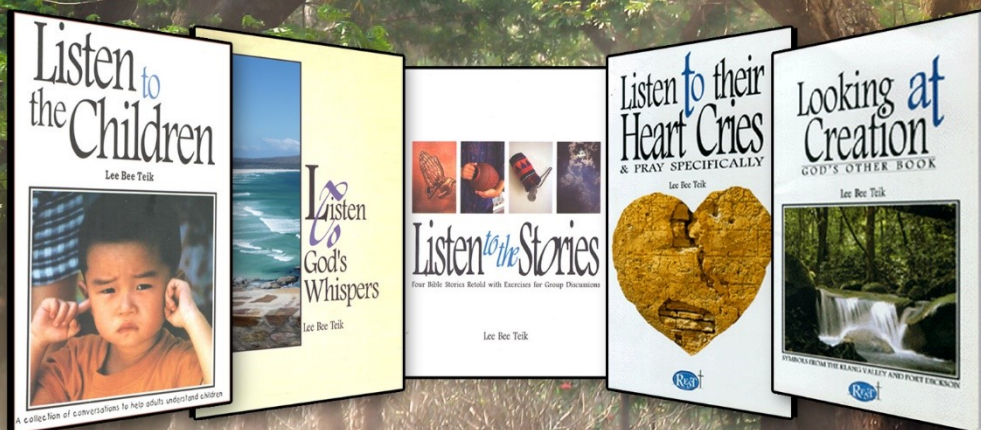


COME, Journey with Me

A Compendium of Five Books
for Reflection



Dr. Lee Bee Teik

Come, Journey with Me

A Compendium of Five Books for Reflection

1. Listen to God's Whispers. Embrace Him!
2. Listen to Their Heart Cries. Pray Specifically
3. Listen to the Children. Understand Them
4. Listen to the Stories. Retold Today
5. Looking at Creation. God's Other Book

by

Lee Bee Teik

August 2022

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A Compendium of Five Books for Reflection

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Note: The author, Lee Bee Teik, was taken home to the Lord on 11-June-2022. She was not able to proof read this final formatted digital book. To ensure that the text represents what she intended as far as possible, the manuscript is published “as-is”.

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BOOK I: LISTEN TO GOD'S WHISPERS. EMBRACE HIM.

Learning how to be still so that God is free to reveal something of Himself to enrich and deepen us expresses the heart of this book.

Listen to God's Whispers is a timely reminder that the pressures of a hectic and busy life need not draw us away from God. Instead, in the midst of a heavy routine, Dr Lee Bee Teik shares that God continually speaks words of encouragement, rest and healing to our souls.

This book draws upon devotional readings and shared experiences of the writer herself, to help us stay tuned to God's "still small voice" that brings us peace and assurance despite the hustle and bustle of modern life.

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INTRODUCTION

Many Christians in our nation today are getting busier in the midst of increasing pressures to perform in order to conform to standards dictated by friends or foes. With a hastening pace of living also comes higher levels of noise and sounds that affect our lives. Though we may try to avoid external noises such as those from nearby construction sites, inner noises, inaudible to our ears, are more difficult to handle. Some of these noises of disturbed consciences and inner hurts refuse to leave us alone.

The intention of this book is to remind the readers that there may be a number of precious messages that we could have missed while living through the pressures of each day. These messages come from the God who loves us more than anyone else who has loved us or who will ever love us. The author hopes that as each passage and bible meditation is read attentively, the readers will once more hear God for themselves and continue to hunger and thirst after Him in their daily lives; for it is in Him that we live, move and have our being.

1. Home Is Where Jesus Is

On the first night of a 5 day quiet retreat with a small group of friends, I missed my husband and our three children deeply. Just before I slept, the Lord asked me lovingly,

"What do you want Me to do for you?" I replied,

"Lord, I want to go home..." Immediately, He said,

"All right, you are home!" I was surprised and queried,

"What do you mean?" He then explained to me,

"Where I am is home...as I am here with you always, you are always home."

Thus He imprinted in my heart that night not to think of home as the place where my late parents used to live or where my present family gather. Wherever He is present is my home and He will never leave me or forsake me, I know.

Meditation:

Hebrews 13:5

"...God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

2. Jesus Dances?

As thirteen of us were worshipping the Lord in silence except for background instrumental music, He surprised me with a mental picture of our enjoying a ballroom dance together! Of course, I was overjoyed and prayed in my heart,

"O Lord, You know how much I loved to dance in my school days and how I long to dance again! Yet, I have little opportunity to do so now because my husband has no affinity for dancing! How You understand my make up, O Lord, how You love me enough to convey my oneness with You through music and dance! I thank You, my Lord! I love You!"

Meditation:

Psalm 30:11-12

"You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever."

Psalm 149:3-4

"Let them praise His name with dancing and make music to Him with tambourine and harp. For the Lord

takes delight in His people; He crowns the humble with salvation."

3. Your Love, My Love, God's Love

Your love reassures me of God's unfailing acceptance of me; I hope that my love for you expresses His friendship with you.

Meditation:

John 13:34-35

"A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 15:14

"You are My friends if you do what I command."

Matthew 25:40

"...whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me."

4. Shepherd's Language

A missionary in modern Cyprus shares:

As I observe the life of sheep with their shepherd, I have noticed that as a sheep grows, it learns the language of its shepherd...his voice, his gestures and his behaviour.

When the shepherd knocks his rod on a hard surface, his sheep hear the knockings and come running up to him. They know that his presence means safety, food, drink and shelter from the rain or scorching heat.

When a little lamb loses its way, that same sound speaks of home and rest as it bounces in frisky steps back to the source of the sound...its Master and its Friend.

Meditation:

Psalms 23:4

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

5. Shepherd and Sheep

In order to understand Jesus our Good Shepherd, we need to be willing to become His sheep. Too often, we try to behave like His assistant shepherds without first learning to live as His sheep.

Meditation:

John 10:2-4

"The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice'...but they did not understand what he was telling them."

6. God Prunes Good Things

Sometimes God cuts off our good branches in order that more branches will bear more fruit. He does not only cut

off bad branches. Therefore, do not keep your good things from Him.

Meditation:

John 15:1-2

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in Me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bears fruit He prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

7. He Whispers Gently

Since God usually speaks gently and softly, how are we to hear Him in the hustle and bustle of our days unless we quieten ourselves?

Meditation:

1 Kings 19:9-13

***"...And after the fire came a gentle whisper...
'What are you doing here, Elijah?'"***

Psalm 23:2

"...He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul."

Mark 1:35

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed."

8. My Cup Overflows

Due to the breadth of its mouth, a sheep can only drink from a cup which is filled to its brim and overflowing. David, the experienced shepherd boy, writes,

"...my cup overflows..."

he means that his God not only understands all his needs but will supply them in a way that ensures that he can receive His provision. He does not dangle a carrot to trick us in our time of need. Instead, He comes near enough to us to make sure that we actually drink the water from His special cup.

Meditation:

Psalm 23:5-6

"...You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows..."

9. A Learning Process

If we do not learn to hear Him in the routines of daily life, we may not be able to hear Him in our times of crises.

Meditation:

Genesis 18:1, 33

"The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day...When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, He left, and Abraham returned home."

Genesis 22:1, 11

"Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied...But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, 'Abraham! Abraham!' 'Here I am,' he replied."

Luke 1:8-13

"Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood....

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him...When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: `Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard...'"

10. Walking with Him

Walking with Jesus invigorates me!
Smile, He is watching you!!

Meditation:

Proverbs 8:30-31

***"Then I was the craftsman at his side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in His presence,
rejoicing in His whole world
and delighting in mankind."***

11. Friends

As Jesus is our Friend, so are we to be to one another in Him, whether we always feel we like each other or not. To love our friends is to understand and do good to them, not merely feeling good about them.

Meditation:

John 15:12-15

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learnt from My Father I have made known to you."

12. See Him in Clarity

In the gentle care of our fellow human beings, we see Him clearly.

Meditation:

John 13:3-7

"...He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him...Jesus replied,

`You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand.'"

John 13:12

"Do you understand what I have done for you? ...I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you...Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

13. No Condemnation...Just Love

One night, I was exhausted and overburdened with a deep sense of guilt false and real. Prayers could not be expressed to Him; eyes could not read His word. Then, as I climbed into my bed, God put me to restful sleep with these words...

"No condemnation...just love...and love...and love..."

I literally felt as if I was crawling into my heavenly Father's lap and cuddling into sweet slumber in His loving arms...I sobbed like a little child, hurt by the happenings too

complicated for me to understand...and fell asleep while a voice in me echoed: "He gives to His beloved sleep."

Meditation:

Psalm 127:2

"...for He grants sleep to those He loves."

Romans 8:1-4

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus..."

John 3:16-17

"...For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."

14. O, To Pray Again!

As I saw and heard a sister in Christ kneel and pray to her Father again, after agonising years of bitterness and anger at Him, my heart sang with joy and thanksgiving to the Lord of all!

"Father, it is such a great privilege to stand back and watch Your work of patient covenant love in one more prodigal child in Christ, for to pray again is to love again!"

Meditation:

Luke 15:17-24

"When he came back to his senses, he said,

'I will set out and go back to my father and say to him...but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.'

15. God Uses Dreams

Sometimes God uses dreams to keep us from falling into dangers or temptations.

Meditation:

Genesis 31:22-29

"Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night..."

Matthew 2:13-15

"When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream..."

16. The Written to the Living Word

The purpose of the written word is to lead us to Jesus Christ the living Word who, through His Holy Spirit within us, is able to save and transform us into His likeness.

Meditation:

Luke 24:27

"And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself."

John 5:39

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life."

17. Truth and Grace are Greater than Man's Attitudes and Deeds

Brethren, do not allow others' unkind opinions and actions to overshadow God's love, joy and peace in you... because His truth and grace are far greater than men's attitudes and deeds.

Meditation:

Hebrews 13:6

***"So we say with confidence,
'The Lord is my Helper; I will not be afraid.
What can man do to me?'"***

Romans 12:9-21

"...Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer..."

18. To See is to Intercede

To see the Gethsamane scene in someone else is to hear God's call to intercede till that the person's prayer shifts from:

"...if it is possible, do not let me go through this awful experience..."

to:

"Nevertheless, not my will, Father, but Yours be done."

Meditation:

Colossians 1:10

"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God..."

19. The Message of Gethsemane

Ultimately, the message of Gethsemane is:

- To be open to God our Father about our weaknesses and feelings in our communion with Him
- To entrust our whole life to Him completely
- To depend entirely upon His mercy and love to uphold us
- To do God's will only in God's ways

Meditation:

Matthew 26:36-44

"Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane..."

20. Allowed to Choose

As I pondered over the differences in the three groups of people in the Garden of Gethsemane (eight at a distance away, three nearer to Him and Jesus the Son of Man), I asked the Lord this question:

"Master, whose shoes am I in?" Amazingly, He replied, "You choose!"

Meditation:

Joshua 24:15

"...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

21. Jesus Had Mixed Emotions

P.S. Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man had mixed emotions like we have...but He did not allow those feelings to affect His decision making process.

Meditations:

Luke 22:42-43

"Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me; yet not My will but Yours be done.' An angel from heaven appeared to Him and strengthened Him. And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly, and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."

22. Jesus' Second Prayer

When Jesus prayed a second time in the Garden of Gethsemane, His prayer focus had shifted from the negative perspective:

"...if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me..."

to the positive perspective:

"...if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done."

And we may almost hear Him add,

"Therefore, My Father, help Me, I pray...." as He wept in sorrow and dread of the cross.

This event leaves us wondering whether or not Christ's victory over sin, death and Satan actually commenced in Gethsemane, though it was completed on the cross.

Meditation:

Matthew 26:39,42,44

"...My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will..."

...My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done..."

...Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

23. To Bypass or to Submit

Looking at the conditions of our lives at home, in church and in society, one wonders whether or not we make more effort praying that we may bypass God's will for us

than that we may do what He has already revealed to us??

P.S. Jesus prayed **once** to avoid His death on the cross for sinful men and women like us, but **twice** to submit to His Father's will for Him. If it was uphill for Him till the end, how much more is it for us?

Maybe we should consider praying **once** that we **may** avoid His will and **a hundred times** thereafter that we **will** be enabled to do His will for us.

Meditation:

Matthew 26:39-44

"Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to them,

'Sit here while I go over there and pray.'...

Then He said to them,

'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with Me.'...

Then he returned to His disciples and found them sleeping.

'Could you men not keep watch with Me for one hour?'...

*He went away a **second time** and prayed...*

*When He came back, He again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So He left them and went away once more and prayed the **third time, saying the same thing.**"*

24. His Job, My Job?

Peter aggressively tried to do Jesus' job for Him but forgot to fulfil his own!

Meditation:

Matthew 26:33,35,37 38,
26:40,43,45,51 54

"...Even if all fall away on account of You, I never will...Even if I have to die with You, I will never disown You...' Then He returned to His disciples and found them sleeping...When He came back, He again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy..."

25. Do You Wonder?

Do you wonder why Jesus gave more specific instructions to the eight disciples who were further from Him than to the three closer to Him in Matthew 26:36, 38?

Perhaps it is because the more we know Him the more creative we will be in our efforts to please Him, as more of His mind has been formed in us and more of His heart has touched ours.

Meditation:

Jeremiah 29:13

"You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you..." declares the Lord.

John 12:3-4,7-8

"Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume...Judas objected...

'Leave her alone,' Jesus replied. '...you will not always have Me.'"

26. Individualism in Exchange for Identity and Personality

In any meaningful relationship, each person loses her husk of individualism but gains her identity as a human being who is made in the image of God...having a personality that is able to communicate intimately with another person in community. Hence, she discovers her deeper identity.

"Individuality counterfeits personality as lust counterfeits love. God designed human nature for Himself; individuality debases human nature for itself."

"My Utmost for His Highest" Reading: December 11th by
Oswald Chambers

[Note: The older usage of the word "individuality" in above quote has today's usage of the word "individualism", which means "egoism".]

Meditation:

Matthew 16:24-25

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.'"

John 7:22

"I have given them the glory that you gave Me, that they may be one as We are one...."

27. Dwelling in the Great "I AM"

Knowing that we belong to the great "I AM" is to dwell secure in His unchanging identity!

Meditation:

Genesis 1:26-28

5:1-2

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..."

Exodus 3:14

"God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Isaiah 43:1-2

"... 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are Mine...I am the Lord your God...your Saviour.'"

28. It's Time to Move On

When God says to us,

"Come on, it's time to move on...",

He takes us personally by our hands and provides everything that is necessary for that trip.

Meditation:

Matthew 4:19,20

"...`Come, follow Me...and I will make you fishers of men.'"

Matthew 6:25-34

"`Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life...what you will eat or drink...or...wear...Your heavenly Father knows that you need them...'"

Philippians 4:13,19

"And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

29. The Parable of a Traffic Jam

To persuade someone to follow God's will can be really traumatic for the persuader, especially if he is of a sensitive temperament. It would be difficult for him to pray that suffering be allowed, when necessary, in order that God may awaken the other person to His truth and grace.

I usually choose to wait and see first before I have the courage to call out "Hi, Friend, you are heading in the wrong direction!" I think the parable of the Traffic Jam describes the dilemma of a backslider well...

Once upon a time, there was a long queue of miles of vehicles along the Federal Highway. Henry was one of those resigned to take his turn in the line of cars and lorries because he could not do otherwise. At least, once the jam cleared, he would be home for a yummy dinner and a warm soak in the long bath.

As he was almost dozing off at the wheel of his Proton Wira, he was suddenly awakened by the spluttering of a helicopter hovering over his car. Henry put his head out of the window to take a look and was even more surprised that the pilot, a road traffic controller, was waving to him and thundering in a booming voice,

"Hey there, Henry...you are heading in the opposite direction from your house! You missed the turn off a mile away!"

Wide awake by then and realising that it was Ahmad his neighbour up in the helicopter, Henry shouted back,

"What do I do now! From where you are, can you see exactly where I am? How can I get back on the right track?"

"Henry!" boomed Ahmad again, "Wait till you get to the next turn off, make a U Turn and go straight on in the direction from which you came as fast as you can...there's no jam there...and join the next freeway! You'll be home in minutes...All the best!!

Well, it is now up to Henry to believe Ahmad and take action, or continue to wait in the queue till he discovers his friend was right after all. But he would be really exhausted by then...no dinner, no warm bath...

Meditation:

Jeremiah 3:22

"...Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding."

“Yes, we will come to You, for You are the Lord our God.”

Ezekiel 37:23

“They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be My people, and I will be their God.”

Galatians 6:1

“Brothers, if someone is caught in sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”

30. Frustration Through Wrong Expectations

We must be careful not to expect from others (including parents, spouses and children) or self what only Christ can be to us. Ultimately, all security and comfort come from God!

Meditation:

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our trouble, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."

31. Burning Hearts

To read the Scriptures and sense our hearts burning within us as He speaks to our listening ears is joy unspeakable indeed!

Meditation:

Luke 24:27, 32, 52

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself...`Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?...Then they worshipped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

32. The Master Knows Better

When Jesus' disciples obeyed Him by throwing out their fishing nets where He told them to, He gave them 153 large fishes, more than what they achieved all by themselves the whole night long.... Therefore, as our Master, Jesus, sees our genuine earthly needs, He will provide us with more than what we can ever earn by ourselves. In fact, knowing that we are tired, He may even cook breakfast for us just as He did for Peter and his friends.

Meditation

John 21:5-12

"...Friends, haven't you any fish? ...Throw your net on the right of your boat and you will find some...Bring some of the fish you have just caught...Come and have breakfast..."

33. When the Master Pretends

When the Lord Jesus pretends to be ignorant, don't talk too much! Instead, listen for He may have something precious to say to you!

Meditation:

Luke 24:17-19, 25-27

"...What are you discussing together as you walk along?... What things?... 'And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself."

34. Be an Asian

When our Lord pretends to wave good bye, be a true Asian...invite Him in for a drink. You may yet be surprised by joy like we were!

Signed
Cleopas and friend

Meditation:

Luke 24:28-31

"As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if He were going farther. But they urged Him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So He went in to stay

with them...Then their eyes were opened and they recognised Him..."

35. Personally Invited?

One morning, as I prepared to partake of the Lord's supper with my brethren at a retreat, the Saviour met me at the table with bread and "wine", knelt beside me with His arms over my shoulder and gently said,

"My beloved one, do not feel unworthy to sup with Me. Remember...what you couldn't do for yourself I have done for you on the cross. I am not only your Saviour and Lord, I am your Brother too. Am I not totally worthy of your trust and dependence on Me to care for you always?

Come, My sister, eat of this bread and drink of this wine in remembrance of Me till I come again with My angels to take you to our Father's house!"

Meditation:

Luke 24:30-31

"...I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

Luke 24:30

"When He was at the table with them. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them."

36. Moods

The harmony within our inner and outer lives has been so damaged that when God intervenes with His healing grace, our moods might take time to shift from an all time low to neutral before they soar to heights of exuberant joy!

Nevertheless, God is so patient with us. Therefore, let us be patient with ourselves as we plod on in this process towards everlasting joy in Him!

Meditation:

Hebrews 12:1-3

"...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with

perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him..."

37. Hidden for a Purpose

To spend resources of time, energy and expenses for prolonged periods of quietness with God seems a great waste to many Christians today unless they are able to see that God sometimes wants His children to be hidden for a Purpose.

Remember Moses in Midian...

David with the sheep...

Jesus in the wilderness...

Paul in Arabia...

John on the island of Patmos...

Meditation:

Isaiah 43:1-7

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you...When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned..."

Luke 5:15-16

"...crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

Philippians 3:10

"I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death..."

2 Corinthians 3:18

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

38. When You Cannot Sleep

If the Lord allows us to be awake at night, He might be asking us to change our minds over certain decisions we have made. So, the next time this happens to you, why not ask Him what it's all about...but be ready to consider His alternatives.

Meditation:

Psalm 42:8

"By day the Lord directs His love, at night His song is with me..."

Psalm 77:6-20

"I remember my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired: 'Will the Lord reject forever? Will He never show His favour again? Has His unfailing love vanished forever? Has His promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has He in anger withheld His compassion?'...Then I thought, 'To this I will appeal...I will remember...I will meditate...and consider...You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.'"

Luke 6:12

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God."

39. Not Instant

Sanctification, like spiritual formation, is a life long process on earth, not an instant cure for all problems.

Meditation:

Romans 12:1-2

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this 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."

40. Returning My Heart

When I learn to obey God in love, it does not mean that He has stolen my heart; my heart has merely returned to its legitimate owner.

Really, we will have no rest until we learn to rest in Him.

Meditation:

Deuteronomy 6:5

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."

Joshua 22:5

"But be very careful to keep the commandment and the law that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you: to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to obey His commands, to hold fast to Him and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul."

Psalms 119:32-35

"I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free...Direct me in the paths of Your commands, for there I find delight."

41. Think About These Things

Jesus, the Lamb of God sacrificed, became the Good Shepherd;

Jesus, whose poor parents were rejected by busy hoteliers, became the King of kings!

Meditation:

Philippians 2:5-18

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father..."

42. It Takes a Life time

To be born again in the Lord may just take a moment but to prepare to meet with Him face to face takes a life time.

Meditation:

Philippians 2:12-13

"Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed...continue to work out your salvation with fear

and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose."

Revelation 19:6-8

"...For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready..."

