then, in verse 8, Qohelet states that a man experiences life through sight, words and sound; the eye and the ear and the words we speak help us to understand the world we live in. Throughout the book he uses words and phrases such as; I see, I saw, I heard, words spoken, as this book is a reflection of Qohelet's life experience, not a third party.

Seasons in Life.

Chapter 3 is a poem about time and life experiences. Together with chapter 1, there is a second poem in chapter 3 that outlines the contents of the book.

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:
A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,*

Chapter 3 is perhaps the best remembered part of the book, a poem about time in verses 1-8. Two things are certain in our time in life, the day we were born, and the day we return to dust; the two dates in our tombstone. Everything that happens between life and death are a myriad of activities, plant and uproot, tear and build; desires, we search and give up, love and hate and emotions; we weep and laugh, mourn and dance according to the occasion. All these happen to us, sometimes we plan and control them, but they can also be random and unexpected; life, after all, is so full of surprises. This poem merely lists a range of contrasting activities. It does not evaluate them as wise or foolish, righteous or sinful, but rather highlights the seasons we each walk through in life, not prescribing what we should do.³

This poem sets the stage for chapters 4-11 where the Qohelet then elaborates on all the variety of life scenarios one can experience. Chapters 4-11 form the body of the key observations and wisdom sayings of Qohelet. The same messages and good advice are repeated throughout, and it is difficult to find an outline or structure to these chapters. This might look haphazard

but it reflects Qohelet's roller-coaster journey of life and it is not always easy to fit jigsaw pieces of life together.⁴ Qohelet in sharing his honest reflections and observations might often sound angry, questioning God, or very unChristian. That is just part of the learning wisdom process; not the words of a skeptic.

We will selectively look at a few of Qohelet's observations and wise advice he gave. Before we get immersed into the details, the answer to Qohelet's search lies in what he said in the last two verses (**Chapter 12:13,14**) of the book. He leads the reader/listener at the end of his intellectual discourse to fear God, that is, to be subservient to His deity, respect, honour and worship Him. He also exhorts us to keep the law, in keeping with the normative teachings of Moses and the Old Testament.⁵

2. OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE AND THEIR LIVES.

Life is not fair.

*9:11 I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong,
nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favour to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.*

The wealthy, intelligent, well- educated are expected to succeed. The valiant warrior will win the battle and the fastest runner will win the race, but results are sometimes not what we expect. Many things in life are subject to chance and we cannot control the timing of events.⁶ A person born poor in the slums of South East Asia or Africa will have little chance of getting out of poverty. You cannot determine whether you are born into a poor or rich family. Life seemed to be determined by fate (time and chance) for many.

To succeed, take risks in life.

*11:1 ¹Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return.
²Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do*

3. Daniel Akin, Jonathan Akin, Exalting Jesus in Ecclesiastes, (B&H Publishing, Nashville, 2016), 36

4. Craig Bartholomew, Ryan O'Dowd, Old Testament Wisdom Literature, A Theological Introduction (IVP, Downer Grove, 2011) 189

5. Tremper Longman III, Ecclesiastes, NICOT, 305

6. Seow Choon-Leong, Ecclesiastes, Anchor Bible Commentary, 321

not know what disaster may come upon the land.

⁴Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap.

⁶Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

A friend of mine is very knowledgeable regarding finance, investment theory and corporate news. However, all he does is talk about it. He is the one who ‘watches the wind but will not plant’; hence he never harvested from his knowledge. Qohelet observed that those who succeed often have to spread out their risks, put their money in seven, or eight ventures, and not put all their eggs in one basket. Success also requires hard work, sow in the morning, and continue to work in the evening. Keep doing the right things and some will bear fruit; a farmer or investor cannot determine which investment will succeed; it is all in the hands of the Maker.

Similarly, I realised over the years that diversification into different investment products is a good strategy, but it requires hard work and the ability to analyze and understand companies, investment products and their suitability to bear fruit in the longer term.

Rich people are not always happy.

***6:10** Whoever loves money never has enough;*

whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless.

Qohelet had a lot to say about wealth and one’s attitude towards possessions. All of us love money to some degree; and it is not easy to part with it too. And, somehow, we never seem to have enough, because we worry a lot about the future - children’s education, old age and health care needs - and we just want more and more as we progress in our careers and lives.

***6:11** ¹¹As goods increase, so do those who consume them.*

And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?

¹²The sleep of a labourer is sweet, whether they eat little or much, but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.

Rich people often get sleepless nights when the stock market crashes, when there are geo-political uncertainties, or when they are caught in a bad business deal. They have more to worry about how to grow and maintain their wealth compared to the ordinary worker. Qohelet did not condemn the rich nor conclude that poverty is preferred, but rather observed that the wealthy can have many problems and worries to contend with. These are just a few samples of the many real-life observations Qohelet made.

3. GOOD AND SOUND ADVICE (PROVERBIAL WISDOM).

The section from chapters 4-11 is interspersed with observations and wise sayings/proverbs. In this literary style Qohelet helps us to process what we observe with some sound advice to follow. There are many useful proverbs in **4:17-5:12**, **7:1-14** and **9:14-11:6**. Better than sayings....**7:5-8**

***7:5** It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person than to listen to the song of fools.*

***7:8** The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.*

In chapters 4, 5 and 7 there is a list of proverbial sayings that contrast the wise and the foolish, and good advice to follow; better to ‘be like this than that’. Many of these are simple one-line proverbs such as, “better is patience than pride”, which are easy to comprehend. Some are couched in metaphors. “The songs of fools are likened to noisy pots, a lot of noise but little substance; so better to heed a rebuke” (we do not like to hear hard truths) than be flattered by praise from fools⁷”. The contrast between wisdom and folly is to drive us to walk in wisdom.