43. Repentance

Repentance is like getting disentangled from the webs of our past habits, thoughts and words so that we may freely fly in God's will.

Meditation:

John 3:6-8

"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at My saying, 'You must be born again....'"

Acts 2:36-39

"Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, `Brothers, what shall we do?'

Peter replied, `Repent and be baptised, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call.'"

44. Don't Argue but Discuss!

I've come to learn that when the holy God speaks, we don't argue! Nevertheless, He allows us to discuss till His thoughts become our thoughts and His ways, our ways.

Meditation:

Exodus 3:7 - 4:18

"The Lord said...But Moses said to God...And God said...Moses said to God...God said to Moses...God also said to Moses...Moses answered...Then the Lord said to him...Moses said to the Lord...The Lord said to him...But Moses said...Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses..."

Luke 1:11-22

"Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him...the angel said to him...

Zechariah asked the angel, 'How can I be sure of this?'

The angel answered, '...And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at the proper time.'

When he came out, he could not speak to them..."

45. Only What We Have

God requires of us only what we can afford...and that would be as valuable to Him as another person's gift, whether it be a talent, time, money, property or energy, if it comes from the giver's heart.

Meditation:

Luke 21:1-4

"... 'I tell you the truth...this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out

of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

John 6:5-13

"...`Where shall we buy bread for all these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him...

`Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?'...Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish..."

46. Miracle Replayed

O Lord, to watch You pick someone up from the broken world of abuse, neglect, rejection, addictions, malnutrition...and nurse them to a discovery of Your gracious Fatherhood is like watching the miraculous creation of a baby in his mother's womb!

Meditation:

Psalm 139:13-14

"...For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well..."

Ezekiel 16:1-34

"The word of the Lord came to me: `Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices and say,...

On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised. Then I passed and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, Live!...I bathed you...I clothed you...I put bracelets on your arms...So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric...Your food was fine flour, honey and olive oil. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen...But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute..."

Ezekiel 37:1-14

"...`Son of man, can these dry bones live?`...So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet a vast army...

`Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it,' declares the Lord."

47. Mother Prayed

Thank You, Lord, for Mother who showed me how to pray!

Meditation

1 Samuel 1:10 - 2:11

"In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord. And she made a vow, saying,

'O Lord Almighty, if You will only look upon Your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget Your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life...'

As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard...

***Then Hannah prayed and said;
'My heart rejoices in the Lord...'***

2 Timothy 1:3-5

"...I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also..."

48. Womanhood and Manhood

Womanhood and manhood are precious gifts from God. When treasured and used faithfully, they reflect some of Jesus' perfect humanity and yet, incomprehensible divinity in the Trinity.

Meditation:

Genesis 1:26-28

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule..."

Genesis 2:18-23

"...Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man...they will become one flesh...and they felt no shame."

49. Don't Envy

Many teenagers and young adults only see their friends' material wealth and their apparent freedom to enjoy "the good life". But they do not see their spiritual and moral poverty. Consequently, many of the poorer ones yearn to be like their friends but feel bitter when their desires are not fulfilled. Hear then what our heavenly Father says,

"You, my child, are of more lasting value than a yuppy's lifestyle. Don't envy it."

Meditation:

Isaiah 43:1-7

"...Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will

not set you ablaze...Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made."

Jeremiah 1:4-8

"...Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart..."

50. Long sight or Short sight?

If we are too spiritually long sighted, we may fall on the steps before us;

If we are too spiritually short sighted, we may admire our surroundings so much that we don't realise that we have lost our way.

Meditation:

Psalms 119:105

"Your word is a lamp to my feet (current events) and a light for my path (future events)."

51. Roller Coaster Purification

Waiting for a roller coaster ride to end is like gritting one's teeth during labour pains, or like the endurance of a Christian experiencing the fires of purification. However, while the first experience is unnecessary, and the second by choice, the last is both necessary and not chosen by His children but chosen by God for His loved ones.

Meditation:

John 1:12-13

"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

Hebrews 12:5-7

"... 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.'

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons..."

52. The Greatest Blessing on Earth!

O Lord, after over 40 years, You grant me 6 hours a day for 5 days a week for 8 months to spend unhurried time alone with You!

This is the greatest blessing I've received in this life in You, my God! I weep with joy and thanksgiving in praise of Your faithfulness!

How can I give thanks enough for Your overflowing love upon love!

Meditation:

Luke 10:38-39

"As Jesus and His disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said."

2 Corinthians 3:18

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever

increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

53. God Speaks Through Hymns

For several weeks, God seemed distant, silent, yet present. I could not fathom that. "How could I share Your intimacy with others, Lord, if I did not feel Your fellowship, even though I was aware, somehow, of Your presence?" Then I came across this hymn in the United Methodist Hymnal No.434:

1. When the poor ones who have nothing share with strangers,
When the thirsty water give unto us all,
When the crippled in their weakness strengthen others,

Refrain:

Then we know that God still goes that road with us,
Then we know that God still goes that road with us.

2. When at last all those who suffer find their comfort,
When they hope though even hope seems hopelessness.
When we love though hate at times seems all around us,

3. When our joy fills up our cup to overflowing,
When our lips can speak no words other than true,
When we know that love for simple things is better,
4. When our homes are filled with goodness in abundance,
When we learn how to make peace instead of war,
When each stranger we meet is called a neighbour,

As I played the piano, tears rolled down my cheeks uncontrollably...God was speaking to me once more...He was speaking to me as a fellow traveller towards heaven, identifying with my longing to be more real in this strife torn world.

Love is still with us, for GOD IS LOVE; and where love is, meaning and purpose exist for us to live on with Him and for Him.

Meditation:

1 John 2:10

"Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble."

1 John 3:16-20

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and

sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in His presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything."

1 John 4:12

"No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us."

54. The Ups and the Downs

Life appears to be a series of ups and downs. Work and our inner moods also go up and down. Come to think of it, Father, You have made us with these rhythms in life to keep us sane. We need time to be with You and we need time to be with our families and friends. We need to work and we need to rest; we need to cry and we need to laugh. We need to buy and we need to sell. Actually, Solomon recorded this observation thousands of years ago.

Those who accept this rhythm appear healthier, more stable in temperament and more contented with their daily existence. But those who fight against this rhythm seem to fall sick and feel unhappy more often.

Father, if that's the way You've created us, we want to bask in Your creative wisdom as we synchronise with You instead of playing our lives out of tune with Your melody for us. O, what beautiful harmony there will be on earth as it is in heaven. What opportunities there will be to reflect and display Your glorious presence!

Meditation:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven..."

55. Sharing the Creator's Joy!

Writing is an art. The writer does not write to impress but to express. As such, the process of writing does not begin with the hand; it starts in the soul of the writer. There seems to be an assimilation of ideas, reactions and responses to the inner and outer world of the artist. After much chewing, swallowing and digesting of thoughts, out comes the words strung together to express the inexpressible of heart and mind.

In this activity, my Lord, I feel with You as You created the heavens and the earth. It must have been exhilarating, to say the least! There You were, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, putting into action what You discussed before the world began. No wonder that You, as our wisdom, rejoiced in the presence of Your Father and of mankind, enjoying the world that You made!

Father, how is it that I am not enjoying myself in the way Your Son did??? But...wait a minute...I think I am beginning to feel that joy with You...hold my hand, I pray.

Meditation:

Proverbs 8:27-31

"Then I was the craftsman at His side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in His presence, rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind."

Psalm 45:1

"My heart is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skilled writer."

56. Ice Skating

Father, watching the figure skating events of the 1992 XVI Winter Olympiad on live telecast lifted my soul up in praise of You!

The skaters may or may not have known You. Does it really matter? You made them and You know them. Just watching them gracefully slide across the white slippery ice created an urge in my daughter and me to dance for You! I cannot explain exactly why; maybe it was the way You made us so that we would find our best way of communicating our adoration and devotion to You through movement and music. No wonder then, that an artist becomes depressed when he, for some reason, is unable to draw. People like that feel free as birds soaring

into the sky when they let go of others' expectations of their behaviour and jump wholeheartedly into action for You!

Lord, how wonderful You are to grant us this freedom in You!

You alone will we worship! To You alone will we give our all!

Meditation:

Psalm 30:11-12

"You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever."

Psalm 149:1-5

"...Let them praise His name with dancing and make music to Him with tambourine and harp. For the Lord takes delight in His people; He crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds."

57. God's Calculations versus Ours

- The world deems: $1-1=0$
God says: $1-1=$ much (John 12:24)
- The world deems: $1+1=2$
God says: $1+1=$ endless supply (John 15:5)

Meditation

John 12:24

"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

John 15:5

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."

Matthew 12:25

"... Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand."

Genesis 13:14-17

"The Lord said to Abraham after Lot had departed from him, `...I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted...'"

58. Ostrich Believers

Humans naturally gather in communities where we feel safe in in order to live relatively stress free lives. Yet, when the Lord allowed external forces of persecution to disperse the first century believers, the faithfulness and the truth and grace of our Lord Jesus was shared widely with new neighbours, business contacts, government officials and others of various cultures and beliefs. How then do we balance this rhythm of being in the world and yet not being of the world? Needing close Christian fellowship and yet being salt and light in a dark sea of humanity?

When a local church seems to be increasing in numbers, many flock to it, hoping to have some of God's blessings rubbed off on them as they mingle with the 'right' group. It is not entirely wrong to do so. Some may have valid reasons for doing that. However, the more natural tendency, after a while, is to become ostrich believers.

We tend to close our eyes to those unable to fit into the 'in' group. How sad it is when this happens, especially when the harvest is plenteous but the labourers are few...when there is much food but little salt to preserve it and give it taste because the salt refuses to be taken out of the pot. Both society and the kingdom of God will be the poorer for this.

Meditation:

Luke 10:29-39

"But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' In reply, Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers...Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?'... 'Go and do likewise.'"

59. When We Hit Rock Bottom

When we fall very low and sink and sink into the pit, the highest joy and relief is ours when we suddenly realise that at the very bottom is Jesus, the Rock of all ages, waiting to hold us up safely and renew us.

Meditation:

Deuteronomy 32:3-4

"I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He."

Psalms 40:1-3

"...He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to my God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."

Psalms 103:1-5

"Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name...who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

60. Love is Here to Bloom

When Jesus comes to our home, He makes us bloom!
Oh what hope, how different from previous gloom!
Master, try some kueh, drink some tea;
We will wait upon You and give our all to Thee
because...

Love is home to bloom,
Driving away our fears of doom;
Our lives He tenderly grooms,
So we can see Him soon!

Meditation:

Rev.3:20

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me."

Luke 7:47

"...Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

61. So much and Yet so Little

Again and again, I feel the Lord's presence ever so closely in the midst of the unknown, neglected and oppressed, the poor in spirit...much more than in the midst of those who own so much, and yet have so little to share with others.

Meditation:

Matthew 5:1-12

"...`Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven..."

62. All is Not Wasted

Little children should be seen but not heard...Only in middle age have I come to see how God used this distorted view to train me to sit and listen to Him from childhood. As I wondered why I was thus enabled to listen and understand Him and others, the Lord reminded me of this childhood blessing which I had taken for granted.

Until twelve years of age, I would sit on Mum's lap while watching the goings on at home or listening to adult

conversations silently. As they chatted, laughed or cried, each eye movement, each bodily gesture and each pitch and tone of voice was recorded in my mind and heart...till I came to feel at home with listening.

Meditation:

Deuteronomy 6:20-21

"...In the future, when your son asks you, 'What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?' tell him: ..."

SUGGESTED READING

1. What Return Can I Make? by M.Scott Peck with Marilyn Von Walder, O.C.D. and Patricia Kay...Dimensions of the Christian Experience [Arrow Books 1990]
2. The Gift of Feeling by Paul Tournier [John Know Press 1981]
3. Listening to God by Joyce Hugget [Hodder and Stoughton 1986]
4. Laughter, Joy, and Healing by Donald E.Demaray [Baker Book House 1986]
5. A Way of Seeing by Edith Schaeffer [Fleming H.Revell Company 1977]

End of Book I

BOOK II: LISTEN TO THEIR HEART CRIES. PRAY SPECIFICALLY.

Listen to Their Heart Cries and Pray Specifically is a collection of Dr Lee Bee Teik's conversations and experiences with others who have opened themselves up and disclosed the deep cries of their hearts to her.

This book is meant to encourage those who have experienced similar pains and sufferings and to remind them that God does know and care. The neglected ones who go through discouragement and frustrations are not only those the author mentions, but all of us as well at some point in our lives.

Heart Cries directs us to the One who longs to tell us that no one is too small to be heard and loved and that anyone who comes to Him will never be turned away.

“Give ear to my words, O Lord,
Consider my sighing.
Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,
For to You I pray.

In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice;
In the morning I lay my requests before You
And wait in expectation...”

Psalm 5:1-3

The Lord said,
“I have indeed seen the misery of My people...
I have heard them cry out...
And I am concerned about their suffering.
So I have come down to rescue them...
To bring them out of that land
Into a good and spacious land,
A land flowing with milk and honey...”

Exodus 3:7-8

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PREFACE

The true God, revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, is the Father of all mankind. Day by day, moment by moment, the ears of this holy and gracious Father are ever inclined to the cries of the people He has made in His image. The fact that all of us have sinned does not lessen His desire that all return to Him...one by one. Yet, among fellow men, we often neglect one another in the rush to protect ourselves, our families and our possessions.

It is my hope that this book will encourage those whose cries are reflected in the pages, to pray to their God and know that He will answer them; no one is too small to be heard and loved. It is also hoped that others will be motivated to pray for those in pain, to intercede wisely and specifically according to God's will for them.

Heart cries is a collection of conversations I have been privileged to have with men, women and children through the years as a student, wife, mother, church member, doctor and friend. Details and names have been changed to protect their privacy.

The Scripture references given after each heart cry are to help the reader understand the mind and father heart of God and pray according to His will. He alone can and will save us from all our calamities as well as share in all our joys as we meet Him through receiving His invitation to dine with Him and He with us in our very hearts (Revelations 3:20)

May the Lord of truth and grace fill you with His peace and rest each day.

Heart Cries!

Can anyone hear my cries?
Can anyone see my tears?
Can anyone feel my sighs?
Is there anyone who understands my fears?

Help me, O God, I pray!
Please say that You'll stay!
Do a miracle in my life...
'Cause I really need to survive!!

SECTION 1: CHILDREN

1. A Big Fellow Like Me (A Two-Year-Old Boy)

My Daddy and my Mummy love me very, very much, I know...but they are often not with me when I am awake. Grandpa and Grandma take care of me. Sometimes I am so confused...they give me one set of rules to follow which is so different from that of Daddy's and Mummy's. What should I do? At times, I work it out my way so that I get what I want. I heard Mummy say that this is called 'manipulation'. But Grandpa calls it 'cleverness'. Who cares what they think...as long as I get what I want, I don't care what they call it!

Still, I wish that I didn't have to cope with so many big people all at once! I need their attention but not their rules...too many...even for a big fellow like me."

Children Ordained For God?

Father, Your Son said in Matthew 21:16 that “From the lips of children and infants You have ordained praise.” Is this true? If it is true, then why are we still hindering them from receiving the fullness of Your everlasting grace upon grace poured out onto all mankind, and especially upon those who call on Your Name by faith? Why do we spend more resources preparing our children for worldly uses and lifestyles than for You and Your ways? Why are we so afraid that we will lose out in the competition of this world till many of us have little left to offer to You? Won’t our children naturally follow in our footsteps rather than in Yours because they can see us but not You yet? Father, help us view our children from Your perspective, we pray.

2. Life On The Mend

Wasted years of aimless wand’ring,
Living yet so dead within;
A prisoner of circumstances,
Trapped within the walls of the past.

Then I heard of the One who came
To give His life that I might live;
This gift of life He offered me
With a hope for the future.

Life on the mend,
When I found Jesus as a Friend.
He fills my heart to overflowing with love
And joy and peace beyond compare!

Life on the mend
When I found Jesus as a Friend.
The day He came into my life
Was the beginning of a lifetime of blessings!
Broken lives and hurting people,
Lost in darkness nowhere to go
'Twas for these reasons Jesus came
To proclaim good tidings to all.

The Son of God in the form of man,
He gave His life on Calvary
That by His death new life we'll find
For all eternity!

Only Jesus can understand our ev'ry struggle
And our hearts' desire.
His victory won at Calvary
Secures our triumph over all things!

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3. Parent - Teenager Seminars

Various groups in our Malaysian society are going all out to help our teenagers avoid unhealthy habits. While filling the emotional vacuum in their hearts with positive activities, like those organised by the Rakan Muda movement. Modern-day Christians, well known for being seminar organisers, are also trying their best by convening a Parent-Teenager seminar in the Klang Valley. These are commendable efforts except for one word of caution:

If fathers do not behave as fathers toward their children, and mothers don't behave as mothers either, no amount of seminars will be able to fill our children's emotional tanks that have been left empty while parents are busy fulfilling their own lives. Sometimes it is hard to know whether to pray for changes to come to the adults or the children first. Lord, how do we pray?

4. Is There A God? (Young And Afraid)

When I woke up this morning, a sense of eerie uncertainty penetrated my soul.

...Who am I?

Yesterday I was still a student; but after sitting for my S.T.P.M., I became a nobody. Being my parents' son doesn't seem enough as I approach adulthood. It's scary...I search for a model but find none as I observe adult life around me. Most of my seniors keep chasing after money and more money. As long as there are no problems, they do not stop to ask, "Why money?" or "What if I go bankrupt?" Will they be able to face it, or will they go mad? Sometimes I want to be like them...independent and free to do what I like. But at other times, I see the vanity of their lives and want to die...unless I find the meaning of my life soon.

If there is a God, please show me!

5. Lord, How Did You Thank Mary?

Melbourne, December 1971. I received the first pay packet of my life. I held about A\$25 in my hands, the fruit of my labour at the Kodak Factory in the suburb of Coburg. I had to do something while waiting for my matriculation results. I wanted to thank You, my God, for seeing me through the year of loneliness in a strange land and also for all that You had been to me since childhood.

But I couldn't buy something for You, Lord, for You don't need anything from me! Hence I bought a really smart-looking handbag for Mum. She took care of us so well and was always there for us! As I sent it back to Penang for her, I felt so good to be able to do something for her in return, something done out of my sweat, to show her that I understand how much she had sacrificed for us.

Lord, do You understand what I am trying to express? I wonder how You thanked Mary, Your earthly Mum.

6. Enjoy The Roses And Endure The Thorns

Beatrice is a middle-aged teacher reaching her fiftieth birthday. She grew up in a happy family of three children. As a good aunty with spare time for nieces and nephews, she often willingly babysits for her brother's family. She also gets along very well with our three active children who enjoy reading and talking to her while they play on her bed. However, Beatrice will not be left alone with little children just in case she cannot handle emergencies or their naughtiness by herself. Honestly, she confesses,

"I would rather enjoy children without having to bear the responsibility for them!"

I gather that some mothers feel the same, especially while disciplining children with unbendable strong wills. Yet, they are ours to hold and to hug, to train even when they sulk! Father, You who have brought up generation after generation of rebellious children, help us to endure the thorns while enjoying the roses, we pray!

7. Were You Like My Son, Lord?

My 11-year-old son exasperates me with his words! He seems to be naturally gifted to test me to the limit! Come to think of it, Lord, were You like my son when You were a pre-teenager? How did Mary cope?

8. Cerebral Palsy

Are You hearing me...? My Great Physician, Mrs. Yee has a child with cerebral palsy. Do You know how she feels? Mei Mei is six years old, still needs diapers and cannot hold her milk bottle steadily yet. Her mum is emotionally and physically exhausted. She has three older sons and waited for ten long years before this daughter arrived. Would you blame her for wishing that she had not longed for a girl? In the face of such a crisis, one naturally

despairs if one does not have a higher view of man. It is Your image in us that gives us value and worth as persons, even if we do not match up to the standards of this world.

As I cry to You, Lord, after being with Mei Mei for one hour, I find my mind playing the game of to-doubt-or-not-to-doubt Your goodness. But as I deliberately align myself to Your perspective, my hope in the truth of Your everlasting goodness wells up from within my soul once more.

Yes, Mei Mei is precious in Your eyes. You died on the cross for her as well. You are ready to receive her into Your kingdom any time, to share in Your resurrected life and to be given a new body one day. But she needs to receive that message through members of Your body like me.

Father, forgive me for my self-righteous doubting. Help me not to lose hope and love her into Your kingdom, I pray.

For Meditation and Prayer:

John 3:16-17; Matthew 19:14-15

9. I Love God And I Love My Grandpa

Come, Journey with Me

BOOK II: Listen to their Heart Cries. Pray Specifically.

Jia En wept uncontrollably in church last Sunday. When she was hundreds of miles away, her beloved Grandpa suddenly died two weeks ago. She could control her tears unless asked by friends, “How are you?” She had two reasons for her sorrow.

Firstly, she grew up in a household under the loving eyes of Grandpa and Grandma. If only she had had a chance to say “Good-bye” to him, she would have been satisfied. But it was too late to long for him now. Jia En could no longer show her love for Grandpa now that he is dead.

Secondly, since she had become God’s child over a year ago, she would not participate fully in the funeral rites that her a non-Christian family used. She could no longer kneel to anyone except her beloved Saviour and Master who died for her. For this, she was severely reprimanded by the sister closest to her. In her sister’s eyes, she had changed; she was no longer Grandpa’s filial granddaughter.

Jia En felt deeply hurt, confused and guilty both ways...if she submitted to her family, she would be guilty before God. If she submitted to God, she would be guilty before her family. She was almost torn apart in her soul between obeying the God she now worshipped and obeying the wishes of her elders whom she loved and, indeed, seemed to know better.

Father, comfort her, I pray. Hold her close to You in her grief and assure her of Your unconditional love for her. Help her to feel Your presence; bring her confused mind to clear thinking again; comfort her broken heart. Father, please show her that Your way of forgiveness and persistent love will prevail. Take her through the lonely path of grief. Sort out for her the difference between true and false guilt so that she will emerge from this experience stronger than when she entered into it with You.

In Your Son's Name I ask, Amen

For Meditation and Prayer:

Luke 14:25-27; Ephesians 6:1-3; James 1:5

10. My Students Are Pimps

Father, what is going on in my school? I thought I was successfully helping my students overcome poverty, loneliness, neglect by parents and adolescent changes. But I just discovered that some of them are homosexual pimps! All my principal could say to this situation was: "Expel them all!" Probably he would have to expel many of the boys! I feel betrayed by my boys but I feel even more angry with my fellow Christian teachers who wash their hands off their students' needs. I need help, they need help, our students need help...where shall we turn to? Is there anyone in the Christian church who has an answer? Or am I too idealistic and judgmental? Answer me, please, Lord, I pray!

"In My Name, My son, love them for Me...love them for Me..."

11. Betrayed

When my brother touched me in the middle of the night,
I awoke, confused and scared...wondering what he meant.

Suddenly, in horror and dread,
I realised it was my tender parts he reached...I froze.

“O my Lord, how could he do that to me?
My brother, my hero...and my friend!
My anger rose against him...he betrayed my trust!
Yet stranger still, I turned the anger against myself
For not being able to resist him or...tell Mum.
Why, Lord, why?”

He replied...

*“My child, whenever someone takes something from
you without permission,
You’ll feel like a part of you is torn away.
It hurts, I know, for I too have gone that way...
But My love will heal and make you whole from today.”*

“Father, thank You, but please let me express myself
still, as I recall the words of this song...

“No one could understand
All the feelings deep within me;
The pain and the sorrow,
The anger and fear.
Bitterness and ugliness,
They were birthed on that day
The day the child within me died.

Living a nightmare
In a world engulfed in darkness,
No joyous laughter,
Only tears along the way.
I can still remember,
How my perfect world was shattered,
The day the child within me died.

Many years thereafter,
I still grieved for that child,
For what could have been,
For the life she could have lived.
Though I had found Jesus,
I never thought He'd understand;
So I continued to mourn for that child
Then one bright sunny day,
My Father took my hand,
Led me to the cross and e'er so gently said
'Jesus understands, He suffered so much more.
The day He died on the cross.'

'But just as He had triumphed
And rose victorious over death,
So must you, My child, you must move on
I have so much planned for you
There is much to be done.
Release her unto Me, the child that was you.'

As the truth dawned upon me,
My tears began to flow;
Relief and peace came upon my heart.
I felt a stirring deep within,
My spirit began to soar,
As I gave up the child to Him
And bade her goodbye forever.”

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SECTION 2: GOD'S PEOPLE

1. Torn Between God And Husband

I thought I was well prepared; I thought I knew how to love God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength. But the day I had to share a room with my husband, Chin, I could not freely talk to God! I tried to share with Chin this unexpected difficulty as a new discovery. But it made matters worse as he misunderstood my need to be alone, undisturbed with my Lord, any time of the day in my room...ours then...and expressed disappointment that I did not love him enough to share a room with him.

I wish I had some space in the house all to myself...to listen to Him, to pray and read His word. But we can't afford such a 'luxury'...which, to me has always been a necessity.

Lord, help me, I pray.

"It is not just enough physical space to be alone with Me that you need, My child; it is learning to hear me in the midst of life changes...and, sometimes, waiting till your husband knows Me as his friend too.

Meanwhile, do not sulk or feel frustrated...simply talk with Me whenever you are alone in the kitchen or bathroom or while waiting to catch a bus...I am with you and I hear..."

2. When Will They Ever Understand?

I have just been on the phone with a friend. We talked about the need for a hiding place for full-time Christian workers. In particular, pastors a place to use for prolonged quiet times with the Lord. Though her husband is such a worker, she does not agree that the provision of such a place will be a ministry to pastors if they are not counselled or prayed for face to face. Lord of the harvest and the church, isn't helping Your people meet with You of value to them? Must human intervention always be present before a person is transformed by You? But Father, if this burden to create a little centre for them to hide in You is Yours, then please grant me a steadfast heart and determined mind to persevere against all odds...so that Your tired labourers will know first-hand that You really care for them, I pray. May they hear You whisper once more that they are precious to You. Provide the resources, O King of kings,

as You did in the days of Aaron and the Levitical priests, I plead.

3. Compassion, Renewal And Transformation

It was great! The British-led counselling seminar for full-time Christian workers was well attended on both days. Nightly sessions for the public were even better attended. Further more, at least three different groups of believers in the Klang Valley are considering setting up counselling training centres to meet our local needs. But what is worrying is that while so many sisters and brothers are busy attending courses, where will they have the time, patience and energy to actually counsel someone in deep pain? Compassion, as I understand, needs to be nurtured at the feet of the Master Counsellor, renewal of the mind comes by listening to His words hidden in the silence of our hearts; transformation, then, follows by the work of the Holy Spirit. How, o how do we minister while hopping from course to course on renewal and counselling?

4. “Biblical Or Non-Biblical” Not “Biblical Or Secular”

I have just attended a seminar on pastoral counselling conducted by a brother from the West. Those who attended, presumably, do care for those they meet within their social circles. Our overseas brethren are kind to clarify to us the differences between secular and Biblical counselling. However, come to think of it, this concept may not apply wholesale to Asian seekers of the truth. Why is this so?

For most Asians, the difference is not between what is secular and what is biblical, BUT what is biblical and non-biblical. Malaysia, for example, is not secular at all, in the depth of her being. Most people accept the existence of a deity or deities. Our Muslim friends believe in Allah, our Hindu friends are pantheists, and our Buddhist friends believe in living the right way in order to escape evil and repeated suffering.

Therefore, the people that we hope to counsel come from a wide range of presuppositions, not just from a background of creation versus evolution that was a result of the Age of Enlightenment in the Western world.

O Master, please grant us wisdom to discern our counselees’ backgrounds and help them see Your answers through their eyes. Help them find the truth

about God, man and everything that You have made, I pray.

5. Chosen Frozen

As a person who likes to express myself to someone close to me, I cannot stand it if my husband unintentionally ignores me. I feel rejected and damaged in my inner being. I walk up and down, waiting for him to speak to me again. Thankfully, he feels the same about my occasional silence. I have discovered that many men in our Asian community do not talk to their wives intimately. It is rather unlikely that their wives are unattractive or unlovable. Such men just find great difficulty in expressing their deepest feelings, good or bad, to those closest and dearest to them. Their feelings appear to be frozen from within. A suggestion to them to tell their spouses “I love you” may give them instant cold feet even if it were straight after their honeymoon. But outside the home environment, they may often be experts in public relations. It therefore appears to me that they need to keep a part of themselves hidden, though usually unintentionally enough. Perhaps some past painful experiences have been so carved into their tender nature in childhood or even later in life, that they

have learnt to automatically close up in order to avoid new pains.

Yet, how wonderful it is to witness the marvellous work of grace in such men's lives when, in the security of God's love and unconditional acceptance through another fellow human being, they open up for Him to peep into their hearts, to wash and to heal their wounds. How relieved they are, how light and free they feel after that! How wonderful indeed to be in touch with their very own selves and feelings for the first time in adult life. Even more, my God, how beautiful to watch the healing of marriages where husbands and wives learn to feel with one another without shame or embarrassment!

6. Child Or No Child

Why, Lord, why can't I give birth to my own child, my own flesh and blood? Does it hurt You when You meet mothers who complain that their children are preventing them from fulfilling their ambitions in the world outside their homes? Some are so fertile that they will do all they can to prevent conception. All this seems so unfair because women like me will do anything to have

children, and yet we cannot. Lord, please help me make some sense out of all this, I pray.

"My daughter, I feel your frustration in not being able to be what most married women hope to be...mothers of their own sons and daughters. I feel your sense of injustice that those who do not want any more children have them easily while those who want children are barren. I understand, too, the sense of hidden anger you feel against Me because you believe that all life comes from Me.

I want to tell you today, My beloved daughter, that I love you still and always will, more than your husband or your longed-for-children ever will. Ultimately, it matters not whether you bear your own children, but it matters that you are faithful in caring for those I have placed within your reach. Today is the day for kindness; today is the day for pouring out your love to others willingly and generously...as My love fills you to overflowing. Do not withhold love from others now in fear of not having enough left for the child you long for so much. My daughter, give, give and give...and leave the question of your fertility to Me."

7. Is It O.K. To Curl Up In Your Arms?

My Father, I am exhausted. I want to pray and to study Your Word, but I can't. The knowledge that Your other servants are out there busily praying and claiming the nations for You causes me to ponder whether a homely soldier like me is actually worth anything in Your kingdom.

I seem to be able to keep myself active in public work for a few months only and then need to withdraw to quietly listen to You. All that my worn-out body, spirit and soul desire right now is to curl up in Your arms like I used to do in my mother's arms, and listen to Your heartbeat as I used to listen to hers. Do You condemn me?

"My beloved daughter, why do you think that I will condemn you? I made every part of you and I know all your strengths and weaknesses; I want you to rest in My strong arms and feel my heartbeat for My people and My yearning for their companionship, so that My thoughts will become their thoughts...My feelings, their feelings...and My will, their will. Rest in Me, My child, and intercede with Me."

8. Lord, Do You Know What Separation Feels Like?

Five days away from home. Do You understand my feelings, Lord? Five full days away from my husband and my children for the first time in ten years, since our son arrived! I was scared, really, and You knew, Lord. But – now that I am alone with You again, as if I were single again, I realise what a blessing it is to be with You for a prolonged period of time...free from the daily routine of caring for my loved ones, and yet knowing that they will be safe in You. I can now listen to You for five unhurried and restful days. Father, thank You for giving me my family on earth to love and be loved by. In this manner, You are preparing us for that larger family when You come again. I don't really mind being away from them for a while. Yet...here comes the gnawing feeling for them once more...

Lord, do You really understand what separation from loved ones means?

9. Broken

"O God, I fear going mad! Pa and Ma are going to separate. I was born because they used to love each other. Now that their love has evaporated, who am I? I

Come, Journey with Me

BOOK II: Listen to their Heart Cries. Pray Specifically.

feel so frightened, so hurt, and too confused to decide who to follow...whatever that means. I feel so torn apart deep inside me...torn between Pa and Ma. O God, if You are really there, love me, please, I pray!!”

Let Go and Let God

Mem'ries of a broken child,
Long forgotten hurts and fears,
The ugliness of yesteryears,
In the pockets of my mind.
All the secrets He revealed
When to Him I surrendered,
Trusting He will see me through
The pain of remembering
I'll just

*Let go and let God
Complete the work He has begun,
Allowing Him the liberty to do as He desires.
I'll just let go and let God
Complete the work He has begun,
Allowing Him the liberty to do as He desires.

At times the memories hurt so bad,
They all but paralysed my life.
Then from the depths I hear His voice,

Reminding me I'm not alone.

So I'll just *

Down the passages of time we walked,

Through the scenes of days gone by;

As I yielded to His healing touch,

The chains broke loose,

The bonds were shattered

He set me free from the memories,

From the grips of hurts and fears,

Bringing wholeness to my mind,

Breathing peace upon my soul when I *

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10. A Devout Roman, Cornelius

Cornelius worshipped the true God. He encouraged his family and employees to do so too. So God was pleased with him.

Father, does it matter whether we are Romans, Samaritans or Jews as long as we sincerely search for You and be finally saved by Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for us? Does a person have to know You personally first before they can worship You? It did not

appear to be so in Your being pleased with Cornelius. Please help me understand Your ways, I pray, because I have many friends who are worshipping You even though they might not have met You yet.”

11. The Need To Be Needed

Father, I willingly offered to help Anne when she was in a tight financial situation. However, instead of being appreciative, she blew up at me in public, accusing me of being condescending towards her. A few months later, I invited her family out for lunch. This time round, she hesitated instead of jovially accepting my invitation as she normally would have. I just couldn't take it anymore, called the treat off, and walked away feeling terribly sore. Since then, our relationship has been rather cool, not like before. I want to be freed from such feelings and behaviour...but, Father, HOW?

Why do I feel so rejected when someone declines to accept what I offer freely? Why must they “tarik harga”? I don't want anything in return...but wait a minute...if that is true, then why do I feel so hurt when the other party actually says “No”? Doesn't Anne have a right to say “Yes” or “No” to me? Lord, please help me

understand myself first before I blame others for my infirmities. Show me why I need to be needed and heal me as You see fit, I pray.

12. Father, Please Take A Seat And Wait

All right, all right, Father...there are so many things to learn and to do. That is why I find it so difficult to sit at Your feet to listen to You and chit-chat. May I be excused? Father, please take a seat and wait...No?...Why?

“Because I love you, My child. I do not want to miss out on our fellowship together. You know, those who love one another desire to be together as much as possible...working – Yes; reading My word – Yes; attending seminars to learn how to serve Me – Yes; evangelizing for Me – Yes; etc. But my heart’s greatest desire is for you to become more like My Son, Jesus...to regain that image which you have lost. True, you will be like Him completely one day and so become like Me. But how long that process takes depends on how much you desire to be completely Mine. Further, the process started on earth is also for others to see Me in you so that they too will want to return to Me. Therefore, take time to be

with Me, My child, and learn of Me...in gentleness and in humility.”

13. Lord, I Do Not Want To Lose My Sensitivity

Father, I am afraid of becoming desensitized to the needs of the society around us. So much bad news is printed in the press everyday that I fear I may become so used to it and accept it as common fare. Foremost on my list of concerns are the cries of parents whose children have gone astray, side by side with the cries of the children whose parents have gone astray. Often, we know what is right to do, whether adult or child, but struggle to do that which is good for others and ourselves. Sometimes it is due to our weaknesses, more often it is due to our sins. As I grow older and recognize more of my sinful self, I have begun to see that mankind has not changed that much since the fall...as long as the “I” comes first in my life, others fade into the shadows, only to emerge in my list of priorities when “I” need them.

The first man saw his helpmate as a woman equal to him before the fall, but he saw her as Eve, the baby-making machine after that.

The first woman lived in the freedom of being co-tenant and co-manager in God's garden before the fall. But she lived just to have more of her husband for herself after that! She was torn between wanting to be dependent only on her Creator, and wanting more of her husband than she was originally meant to have. Lord, help us be what You made and saved us to be. Grant us a willingness to be transformed by the renewal of our minds, to be in the world but not of the world, we plead.

14. In Sincerity And In Truth

The Gospel, Evangelism, Liberalism, Charismatic And Silent Retreats

I don't understand fully how things got started, but they are there if one stops to look. Teachers from western lands brought the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to our country. Our forefathers received this truth and grace with thanksgiving and grateful hearts. In this generation, however, some of us have had to face the winds of change in several areas of our lives in Christ.

In the sixties, we were taught to read the Bible with the use of study guides like the Scripture Union Notes. Some of us found it too methodical for our liking but tried to

adhere to notes and methods since, we were told, such study would make us stronger believers. If we missed the notes for some days, guilt crept silently up on us till our more cerebral friends discovered, to their dismay, that we had “backslided”!

Then, in the 60’s, liberal theology announced its strong presence through seemingly modern songs and tempo. Accusations were hurled across churches at those responsible for importing it to our mission schools and congregations. The labelling of evangelicals and liberals flowed liberally indeed. Spiritual pride resulted, even in God-fearing Pastors. As a teenager seeking to know God better, I had many questions to ask in the midst of such confusion.

After a while, groups of conscientious Christians who clung on to the Word of God complained that the dryness of traditionalism and the emptiness of liberalism did not encourage the growth of their souls. More life was needed, they said. At the right time, another wind blew from the west in the form of the charismatic movement. This did not mean that Malaysian Christians knew little of the gifts of the Holy Spirit then. Far from it, many already were wholesomely using these gifts in quieter ways. Initially this movement seemed good and healthy. Why not, when so many needed healing and salvation? But,

instead of letting the gifts grow on Malaysian soil, some went overboard with imported syncretism.

Currently, some thinking believers are saying, “Well, I don’t want to buy everything that is offered in the charismatic circles...what’s next? Up pops the new movement of silent retreats...” Back to the Bible,” they say, “In fact, the Augustinian or Ignatian methods of Christian meditation and silent retreats are better than our Protestant types. How many retreats have you attended? I have attended five...more coming up...”

Lord Jesus, how should I respond to all these movements that seem to keep coming, mostly from our western brethren? Did You send them? Why can’t we just read Your Word with some help from older Christians, get to know You better and hold our own retreats with You like You did with Your Father? Why can’t we just live with You as we are? Why is something imported more attractive, especially with regard to Your truth which is free for all? Surely, You are the same God who speaks to them and to us! Why do we consider ourselves less for being Asian and Malaysian? O Master, kindly help me accept myself as I am...Your disciple, Your servant...Your Father’s child. All I ask is that I may worship, love and serve You in spirit and in truth...Your truth, not mine, I pray.

15. God's Longer Routes

How I wish I could grow up faster and drive a car!
How I wish our wedding day would arrive sooner!
How I wish I had a baby!
How I wish I could be free of mothering!

How I wish for real peace!
How I wish life were not so mundane!

Lord God, are delayed blessings really good?
Why do You make us wait so long?
Yet,
NOT MY WILL but Yours be done",

May this pray'r be mine, O Lord.
Saviour, help me yield to You
For You alone know the best for me.
All my dreams and aspirations deep within,
To You I give, I surrender all to You
For I know You have a better plan for me;
Which You'll reveal in Your own time."

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16. Understood In The Common Object Of Faith

I was at my first posting as a house-officer. For the first three months, I was sent to a semi-rural hospital in Victoria, Australia. One of my first patients, Mr. John, afflicted with terminal liver cancer, lay jaundiced, lethargic, floating in and out of consciousness. Filled with excitement as a young doctor and zealous for the Lord, I tiptoed into his room one afternoon to find out whether he was a believer. Holding his left hand in both of mine, I finally managed to pop the question nervously...

“Mr. John, do you know where you will go when you leave this world?”

No answer. He opened his eyes a wee bit, stared at me and closed them once more.

“Mr. John, which church do you attend?” He reopened his eyes, looked at me with drooping eyelids, and replied slowly and deliberately,

“...a golden staircase leading to heaven...many people walking up, angels walking up and down...no such thing as Methodists, Baptists...all the same...”

He must know the Lord Jesus! Hurray! Tears rolled down his cheeks as we talked about death and dying for the next few minutes. But then I had to go for one of his

relatives popped his head in through the door. We parted after having recognised each other as children of the Father whom he would meet sooner than I. How I wished I could ask him to say “Hello” to my Jesus when he saw Him face to face! Almost in tears, I left his room and prayed, “Father, thank You for such depth of fellowship in Your Son.”

17. My Brother Danny

With quiet remorse, I remember my classmate, Danny, a devout Catholic. We were fellow house-officers at a district hospital in 1978. I got to know his wife and baby during that one year at work.

A few days before I left Melbourne for good in 1979, they invited my mother and me to their house for dinner. As he dropped us home that evening, in deep appreciation of our friendship in medical school and work, he said,

“We’ll see one another again...we’re all in God’s family...”

In my peevishness, I did not know what to say! It was not that I did not appreciate him as a good friend; it was because I had not understood the grace of God enough to accept that He could and would save even Catholics

and that it was up to Him to correct their theology where it was necessary. I knew then that He loved me enough to have saved me and that He would correct my theology too, if necessary.

Lord, I repent of my prejudices and judgemental attitudes; I repent of my smallness of heart. Thank you for Your forgiveness and for helping me understand a bit better what it means to be reconciled with You through Your death and resurrection for us. Nothing that we do will ever be enough to please You. That is why You had to give Your life for us freely for we could never repay or earn Your friendship. Once You have saved us, nothing can change our relationship with You again, even if we go astray in our new life in You. Such is the permanency of Your grace.

Please grant me that same grace towards others, dear Lord, for I know that pleases You. In recognising more and more of my own sinful tendencies and accepting my real self, I am gradually growing to accept others as You have allowed them to be, and to see the potential for change in them.

Great is Your love and faithfulness that will never let us go!

18. Two Minutes Only, My Lord!

I wonder how I survived my second roller-coaster ride at forty. The first such ride, in 1971, was undertaken as a teenager. It was not so terrifying and I had totally forgotten about it till I started typing just now.

This second time around, I gave in to the plea of my husband and children who wanted to share the fun with me. As we stood in the queue, out of boredom, I decided to record the time each car took to make a round trip back to the platform. It took only two minutes for the yelling riders to return to the innocent holiday-makers in the queue. “Well, it does not seem too long...at least it will definitely come to an end, whatever the ride may feel like...” So off went my son and I!