Success in life is often accompanied by a haughty spirit in us; and together with the songs of fools to cheer us on, we often think we have made it through self-achievement. At the end of life, does personal success matter? So, do not get carried away, rather be patient and wait on the Lord always.⁷

Carpe diem (3:13, 5:18, 8:15, 9:7)

Seize the day.

5:18,19 ¹⁸*This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labour under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot.* ¹⁹*Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God.*

The phrase ‘eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun’ is often referred to the word *carpe diem*; a Latin phrase which means “seize the day”. Qohelet is not suggesting that we should simply live our lives as we please, but like a more contemporary phrase - eat, live, enjoy, for tomorrow we die. *Carpe diem* recognizes that daily life is a mix of blessings and arduous tasks from God, encourages us to use our time, wealth and possessions well, be content as life is a gift from God.⁸

Death – Life is a gift from God.

A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.

Qohelet talks a lot about death throughout the book (4:2, 6:12, 7:1, 12:1-7). It is a theme he kept repeating to remind us that understanding that death brings an end to life on earth helps us to keep a proper perspective of life. My mom was 98 and went home to the Lord in August 2023 after a long illness. During the past few years, I did my best to stay by her side for chats, and have meals together, and we had many meaningful

times together because we both knew her time left on earth was short.

Qohelet also observed that wealthy people leave all their riches behind when they die; they are no different from the poor man or beggar or even the animals. Death is a scary thought, and honestly, I try to avoid thinking about it, sometimes pretending I will live a long life. He also uses the shadow metaphor when reflecting on death (6:12). A shadow provides shade for a while, then it disappears. Our life is ephemeral, just like a shadow that will pass by and be gone.

There are a few life scenarios depicted in Ecclesiastes and it concludes with a funeral scene in a farmhouse (12:1-7). When death comes, the sound of a grinding mill will cease, the streets will be empty, and doors closed, and lights grow dim. The silence is filled instead with the sounds of mourners, a contrast throughout the book. Death is pictured as a dark, solemn and lifeless occasion and man will return to dust, and his spirit returns to God who gave it (12:7).

I watched my mom leaving this world gradually as her strength and breath slowly faded over a period of four months. Dying was an emotional experience for the family as we watched her suffer, bed-ridden, and like many aspects of life, it was emotional, and learning to deal with emotions is part of the wisdom process. Accepting death as a reality has also been a struggle for me even though I am assured of meeting the Lord Jesus Christ. Qohelet’s struggle with the meaning of death is deep and profound.

4. READING ECCLESIASTES IN THE LIGHT OF JESUS.

The prologue (chapters 1-2) and epilogue (chapter 12) are important bookends to grasp the message of Qohelet. He is not a skeptic but a God-fearing shepherd. We have the privilege to read it from the lens of the New Testament, a fuller revelation through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The New Testament Gospels, letters of Paul and James

7. Peter Enns, Ecclesiastes, Two Horizons, OT Commentary (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 2011) 81

8. Walter Brueggemann, Old Testament Theology, An Introduction (Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2008) 186

continue to expound wisdom to their hearers and readers. Family members can recognise Jesus as a sage from a young age as He listened and debated with the teachers in the temple court (Luke 2:45-47). How did Jesus teach wisdom compared to Qohelet? There are many similarities.

Both used empirical evidence. Qohelet appealed to creation; sun, wind and sea (chapter 1). Jesus also made reference to nature (lilies of the field and the birds of the air) as He taught the crowds that followed Him. Do they worry about food and clothing? What about the mustard seed or the Sower that sows seed on the ground? How do they grow and bear fruit?

Qohelet tried to gain wisdom by examining the range of human activities; planting, throwing seed, casting nets, wars, weddings, funerals and farming. Jesus also used common everyday symbols and activities, sheep, coins, seeds and fishing to explain and usher in the Kingdom of God. The parables, proverbs and riddles are wise words to the simple and the sophisticated, poor and rich, young and old. They carry a profound message from daily life that points to God's created order and His Kingly rule.⁹

There are other similarities, but the one big difference is their view of death. The afterlife is not a central topic in Old Testament theology; hence there is little reference in the Old Testament. For Qohelet, there will be judgment of our deeds, good and evil; and we are to live faithfully and obedient to the law and commands and death is a certainty. Jesus had more to say on this matter of death. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (**Luke 16:14-31**) affirmed Qohelet's view of future judgment of the life we lead on earth. The raising of Lazarus from the dead demonstrated Jesus' power over death. Jesus Himself gave this assurance to His disciples; "*I am the resurrection and the life*" (**John 11:25**).

Jesus also taught His disciples to look forward to the future; to be reunited with Him in His Father's mansion (**John 14:1-2**). And He

appeared to His disciples in bodily form after His death and resurrection. We have a more complete revelation in the light of Jesus' life and teachings, the power of the gospel and eternal life through salvation. Does this mean that Qohelet is obsolete? Absolutely not. Let me end with some personal reflections on what Qohelet can teach us today.