The ride started with a slow drag of the cars up a steep incline. I looked over the fence and pointed to a herd of gorgeous giraffes at a mini zoo nearby. But before my son could turn his head to look at them, the roller coaster took a rapidly accelerating Zoooooommm downhill...Did we not grit our teeth and hold tightly with all our might to the bar in front of us...Lord, help!! I was completely unprepared for the next few seconds of cruel jerks and heart-rending descents as it rushed up and down, up and down...till we came to a momentary plateau when I

caught my breath and told myself..."It's O.K...it will take two short minutes...only two short minutes. Lord, please help me go through this in one piece!"

I could feel my little cervical bones knocking against each other on the way down...I wondered whether they were still in their joints! Wasn't I extremely relieved and pleased as the car rolled into a tunnel that took us back to the platform again and actually stopped.

As I got out, I shouted to my six-year-old daughter,

"Ping, DON'T go...you can't take the ride...anyone with heart problem should not go, either!" (on noticing so many of the elderly in the queue). But to no avail; she went with Dad and returned safely, with a stunned facial expression and yet with an unutterable air of victory for having survived so well with Papa holding her securely! What was most embarrassing was that an elderly couple standing in a corner smiled at me over my anxiety.

Over the next few days, as I pondered over the event, I couldn't help comparing that horrible experience with the last stage of labour pains...and...the ordeals of a saint's life before she experiences the everlasting joy of being with her Saviour forever and ever, Amen!

Father, when You purify me with fire, please help me remember that the burning will end and that it will be worth it all when I see Jesus!

19. We Can't Have Everything

My husband gave me five days off to do my own thing. I did not know why I was extremely anxious over my three children just before I left Kuala Lumpur for Melaka. Instead of looking forward to the long-awaited break, I dreaded the possibility of missing my children. But the immediate presence of an elderly grandma in the bus set off an enjoyable conversation that soon released some of my tensions. We exchanged views on the traffic jams in Kuala Lumpur, talked about our sons and daughters and the ease of the public transport system these days. All she needed to do, whenever she missed her grandchildren in the city, was to walk across the bridge that lay just off Jalan Munshi Abdullah in Melaka town, hop on to one of the several buses that headed for Kuala Lumpur, and be picked up by waiting sons or daughters at the Pudu Raya bus terminus.

"It is so different from those days when travelling to K.L. needed much more planning," she added. Only one

missed luxury though – no long traffic jams then. She almost missed the 3:00 p.m. bus due to an hour's car-ride from Cheras to the Pudu Raya bus terminus. Yet, who would think of living in the olden days again?? Life goes forward, not backward, whether it is for the better or for the worse!

Father, help me be single-minded and contented today.

20. Wearing Church Masks

Most people in church circles appear either happy and self-sufficient, or rather bored and overworked. Parents have secure jobs, no financial problems and attend Sunday services fairly regularly so as not to be missed, especially in larger city churches.

Their children attend school and Sunday school faithfully and behave in an orderly fashion whenever we meet them. Everyone and everything seem fine. Therefore, when we do not see them we assume that they are probably holidaying somewhere else. However, an occasional view of their inner struggles will break our hearts if we really care as Jesus cares.

CASE 1

The Lim family is in deep financial waters. Mr. Lim has also been unfaithful. Mrs. Lim, burdened with daily needs, has not noticed the changes in his behaviour and attitude. Their children show signs of restlessness. At a time of urgent need, Mr. and Mrs. Lim had borrowed from loan sharks as this middle-aged couple was too ashamed to share their problems with fellow church members. Now they cannot even pay the interest, let alone the capital owed to those money-hungry moneylenders. They live in fear of being hunted down by their creditors. What should be their next move? To hide or reveal their needs and weaknesses to the church? Would their richer brethren understand their struggles anyway? Perhaps they would be despised for being careless with their finances. Mr. Lim also fears rejection by Christian friends if they should discover his extramarital affair... even though he recognises his sin and wishes that someone could help him get out of his situation.

CASE 2

The Ting family has a child who is autistic. The boy's condition was discovered only when he experienced relational problems with friends in school. Each time Mrs. Ting watches other Sunday school children playing independently and freely, she weeps in her heart. Why

has God allowed such a perplexity to surface in their once joyful family life?

Father, surely You did not place us in church families for no good reason, for You are the God of peace and order, of wholeness and of grace. Help us to so open our hearts to one another that we may comfort each other with the same comfort with which You have comforted us. You do not want us to live double lives. Surely You want us to say what we mean and mean what we say. By Your grace, we will be gracious nurturers of Your children. Finally, Your people will become more and more beautiful as Your Bride-to-be: forgiven, cleansed, healed, and vibrantly living for You! Having thought this over for a while, Lord, perhaps You may have to start this process of becoming vulnerable with me...make me willing, Lord, I plead.

21. Why Relinquish, Lord?

“Will my son live or die?” I asked the Lord one day. There was no answer. On I trudged between hospital and home for weeks. Soon, the false guilt of a mother in pain was washed out by the deep comfort from above and within...

I saw the Lord sitting under a shady tree, welcoming our two small children as I brought them to Him. Having placed them on His lap, He spoke ever so kindly to me...

“Mum, you may go now...I’ll take care of them for you.”

Just as I turned to depart and return to daily chores, my 4-year-old son looked at me. Waving good-bye, he said cheerfully,

“Mum, don’t worry, the Lord will take care of us!”

“Relinquish!” the Lord seemed to say, *“Relinquish them to Me!”*

I did...and He gave them back to me!

“Mysterious are Your ways, my Lord, mysterious are Your ways indeed.”

“Brokenhearted, I felt I’d lose my son to God;
So daily to Him I brought my every thought.
He then lovingly held me close to Him,

Come, Journey with Me

BOOK II: Listen to their Heart Cries. Pray Specifically.

Reassuring me with this theme...
*'Ask not why your child is ill,
Nor why he's irritable still.
Trust Me to know what's for him best.
Come, you and yours, in Me find rest.'*"

22. Commitment In An Imperfect World

I listened attentively as my friend Stephen unburdened himself of his five years of loneliness...

"Suzie has left me and taken our two sons with her...she would not let me make contact with her...would not allow our sons to visit my parents who long to see them before they die. I visit my sons at her parents' home during every school vacation and at Chinese New Year...but I can't even spend a night with them. Whenever I visit, she would not even be there.

All married couples have failures. I admit I am not the best husband for her...but neither is she the best wife for me. As Christians, our marriage is permanent, as far as I am concerned. To your question as to whether I can overcome temptations to date other women, my answer is: Yes, because I will wait for her as long as she wants to be reconciled. I will continue to look to God for comfort,

strength and hope. If she chooses to divorce me and marry someone else, I cannot change her mind. But I am determined to wait for her unless that eventuality happens.”

Father, thank You for granting this brother such commitment to his estranged wife in spite of the agony of waiting alone. His commitment encourages me as I see for myself that there are still those who, in the midst of uncertainty and pains, seek to abide in You and let the counsel of Your Word abide in them, even though the world around them shouts, “Let her go! Let her go! There are other women who will readily marry you!” Uphold this brother with Your victorious right hand, I pray, and bring his wife and sons back to him again.

23. Keep Me Faithful To Thee

We celebrate Your faithfulness, O King!
With hearts of joy Your praises we will sing.
We’ve seen Your mighty hands
Doing wonders in our midst;
Your promises of days gone by,
We’ve seen them come to pass.

“Ebenezer”:

Thus far the Lord has helped us,

“Ebenezer”:

Your faithfulness we’ve tasted

And we believe without a doubt

To higher planes You’ll lead us on,

Where once again we’ll celebrate

The goodness of our Lord...our faithful God!

Unfailing love You’ve shown us through the years;

Your perfect peace and presence ever near.

We’ve seen Your mighty pow’r

Bring renewal to our lives.

Refiner’s fire, purify us ‘till we be as gold. *

We look towards the years ahead with you;

To greater works and deeds You’ll do anew.

Anoint afresh our lives,

Fill us with Your holy zeal

That we may see the greater glory

Of this present house. *

“Ebenezer” © 1992 Catherine L.F. Wong

SECTION 3: GENERAL

1. The Prayer Of A Drug Addict

“God, if You exist, hear my cry of despair! Come quickly and help me...my body is falling apart...my stomach churns, my muscles flop; yet, with all the guts left in me, I’ll do anything in order to get my next shot...I need to feel good again!

Yet, what is goodness? I don’t understand it anymore, for those who pass by shake their heads at me, scold me or arrest me when, in desperation, I commit yet another crime. My companions are those very people who cannot help themselves or me...or those who torture me into selling drugs for them.

If hell is like this, I certainly don’t want to go there...help me...please...”

(The author’s recreation of the trauma of addiction that a late friend endured.)

2. Sentul – A Tourist Attraction?

Sentul, once upon a time the squatter-filled railway district of Kuala Lumpur, has caught the eye of an urban developer. The KTM (Malayan Railways) – owned land worth about RM100 million is to be converted into an economic-socio-tourist development project. In the past years, few people from better-off locations in the Klang Valley would consider shifting here to help the local residents emerge from their poverty-stricken condition. But all of a sudden, those looking for economic benefits find that this once crime-prone area of Kuala Lumpur is about the only piece of land left for the development of the city. Of course, publicity says that the project will help Sentulites come out of their slow state of progress. But I do sincerely hope that the wealth generated there will not be carried off elsewhere, but be used to provide for the down-and-out in Sentul. O, that they may know that someone cares for them and do not come just to get something out of them.

Sovereign Master of all cities, show Your Sentulites a vision of Your presence there, I pray, so that they will not be carried away by materialistic advancement at the expense of their souls. May they continue to pray, to fast and to give to the needy for You.

3. A Seed Must Die

Town Bus 17 in Melaka turned into the Portuguese community off Jalan Ujong Pasir. I sat up and strained forward to have a closer look at the historical spot...and recalled that two of our American friends came all the way from Kuala Lumpur just to see the remnants of European settlements in Melaka. Then the thought hit me that the gospel of Jesus Christ actually reached the shores of Malaya long before the flame was passed on to the continent of North America. I guess that in both cases, the natives did not know God revealed in the Scriptures yet. How is it that in the other country, God's Word took root and spread faster than it did here so that for a long time, it was called a Christian nation, while this nation has hardly been affected as a whole?

Is it because the hot and humid climate in this country and its long distance from Europe were not so conducive for many Europeans to settle down here with their families? Perhaps they came, traded, and returned to their lands to enjoy their riches whereas those who travelled to America actually emigrated there, never to return to the country of their origin.

If this was the case, then His word, embodied in flesh and blood, took to the soil and grew in America, bringing

forth much fruit. Is not the dying of the seed the basic principle for church growth that the Lord of the harvest left for us? Will not the seed that dies in the soil take root, grow...and produce fruits ten-fold, thirty-fold...a hundred-fold?

Yet, how often we still seek to plant and build churches where we are reluctant to die, take root and grow in Him. Instead, we may also end up like our missionary predecessors in our own land...Go out, evangelise and run home to our suburban comforts before we reach out again the next day. Are we really “mixing out sweat with the sweat” of those we seek to love for Him, like His Son did for us? If not, how can the people know why the Son of God came to earth, how can they know who He really is?

4. Mum Smothers Me

Today, I heard the sad story of a man who feels stifled by strong women. He was born into a family where Dad was weaker by nature and thus was unable to make firm decisions for the home. His mother smothered him with a love that was manipulating. She cajoled her children till she got her way even after they were independent

adults. In one sense, she did good by holding the family together. However, being of tender personality, this dutiful son had submitted to her to the point where he could not relate healthily to women in general, and to his dear wife in particular. Whatever feelings of abhorrence there were for Mum had been submerged for years and therefore were not easily recognised by him. The subconscious repression of those hostile feelings eventually caused him to repress his real personality as well. Outwardly, he ceased to be the person that God made him to be while inwardly, the real man struggled to be himself.

This brother thought that marriage would free him from such an oppressive mother-son relationship. Sadly, however, it made him feel worse. His wife had a strong will too. Help! This time, there was no escape!

Both of them fear You, Lord, and seek to honour You in their lives...though their life together has been one round of misunderstandings, arguments and tears. Both desire an atmosphere of mutual give and take, of patience and of gentle words. But each approach to contentment turns out to be another mirage.

Father God, how You must long to hold them in Your loving arms. If only they would lie still, receive Your

healing grace, and rest in Your new creation of feelings, thoughts and hope in them...all over again.

Bring repentance, bring forgiveness, bring healing, Lord. Do anything...just so that Your children will be able to experience Your breakthrough in their lives. In Your mercy, hear our prayer.

5. I Am A Mistress' Daughter

My mother is my Dad's mistress. I know who my half-brothers and sisters are, but they live as if we do not exist. We have never met them in person before. Sometimes, when I am lonely, I long for my siblings; after all, I am one of them...yet, just because of adults' actions years ago, I too have to pretend that I am all alone in this world. Is it simply too bad that my mother happens to be a second wife? As Christians, where do we stand before the just God who forgives? Sometimes I wish that I could be made all over again so that I do not have to bear this stigma of being a second's wife child. O God, please help me, please give me a free conscience that will enable me to live with my head held high...for truly, it is not my fault that I was born!

6. What's The Use Of Higher Education?

Before the 70's, a university education was still relatively rare and difficult to come by in Malaysia. Such training belonged to a group of students who were classified as intelligent, disciplined and rather well-off unless they were on scholarship. Intellectual excellence formed their motive for securing a university degree.

Today, though it is true that this perspective still exists, it exists alongside another motive for higher education...that of obtaining better paid jobs after graduation. However, bosses are also smarter now and prefer to employ good workers than merely highly qualified degree holders who may not know how to apply what they have learnt. So what, after all, is the use of tertiary education?

If students are only meant to be industrially and economically productive, why bother about the insights discovered through studies and research in the arts or sciences?

A Christian student staffworker once said that tertiary education is to help make student thinkers so that God can use them to effect significant changes in homes, local churches and society at large, to His glory and praise! Therefore, those given such a privilege must not take for

granted that because they are supported by their parents or sponsors, they may do anything they like with their training. Even though they may be professionally and financially fruitful, they must not hide the talents He has given them for His purposes. Each person still needs to seek God's will related to his vocation and ministry; each is ultimately answerable to Him alone.

Father God, prevent us from burying and wasting the gifts of education that You give to us in trust, we pray.

7. Submission To Domination

Let me tell you a story about a couple who adopted a son and a daughter. The son grew up to be a submissive and obedient child. He trained his wife and three children to submit to his adopted mother without question or else they would all be sharply chided and often cursed by her.

However, when the mother was old and paralysed, the son's family shifted to a new house and left his elderly mother in the care of another older lady. What I witnessed when I visited her was atrocious: the former dowager of the household was lying in her own motion with flies buzzing all about her.

Did she deserve such treatment just because she was unreasonably fierce with her family? The son had inherited his thriving business from his parents, anyway. What had happened to her once filial son? As to her daughter who rebelled earlier on in life, she became mentally sick and died in the streets.

Who bears the responsibility of such endings? We are not in a position to judge. But one thing appears clear: submission out of fear or mere tradition rather than love brings little if not no lasting good to the oppressor and the oppressed.

Lord Jesus, come and show us Your ways of loving submission to the loving Father, I pray.

8. Why Cancer?

O no, Lord, not again! Another brother in Christ is suffering from cancer. I do not know how to pray. Our church family is interceding on his behalf that he may be healed. Yet, You have not revealed Your mind on the medical prognosis to us yet.

If I should pray “Thy will be done”, I might sound guilty of heartlessness when the patient and his family are hoping

for his recovery; my prayer seems to imply a resignation as to whether he lives or dies. If I should try to reassure them that he will be well soon, I might be guilty of presumption for You have not told me so. Yet, I know that our Redeemer lives and that He will take care of us, for better or for worse in this world. I also know that in the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no sickness and no tears, no poverty and no enmity, no darkness and no death.

Yes, my Lord, I think I can now pray confidently, “Father, may Your will be done in my brother’s life and in the lives of his family members, for I know that it will be the best for him.”

9. Grief

Siew Cheng is grieving for her late husband. They loved each other very much. He was her spiritual mentor. Why did You have to take him away from her? She cannot comprehend Your action. She feels angry with You and feels that You do not love her anymore. When she tries to express her really honest feelings with close friends, they do not seem to understand. They counsel her not to recall the past anymore. This, of course, multiplies her

agonies. So, here she is, still badly missing her husband after three long years. If only someone would lend a listening ear to her recollection of those memories of her husband and her doubts of the reality of Your love, I believe that the barriers to Your love and healing will come tumbling down. Nightly, she cries:

“My God, my God, I miss the husband You gave me...to cherish and to care for. ‘Till death do us part’...that vow was so simple on our wedding day, all was beauty and joy. Little did I realise that the reality of death would come so soon...too soon, my Father God...How I grieve for him...how I long for his hand to hold mine...how I remember his encouragement and leadership in my walk with You. Now that Ah Seng is gone, I feel so lost...Does anybody really understand this pain? Can anyone really feel with me? Father in heaven, carest Thou not that I am hurting?”

Jesus cried out on the cross, *“My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?”*

10. Almost A Batterer

Right this moment, my Lord, I am utterly ashamed of myself, for I almost battered my own children. Now that I am calmer, I can't imagine that it was I who punished them so severely for such minor mistakes. How could I have done it?...Yet, it is true. I, who know so much about the importance of nurturing their tender natures, took out my unreasonable anger and frustrations on them. You said that when those who teach others sin, they bear a greater guilt. Is there no way out? I feel trapped in my recurring spurts of irrational rage...and I fear for my children and for myself.

11. Trapped By Unknown Voices

I hear voices...voices that are real to me. But nobody, not even the doctors who try their best to help me, believe that they are real. These voices come and go at any time they like. At times they tell me how good I am; at other times, they tell me how bad I am. They keep repeating themselves and crying out for my attention. Therefore, I can't eat, I can't sleep. All my energy seems to cater only to listening to them. I try my hardest to control myself when they tell me to do the things that I know I shouldn't

do. I am trying my very best but am losing my grip...yet, nobody believes me. They give me medicine, they lock me up, they observe me as if I were an animal. BUT I AM NOT! What I really fear is that one day I may not have the power left to resist these voices and end up hurting someone...including myself. O God, if there is a God, please help me!!!

12. Of Maids And Agencies

Foreign maids in Malaysia will be here to stay. Local ones are often unavailable, too calculating or unreliable. To avoid such headaches, many women prefer to take the risk of employing live-in-foreign maids. Some such maids work very hard in order to support their families back home. However, at times, some dishonest agencies siphon off so much of their salaries that they are not sure at all whether the money the agencies promise to send to their homes actually reaches their relatives. Who then benefits from such mass employment schemes? The employers do, if they have faithful maids, and the agencies do...but not the poor maids in such cases. When someone mistreats them like this, only they stand to lose. This is a harsh and cruel world where the rich often get richer while the poor get poorer...like a dumb person

being stung by a bee...so goes a Chinese saying. Lord, when will justice be seen in such situations?

13. Am I A Computer?

Information Technology, information technology and more information technology! Students leave school missing something useful if they do not have any idea of how computers function. The more educated ooze with excitement over this increasingly developed technology; the less educated hold them in awe and wonder. In Chinese, the literal translation for a computer is “Electric Brain”. Yet, the real brain lies in the programmer. If the computer fails to follow the programme fed into it, it is either spoilt or infected with a virus. It has ceased to fulfill the role for which it has been designed.

In a similar manner, the Creator made human beings to fellowship with Him, identify with His mission on planet earth and be the means through which He gathers back His children. However, we have all failed Him to the extent that we often fail to recognise our dilemma or refuse to acknowledge it when the fact is pointed out to us. Are we really worse than a lifeless computer? Is there

hope for us? I don't really want to obey God like a computer obeys its programmer...But HOW?

Jesus said, *"...but the world must learn that I love the Father...I do exactly what the Father has commanded Me."* (John 14:31)

Here lies the secret of willing obedience for me...as my Master obeys His Father out of love for Him, so I can obey my Master out of love for Him too. A computer, however, can never obey its programmer out of love.

14. Treasure Every Moment In Contentment

I live in the Federal Territory of Malaysia, the hub of our nation. Here is where major decisions are made for the people. But here also lies the problems of urban life. The Klang Valley has a population of about 1.2 million currently. The prediction is that it may reach 5 million in twenty years. In the midst of the sheer number of workers moving like ants in and out of streets and highways, I feel motivated to work hard. Here is where business is good. However, at times, I long for serene surroundings and wonder what it would be like to retire to the rural areas instead.

However, if I were to live in a smaller town like Seremban...I think I would enjoy the quieter and cleaner environment but miss the wide variety of hawker food in Jalan Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur. I would have more time to chat with my neighbours across the fence but miss the multiple celebrations presented throughout the year at the Merdeka Square. I might even rear some pets and plant my own vegetables, but then I would become so rural that I would not know how to communicate with my city friends anymore.

Come to think of it, there would be so many positive and negative points in any place I go to that the best that I could be at any one time is to be contented with where God has currently placed me. I need to know that He is with me wherever I am.

Dear Lord, help me to treasure every moment of my stay in this place, I pray.

15. Practicality, Not Theology

Thirty years ago, Mr. Tan Eng Beng's wife would have been referred to as Mrs. Tan Eng Beng or as Madam Lim Bee Suan, her maiden name. That was the manner by which we addressed our lady teachers then.

Today, we would call her Mrs. Tan Bee Suan or, less often, Madam Lim Bee Suan, depending on her preference. Frankly speaking, Father, does it really matter whether a lady uses her maiden name or her husband's surname? Can't each couple be allowed to sort out how they prefer to be addressed since a mere change of name by no means indicates oneness?

After much soul searching, Lord, I think this too, like many other issues, is a matter of practicality and not theology. Husbands and wives who are in the Lord are one. No amount of external changes can alter that fact. If we start from this angle, many emotionally tired wives and husbands would be put to rest over these issues of the external signs of oneness. They would be able to redirect their energy to more essential things, like understanding one another and speaking the truth in love. Agreed, Lord?

16. How To Break The Vicious Cycle?

I observe one common characteristics in children growing up in families where parental loyalties are split.

They tend to feel insecure, unsure that they are really accepted by others if they should reveal their hurts and family background. No one likes to be labelled as coming from a broken home, whether that means that Papa and Mama have no commitment to each other because of differences or because one of them is being unfaithful. For example, children, especially girls from families where Papa has been unfaithful, tend to feel that they are not good enough for him. They feel that they have to be extra special before he will love them and their Mama again. Such children often blame themselves, even though subconsciously, for their parents' problems. I still do not understand how children come to feel like that in spite of the conscious recognition that it is not their fault.

They grow up having a damaged self-esteem, unable to show self-acceptance or self-love. Some flirt to attract attention, others study hard to reach the heights of academic achievement. Maybe, then, Papa or Mama would pay some attention to them.

Whatever these children do, Father, why don't parents feel with them so that they may strive to be faithful to each other, even if it is just for their children's sake? Were they not children before? Maybe they too have been hurt by their own parents and have not found Your

comfort and healing grace. How, Lord, may this vicious cycle be broken?

17. From A Garden To A City

God first made the world a garden
Where Man and Woman resided;
He constantly to them returned
For in them He delighted.

When sin entered the world,
It cut the Father's heart so deep;
As Adam and Eve in sin did swirl,
He planned redemption through Abraham's seed.

His Seed has come and gone;
In Him alone can man and woman be reborn.
To Him will come the tribes and nations,
As His body prepares for His coronation.

The place He chooses will a city be,
Where all races live in harmony;
Would it not be a pity
If we should miss His heavenly city?
For now, the tribes gather in earthly cities,
No matter where we go.

Why not learn to see Him apart from dignitaries
As we walk with Him to and fro.

He will return to restore the cities
As the harvest He gathers in;
All are welcome to Jesus, really,
If we want forgiveness for our sins.

18. Mental Illness And Death

While working at a psychiatric ward, I observed a parallel between mental illness and death. Both are levelers of a person's position in this world. In that ward, I met members of the royal family living side by side with the outcast of society, the rich mingling unashamedly with the poor. Both mental illness and death afflict anyone they choose. No one in a healthy state of mind would choose either. Yet both come to us as the consequences of a broken world. No one can really boast of his own wealth or health. But for the mercy of the Creator go I.

19. The Evil Of Myths

Father, at one time, I did not know what to believe about certain sayings passed on to us from generation to generation. At first I thought they were Asian tales; but when I lived in the West, I discovered that they were also Western ones. Some of these sayings go like this:

- Women are emotional beings, unable to think clearly.
- A real man does not cry.
- Those who trust God will not be sorrowful when a loved one dies.

Many men and women are trapped within the walls of frozen or over-controlled emotions simply because they do not wish to be labelled as weakly feminine, even in the most appropriate circumstances, such as when in grief.

Some women bite their lips to control their tears at their Christians husbands' funerals because "Christians will meet in heaven again". But what will happen after the funeral? Friends may assume that they are fine and so leave them to grieve all alone in their bedrooms. Fearful of being criticised for having little faith in You, they do

not talk about their real feelings even to the closest family members, including their children.

O Father, but You are not like that! You do have emotions; You do cry and mourn; You do appreciate the loss of loved ones! In fact, it is recorded that You raised at least three people for their bereaved relatives so that they may did not have to mourn anymore. Is not grief a process and are not tears Your provision for soothing our hearts and healing our sorrows when we are wounded? Are not friendships strengthened in the midst of sharing joys as well as pains because these feelings are part of being humanly real?

Father God, it is so good to be free to come to You crying or laughing, mourning or dancing...and to know that You appreciate and understand every part of us and receive us with wide open arms!

20. Do I Really Wish I Were Born A Man?

In my mother's days, the question of a woman wishing to be like a man did not surface. Today, with opportunities opening up for women to be on par with men in society and vocations, some of my fellow women have been confused.

Why do we have to bear the brunt of bearing and nursing children whereas men are left to fulfill their wide choice of ambitions in the usual ways? I want to be free like them and yet I don't really want to be them. I want to receive the same pay but not the insensitive comments of men's talk. I want to be independent but I also want to nurse my children with tender kindness. Caught in-between such good things, Lord, how shall I choose?

"Each to her own, My daughter, each to her own be faithful. My gift for women like you is the feeling and tenderness that embraces not only your children but the rest of mankind. Use whatever gifts I give to you specifically, use these well and there will well from within you a sense of My joy and contentment. There will be nothing to hide, nothing to bury when we meet again."

21. Is It A Crime To Be A Woman?

It hurts, my Lord. It hurts so much. I suppose you will never understand how I feel because You came as a man, not a woman. What have you to say to this? My parents have six children – two girls and four boys. My brothers are married and financially well off. My sister and I are single and earn just enough to cover our daily expenses

while still living at home. But my father has willed his houses to our brothers! Where will we live when Dad and Mum are here no more? Do we have to look for our own shelter when our brothers live on without any fear of being evicted from home? It's so unfair!

Further, Dad keeps pressurizing us to get married, thus making us feel guilty for not having been proposed to by the right men. Don't we want to settle in our own homes? Don't we wish we could bring our little ones for them to cuddle and kiss? Oh Lord, it is painful. Please help me, I pray.

22. Poor And Afraid

The cleaner did not turn up after I had paid her last month's wages. Why was she afraid to simply resign so that I could look for someone else? Maybe the poor in our society have been cajoled into doing the things they dislike so often that some become fearful of saying 'No' in a dignified manner. Maybe they are already so sensitive to rejection that they are afraid of being rejected as persons with basic human rights if they should choose to quit a job. Lord Jesus, Master of all,

please help me to see others only through Your eyes of justice and yet of deep understanding.

23. Handcuffed In Chow Kit

The plight of illegal Indonesian traders in the Chow Kit area of Kuala Lumpur was recently highlighted in the press. City Hall officers were sent to clear the area of such traders as their business was affecting local legal traders too much. Those officers were only performing their duty. It was also only a piece of news to me...till I passed by Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman in a mini-bus.

A small crowd had gathered by a section of the pavement. I turned my head to look for the object of curiosity. There, standing with eyes lowered and left wrist handcuffed to a City Hall officer, was a frightened Indonesian man. They were probably waiting for the City Hall van to take them away. His goods were neatly packed by his side. Suddenly, instead of viewing him as a criminal who had flouted the laws of this country (by entering illegally or trading without a license), I felt deep compassion for him. Here was a man who, at least, was hardworking enough to do what he did in order to earn a living. I wondered what could have been in his mind then:

a hungry and eventually disappointed family waiting for his money? No money to pay the fines? What would jail be like? What else could I do except to push this scene to the back of my mind and carry on with my journey...Who would be his middleman before the judge? Who would plead his case or help pay the fine?

24. Gopeng Heart Cries

Heart Cries Of The Disabled In Gopeng

"I can't walk. All my relatives tell me that my legs have spoilt my life. Sometimes I wish someone would help me learn to walk...at least give it a try. I wish that I had something more to do than simply sit at home in the same place day in and day out...I'm tired of getting bored, miserable and growing fat! Is there no hope for a better life for people like me? Don't I deserve friends and fun? Do I have to wait for death like this?

Yet...there is still hope. My neighbour just told Mum of a centre in Gopeng where the disabled like me, who can still move our hands and fingers, are welcomed and trained to work with their hands. O God, if this is real, please get me there, I pray. Yet I am scared and shy, for I have never ventured outside my village except to see my

doctor...neither has any stranger invited me out before. I wonder what it will be like out there???

25. Mingling With The Crowd

O Lord, You know that I have been feeling restless for weeks. In the beginning, I thought that it was due to the changes in my children's daily routines. Then I thought it was due to indisciplined times of deep fellowship with You. Nevertheless, this strong urge in me to get out and feel real kept needling me till I caught a mini-bus heading for the Mall and walked along the Chow Kit streets.

To my pleasant surprise, as I walked and talked with You about the people we met on the way, Your life rose in me again...I was happy and contented to be with You as we mingled with the crowd of commuters, shoppers, hawkers and tramps. I began to feel Your joy in the throng of fellowmen and women, adults and children. You seemed to want to reach out to tell them, "I love you, folks, I really do!"

Yes, Lord, I now can feel with Michel Quoist, a Catholic priest, when he asserted that he could not live a contemplative life for long. Why? Because You are not only in the silence but in the noise, in the sea of

humanity, and in the struggles of the needy of all races and cultures, longing to bring them home to be with You and with Your Father, the Father of all mankind. I have one request, my Lord, “As it is so delightful to be with the crowd You love, will You please take me to mingle with them again?”

26. Scatter Us, We Pray

To remind myself of Georgetown in Penang, my beloved “Kampung”, I visited Melaka town. I took a bus to shop around and then returned by another bus route...all one-way-street-lah! As I was not familiar with the locations of the bus stops, I requested the bus driver to stop at the Balai Polis for me. He could not understand what I was saying as the Balai Polis was on a different route. On hearing the confusion, a man sitting behind me readily offered the clarification which put both the driver and me in the right direction. I had referred to the Balai Raya as the Balai Polis. The lady next to me also smiled approvingly to reassure me that all was well. The local Melakans’ politeness and helpfulness left a great impression on me. They had accepted me though I couldn’t speak Bahasa Malaysia well, especially when I was born and bred in Malaysia. I felt at home and one

with them as we journeyed on. No wonder then that foreign tourists generally appreciate our heartwarming Malaysian hospitality.

Thank You, Father, for making us Malaysians for You. Through this multiracial and multicultural training homeground, hone us and scatter us to all peoples of the world, we pray.

27. Homesickness

January 1971. The moment came for me to leave my parents' nest in Penang. Time to spread my wings and fly into the whole wide world on my own. For the first time in my life, I owned a suitcase, and made ready to care for myself. I thanked God for the kind people I met all the way from Penang to the Essendon Airport in Melbourne, Australia. On landing, my brother picked me up and we headed for the central post office to telegram Mum and Dad that I had arrived safely. It was Sunday. Shops were closed. The huge flat sprawling city appeared lonely and isolated. We took a short ride to the students' house in Parkville that was to be home for me for the next twelve months.

Brother told me to unpack while he prepared some food. I snapped open my precious suitcase, brought out gifts for him and, all of a sudden, burst into torrents of tears!!!!

I could not help it, Lord. I cried and cried for seemingly nothing! There I was – free to choose what I wanted to eat or wear, free to choose my own friends, free to study whatever course I wanted to opt for; yet, I cried. My heart ached for the next few days while Brother tried his best to introduce Melbourne to me.

Subsequently, peace reigned within me again. No more tears, no more nauseating homesickness. I found new friends, new work, and a renewed enthusiasm to be my best for You once more. Thank You, Father, for going through that experience with me.

28. Mystery In Grief

I was having breakfast with my daughters. The telephone rang. Uncle David, a good friend, spoke in a cautious tone,

“Miriam died. She died this morning at 7:00 a.m.”

I was stunned. The first thought was: “This is unreal!” The last time we met was several years ago; the last we talked over the phone was about two years ago. My mind had occasionally flicked back to our friendship which started at a clinic where we both worked. Since then, through a difficult patch in family life, she and her family had considered us their confidants. She often confessed that when things were well with her, she seldom contacted me. But I did not mind. I had hoped to visit her again this year. But now she was gone...

As I could not attend the funeral, my husband and I visited her family two days later. On seeing us, her mother hurried out and hugged me as if I were Miriam and kissed me continuously on my cheeks. The grief that I had controlled for two days broke its dam. We wept and comforted each other. Her Mum recounted how Miriam had often wanted to contact me. “But why not?” I thought.

Lord, I have a strong feeling that she knew that she would die of bilateral kidney failure because dialysis cost too much for them. Her husband and two daughters needed money more than she did to carry on in life. She was a fighter who seldom admitted defeat in failure. She was usually swift in getting up again...and would succeed the next time round! This time, however, I guess that she just let go (having defaulted treatment for two weeks) in order that her family might not have to share her prolonged pains. Mistaken though this attitude was, her probable self-sacrifice amazed me! Did she turn to You in the last moments, Lord? Only You would know. I commit this mystery to You in my grief.

29. Misguided Love

“How could Ricky do that to me! Once he was so sure that I was right girl for him and refused to take a ‘No’ for an answer. I was younger then, though older than he. I was never sure of our compatibility. But after he persuaded me that it was God’s will, I agreed to give the relationship a try. Now, after just a few months, he has the guts to tell me that, after much praying, he finally realises that I am not God’s will for him! How presumptuous, how arrogant! But Lord, I am glad that we are breaking off

now rather than later, for I would never be sure of his commitment to You and knowledge of You after this experience.”

30. Punching A Scapegoat

In the 70s, Seng Hee was a Malaysian student working as a part-time tram conductor in Australia. One morning, while busily collecting fares from passengers, a drunk guy approached him from behind and punched him on the shoulder, yelling, “Japanese! Japanese!”

In sudden fright, Seng Hee defended himself by pushing the man who continued yelling. Finally, the swaying man got off at the next stop.

Why did that guy do that to Seng Hee? Was he hallucinating? Was his pent-up anger against some World War II Japanese soldiers now surfacing under the effect of alcohol? This incident brought to mind another such calling of names...Once, beside the Melbourne City Library, a group of primary school age children shouted at me from behind, “Mao Tze Tung! Mao Tze Tung!” I am a Chinese from democratic Malaysia, not a communist. It’s not fair!

Yet, I suppose, when ridiculed as victims of prejudice, we tend to react instead of ignoring or forgiving the oppressor. Help me, Lord, to be like You, just and kind to others even when mistreated.

31. Have You Ever?

Have you ever met someone who almost always puts you down when you make a good suggestion about anything? Have you ever met someone who is always on the lookout for someone else to make a small mistake so that he can blow it up in public and turn it into a joke? How would you feel if you were the victim of such attacks?

I once worked with a fellow doctor whose behaviour was just like this. Dr. Bromwell was usually a lovable guy apart from this trait in him. He accepted an invitation to our wedding celebration happily. But on that day, he was so engrossed in his ward rounds that he forgot all about it. That made his girlfriend hopping mad as she was dressed in her best to attend an Asian wedding! He simply brushed his own mistake off as a small matter!

Dear Lord, please give me Your patience, love and generosity towards people like Dr. Bromwell. Maybe

they will then come to realise how much You love them and so learn to love themselves and others in Your way.

32. My Landlady

Everything appeared fine on the surface. Mrs. White lived in a large bungalow in one of the more exclusive suburbs of Melbourne. Although widowed for several years, she was rich and healthy enough to care for herself. Her adult son and daughter had their own families. She was always generous and courteous to her student tenants till one day, under the effects of alcohol, she cried her heart out to one of us. Living in extreme loneliness, she had no one to confide in. Her son did not really care for her. He even tried to cheat her of her property. We were glad, in a way, that she finally opened herself up to seek help. She was being real and ready for love, we thought. However, after a good night's sleep, she was back to her usual unreal appearance and behaviour...prim and proper, in control of her life.

Lord, if only we had had the courage to approach her with Your love directly then. But we waited too long. I wonder where she is right now. If it is not too late, Lord,

please reveal Yourself to her where she is now. Forgive us for dawdling. Please befriend her, we pray.

33. A Chinese Second Son

The traditional Chinese take the positions of their sons in the family hierarchy seriously. The eldest son is given a value and authority that the second and subsequent sons do not enjoy. Of course, authority comes with responsibility. But, very often, because of sin, the eldest son wields this delegated authority and accompanying power with little consideration for the feelings of his younger siblings, especially that of his second brother.

Once, I heard an angry and deeply hurt second son in such a family say this to his elder brother because the latter had totally misunderstood his younger brother's actions with which he disagreed:

“Just because you happen to be born before I was does not give you the right to rule over me mercilessly! You have been given the money, education and freedom to do as you like. You started courting girls in your schooldays and even owned a car as an undergraduate. Yet, now that I need some temporary support from you

to get me through my studies, you reprimand me for my weaknesses and my failures.

I am not asking for luxuries, which you had to the full from Pa and Ma. I am only asking for aid to see me through my training. If that is your attitude, lend the money to me! I will repay you when I work.”

I wept for the younger brother. Lord, how could the eldest brother be so insensitive to his own brother’s needs when he had so much more? But then, as I turn to You, the firstborn of the Father in the new family of God, my hope for justice and grace rises as You are so different. You are responsible to Our Father, taking care of us, Your siblings, through thick and thin. You not only died on the cross for us so that we would receive Your Father’s blessings with You, You exercised the delegated authority so well that now He has placed all power and honour and glory at Your feet! No one would mind having an eldest brother like You!

Teach us to be like You, our Lord, so that we too may humbly care for those You place under our authority...our children, our employees, our students...Your lambs and Your sheep.

34. Trapped In The Flesh

A friend just confided that his wife is not only battering their two children, she is battering him as well. He thinks she is going mad! Her rage is usually unprovoked, even though at times there is some domestic conflict. Does she need help, Lord, or condemnation? Please grant me Your wisdom to help this family, Lord, I pray!

35. Follow - Up Defaulter

Thanks to modern medical science, Mr. Tai's symptoms of depression had been under control for the last two years. However, recently, the nurse at the follow-up clinic reported that he had not been collecting his tri-monthly supply of medicine. I wondered why. On investigation, I discovered that he had refused to take anymore medicine. He said he was so well that he wanted to forget his past illness. But what will happen to him if he faces another crisis in his life? His previous two relapses had been due to his termination of treatment without his doctor's advice or knowledge.

I vividly recall one of those occasions when he saw me for friendly advice. Troubled and frustrated by a failed business venture, he was unable to sleep, eat or mix with

anyone outside his home. His whole family slipped into turmoil because of his prolonged depression. Yet, once the ordeal was over, he forgot that he still needed medical supervision because he was behaving normally then.

Great Physician, either do not let him fall sick again or make him take care of himself so that his poor wife will not have to bear the burden of another period of emotional and mental stress. I feel so impatient with patients who default on treatment...so, please:

“Grant me the courage
To change the things I can,
Patience to accept the things I cannot change,
And wisdom to know the difference, Lord,
I pray.”

(From a Prayer of a Catholic Priest)

SECTION 4: FULL TIME CHRISTIAN WORKERS

1. A Hiding Place We Can Ill Afford

Lord Jesus, to watch You is to follow You...and I recall that You spent much time with Your Father in the busy three years of Your earthly ministry. There was no fuss, no attention seeking; You simply did it...so that we might do as You did. As far as I understand, Your people may meet with You anywhere, at any time suitable to them. The secret, it seems, is unhurried time with God.

But, for those who minister in Your name publicly...don't we need even more time to listen to You, uninterrupted by inner or outer noises? How we need to hear You so that we may speak for You...how we need to feel afresh Your love and approval when there are so many who accuse us out there...to review our lives and roles in Your presence...to receive Your wise counsel when we lose perspective in the midst of intense ministry, fruitful or otherwise.

Like Moses in the wilderness or like Paul in Arabia, we need to be constantly refined and honed for worship and service. Yet, like many others in Your family, we cannot afford to spend so much time with You alone, in silence and restfulness. Our earthly demands are so pressing and

real, not necessarily sinful, as You know. How can we take leave and pay for the so-called Silent Retreats? One in several years may be possible...Does that mean then that we cannot be drawn closer to You and become more like You? Could You please meet with us in the midst of our busy lifestyle? Come quickly, Master, we pray.

2. Release For Him

A

Lord Jesus, our real Boss, many of us who are pastors' wives feel guilty for not working outside the home in order to save some money for our children's future education. Many also do not have supportive family members who understand our struggles in our desires to serve You with our giftedness. More often than not, we have been accused of being lazy or foolish if we decide to minister with our spouses in the churches. Inevitably, we worry about our children becoming resentful against You for not providing for them in the years to come...especially when they see their Sunday school friends richly provided for by their parents. Why, dear Lord, why don't our brothers and sisters in Christ understand our hopes to love You wholeheartedly and

our fears of being continuously treated like stepchildren of the one Heavenly Father? Why do they have to tell us that it is our lot when we answer Your call to full-time ministry? Please take away our brewing anger against such injustice and provide for us as You provided for the Levites in those days, we pray.

B

Lord, You put music in my ears and words in my heart to compose and sing for You. Sometimes You wake me up in the middle of my sleep just to listen to Your melodies...I can't rest until I have penned them on paper...Often, the fire of Your message burns within my inner being, ready to be poured forth to Your people. But I have to wait...and wait...for am I not paid as a pastor to teach and to preach, to visit, to baptize and to bury...but not to sing? What will my church leaders think if I should even suggest to them that I believe God has made me to sing for Him? Am I to leave this world without fulfilling Your mission for me?

O Master, when are they going to release me for You? If it is Your will, please intervene, I pray!

3. Silent Cries

Lord, have You heard their cries for their Papas and Mamas?