5. PERSONAL REFLECTIONS.

I have spent many hours and days reflecting on my own life as I read and re-read the book. The process of self-awareness (not self-centeredness) has led me to a greater desire for healing, repentance and restoration in my spiritual journey. Let me share some thoughts from my self-reflections.

Live for today, not yesterday.

Both Qohelet and Jesus drew important lessons from daily life observations. We can do the same. To start with, there are definitely seasons in life, and I have had many. I retired in 2013, and entered into a new season where I felt I had more control over time and activities without the demands expected of an employee. It is a freedom I have embraced with gratitude and ten years have passed since. Some days are longer than others; but I have better control over my life than before. It takes wisdom to adapt and to recognize changes in life circumstances; that retirement for me is not one, but a multi-phase experience; each requiring new priorities and weekly routines.

Alone, but not loneliness.

The virtual world we live in can be both a blessing and a curse. We can be connected from early morning to nighttime with friends and with the outside world through our phone apps and zoom meetings, yet feel lonely through lack of human contact. As I advance in years, I also realise that my activity log is low compared to my busy executive days. Less is more now, but spending time alone is different from feeling lonely. Seeking wisdom and knowledge requires long hours of reading, meditation, writing and being alone with self and God. The gift of time can also be used wisely to reach out to lonely people around us,

9. Peter Enns, Ecclesiastes, Two Horizons, 173

NON-CHRISTIAN

Friends

By Alex Tung, PJN1



How Close Should Christians Be With Non-Christians?

If you were confronted with this question, how would you answer it?

Everybody has their comfort level of what they deem to be a healthy handling of their relationships with non-Christians. Perhaps it is not a level that is cast in stone, and perhaps it differs over time, from one situation to another and from one set of friends to another. But it is likely that they have not examined their reasoning of how or why they came to adopt these comfort levels.

In today's day and age, certainly we would not resort to either extreme end of the spectrum, i.e. to either avoid any associations with non-Christians like they were a plague, against only having non-Christians as our closest and dearest. But where do we draw the line between these two polar extremes – and more importantly, why do we draw our lines there?

Here is an answer which hopefully strikes an agreeable balance:

HAVING NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS IS A RISKY AFFAIR AND YET YOU SHOULD HAVE NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS, AND CLOSE NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS FOR THAT MATTER, THOUGH YOUR CLOSER FRIENDS SHOULD REMAIN CHRISTIANS, AND IN THE END, YOUR CLOSEST FRIEND CAN ONLY BE JESUS.

Let us break this answer into five points and examine the biblical reasoning behind each of them.

I. HAVING NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS IS A RISKY AFFAIR...

The Bible is rife with warnings about having any form of relationships with non-Christians. Perhaps the most often-quoted of them all would be Paul's warning to the church at Corinth as he cautions them not to be yoked with unbelievers as there can be no harmony between Christians and non-Christians, the two having nothing in common.

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or **what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?***

2 Corinthians 6:14-15

Reading on from verse 15, Paul goes further than merely warning the church to exclude unbelievers in their congregation, he even urges them to deliberately remove themselves from any dealings with unbelievers and to have absolutely nothing to do with them.

*Therefore, "**Come out from them and be separate**, says the Lord. **Touch no unclean thing**, and I will receive you."*

2 Corinthians 6:17

Notwithstanding Paul's seemingly extreme direction for believers to have zero association with unbelievers, this stance is hardly novel in his time of the New Testament. Even from as early as the Old Testament days of King Solomon, King Solomon himself had a lot to say on the similar topic. As part of the Proverbs of Solomon, King Solomon recorded that:

*The righteous choose their friends carefully, but **the way of the wicked leads them astray.***

Proverbs 12:26

*Walk with the wise and become wise, for **a companion of fools suffers harm.***

Proverbs 13:20

*An **honest witness does not deceive, but a false witness pours out lies.** The mocker seeks wisdom and finds none, but knowledge comes easily to the discerning. **Stay away from a fool, for you will not find knowledge on their lips.***

Proverbs 14:5-7

There are numerous other examples in the Bible referring to similar dangers of Christians being in association with non-Christians, and they all urge a similar caution to avoid such friendships or interactions. The rationale for this prohibition can be summed up in Paul's warning to the church at Corinth where he says:

*Do not be misled: "**Bad company corrupts good character.**" Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God—I say this to your shame.*

1 Corinthians 15:33, 34

2. ...ANDYET, YOU SHOULD HAVE NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS...

However, it cannot be denied that throughout history and even throughout biblical history

from Old Testament days, countless souls have been saved into the faith through the resolute ministry and effort of believers reaching out to unbelievers.

Even today, unless you were born into a Christian household, it is likely that your repentance had been spurred by the love, care and concern given to you by fellow Christians in your midst. If these Christians had dogmatically adhered to the warnings of Paul and King Solomon (and so many others throughout biblical history), you may not have had the opportunity to witness God's love personified.

In fact, as Christians we have specifically been instructed to witness to and share God's love with non-Christians. The hallmark of this instruction can be summarised in the Great Commission.

*Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Matthew 28:19, 20

And if Jesus's instruction vide the Great Commission is not sufficient to convince us of our call to love and serve the non-Christians in our midst, Jesus Himself displayed the ultimate act of love when He sacrificed His own life for us when we were still unbelievers.