These children cannot understand why the God of love that their parents serve do not hear them...Instead, He seems to have taken their darling Papas and Mamas so far away from them...to serve Him!

“Is this the way God loves us?” they ask in the loneliness of their little hearts; but no one seems to understand them, no one hears their cries...

Father, do You really care?

“I come, I come swiftly...I come now to deliver My children from their heartaches, their confusion and their despair...

Tell them that I love them...

Tell them that I care...

Tell them that I will hide them in my bosom...

Tell them they’ll meet their Papas and their Mamas there...”

4. Lord, Make Me Your Branch

I get confused when I assume responsibility for others' deeds and needs.

Told to be a soldier for the Lord, a servant strong and true, I feel tired when I cannot fulfill all my duties.

Help me, Lord to know only Thy tasks for me...then I will not feel guilty if I do not perform others' tasks for Thee!

5. Stepping Aside For Others

~ The Silent Worker ~

Up in the clouds one day, while flying over Pittsburgh, America, I asked of Him,

"Where is the Holy Spirit in this creation, Lord? What does He look like?" He replied,

*"He is the Silent Worker. You cannot see Him but
You may see His works.*

*Are you willing to work behind the scene for Me like
He does?*

Unseen, unheard, quietly and peacefully?

*Contented that I alone be lifted up, adored, praised
and worshipped?"*

Meditation and Prayer:

John 3:5-8; John 14:16-17, 26-27; Genesis 1:1-2

I learnt that day, miles above the surface of the earth, that to be a silent co-worker with the Lord is not to deny that I may have completed a piece of work well for Him. Rather, it is to so identify with His heart's desire for others that I am able to rejoice when others are used to bear fruits for Him; I am able to step aside when my part in a certain mission is completed and allow others to step forward to carry on according to His directing. I still need to give thanks to God that He is glorified even though no one else may know that God once used me to initiate that particular piece of good work.

Father, purify my motives for ministry so that I will truly desire only to honour and please You. Help me be contented that others know You better, even if they reach You through channels other than me.

6. Can An Empty Church Hall Be Filled Again?

It was almost sold off; the beautiful old church building in Lygon Street, Carlton, Melbourne. For three to four years, a young pastor employed to build up the congregation tried to fill the nine-tenths empty pews but to no avail. None of the twenty-odd active members, excluding about ten Asian students, lived within ten miles of the church. Pastor and family chose to live in a suburb almost twenty miles away. The trustees of the church refused to sell off the building and relocate to the suburb for old times' sake. The pastor, unable to identify with the needs of the surrounding neighbourhood, did what he could by persuading foreign students to use American church methods of bringing children from the nearby high-rise flats to Sunday School. We tried with him. The result? Nothing seemed to work. Eventually, he resigned. But the building stood firm.

Soon another pastor was found; one who could and would identify with the drug addicts, homosexuals and victims of poverty in the large downtown district of Carlton. The Lord blessed the renewed ministry. Gradually, the lost and the lame and the blind entered the building to receive God into their broken, sin-sick and tired lives. They were accepted in love and kindness, forgiven, saved, reconciled with God and man and

restored to health. The building was filled to full capacity till two pastors were needed to tend the sheep.

How marvellous, how wonderful, is the Saviour's grace!! Father, when we should meet with the same situation again, please help us remember to go out and bring in the needy and humble locals into Your family, even if they may seem strange to us. Forgive us for our smallness of heart, we pray.

7. Alcoholic Butcher To Pastor?

Pastor Philip! Remember Pastor Philip, Lord? Twenty-five years ago, constrained by Your love one day, he walked up the aisle with his newly-married bride and handed his life over to You for salvation and service. You transformed his life dramatically! No more alcohol; no more swearing! Digging into Your Word hungrily, he obeyed Your call to the pastoral ministry, swam through the deep currents of theology and philosophy for 6 years (what a change from slogging in a butcher's shop), to emerge one of Your most powerful instruments in reaching out to the Asian students in Monash University, Melbourne, in the 70s. Somehow, Your messages through him could be understood by the young and the

old, the primary school leavers and the university thinkers, the poor and the rich, the men and the women.

Nevertheless, when his parents needed him in the countryside, he resigned from a city church in favour of a small country one just so that he could take care of them. That is practical theology indeed!

At times of discouragement in serving others, recalling Your grace through this faithful servant of Yours reminds me that Your word is truth and that Your grace will never let me go. Yet, when he visited some of us in Kuala Lumpur a few years ago, he considered the Asian students' presence in Australian churches to be a great blessing and encouragement to him while the Australian church itself was plodding through dry periods in the seventies. What humility! As for the speculation of when You will come again, he rests in this attitude with regard to the "millennium":

"Some say post, some say pre;
But as for me,
I'll wait and see!"

Lord, more of such pastors, we plead!

8. Crumbs For A Pastor

Suddenly, at a small pastors' retreat, an outburst of sincere frustration broke the air:

"We are supposed to meet the needs of our parishioners, to comfort and to counsel, to grieve and to rejoice with them. But when we have needs, who do we go to?"

Dear Master, my heart feels for this speaker as we have gone through such deep waters before. It seems little comfort to those in such situations to mentally assent to the fact that You care for them. They need to see Your love through a man or a woman who is at that moment a little closer to You than they are, who is able to give them Your understanding, Your listening ear, Your wisdom and provision. If the giver does not have whole loaves or fish, even crumbs will do; if they do not have fountains of fresh water to offer, even a few cool drops will be gratefully received to quench their thirst. O Lord, how Your servants need Your friendship through others today.

9. One More Question, Lord

Master Jesus, You had parents to take care of You. Shouldn't the pastors' kids and the missionaries' kids have them too?

"Yes, My child, for though Joseph died young, Mary thereafter was father and mother to Me till I was ready to leave home. If it is really necessary for My pastors and missionaries to leave home because of Me, then My Marys will be strengthened to nurture their children for Me."

Lord, will other people help care for them?

"If they love and understand Me, they will."

My Lord, now I know that You are just and that You really care for us...pastors' kids and missionaries' kids and all!

10. Fear Almost Overcame Hope

After two years in the pastoral ministry, Peter had felt like quitting; he could not take the trapped feeling anymore. As a young newly-married couple, he and his wife were sent to a small rural congregation of predominantly middle-aged women. Some of them were

widows, others had husbands who were not keen on the usual church life. Peter and Jane, his wife, did not know how to minister to them, especially as they had never had a chance to learn by ministering side by side with a senior pastor before. Agreed, some young ministries developed such pastoral skills naturally and gradually, but others, like Peter, needed more exposure and learning by example.

Peter now still wants to quit because he is afraid that his seniors might misunderstand his request for another congregation and think that he is just being fussy or lazy. Further, due to a shortage of pastors, it is highly unlikely that he would be posted to help a senior one.

Feeling extremely small and useless, he begins to slide into depression. In desperation, he feels that even God has let him down. What other way of escape except to end his life now? He prayed,

“Father, I cannot take this anymore...I feel that all the unfulfilled expectations my middle-aged congregation have are lumped on me...they expect me to be father, husband, brother and son to them all at once! Help!!

I want to get out while there are jobs waiting for me out there! Please show me the way out of this mess, I pray!”

O my Father, please do not let him harm himself. I know that he is very precious in Your eyes even if he feels so insignificant in the eyes of man. Please comfort him, save him, keep him and heal him deep in his soul so that, being transformed by Your healing grace, he will emerge a better instrument than he has ever been. Dear Father, if he has to be refined this way, let him know Your everlasting friendship for him...so that he will not feel so lonely after all, I pray.

“Wait upon Me, My son, wait upon Me. Do not worry, help is on the way. Meanwhile, just soak in My love and My compassion, tenderness and power...a seed must die...then only will it bear fruit. Do you believe Me?”

Epilogue

It Is Well With My Soul

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

*It is well...with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul. *

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! *

And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul. *

Horatio G. Spafford

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End of Book II

BOOK III: LISTEN TO THE CHILDREN. UNDERSTAND THEM.

Simple Life

Big Sister (aged 9):

Pat, these two pieces of cake I share with you...
those five, I don't share.

Pat (aged 7):

Aiyah...share everything-lah! Why are you so
complicated?!

No Prediction

Mum:

Lee Ean, when you are of Koko's age (13), will
you behave like him?

Lee Ean (aged 7):

I don't know, Mum...I can't tell what will happen
in future.

Listen to the Children is a collection of conversations to help adults look at the world from the eyes of a child. It is a heart-warming peek into the innocent and not innocent minds of children as they try to make sense of the strange adult world that surrounds them.

The author, Dr Lee Bee Teik, has drawn out the humour and cheekiness of the children in each event she records. However, the liveliness of the conversations is original to the children themselves! Listening to them express themselves in the natural surroundings of home and school will surely remind even the crustiest adult of the forgotten joys of being a child.

Dr Lee hopes that her readers will be stirred to re-learn the simple faith of a child in our heavenly Father from this simple book. Furthermore, she prays that the adults reading the book will come to a deeper appreciation of the children under their care; that they be encouraged to foster their spiritual and emotional development in an environment of listening acceptance and loving discipline.

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A Parent's Prayer

PREFACE

Jesus said, "...I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of God. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 18:3-4

JESUS LOVES ME

(Anna B. Warner & David Rutherford McGuire)

Jesus loves me, this I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong;
We are weak but He is strong.

* Yes, Jesus love me! Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

Jesus loves me, this I know
As He loved so long ago,
Taking children on His knee,
Saying, "Let them come to Me." *

Jesus loves me still today,
Walking with me on my way,

Wanting as a Friend to give
Light and love to all who live. *

Since Jesus said that we have to become like little children in order to enter the kingdom of God, I thought that it would be a good idea to listen to what some of them say and, maybe, learn from them. This book on listening to children is a collection of actual every day conversations between the children and those they know well in the security of their homes or schools. Names have been changed to protect their identities.

The purpose of this book is threefold:

Firstly, it is to illustrate the fact that God made each child with a simple yet deep understanding of His creation which has been made for Him to enjoy. Further, children who are taught that God loves them, hears their prayers and speaks to them through His word and creation, readily live a life of faith in God unless hindered by others, especially by those placed in authority over them.

However, as will be shown in the conversations, original sin is as real in children as in adults who have often learnt to hide it from God, others and even self. Therefore, though children may be simple in faith, they are by no means completely innocent in God's eyes. They too need the Saviour's saving grace. The difference between a

child's faith and that of an adult is that a child seldom rationalizes away his need for forgiveness and love when he meets God. He seems to recognize and trust Him more readily.

Secondly, it is to encourage children and adults who take care of them directly or indirectly, so that they may understand them better, and thus meet their emotional and spiritual needs in ways that are relevant to them at each stage of their growth.

Thirdly, it is my hope, that as we ponder over the children's words and perceptions of God and His world, we may be encouraged to become more childlike in our trust in God but not remain childish in our relationship with Him. To be childlike is to trust and follow Him even when we cannot understand everything that happens to us; whereas to be childish is to persist in remaining in self-indulgence and to insist on enjoying privileges without responsibilities.

Hence, let us lend them our ears...

(The sentence after each asterisk * are the author's interpretations of each child's perception of the situation, while the child's age is in brackets.)

Please note that children may not strictly follow grammatical rules in their daily conversations. Hence, for the dialogue to be real, the author has left most of the actual conversations unedited.)

1. Growing Up Takes Too Long

Mum was scrubbing the floor while daughter Ting stood watching her.

Mum: Ting, you can help me when you grow up.

Ting (4): (Silently) Mmm...I'd like to do it...(pause)

Can I help you now even though I am young?

- Playing with soap water is fun!

2. Pens Don't Talk

Pa could not find his pen after an extensive search of the house. At dinner table that evening, he asked,

Papa: Did anyone see my black pen?

Kate (3): I think it ran away by itself...(without blinking an eyelid)...and was thus caught red handed).

- I hid it for myself because I like it...but I'm not going to tell...I cannot blame Koko (Big Brother) and Jie Jie (Big

Sister) either. They will tell Papa that they didn't do it. So blame the pen...it can't talk!

3. Decorating the Lawn

A neighbor who lived below Siew Lee's apartment was see sweeping dry leaves one her own.

Siew Lee (4): Aunty, if you sweep up all the leaves, how are we going to decorate the grass??

Aunty was dumbfounded but felt relieved that she wouldn't have to feel guilty the next time she could't sweep the leaves often enough!

- The lawn looks really pretty with those brown leaves dotted on it...I wonder how Aunty is going to decorate such a large space again. She will have a difficult time...how foolish of her to sweep the brown leaves all away. I'd better remind her before it is too late...

4. Looking For Baby Bird

A sparrow made a beautiful nest in an old shoe box. The children found four lovely eggs in it. Delighted at the discovery, Mum told her three children that each egg had a baby inside it. However, a few hours later, she was upset to one egg had been broken. So she enquired...

Mum: How did the egg break?

Mee Ree (5): (Coolly...) There's no baby sparrow inside...

Mum: How do you know?

Mee Ree (4): I poked it with my finger...and only yolk came out!

- Mum, what you said wasn't true...there is no bird inside...but I know that you would not lie to me. Mum, I am confused and need an explanation...please don't be upset, Mum...just tell me why the baby bird was not there.

5. Uncaring Mum

A few days passed by...

Mum: The mother sparrow still hasn't returned
to sit on her eggs.

Mee Ree: (In a matter of fact manner while walking
away) Must be a dodo bird.

- Silly mother bird...she does not care for her babies...Mum would not do that to us!

P.S.

A dodo is an extinct Mauritian bird which is used as a symbol of a stupid or foolish person.

6. Fair Exchange

Papa was overseas. The children took turns to sleep with Mum at night. It was Big Sister's turn.

Little Sister (4): Want to trade? (Grinning)

Big Sister (6): No way!

- Actually, Jie, I know you will not give me your turn to sleep with Mum...but I was hoping that by being very nice to you, you wouldn't mind sleeping alone tonight. Tomorrow night will be my turn...but I can't wait for my turn now!

7. I Want To Do As Papa Does

A father had just resigned from his job and so was able to sleep in over the last few mornings. At the same time, his 5-year old daughter was finding great difficulty in having to get up in the morning for pre-school.

Mum: Jose, you just have to get used to getting up earlier...

Jose: Mum, I am going to resign from school!

- Mum, if Papa can stop work and sleep in, why can't I stop attending school and join him!

8. Let Me Help Dad, Mum

Late one afternoon, after spending hours preparing his lectures, Dad sighed...

Come, Journey with Me

BOOK III: Listen to the Children. Understand them.

Dad: I am tired!! (and walked away from his computer)

Mark (4): You work too much, Dad.

After a few seconds, Mark yelled out to his Mum...

Mark: Mum, I turned off his computer.

Mum: Oh no, Markie, what have you done...has Dad saved the information yet? If not, you'll get into hot soup!

- Parents...I don't understand them. So hard to please. What does my helping Dad to stop work and rest have anything to do with the saving of information? What is information, anyway!

9. I Know Your Trick!

Mum: En Ling, if you don't come for your cup of milk now, I will give you 2 cups.

En Ling (3): Tomorrow it will be 3 cups...

- Don't bluff me, Mum, I know your trick...you won't do that to me...you know my little tummy cannot hold that much milk at one go. Also, you will not like cleaning up

the mess if I bring the milk up again...you went mad when I vomited it all out the last time...

10. Confused by Teachers

Teacher Ali: Ern Ern, your hair is too long in front. Have it cut shorter by tomorrow.

So it was done.

Teacher Boey: Ern Ern, your hair is too long at the back. Cut it shorter by tomorrow.

Ern Ern (7): Sir, I am confused. Teacher Ali ordered me to cut the front of my hair and now you asked me to cut the back of it. If this keeps going, I will soon be bald!

- Aiyaaa...you teachers better agree with each other before you tell us off!

11. It's All Right, Mum

Papa has been away for 2 months.

Mum: Jane, eat up your food...or else when Papa sees you he may not recognize you and calls you a scrawny lion.

Jane (5): (Pulling up her blouse and thumping on her tummy) See...I'm still chubby...(grinning at Mum)!

- Don't worry, Mum, I am as chubby as when Papa last saw me...he won't complain. So I do not need to eat up my food.

12. Please Do Not Laugh at Me

Betsy's 17-year-old brother, Norman, had just left home for further studies in England. Mum was crying in her bedroom.

Betsy (2): Why are you crying, Mum?

Mum: I miss Norman.

Betsy: Don't cry, Mum, you still have John, Ruby and me!

After a while, Mum found Betsy sobbing quietly.

Mum: Why are you crying, Betsy?

Betsy: I miss my Big Koko...

Mum, I think I know how you feel about Norman now. I am sorry that I didn't just now...please don't laugh at me...

13. I Want To Go With You, Mum

One evening after family prayers...

Ping (7): I wish Jesus comes again before I become an adult.

Mum: Why?

Ping: Because I don't like adult work.

Mum: When I was a child, I wanted to become an adult...but when I became an adult, I want to be a child again. So, you should enjoy yourself now...since all you need to worry about is doing your homework.

Ping: (Smiling) I hope Jesus comes before I go to college.

Mum: Why?

Ping: Because I don't want to leave you!

Mum smiles with a twinkle in her eyes...

- It's not really work I'm worried about, Mum. It's being left without you if Jesus takes you first when you grow old...But if He comes when you are still young, we can go together! I know that Jesus loves me and will take care of me, but I still need you!

14. I Prayed

Mei Mei's school bus was cooler than the van that was sometimes used to pick up the students. Not liking the hotter van, Mei Mei secretly prayed to Jesus that the cooler bus would come for her the next day (after having travelled in the van for two days in steamy weather). Mum was in the kitchen when the bus arrived to pick her up.

Mum: Is it the van or the school bus today, Mei?

Mei Mei (5): (Loudly from the corridor...) Bus, Mum!
(As she reached the door of her house,
beaming from ear to ear) I prayed what...

- Remember, Mum, you taught me to call to Jesus any time I need Him? Well, I did...and He answered me! I am so happy!!

15. You Prayed

On the first day Mei Mei had piano lessons, she would not speak to her new piano teacher. The teacher was therefore not sure that Mei Mei should continue being student. That night, during family prayers...

Mum: Lord Jesus, please help Mei Mei not to be shy with Miss Ho so that both of them will enjoy the piano lessons.

A week later, after the second piano lesson,

Miss Ho: (Outside the piano room) Mei Mei played very well. She has a natural sense of rhythm...we'll carry on!

Outside the piano room,

Mum: Mei, how was the lesson? Did you answer when Miss Ho spoke to you?

Mei Mei: You know...

Mum: How do I know...I wasn't in the room.

Mei Mei: Well of course I answered her...you
 prayed for me!

- Mum, how could you be so absent-minded! After you prayed for me last night, of course Jesus helped me not to be shy with Miss Ho anymore!

16. Glad To Be A Human Being

Little Ning overheard Mum chatting with Jerng, her brother.

Mum: God created human beings in His image. But some time ago, some people taught living things came by chance, like one piece of dust knock into another piece...then when there was a big bang where animals were made. They became larger and more complicated...and became human beings. That is why a few scientists believe that human beings came from the ape family. But it was not so...God created us in His likeness from the beginning by breathing His Spirit into us...

Jerng (10): Yes, and it does not matter if the scientists want to talk about humans being made through the evolutionary process. We are still different from animals.

A few hours later, during family prayers...

Ning (5): Lord, thank you that you made me a human being. Amen.

- Really, I like animals...but I am glad that I am not one. I am happy just as I am!

17. Don't Hurry Me, Dad!

In the middle of the night, Mary (5 years and 8 months old), lost her first milk tooth, showed it to Papa and asked for a drink. The next day, Papa spoke to her at dinner time...

Papa: Mary, you are no longer a baby, right?

Mary: But my adult tooth has not come out yet...when it comes out, I'll be an adult and not be a baby.

- Papa, I still enjoy being a baby at home... so don't hurry me to grow up!

18. If Mum Can Go Through This, So Can I!

Little Su Ling, being the youngest child in her family, plays by herself more than her older brother and sister.

Su Lig (5): Mum...(soberly)

Mum: Yes, Su Ling.

Su Ling: When you were little, did you play by yourself a lot?

Mum: Yes, my dear, I did because I was the youngest of 7 children...my brothers and sisters had their own things to do when I was small like you...and was often left out of their activities.

Su Ling continued playing without anymore questions.

- She was comforted and felt good that Mum also had felt the same loneliness as she had, though she did not like feeling left out very much.

19. Too Much Of Cinderella

Dad wanted to find out how Pam felt about living with a Step-Parent.

Dad: Pam, if he Lord takes me home to heaven first, would you like Mum to marry another man...so that he can help her take care of you?

Pam: I don't know...I am scared...

Dad: Why?

Pam: I have read so much about Cinderella...

- I don't mind having a step-father, Dad, but I would rather not have a step-father than suffer under a cruel one.

20. Losing Weight

Ruth often hears Dad saying that at middle-age, to keep himself fit, he should try to keep a constant weight by exercising and not overeating. He sometimes adds that one sign of his weight increase was a tightening of his pants at the waist. In the bath tub one evening...

Ruth(5): (Looking down at her tummy...) Mum, I want to lose weight.

Mum: Why do you want to do that?

Ruth: Look (rubbing her tummy while protruding it forward...), I am too fat!

- I really want to be strong like Dad, Mum. Since my tummy is so big, I'd better lose weight to keep my body fit too. I don't want to fall sick.