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: **While we were still sinners**, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:8

3. ...AND CLOSE NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS FOR THAT MATTER, ...

If we are to pursue Christlikeness, then following from Jesus's example we need to have more than non-Christian friends - we need to have close non-Christian friends. Like Jesus, we are to relate to non-Christians in

our midst as more than loose acquaintances; we are to build true and meaningful relationships with them. Our bond needs to surpass a mere friendship-for-salvation transaction to one in which our non-Christian friends would be comfortable to share their personal and deep struggles with us without fear of judgement. It would be incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to witness and reveal Christ's love to them if we did not first build the foundations of a meaningful friendship.

On this note, Jesus's life offers a compelling example of how far we ought to go to be friends with unbelievers. One clear account was when Jesus allowed the sinful woman to anoint Him with perfume (**see Luke 7:36-50**), unlike the others in His midst who despised and avoided the sinful woman like a disease. Whilst others avoided having anything to do with her, Jesus extended kindness and welcomed her to be within His vicinity and even allowed her to wipe His feet.

This was hardly an isolated incident, and it was the regularity of such incidents that ultimately led to criticisms from the Pharisees and confusion from His own disciples.

*The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, **a friend of tax collectors and sinners.***

Luke 7:34

In yet another account from John 4, Jesus is seen in communion with a Samaritan woman by the well; and true to Jesus's approach, notwithstanding the cultural norm for Jews not to be associated with Samaritans, He extended love to the Samaritan woman and explained to her, her need for living water.

*The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For **Jews do not associate with Samaritans.**) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and **he would have given you living water.**"*

John 4:9, 10

Extending kindness to unbelievers was a hallmark of Jesus's ministry. The Bible even specifically calls us to approach our non-Christian friends with gentleness even if they oppose our faith. As Paul puts it succinctly in 2 Timothy:

*And the Lord's servant **must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone**, able to teach, not resentful. **Opponents must be gently instructed**, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

2 Timothy 2:24-26

This is also echoed by Matthew in his Gospel (in Chapter 5). The central idea is that, through our witnessing to our non-Christian friends in an authentic and loving posture, they will see the love of Christ; and it is thus through these encounters with Christians that non-Christians will see the hope that is within us and experience the aroma of Christ. These encounters simply cannot be orchestrated as one-off projects as they require prolonged investment of our love to non-Christians in our midst.

*Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth **and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil**, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

2 Timothy 2:25, 26

*"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, **that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.***

Matthew 5:14-16

4. ...THOUGH, YOUR CLOSER FRIENDS SHOULD REMAIN CHRISTIANS; ...

Despite the New Testament's various accounts of Jesus challenging the cultural norms and extending unprecedented friendship to unbelievers, it should nonetheless be pointed out that Jesus did have His inner circle of friends. These were His closer friends and those He considered His closest companions.

Notwithstanding His regular interactions with unbelievers, Jesus kept His most intimate relationships to a few of His disciples – namely Peter, James and John. And it was only these three, His closest and most trustworthy friends, who witnessed Jesus's transfiguration and accompanied Jesus on the night of His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

*After six days **Jesus took with him Peter, James and John** the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **There he was transfigured before them**. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.*

Matthew 17:1, 2

*They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." **He took Peter, James and John along with him**, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."*

Mark 14:32-34

The model Jesus had exemplified for us can perhaps be coined as "friendly to all but selectively intimate". As much as we are called to extend God's love to all whom we meet, there are nonetheless boundaries we ought not cross. This is especially so when we find ourselves downtrodden and in need of support and motivation. At such vulnerable times, it is crucial that we seek counsel from fellow Christians.

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but **encouraging one another**—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Hebrews 10:24, 25

Irrefutably, those closest and dearest to us would have a greater influence over our hearts. For this reason, many interpret Paul's warning in 2 Corinthians to the Church in Corinth to not be "yoked" together with unbelievers to refer specifically to intimate relationships – and this would unreservedly refer to marriage, for there is no human relationship more intimate than that of husband and wife.

***Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.** For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?*

2 Corinthians 6:14

5. ...AND IN THE END, YOUR CLOSEST FRIEND CAN ONLY BE JESUS.

If we took the most conservative interpretation of Paul's warning to the Church of Corinth in 2 Corinthians (i.e. to not be "unequally yoked" with unbelievers (v14) and to set ourselves completely "separate" from them (v17)), we would see our interactions limited only to fellow Christians. Such an extreme adherence would see us limiting all of our dealings, correspondences, relationships and acquaintances to strictly within a circle of fellow Christians.

Such an extreme is not only impractical and impossible today, it is also not fool-proof as we, like all Christians, are sinners and imperfect individuals too. We are all on the journey of sanctification, and (aside from Jesus) not a single Christian can claim to be perfect.

Job is a great example of this as someone who arguably did it right. He kept as his best friends and most trusted companions individuals who he believed were pious and godly men. When Job's best friends (Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar) heard of his plight, they dropped everything and immediately came to grieve with him and to share in his sorrow.

*When Job's three friends, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite, heard about all the troubles that had come upon him, **they set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him.** When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him; **they began to weep aloud, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads.***

Job 2:11, 12

But instead of actually offering helpful counsel, the trio engaged for 30 long chapters (from Job 3 to Job 32) debating with Job one after another trying to convince Job that He had somehow disobeyed God and that he only had himself to blame for all his suffering. Certainly this was not what Paul had in mind when he teaches for fellow believers to "spur one another on toward love" and "encouraging one another".