21. My Wedding Dress

Mum likes to tell family stories to the children. One day, she mentioned that her wedding gown was not bought or hired but borrowed from her sister-in-law. Her 6-year old, Kim, who likes dressing up, often flips through the family albums.

Kim (6): Mum, I want to get married.

Mum: Well, you'll have to grow up and know how to take care of yourself first.

(Silence for 10 seconds)

Kim: Can I borrow your sister-in-law's wedding dress?

- Well, all I really want is to try on that beautiful wedding dress...I don't care whether I get married or not!

22. What Else Did He Say?

Johnny's behavior has been negative for a few days. Mum was driven to tears as she struggled before the Lord and asked Him for wisdom to know how to get through to him. God spoke to her as soon as she conveyed His message to Johnny.

Mum: Johnny, heavenly Father asked me to tell you that He loves you very much.

Johnny (10): What else did He say? (Immediately his face cheered up with a look of joy and expectancy)

- I know that God often speaks to you, Mum; but it's even greater that He actually asked you to pass me a message! He really must love me!

Johnny's attitude and behavior became more positive after that.

23. Mum Knows Best

Daisy (6): Mum, after I get married, can I still live with you?

Mum: It depends on your future husband.

Daisy: You choose for me!

- If that's the case, you better choose because the man you choose will certainly obey you. So please help me, Mum...I want to get married but I also want to stay with you always!

24. Not On My Birthday...But I love Koko

8 May 1994...Amy turned 6. Her family celebrated with a birthday cake followed by an outing to Taman Titiwangsa, Kuala Lumpur. While playing hide-and-seek, Philip, the eldest of three siblings, had a serious fall. The family rushed home before taking him to nearby Tawakal Hospital. At the front door, Amy, almost in tears, said to Mum...

Amy: I don't like this happening on my birthday...but I love Koko...

- I know it's an accident, but my birthday is special to me...and I don't like the fun time to end suddenly like that at all. Actually, I love Koko...O might as well pack something to do while waiting for the doctor (which she did and spent the next two hours happily colouring pictures and watching the crowd at the emergency clinic.

25. Trusting God and Man

In exasperation, Auntie Lilian made a remark about her husband, Uncle Tom, while Chin Aun was reading in the same room...

Auntie Lilian: My husband does not trust anyone!!

Later, in Auntie Lilian's absence...

Chin Aun (6): Mum, does Uncle Tom know Jesus?

Mum: Yes, he does. Why do you ask that?

Chin Aun: Because if he knows Jesus and Jesus is God, then he must trust God.

Mum: What exactly is your worry?

Chin Aun: If Uncle Tom trusts God, then He must also trust His people.

- I am puzzled, Mum, because if Uncle Tom trust God, then he must trust the people whom He has made...God is in charge of everybody. He does not have anything to fear from people, does he? (Mum had to sort out her theology after that...)

26. One Rule For All

Mrs. Hunt once stayed at our home. To help me tide over my chores, Mrs. Hunt welcomed my two pre-school daughters into the guest room.

They were thrilled and started to scream in delight as they messed around . As I pped my head in to enquire about the rowdiness, I heard Mrs. Hunt exclaim...

Mrs. Hunt: O.K. we have agreed that whoever screams will have to leave the room!

Both girls shouted: Yes!

Ning (5): You too, Aunty!

Aunty had no choice, as the two adults looked at one another...

- Aunty, since you are inside this room too, you have to obey the same rules. I think it is only fair. Don't you think so?

27. Rejecting Yet Yearning

Sarah, a 13-year old girl, while on family vacation in Sibiu, stayed for a few days at the home of a 13- year old boy.

Day 1

Samuel: (Roughly and angrily) Mum, who's that?
What's she doing here?

Mum: She's my sister's friend. He is staying with us for a few days while her parents visit a few students upstream.

Day 2

Mum: (Whispering to her sister.) Today is the first time I have noticed Samuel getting vain. He has been combing his hair and admiring himself in the mirror again and again! Let's watch what he will do next...

Day 4

Samuel: Mu-um. Dad and I are going to have a swim at the club? You think anyone else might like to come?

Of course, Sarah was immediately invited for a dip!

- I do not like intruders in my territory. But I just cannot resist talking to her and seeing her smile and swim!

28. Marriage Is Not For Me

One evening, Aik Lee discovered two cockroaches mating...

Aik Lee (8): Mum, what are the two cockroaches doing, stuck to each other? I have not seen them in such a position before.

Mum: O, they are reproducing.

Aik Lee: How do they do it?

Mum: The male cockroach places its sperm in the female's body.

Aik Lee: Do humans do the same?

Mum: Yes.

(Pause)

Aik Lee: Yuk! I am never getting married!

- Oh no! No way am I going to take off my clothes in front of a girl!

29. You Just Don't Understand Mum

Gaik Bee listened attentively to the testimony of a former actress who had recently received Christ Jesus as her Saviour and Lord. She urged her listeners not to watch movies as they tend to portray unhealthy lifestyles that were not pleasing to the Lord...many of the movie stories were false or had violent or immoral themes.

Gaik Bee (11): Mum, I am not entering a cinema hall any more. God would not be pleased if I do. I feel the actors and actresses are only lying to the audience about what they do.

Mum: Do not be hypnotized by that lady speaker! You are getting extreme in your ideas. Who is staying home with you if you don't follow the rest of the family to the movies? Don't be selfish!

Gaik Bee felt deeply hurt and angry that Mum, also a child of God, could say that about God's messenger to her.

- It's not that I wish to be difficult, Mum. I am just trying to obey God whom you have taught me to trust and honour. I don't think you understand me...you don't even listen to my explanation...I think I am not important to you.

30. I Only Want To Please You, Dad

John changed his school Mathematics grade from E to B. His teacher discovered his misdeed and informed his Dad about it. That evening...

Dad: How could you do this to your parents?
 It's bad enough to know that you failed
 your Maths. Test. But it is worse for me to
 be called in by your teacher and be told that
 my son has cheated! What a great shame
 you have brought to your family. Bring me
 the cane!

John (14): I am sorry, Dad.

John took his punishment and cried himself to sleep that night.

- Dad, please do not hurt me further. I do not wish to bring you shame. I only want to please you. But if I told you the truth, you would still have caned me. I cannot live up to your expectations. I need help with Maths. I feel hurt when you don't understand me...but I feel even more hurt when you do not give me a chance to explain things and just punish me...I feel utterly rejected and lonely!

31. Broken Communication

Lay See (17): Mum, God wants me to study at a Bible collage after my Form 5 exams.

Mum (without any discussion): You don't go till I die!

Lay See swallowed her tears in silence and decided not to mention God's calling to the full-time ministry again. She submitted to her mother's wish and enrolled at a university.

After three years,

Mum: Lay See, you have changed. You used to tell me everything that was in your mind. Now you don't. I don't think you love me as much as before.

Lay See had nothing to say.

- Mum, you don't know how I really care for you. But since you will not allow me to discuss my life with you, but threaten me into obedience instead, I no longer know how to talk with you. I don't desire to hurt you further for I feel so hurt and guilty when you get upset with me.

I wish I can love you as an independent adult, not as a daughter possessed by you. Mum, I hope that one day

you will give me a chance to do just that...we will be so happy then.

32. Trapped

Clara grew up watching Papa abuse Mama. She frequently heard Mama tell her friends...

Mama: I cannot get away from home now because Clara needs me. As soon as she leaves for her studies overseas, I'll be free to visit my other children and see my grandchildren. I will not stay a minute longer with my abusive husband.

Clara failed to gain entrance into an overseas university. The thought of having to wait one whole year before she could re-apply and then wait for the results, shook her tender emotions. Unable to withhold her painful disappointment and fear of the future, she broke down in tears when her married sister visited them.

Sister: Why are you crying like that? You have always been a clever and happy girl.

Clara: I cannot go overseas this year.

Sister: I understand, Darling. Don't cry...try again next year.

Clara kept quiet and decided not to reveal the real reason for her distress i.e. Mama could not leave the house because of her.

- Sister, you are so blessed to be out of the house. It's not that I just want to go overseas...it's because if I don't leave home quickly, Mama will have to stay at home and suffer Papa's emotional abuse longer. I feel so terribly helpless and guilty that I am the cause of her prolonged suffering. But I cannot tell you because you have never asked about my real feelings before!

A Parent's Prayer

Father of all families on earth, please grant me the patient love that comes from you alone...in order that I may sincerely listen to my children and other children in my care. Help me understand them so that I may know that You do too.

Please help me to be sensitive to their silent cries of confusion and their need for tender loving care. I do want to convey Your comfort and wisdom to them.

Grant, my Father, that I may be aware of their changes as they grow up so that I too may grow with them...to the end that Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In Your Son's Name, I pray

Amen

End of Book III

BOOK IV: LISTEN TO THE STORIES. RETOLD TODAY.

Listen to the Stories is a simple collection of four Gospel stories retold and rewritten to fit our 21st Century Malaysian Christian understanding. It is an effort which writer, Dr Lee Bee Teik, hopes will prove to be an encouragement and launch pad for others to also try their hand at Christian drama and creative arts.

This little book of parables attempts to present Christ not as someone remote and far away, but as a friend who is close and familiar. Readers will be pleased to see that His life story is transported into contemporary Malaysian life in a way which reflects His humanity and immediacy. Jesus is someone who loves to mingle with the thronging crowds, becoming one of them in order to show them the way home to the Father.

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Preface

1. Father, Why have you Left Me in the Lurch?
Identifying in Pain
2. The Woman at the Well
Crossing Barriers with God

The Lord said to Ezekiel,

“Son of man, set forth an allegory and tell the house of Israel a parable.”

Ezekiel 17:2

Then Ezekiel said,

“Ah, Sovereign Lord! They are saying of me, ‘Isn’t he just telling parables?’”

Ezekiel 20:49

PREFACE

Many Stories have been told of Jesus of Nazareth. Adults and children all over the world adore and worship Him.

This book is another attempt to portray the multifaceted wonder of the Person, the Son of God and the Son of Man, as He lives among us in history and mingles with the crowd of which we are an integral part.

Further, as Malaysians are now into the creative arts, I hope that these few readings and short plays may act as one more catalyst to motive many local churches or small groups to write and act out their own sermons and lessons against a Malaysian background. I believe that some aspect of the reasonableness, beauty and reality of the true God will be revealed through acting or other creative expressions of words. This is because our Creator did and does still speak to His people through parables, metaphors, stories and even symbolic dreams which people of Biblical times understood easily.

Human nature has not changed that much since then. I also believe that those who seek to serve Him through this path will be surprised by joy!

At this point, I would like thank Khoo Chock Seang and the team of performers at the Sungei Way - Subang

Methodist Church (SSMC) for their encouragement and hard work in presenting the play called “Resurrection in the Valley of Dry Bones” in 1994. That event acted as the stimulus for me to write more stories for the Master.

May you also be blessed by His presence as you read...watch...hear...feel...think and, maybe, perform for Him!

Tell Me the Stories of Jesus

Tell me the stories of Jesus, I love to hear;
Things I would ask Him to tell me if He were near.
Scenes by the wayside, tales of the sea.
Stories of Jesus, tell them to me.

First let me hear how the children stood round His knee,
And I shall fancy His blessing resting on me;
Words full of kindness, deeds full of grace,
All in the lovelight of Jesus' face.

Into the city I'd follow the children's band,
Waving a branch of the palm tree high in my hand.
One of His heralds, yes, I would sing
Loudest Hosannas, JESUS IS KING!"

William H. Parker 1885

Story 1. Father, Why have you Left Me in the Lurch? *Identifying in Pain*

[A Play]

This story may be used as a part of an outreach programme for thinking young people and adults in our fast-paced, impersonal and materialistic society.

Cast:

- Narrator
- Singer
- Jesus
 - an infant
 - a 12-year old adolescent
 - as an adult in His 30's
- Mary
 - as a teenage girl
 - as a woman in her 40's
- Joseph ... a silent actor
- 2 religious teachers ... silent actors
- Bride ... silent actor
- Bridegroom ... silent actor
- 2 ladies ... silent actors

- 3 disciple ... silent actors
- A Servant
- A Guest
- 3 postgraduate students
 - Grace
 - Maniam
 - Ah Kheong

Scenes I and II are on stage.

Scenes A and E belong to a pre-taped play flashed on a white screen facing the audience.

Scene I

The University of Malaya Cafeteria

Maniam appears gloomy when Ah Kheong joins him for a drink at a table.

Ah Kheong: Hi, Maniam, how are you? Haven't seen you for a few days...

Maniam: Well...not too good...

Ah Kheong: What's the problem? Girls after you again?

Maniam: Oh no, that's the last thing I need for a long, long time!

Ah Kheong: What's up then? Maybe I can help you...

Maniam: I haven't told you this...there's this girl I was hoping to marry...but she just told me that she's found someone more suitable for her!

Ah Kheong: I am so sorry to hear that. Time will heal, Maniam. It's better that she says it now than later, isn't it?

Maniam: I know, Kheong...it's just that my mother keeps pestering me to get married so she can die in peace. And each time my relationship with a girl ends, she blames it on me...that depresses me even more...I don't know what to do. I suppose she is all that I have since my father walked out on us...when I was a little boy. Life simply isn't worth living. What good will a Master's degree do for me? All Mum can think of is that it can bring me a higher dowry. I'm not for sale!

Ah Kheong: Don't feel like that, Maniam...you are my good friend. Why don't you follow me to Grace's house for a video show tonight?

Maian: No, No, Kheong...I appreciate you help...but I will only pull your mood down in my present mess.

Ah Kheog: No problem at all, mate...in fact, you will be doing me a favour. Can you pick me up?

Maniam: O.k. Ah Kheong...I don't feel like facing Mum's music at home tonight, anyway.

Scene II

At Grace's Home

The show is about to start. Maniam, Grace and Ah Kheong are facing the audience diagonally. The screen on stage faces the audience and depicts a family room scene.

(Stage lighting: Dim)

Screen: **SCENE A**

Background: A table for changing diapers, a chair and a simple cradle.

Narrator: This is a story of the historical Jesus, commonly known as Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph and Mary. He is the Son of God who became a man like one of us so that He may save us from our sins and eternal death...which is complete separation from the holy and all loving God, the Creator and Father of all mankind.

The story is based on historical events recorded on the first four books of the New Testament, commonly known as the

Gospels or Good News according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But...who is this person, Jesus, really? If He really exists and is relevant to us today, WHY did His Father God forsake Him near His moment of death? Well, maybe the Singer can shine some light on Him for us...

Male Singer: [He is in modern clothing and appears from the right side of the screen, strumming a guitar. Facing the audience and with the spot light on him, he begins to sing near the centre of the stage.]

TWO THOUSAD YEARS

1. It was just two thousand years ago
He walked through Galilee,
The eternal God had stepped below
In human form to be;
Born of a lowly Hebrew maid,
A carpenter He was by trade;
He came down,
Two thousand years ago:

[While singing continues, Joseph and Mary, in Jewish attire, emerges from the left side of the screen, with Joseph carrying infant Jesus. He occasionally tosses Him

up for all to see. Jesus gurgles and cackles – use sound effects. Then Mary takes over and changes baby’s diapers.]

They tell Jesus’ glory,
Who met Him in the way;
And it is no idle story
For He lives in me today:
He gives me peace and purpose true
A power that’s old but ever new;
God came down,
Two thousand years ago!

2. It was just two thousand years ago
He died on Calvary;

[Flash a slide of the cross on Calvary superimposed on the screen]

It was for sin He suffered so,
Though innocent was He.
My sin and guilt lay on His head;
My penalty He bore instead;
He suffered, two thousand years ago.

3. It was just two thousand years ago
An empty tomb was found;

[Flash a slide of an empty tomb superimposed on the screen.]

The stone was rolled away we know,
The powers of hell are bound;
My risen Lord is now on high,
He lives that we may never die,
He triumphed,
Two thousand years ago!

Richard Bewes, Jubilate Hymns. Youth Praise No. 32

[Flash a slide of Jesus...personified and blurred...glorified on the throne in heaven.]

Grace: It's rather boring, Ah Kheong...[Yawns...]

Ah Kheong: Wait, Grace, another scene is coming...

[Lights off actors on stage; lights on screen]

Screen: **SCENE B**

IN A SYNAGOGUE LIBRARY

Background: A shelf with thick books and a table with books opened and strewn on it. A 12-year old boy sits with an open book on his lap and is asking two bespectacled middle-aged men questions. The boy is

deep in thought but obviously thoroughly enjoying himself.

Narrator: Adolescence! What a bewildering time for a young boy like Jesus, Believed to be the eldest son of Joseph and Mary...what with hormonal changes, the start of acne problems and an uneasy feeling whenever His friend's sister pops into His house. He wishes to become more independent of His parents, and yet He knows that He is still very much dependent on them...for love and daily necessities.

But He may be comforted to know that boys and girls at this stage of growth, are like newly formed butterflies trying to free themselves from the webs that seem to entangle them of their old cocoons of late childhood...

I wonder how Jesus still finds time and concentration to read the Scriptures; what with His younger siblings all around Him, shooting at each other like our Sunday School boys and girls, calling out to Him to join in the games or to act as peacemakers! Yet, nothing can stop Him from learning about the true God who is so real to Him...In fact, He thrives on

knowing Him as His Father, to the exasperation of parents at times!

[The library door opens...in rush Mary with Joseph panting and following behind. When they see Jesus in a serious discussion with older men, they stop near the door, embarrassed yet relieved...and signaled Jesus to go to them...]

Mary: My son, my son, how long have you been here?? Our religious celebrations temple ended hours ago! Why are you still talking to the Sabbath day teachers? Your father and I have been searching for you like mad...in and out of the traffic jams, up and down from Auntie Ai Li's house, trying to trace Uncle Richard's Pajero and Uncle Patrick's car for you....Don't you do this to us again, understand?

Jesus: O Mu-um, why are you so worked up? Don't you know that I must be in My Father's house?

[Aside, in a whisper to Mary] Some of these teachers do not really know who God is! Come on. Let's go home...I am hungry! I promise not to do this again, Mum!

[Lights off he screen; spotlight on the actors on stage.]

Grace: Ha, Ha, Ha! Jesus certainly sounds like my kid brother Jason.

Ah Kheong: Grace...I'm sure you ladies will like the next scene. It's about a wedding.

Maniam: Oh no! I am getting out of here...
[Posturing to leave his seat]

Ah Kheong pulls him back while someone shouts in the background...

SHHHH...we want to listen.

Screen: **SCENE C**

A WEDDING AT CANA

Background: Dark

Narrator: About 18 years have flown by. Jesus is now 30 years old. He has just been baptized by His cousin John, who was born to Uncle Zechariah and Aunt Elizabeth a few months before His own birth to Mary.

Mary's family had swum sadly since Joseph died several years ago, leaving Mary to care for

their small sons and daughters. Thankfully, Jesus was already in His early teens then. He bore the tension of having to stay home to be the breadwinner for His earthly family while waiting to fulfill the personal vocation that He believed was from God His heavenly Father. Jesus' filial piety resembled that of a South-East Asian culture. Such a heavy responsibility, placed on the shoulders of the eldest son in a Middle-Eastern family, only served to discipline and mould Him into the mature young man that He now is.

Repeatedly, matchmakers appealed to Mary to look for a wife for Him. But Mary, remembering what the angel had told her concerning God's purpose for Jesus, wisely refrained from pressurizing Him either way. Only the holy and Almighty God could decide on the course of Jesus' life. So, for now, Mary is really glad that Jesus is with her at a wedding in Cana...even though He had His newly found disciples tagging along...

[Lights switched on screen immediately to a happy wedding celebration scene...with music from stringed instruments filling the air.

The newly-weds sit on the right of the screen with a group of young men, including Jesus and Singer, chatting and eating. Occasionally they laugh at the top of their voices! A large table, with scrumptious food in costly crockery, separate the newly married couple and the young men. A servant serves the guests.

A curtain separates them from those on the left who are in a smaller room with large water pots on the floor. Colourfully dressed women, including Mary, admired one another while adjusting their hairdos.]

Suddenly panic hits the smaller room when a servant rushes in to report:

Servant: Ladies, ladies, what should I do? My Master mustn't know...we have run out of wine for the guests...only water left...I miscalculated the amount we would need...also, we did not expect Jesus to bring His thirsty disciples!

Mary: Hush, my brother...I know what to do...

[Mary stands at the slightly drawn curtains to try to attract Jesus' attention...and then beckons Him to enter the smaller ladies' room.]

Jesus: [Seeing His mother, says to His friends...] Excuse Me a moment...

[He walks into the smaller room] What is it, Mum?

Mary: Jesus, you have to help the host...we have run out of wine...

Jesus: Not here, Mum...I have performed miracles only at home. It is not time for Me to go public yet.

Narrator: [While Mary turns and rings her hand...]

But Mary, having seen Jesus growing up for thirty years, knows that it is time for Him to do His Father's work in public...what is there to wait? He has been baptized!

Mary: [To the servant...] Do whatever He tells you...[and exits through the left.]

Jesus: [Waits for Mary to leave...and mumbles to Himself] She is right... [Turns and approaches the servant...] Fill the jars with water...then ladle out the drinks and serve them to the guests...hurry or they may suspect something is wrong!

[the servant fills up the jars as fast as possible...to the delight of the guests! One of them, half-drunk, shouts...]