*And let us consider how we **may spur one another on toward love** and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but **encouraging one another**—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Hebrews 10:24, 25

Whilst little is known of Job's wife, it would be safe to infer that as a devout man of God, Job would have heeded the warning to not be "yoked" with unbelievers and had married a fellow believer. Nevertheless, even his wife erred upon seeing the devastation which had befallen Job and their household. She too offered unhelpful advice.

His wife said to him, "Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!" He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

Job 2:9, 10

In the end, it was Job's close communion with God that pulled him through his trials. It was his grounded-ness in God and close relationship with God that gave Job the assurance he needed. Such a relationship that Job had with God and his confidence in Him could only be developed through years of walking in close communion with God.

So, correct as Job may have been in keeping only fellow believers as his closer friends and marrying a fellow believer, ultimately it was his closest friend who kept him from straying.

Putting it together:

HOW CLOSE SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE WITH NON-CHRISTIANS?

HAVING NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS IS A RISKY AFFAIR AND YET, YOU SHOULD HAVE NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS, AND CLOSE NON-CHRISTIAN FRIENDS FOR THAT MATTER, THOUGH YOUR CLOSER FRIENDS SHOULD REMAIN CHRISTIANS; AND IN THE END, YOUR CLOSEST FRIEND CAN ONLY BE JESUS.



Partnering **GOD** In Cambodia

By Kelvin Yong, Missions Pastor



The first mission statement of DUMC reads: “To evangelise the Klang Valley and to send missionaries to unreached people groups worldwide.” That defines one of our intents as a church and clarifies our role in the Great Commission - in fulfilment of the purpose Jesus came to this world. Jesus came to send His followers, His disciples, out to be His witnesses, including to some of the remotest parts of the earth.

And it was on the basis of this mandate that Dr KC Ling led our first mission team to Cambodia in December 1993. Following that, the Lord led us to establish our mission work in Baray, a district within the Kampong Thom province, and a local NGO called the Cambodia Mission & Services (CMS) was registered. The primary role of CMS was to function as the local vehicle for the three-fold mission work of church planting, pastoral training and community development.

In 1995, Esther Ding was sent as our first field missionary to this nation, which at that time had just emerged from a devastating civil war. She then went on to serve with the CMS pastoral team until 2009. Thereafter she became a self-supporting missionary, using ‘business as missions’ as her platform. For the record, DUMC has to-date sent out seven field missionaries to Cambodia, with four still active today.

Churches were planted in different parts of the district and local indigenous pastors were appointed and commissioned to oversee them. To support the endeavours, mission teams were sent on a quarterly basis to train and equip the pastors and leaders, and to support the work of our missionaries.

Community development initiatives were meanwhile undertaken to open doors for the gospel to reach the hearts of the local communities. These projects included the building of wells and toilets in poverty-stricken places, the setting up of a mobile medical clinic to serve remote villages, and the initiation of a rural development programme and income-generating projects in the form of village-based handicraft businesses to alleviate poverty.

To help and encourage the emerging generations academically, kindergartens, English classes and a tuition centre were established. Financial assistance, in the form of a child sponsorship programme and university/college student scholarships were provided to promote tertiary education.

These efforts were in fact recognised by the Cambodian government and CMS was conferred a 'Gold Medal' award in 2003 for its contribution to community development and education upliftment. But more importantly, Baray has been transformed spiritually - from being a district with very few believers 30 years ago, to today having the highest Christian population in the entire nation.

Since CMS's inception, the number of local indigenous churches under its umbrella has grown to 33 with over 2,000 members under the leadership of three lead pastors, each overseeing a geographical zone. These lead pastors are assisted by seven full-time associate pastors and ministry staff and 23 bi-vocational ministry leaders.

As we look back and reflect on this 30-year faith journey in Cambodia, our hearts are filled with immense gratitude to God for allowing us to partner Him as His vessels where He is working. Thanks be to God and all glory to Jesus, the Saviour of the world.





ARISE & SHINE

A Combined Zone Camp for PJN2 & PJN7

By Joshua Wu, PJN7

By the grace of God, the cell groups within the Petaling Jaya North 2 (“PJN2”) and Petaling Jaya North 7 (“PJN7”) zones came together to organise a Combined Zone Camp (“the Camp”) on 2nd and 3rd September 2023. The Camp was held at the MBS Recreation & Training Centre with a total of 109 individuals attending.

The Camp’s theme was **“Step Beyond & Shine His Light Wherever He Places You.”** The theme chosen for the Camp was in line with DUMC’s 2023 theme, “Go ... and keep going ... to the least and the lost ... wherever He places you.”

The passage of Scripture which inspired the Camp theme was **Isaiah 60:1**, which says:

***“Arise, shine; for your light has come,
And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”***

The theme of the Camp was intentionally reflected in the different activities held during the Camp.



Theme Talk 1



Telematch



Talent Time

Theme Talk 1, on the first half of the theme “Step Beyond & Shine His Light”, was delivered by Pastor Dylan Wong (District Pastor 4 cum Zone Pastor for PJN2) based on 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. In his talk, Pastor Dylan, amongst others, conveyed to the Camp attendees that:

- (a) Challenging circumstances in life are inevitable but we can trust God to bring us through the storm.
- (b) An Attitude of Gratitude brings about transformation. It is our weapon against fear, and strengthens our faith.
- (c) We can all shine God’s light as overcomers of the storms in our lives. We do so by sharing, and by serving.

At the end of Theme Talk 1, the Camp attendees broke into groups of two or three to share one area of gratitude to God and one way they want to shine for Jesus.

For the **Talent Time** activity, the Camp attendees were required to use their creativity to act out Bible passages which were in line with the Camp theme.

The passages chosen by the Organising Committee were Mark 5:1-20 (Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man), Mark 5:21-43 (Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick

Woman), Acts 16:20-40 (Paul and Silas in Prison), and Acts 27:39-Acts 28:10 (The Shipwreck and Paul Ashore on Malta).

Day 2 of the Camp started off with a morning devotion led by Pastor Angeline Tan (Zone Pastor for PJN7). The title of the devotion was “**Breakfast with Jesus**” and was taken from John 21:1-17.

The Camp attendees broke into their cell groups to meditate on the passage and to discuss the devotional questions provided.

We then participated in five physical challenges as part of the **Telematch** activity. The five physical challenges were Scoop the Beans, Armour of God, Rescue the Village, Fishers of Men, and Fruit of the Holy Spirit. After the completion of each challenge, the specific missional takeaway for the challenge was explained to the Camp attendees.



Breakfast with Jesus



↑ Team Building



↑ Organising Committee



DUMC Missionary

Theme Talk 2, on the second half of the theme “Wherever He Places You”, was delivered by Pastor Angeline Tan based on Isaiah 60:1-3, and taken from the book “The Invasive Kingdom” by Pastor Dr Philip Lyn. Pastor Angeline, amongst others, impressed upon the Camp attendees that:

- (a) The workplace is the largest and fastest growing mission field, and believers are called to be workplace ministers.
- (b) Every believer should strive to be an agent or a representative of the Kingdom of God to carry the mission of God into every sphere of his/her life.
- (c) There are 4 types of believers & lights, namely the survivors (lamplights), steady believers (lampstand lights), supernatural ministers (floodlights), and society transformers (city lights).

After the conclusion of the talk, the Camp attendees were divided into 8 domains (including an additional Healthcare domain) to discuss the challenges faced by them and their respective domains as well as to pray for each other and for their respective domains.

The **Team Building** activity saw the Camp attendees preparing and delivering a short

skit promoting and inviting others to join short term mission trips to Laos, Nepal, Thailand, and Vietnam respectively. These 4 countries were chosen as DUMC regularly sends short term mission teams to those places.

After the presentation of the short skits for the Team Building activity, John Ow and Joyce Lau (DUMC’s missionaries to Laos) shared their experiences regarding missions and encouraged the Camp attendees to attend upcoming short-term mission trips.

All in all, based on the feedback received by the Organising Committee after the conclusion of the Camp, it had been a wonderful and blessed time for the attendees.

The Organising Committee, comprising the following individuals, would like to give all glory and honour to God for the Camp:

1. Pastor Dylan Wong (PJN2)
2. Pastor Angeline Tan (PJN7)
3. David Wong (PJN7)
4. Jackson Ho (PJN2)
5. Joshua Wu (PJN7)
6. Sharon Ng (PJN2)
7. Noel Victor (PJN7)
8. Tan Jee Aun (PJN7)
9. Tan Vin Sern (PJN7)
10. Wong Valvet (PJN5)



TIME-OUT

MEN'S ENCOUNTER WEEKEND

By Lee Kha Loon, PJS1

In mid-October, the Men's Fellowship group went to Ipoh for our annual "Encounter with God" retreat. This year, we had the privilege of having Pastor Daniel Ho as a speaker and the theme was 'Find your purpose, live your legacy'. Our journey started by bus and I sat next to a brother whom I had met for the first time, and we had a wonderful chat all the way. On the ride home, I did the same with another brother I met at the retreat. It was a great opportunity to connect and make new friends.

I enjoyed listening to Pastor Daniel as he preached from **2 Tim2:1-7**. He began by challenging us to examine who we really were and to do so by being honest and asking the right questions. Then we can live our legacy by sowing seeds in the life of others. In the journey of faith many start well, but it is more important to finish the race.

One of the highlights of the retreat was a two-hour quiet time at the park early on

Saturday morning; I sat alone for an hour just talking, praying and listening to God. The Spirit reaffirmed what I had been thinking about living my legacy; spending more time with my two daughters and my grandchildren, teaching and playing with them, and getting to know more men in DUMC to mutually encourage one another. Apart from my MAG group, I intend to connect more with new friends made over the weekend retreat.

The retreat was pleasant and well-organized. The leaders went a day earlier to set up and make preparations for a smooth arrival for us. I felt so spoiled by their dedication to service. At the end of the retreat, I realized that 'Men Alive' is not just a motto or a label; it defines who we really are, a band of brothers. Together we have passion and purpose and provide care and comfort to one another. We are men, truly alive for God. Hallelujah!



Pain AS GOD'S HIGH PURPOSE

By Sarah Lye PJS2

As I approach the end of the year, I remember how the beginning of the year kicked in with unpleasant surprises for me. I felt severe pain in my right foot when I woke up one morning in January and this persisted for several weeks. I decided to see a doctor to see what was wrong with my foot. The doctor informed me that I had plantar fasciitis. This is a condition where I had overstretched or overused the thick band of tissue on my foot. It was painful and it was hard to walk. I was advised by the doctor to go for physiotherapy twice a week and to see him in three weeks' time. I was also given some medication to treat the pain.

To cut a long story short, I did not recover in three weeks. It was a long process of recovery with adjustments that I had to make in my daily routine. I had to be patient with my body and I also had to be patient with God as I realised that it would take time to recover completely. It was not easy as I had to watch my movements so as not to aggravate my condition and had to wear a special shoe on my right foot in order for the condition to improve.

On top of that, sometime in March, I had so much pain in the back of my neck that I decided to see a doctor. I was surprised to hear that the neck pain was due to a condition called cervical spondylosis – a condition of age-related wear and tear affecting the spinal disks in your neck. And again, I had to go for physiotherapy for my neck. This was another setback for me as I was still battling plantar fasciitis!

Throughout the whole process, I was really battling in my mind – what was going on, what was happening to me, why was this happening to me, when would I get over it?... I did not get any reply from the Lord. The only thing I knew I could do was to trust God and trust in His goodness. Though I was experiencing the pain, I had to surrender the pain to Him and plead for God's mercy to sustain me.

Fast forward to the moment I am writing this at the end of October, I am still feeling pain at the back of my



neck but thank God the plantar fasciitis has gone after nine months! However, there is additional pain that I am experiencing on my right arm or wrist whenever I overuse it. I can feel the pain whenever I cook after I come back from work every day. The pain will be so intense that sometimes I will just have to leave the utensils in the kitchen to be washed later. My arm/wrist needs to rest, and I just need to lie down. At first, I could not come to terms with what was happening!

The only comfort I can find is in the promises of God in the Bible. I have tried to see things from the elevated position – that is to see things from God’s perspective. I learnt that because of the suffering, I could not focus on the current situation although it was so easy to see the present/“now” situation – to complain about the pain, to grumble about the inconvenience, the difficulties. But I had to make a paradigm shift, to not focus on the pain, but to allow and co-operate with God so that He would have the liberty to work in the midst of the pain that I was experiencing. I needed to keep trusting in His promises that He would be faithful. God would keep me safe even in the midst of pain, God is there and He truly understands. He is shaping me – teaching me to depend on Him, teaching me to wait for His timing, learning to wait for His

greater purposes to be accomplished which I cannot see right then at the moment.

God is also shaping me to have stronger faith each day although it is not easy. **1 Peter 5:10** says, “And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong...”.

God is reminding me that my cries to Him are not in vain but I am to patiently wait for Him to respond. He may take years to respond. He is teaching me that even in the midst of my pain and suffering, Christ is to be magnified. He is there, ready to give me a helping hand in my times of need. God alone is my HOPE.

Romans 5:3-5 says, “Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”



By Alvin Chong Chee Kin PJN3

FROM
DARKNESS
TO
REDEMPTION

HOW GOD TURNED MY SCAR INTO A SHINING STAR FOR HIS GLORY

My name is Alvin Chong and I would like to share how God transformed my life over the past few years. I grew up in a Christian family and went to an Anglican church in Jinjang in Kuala Lumpur when I was a young boy. In my college years I mixed with friends who led me into drugs. Hooked on marijuana, my life was a turbulent storm, until one day I read a book on end-times that sent shivers down my spine and filled me with an overwhelming sense of fear and uncertainty. Seeking solace in the television, I reached for the remote control, and there on the screen was the movie "Armageddon". It was as if the universe itself had conspired to remind me of the fragility of life. Desperate for guidance, I found my sister's Bible hidden away in a cupboard, and though I struggled to understand its words, I clung to it as a lifeline. Seeking out my



college mates, I discovered that one of them attended church, and I implored him to take me along.

My Conversion

Within the hallowed halls of that church, I sat through a sermon that stirred something deep within me. Then came the altar call, a divine invitation I could not resist. Three young souls approached me, inquiring about my prayer request. I had none, only an unexplainable yearning to be touched by something greater than myself. As they prayed over me in tongues, a powerful presence enveloped me, and I fell to the ground under the weight of God's grace. I was in a state of awe and wonder, tears streaming down my face like a cleansing rain. In those precious moments, I felt the weight of my sins being lifted from my heart. It was a spiritual rebirth, a revelation of God's boundless love and mercy. I was healed and cured of my drug addiction by God's grace.

Relapse and Rehabilitation

Many years later I had a major crisis in my life and in my darkest hour, I turned back to the vices that had once enslaved me—marijuana, and eventually, methamphetamine. My life spiraled into an abyss of despair. I lost my home, my job, and my way. Darkness clouded my vision, and I was ensnared by the enemy's grip. It seemed as though all hope was lost. I sought help to recover and through YouTube Live, I connected with a Hong Kong artiste. She was a Good Samaritan who responded with genuine care and love that led me to have renewed determination to pursue a rehabilitation program. I sought help in a rehabilitation centre run by Pastor Sam Krishnan under DUMC. Pastor Sam's guidance, along with daily teaching and communal support, helped me to rebuild my life from the ground up. After two and a half

years of rehabilitation (2021), I emerged from the centre a changed man.

Serving in DUMC

I had begun attending DUMC in 2018 as I recovered from drugs. A year ago I joined a cell group led by Andrew Hong (PJN3) and the cell group members have provided me with support and encouragement and their fellowship has helped me to stay away from drugs. I volunteered to serve in Children's Church and the Connector team, which helps newcomers to settle into DUMC. By serving actively I am much blessed and there is so much joy I have received by serving others.

From Scar to a Shining Star

God blessed me immensely too through my mother, who helped me climb out of the abyss by providing me with an apartment and a car, along with some income through property rentals. But, instead of just accepting help, I dared to dream big, to strive to make a difference in God's Kingdom. To achieve this, with unwavering faith and a single-minded focus, I worked on creating for myself additional income of my own. I knew that with Christ's strength, I could achieve anything. I am now more conscious about the friends I mix with. I attend seminars to connect with new people, and recently met two young adults with similar struggles and was able to share with them my journey and we encouraged one another.

Finally, through an animated message about aiming for the moon and landing among the stars, God spoke to me in His unique way, turning my scar into a shining star. All glory and praise be to God, for He transformed my life from the depths of despair to a beacon of hope and redemption. My story is a testament to His unending grace and His miraculous power to turn scars into stars.

God Saved My Life At The Playground

Interview By Lynn Foo, PJN6

It was a regular evening in October 2022 at the playground of Desa Park City. Sharon Evelyn Roy, an eight-year-old, was enjoying the slides, playing on the swings and climbing the ropes as she would usually do. It was a fun day and her mum, Hannah, was nearby looking out for her.

As Sharon climbed one of the higher platforms, Hannah inched closer. As Sharon was climbing the ropes from the platform, unfortunately, she lost her grip and slipped. Hannah immediately tried to grab Sharon's hand but did not manage to fully catch her. As a result, Sharon fell forward flat on her tummy as and her face hit the ground.

Blood flowed out from Sharon's nose and she stopped breathing. Hannah picked her up and started praying. Sharon let out a loud cry and regained consciousness. As Hannah brought Sharon to the benches at the side, she was filled with guilt. "I was blaming myself for not catching Sharon on time. At that moment, the Lord reassured me - it's OK, I've got her!"

Hannah then brought Sharon to a clinic for further examination. Much to Hannah's

and the family's relief, the doctor found no internal bleeding or anything serious. Sharon was discharged without any need for medication.

After that, this incident was somewhat forgotten, until a cell group member shared a testimony for DUMC Stories recently. Sharon was inspired by it and remembered how God saved her in that playground and told Hannah that she wanted to also share her testimony. Below is a transcript of Sharon's testimony:

"I'm Sharon, the daughter of Hannah and Roy. Me and Hannah were in the playground. I climbed up a rope like everyone was doing. Suddenly, I fell off the rope to the ground. I thought that I would die but Jesus saved my life. I thank the Lord for saving my life and that is the story of my life."

Indeed, Sharon's testimony, spoken with the innocence of a child's heart, reflects the unwavering belief that Jesus saved her life that day. May we all draw inspiration from Sharon's testimony as we navigate life's playground of challenges, knowing that, in our falls, we too can find the loving embrace and grace of the Lord.

A Shining Example of Joyful Service

Interview By Ng Phaik May, PJN6



In the heart of the ushering ministry, a shining example of dedication and service has emerged in the form of 12-year-old Valerie. I had the privilege and honour of chatting with her recently, and it is with great delight that I share her testimony here – a testament to the encouraging journey of a young lady devoted to serving joyfully and making a difference within our congregation.

Young Valerie started serving at the tender age of six. She stepped forward to take on the responsibility of an usher, after being encouraged by her grandmother, as they were both attending church together. Since then, Valerie's service as an usher has been a constant, both in her life and in the ushering ministry. Her unwavering commitment to serve consistently should be a beacon of light to many. It began with a simple desire to serve God, and in the community that she holds dear. The spirit of excellence that Valerie embodies has been impactful, and it has become a form of 'discipleship' to other ushers too, and to those that she comes into contact with.

As an usher, Valerie stands for the spirit of service. She greets each member of the congregation with a warm smile and a genuine sense of hospitality. Her ability to make everyone feel welcome is a gift that transcends age, and this has 'spilled over' to other fellow ushers. Valerie's energy and effortless dedication to serving well has served as an inspiration to other young

ushers. She is looked up to as a role model, constantly engaging with other ushers on how to better serve and have fun along the way. Valerie is also humble in that, despite being a 'veteran' usher, she believes that there is still much to learn and improve on in serving the Lord.

Despite the challenges of serving as an usher, Valerie is never fazed. In her quiet time, she prays before serving, always seeking God for help. She enjoys meeting people and the opportunity to connect with the congregation. Valerie is personable and gets along well with everyone. Her cheerful presence extends a sense of comfort and welcome to anyone who meets her. She constantly invites her school friends to visit church too.

Valerie recognises the importance of reading the Bible regularly in helping her to serve effectively. This is reflected in her posture of serving as she expresses hope that more of her young friends from children's church will join her in serving the Lord in ushering.

Valerie's journey and experience with the Lord reminds us that, with a willing heart, God can use anyone to achieve His purposes. The impact that Valerie has made and is continuing to make is very encouraging to me personally, and she has shown that true leadership is not marked by age or background. Our church is indeed very blessed to have her in our community.

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