A Guest: Yummm...this is sweet...how come you keep the bet wine till the end??? [To the bridegroom who stares in surprise...] I'm glad

to be here tonight...and late too. Come, let's
have a song with the wine!!

Singer: [Jumps into the centre of the stage and
serenades]

A Wedding Prayer

In this place, O Lord, our praises we bring;
With hearts of thankfulness and joyful adoration.
We thank You for the hearts You have joined,
We thank You for the lives You have united as one.
As they start their lives together...
As they put their hands in Your hand.

Chorus:

We pray for blessings from above to fill their lives;
We pray for the love of the Father
To flow through their hearts.
We pray for the joy of the Spirit, peace of the Son.
And in Your presence each day they'll find
New strength to see them through.

In this place, O Lord, we worship we bring
To You our Lord and King and Rock of our salvation.
To You and only You will we sing,
For You alone are worthy of all praises and song;

You're the One who made this union,
You're the source of love eternal.

c. 1992 Esther B A Soon

[Lights off screen, spotlight on actors on stage]

Maniam: Well...in a way, my Mum will be able to
identify with your God better.

Ah Kheong: How?

Maniam: She is always dreaming of a grand
wedding banquet for me.

Background: Shhhhhh...shame on you big fellows!

SCENE D

THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE

Stage: Dark

Screen: A shaded garden

Silence for 30 seconds

Narrator: [Slowly and deliberately]

After 3 short years of a public ministry of preaching, teaching and healing, Jesus, the Son of God and Son of man, fast approaches the very purpose for which He was sent by His Father in heaven to fulfill...Having lived as a son of Joseph and Mary, as a brother to their children, as a neighbor to many others and as a serious threat to the religious leaders, He has felt the burden of our broken sin-sick world more than any other person has or ever will.

However, His last and final task is not finished yet...it all depends on His next action in the next few hours...will He be able to go on to love His Father and His people till the end...or will He retreat because of fear or disgust as He experiences intense suffering that threatens to overcome Him...as wave after wave of the darkness of sinful human hatred, individualism, selfishness, self-ambition and ungodly pride engulf Him. These pains come not only from His enemies, but also from His beloved disciples who fall asleep when He needs their support and prayers most...

[A dim light dawns on the figures of three sleeping disciples on the far left...]

[Lights on Jesus kneeling by a rock, silhouetted in the centre near the front of the stage.]

Jesus: [Speaking with intense emotion from a very heavy heart...]

My Papa, I know that You love Me...and will always do. When we agreed on this plan for Me to die on the cross for these people whom You and I love so much...to die for them so that they might be forgiven of their sins against us and be reconciled with us...I did not realise that it would be so painful...but now I know...

It is so hard to love those who mistreat Me , My Papa...they accuse Me without any cause...even my brothers, sons of Joseph and Mary, think that I perform miracles to show off...and challenge Me to go to Jerusalem at such a time as this...when they know the presence of the religious leaders, who hate Your laws, are looking out for Me so that they can kill Me!

Papa, do I have to bear all their sins in My body, My soul and My spirit? Is it not enough that I have borne the brunt of the sin of humanity already while I live as Man?

Papa, do I have to be hung as a common criminal on a rugged Roman cross while they ridicule, slap, spit on Me and taunt Me? All I have done is to love them, even when they do wrong?

O My Papa, WHY do they have to tell lies about Me, distrust Me, try to trap Me with My own words...and...worst of all...twist Your word to Your people, enticing them to believe in them instead of You!!

[Pause]

Yet, My Papa, You know that the worst is yet to come...I cannot bare to be separated from You...I have never been left alone by You before...Yet, You cannot behold the evil of the sin of the world to be laid on Me...In a way, I am glad that My earthly foster father is not here to see Me like this...but Mary...what about Mary who loves Me so much, how will she feel? Papa, please send someone to take care of her after I die...

[Jesus weeps in agony...Pause]

Papa, if it is possible for Your mission to save the world to be fulfilled without My dying on the cross...please take the cross away from

Me...nevertheless...Not My will BUT YOURS BE
DONE!!!

[At once, sound effect of thunder of doom and
judgement looms in the background]

[Pause]

Jesus continues: **FATHER, FATHER...WHY HAVE YOU
FORSAKEN ME?!!**

Why have You left Me in the lurch??

[Lights off screen; spotlight on actors on stage]

[Suddenly Maniam becomes still and appears dazed...He
begins to sob uncontrollably...

Ah Kheong: Why, Maniam, why are you crying?

Grace: It's just a show...

Maniam: [Slowly and deliberately] When Jesus cried
'Father, Father...', I suddenly recall the
scene when my father walked out on Mum
and me...I had better not say anything
more...

Ah Kheong: I understand...Come on, let's go out for
some fresh air...

The three friends get up to leave and stop momentarily to chat.

Maniam: Kheong, I really appreciate your kindness in wanting me to know your God...I think I need to find out why that cry on stage struck such a sensitive cord in me. I think I need to find out for myself why I suddenly feel as if this Jesus understands my pains...But I want to assure you that the story of Jesus has not ended...His Father could have left Him for a different reason...

Ah Kheong: Yes, Maniam, for a very different reason indeed. When you're ready, just let me know and I'll be glad to share the good news with you.

Maniam: [[Grabbing his friend's shoulders and leaving together...]] Thanks, Kheong, I will...

Grace: I think I'd like to know too...count me in!

Both guys: Bye, Grace...thanks for the evening...

Grace: Bye, guys...see you in college!

[Lights off stage]

THE END

Exercise

1. Who do you most identify with in the play? Ah Kheong, the sincere believer and a friend in need, Maniam the seeker or Grace the religiously insensitive?
2. Read Mathew 26:36-46
 - a. Do any of the scenes or speeches strike a cord in you? If so, why?
 - b. Picture the geographical positions of three groups of people on your mind or draw a representation of them on paper:
 - i. The eight disciples
 - ii. Peter, James and John
 - iii. Jesus in His Father's presence
 - c. Imagine the words that Jesus spoke to the first two groups and those He spoke to the Father.
 - d. Follow through to find out what the disciples did after receiving those instructions.

- e. Feel with Jesus in His response to the disciples' attitude.
 - f. Feel with Him through His three prayers to the Father. Identify any change in His first two prayers that led Him to repeat the second prayer. Ask yourself why the change happened.
3. Who do you identify with the most: the eight disciples, the other three or Jesus? Why?
 4. In what ways can you identify with Jesus in His emotions, thoughts and prayers while in the Garden of Gethsemane (remembering that He was a human being like us that He faced the cross).
 5. Could Jesus' prayer be your prayer in your present situation?

Story 2. The Woman at the Well

Crossing Barriers with God

[Readings]

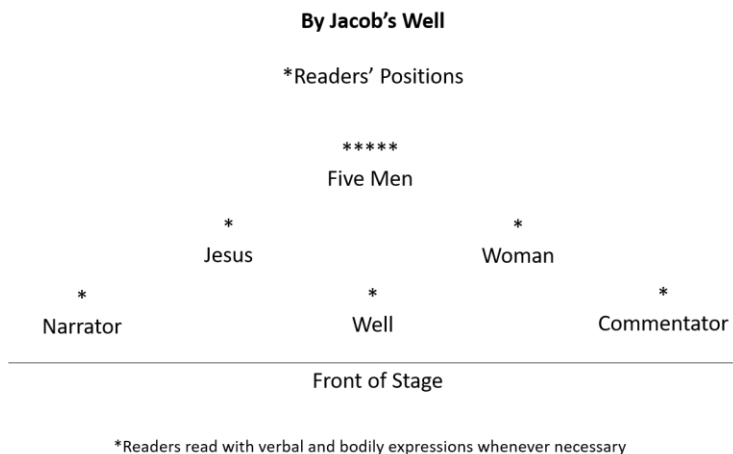
Suggestion: The dialogue may be used as part of a teaching seminar to help participants identify with the characters of the Bible.

Cast:

- Narrator
- Jesus in Jewish attire
- The Samaritan in Jewish attire
- Commentator
- Five men from the town of Sychar

Female soloists: [Soprano singers]

Curtains Up:



THE STORY BEGINS

[Narrator and Commentator take their place on stage]

Narrator: Let us consider the background of the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met, as recorded in John 4:1-42.

The Samaritans were a mixed race descended partly from the ten tribes of Israel and partly from the non-Jewish immigrants, the Assyrians. They inhabited the central Palestine of Bible times, between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north.

Their faith and daily living were based on the first five books of the Old Testament alone. They rejected the rest of the other Jewish books. Due to this partial understanding of God's ways with His people they looked forward' with a great deal of speculation, as to who the prophet mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:18 could be.

Conflict points, therefore, arose in the Samaritan woman's mind when she talked with Jesus, a Jew through Joseph's line:

Firstly, the Rabbis or Jewish teachers would not hold a conversation with women who were considered as second-class citizens.

Secondly, Jews, especially men, were scrupulous about contracting defilement or impurity from others, especially if the "others" were not of pure Jewish blood. Impure objects used for food or drink needed to be purified before they could use them. But Jesus asked the woman at the well for a drink from her vessel, presumably.

Thirdly, whereas Jews regarded the Jerusalem temple as the Temple of God, the Samaritans regarded Mount Gerizim, in Samaria, as the place of worship. Gerizim was part of a scene of great solemnity when Israel finally

entered Canaan. On Mount Gerizim the 12 tribes were blessed (Deuteronomy 11:29, 27:12).

Jesus, however, showed her and His disciples, that everyone needed His sacrifice for salvation by expressly including the Samaritans with Gentiles (including us) and Jews, in His commission to preach the Gospel (Acts 1:18).

The Samaritan women's beliefs, influenced by her religious-cultural-racial background, were:

- God was particular about where His people should worship Him. He was sort of a perfectionist, fussy about outward details.
- She was of less value to God than the Jewish men both because she was not of pure Jewish blood, and also because she was a woman.
- She should be ashamed of being herself, even among her kinsfolk, because of her having been divorced 5 times already, and was now living with another man.
- Morally, her kinsfolk were better than she was. She could have felt that they had true friends while she was lonely; they were unfair to her for not listening to her of the story behind all those 5 divorces, and then blaming her for not being able to be faithful in her relationships. She most likely hated men.

[The Narrator tells the story through the reading of parts of John Chapter 4, taken from the NIV of the Bible, while the Commentator gives a running commentary on the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman.]

Narrator: One day, Jesus had to go through Samaria to get to Galilee. Soon He came to a Samaritan town called Sychar. It was near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son, Joseph. It was about noon when Jesus, tired out by the journey from Judea and on the way to Galilee, sat by Jacob's well.

["Jesus" takes his position on stage]

Narrator: It was about noon. Jesus' disciples had gone into town to buy food, when a Samaritan woman came to draw water...

[The Samaritan woman takes her position on stage]

Commentator: It was hot and quiet by the well. Why did she choose such a time to draw water? Didn't she like to meet the other women from town? Was it her normal routine?

Narrator: Jesus said to her...

Jesus: Could you give Me a drink?

Commentator: Doesn't sound unusual unless we understand her background.

Narrator: The Samaritan woman said to Him...

Woman: You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?

Commentator: She did not hesitate to verbalise her low self-esteem. It was already part of to view herself in those terms. Jesus seemed to be breaking all religious-cultural-racial norms! He had better watch out...

Narrator: Jesus answered her...

Jesus: If you know the gift of God and who it is who asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water!

Commentator: Jesus was quick to catch the opportunity to lift the conversation to a higher plane by hinting at His identity...and linking it to living water.

Narrator: The woman said...

Woman: Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living

water? Are you great than our Father Jacob who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?

Commentator: At first playfully suggesting that Jesus was talking rubbish, she then tried to boost her self-esteem by identifying herself as a descendant of Jacob, third in line from Abraham. She thus had the guts to challenge Jesus about His identity.

Narrator: Jesus answered...

Jesus: Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

Commentator: Jesus, sensing that her self-defence mechanism was on the alert, refused to be dragged into a fruitless argument as to whether Jews or Samaritans were more favoured by God. Instead, He brought her back to the theme of living water...while at the same time using her style of jestful language...gushing up to eternal life!

(Don't you think that His hand would be gesturing in demonstration of that fountain of living water as well!)

Narrator: The woman said to Him...

Woman: Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water!

Commentator: Flowing along in a relaxed mood, she cynically asked for that living water that will never run out...half-hoping that it could be real...so that she does not need to tire herself by walking to draw and carry water in the hot sunshine. She has no one to chat with or help her most of the time.

Narrator: Jesus tells her...

Jesus: Go, call your husband and come back...

Commentator: Jesus matter-of-factly tells her to call her husband to help if she is so tired of the chore.

Narrator: The woman replied...

Woman: I have no husband!

Commentator: She snapped back immediately...the boil in her life has been touched...how could he mention the word "husband"! Suddenly, her inner feelings of anger and hatred are aroused...and her true bitter self surfaced!

Narrator: Jesus then confirms that what she said is true and tells her why.

Jesus: You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is...you have had 5 husbands...and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.

Narrator: The woman said...

Woman: Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the places where we must worship is in Jerusalem.

Narrator: Jesus declared...

Jesus: Believe Me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You

Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know...for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit and His worshippers must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Commentator: Feeling trapped and sensing that Jesus is some sort of prophet, the woman goes off at a tangent, posing a question about the place of worship. Does she talk about something else to avoid facing her real need or is she now genuinely interested in spiritual things?

But Jesus, seizing the golden opportunity, immediately used her point of contention and turned it into a clarification of who the Father really is...He is Spirit and those who desire to worship Him must worship Him in spirit (sincerely) and in truth (according to His revelation of Himself).

Narrator: Then the woman, shrugging her shoulders, says...

Woman: I know that Messiah, called Christ, is coming...

Commentator: Again, she tried hard to postpone having to face the truth about God's holiness...in case He punishes her for her sins...if she has not received mercy from her own people, how could she receive mercy from God? As yet, her idea of God was still distorted, out of shape... So, she dismissed the strange prophet by appealing to the higher authority who hasn't come (so she thinks)...the Messiah!

Narrator: Then Jesus declared...

Jesus: [Slowly] I who speak to you am He!

Commentator: [Excitedly] Completely beyond her expectations, this stranger says to her in the gentlest and most gracious manner, with eyes expressing total acceptance and forgiveness (not like those who usually accused her)...“I am He...I am the Messiah...and I have forgiven you all your sins and will heal you of your wounds so that you can live the life God gives to you all over again...God's way...not Jacob's

way or Jerusalem's way or your way...but the true God's way!"

Narrator: [As if an anti-climax...] Then the disciples return...but the Samaritan woman is so stunned by Jesus' revelation that she forgets about her water jug!

John records that she goes back...not runs back!

Most certainly. She is thinking hard as she takes her time to walk back to her old friend, her old neighbours and her old lifestyle...what should she do...?

The real Messiah comes as a Man to her...so humble, so pure...and yet He needed her to give Him a drink...He does not punish her, He does not look down on her, does not take advantage of her...but accepts her as a woman with the promise of giving her life eternal! This reasoning could have led to her telling her people about what has just happened...as fast as she can...

Woman: If I tell the later, they won't believe me...they seldom do...and it may be near impossible to live a new life here...the place I love...my home. But if I tell now, they can see and hear Him for themselves. It will be good for them to hear Him for themselves...it will be good for them if they know the Messiah as I have known Him.

Narrator: With that, she shouts to the townsfolk...

Woman: [Turning to the 5 men behind her, she loudly calls out...] Come and meet a man who tells me everything I have ever done...

[Then, softly to herself while looking at the audience...] Who cares what they think now, He as forgiven me!

[Loudly] He cannot be the Messiah, can He?

Narrator: [Excitedly] Oh, isn't their curiosity instantly aroused! "Everything she's ever done? What is it that we have not heard before? Let's go and hear for ourselves!"

So they actually leave the city to look for Jesus!

Commentator: So different from our evangelistic campaigns!

Narrator: [At a normal pace...] Meanwhile, Jesus is talking to His disciples about doing His Father's will, that it is food to Him...and about harvest...but they do not understand what He is talking about...till later...

Further, John tells us that the people at first believes that Jesus is the Messiah because of the woman's testimony... fantastic, we may say...But after 3 days with Jesus in their own town, her fellow Samaritans tells her emphatically,

Five Men: We no longer believe that He is the Messiah because of what you tell us...but because of what He has told us!

Commentator: And one can only imagine what Jesus tells them about themselves!

Five Men: He is really The SAVIOUR of the world!!

Commentator: This was even more fantastic for the woman by the well... for one who is so grateful to her Saviour for having completely forgiven her for all her sins and accepted her into His Father's house!

[Stage darkens as spotlight shines on singers of duet.]

Lord, You Have Come To The Lakeshore

Lord, You have come to the lakeshore
looking neither for wealthy nor wise ones,
You only asked me to follow humbly.

Chorus:

O Lord, with Your eyes You have searched me,
and while smiling have spoken my name;
Now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me;
by Your side I will seek other seas.

You know so well my possessions;
my boat carries no gold and no weapons;
You will find there my nets and labour.

You need my hands, full of caring
through my labours to give others rest,
And constant love that keeps on loving.

Uniting Methodist Hymnal 344
Words by Cesareo Gabarain 1987

Curtains Down

The End

[The Preacher for the day may take over]

Exercise

1. Think about lessons gleaned from the readings:

a. The significance of Jacob's well:

Jacob represents the old and partial understanding of who God is...He is very strict...His people are to obey His laws 100% or they cannot partake of His promises.

b. Well water represent stagnant water even though it comes from the underground streams or reserve. It is limited in its ability to keep supplying us with a drink in order that we may continue to live.

In contrast:

Jesus represents the new and complete understanding of who God is. The Almighty and Holy God knows that His people have spoilt their own lives by repeatedly sinning against Him. They will never be able to please Him 100% again if left on their own.

Yet, He loves them so much that He sends His only begotten Son to become man in order to die on their behalf. In this way, He could save them from the punishment for sin and bring them home to the Father

forever. Jesus' resurrection ensures that they will be redeemed.

It is this intimate and continuous knowledge of God as our Father through His Saviour Son that constitutes the living water that Jesus talks about to the Samaritan woman. He is the God of justice and yet of everlasting and unconditional love because He has paid the price for us. Such is the real character of God that Jesus shows to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well over 2,000 years ago.

2. The Samaritan woman's perception of God changed after she received Jesus as Saviour. Her renewed mind can now see God as He is. From viewing Him as distant and perfectionist, He is now holy and pure, truthful and forgiving as well as unassuming and personal. Consequently, she is no longer ashamed, trapped in abuse and guilt, living in loneliness.

On recovery, she is able to serve God with her gift of extroversion in sharing the Gospel of Jesus salvation. People respond and rejoice with her in their new found Friend, Jesus. From being rejected and rejecting of her neighbours, she now wants them to enjoy Jesus' friendship too.

3. As God's child, am I using my God-given gifts, natural and spiritual, to enhance His kingdom work? Am I helping those under my influence to be attracted to Him and not me?

End of Book IV

BOOK V: LOOKING AT CREATION. GOD'S OTHER BOOK.

God's Other Book

It is only when we consent to be still and silent before the Lord that we can hear His voice assuring us of His love for us. One of the ways in which God speaks to us is through the beauty of His creation.

The author of *Looking at Creation*, Dr Lee Bee Teik, reminisces about a silent retreat she experiences with a group of tired Christians. She shares with her readers how the grace and healing love of God can be shown to His children through an appreciation of nature.

The book reminds us of the bountiful love of God who has given us a wonderful heritage to enjoy.

“The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the works of His hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.

Their voice goes out into all the earth’
Their words to the end of the world...”

Psalm 19:1-4

“...since what maybe known about God is plain to them.
For since the creation of the world,
God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and
diverse nature – have been clearly seen.
Being understood from what has been made,
so that men are without excuse.”

Romans 1:19-20

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INTRODUCTION

In the month of November in 1994, an opportunity came for me to hear Him in quietness for about five days at a retreat centre in Port Dickson, Malaysia, together with twelve others from various churches. The tenderness of His voice and the warmth of His compassion thus received through His creation around us were too precious to keep to ourselves. Hence, with permission from those whose symbols I use, I shall attempt to share with you the pains and the joys of listening to Him anew for a prolonged period, even if it is only now and again. This is written in the hope that the readers will be rejuvenated by some rewatering of their roots in order that some drooping branches may be lifted up once more in order to behold the face of our God and to reflect His presence in nature!

I hope that you will be richly blessed as you look at creation and hear His whispers in your ears...hush...listen...

In the Garden...

I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.

***Refrain**

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known

He speaks, and the sound of His voice is so sweet
The birds hush their singing,
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.*

I'd stay in the garden with Him
Though the night around me be falling,
But bids me go; thru the voice of woe
His voice to me is calling.*

United Methodist Hymnal No.314

C. Austin Miles (1913)

1. Creation - God's Other Book

In the process of modern development, men, women and children often lose sight of the reality that God is in charge of the whole universe. We take things into our own hands as we begin to feel, think and gradually believe that we can achieve what we want by our own efforts. God is becoming irrelevant. Maybe there is a place for us to stop...ponder...and look at our natural surroundings...be it a flower by the roadside or the cascading showers of Malaysia's gorgeous waterfalls, and wonder whether man...or...God...is really in charge.

David asserted:

*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made,
their starry host by the breath of His mouth.
He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
He puts the deep into storehouses.
Let all the earth fear the Lord;
let all the people of the earth revere Him.
For He spoke, and it came to be;
He commanded, and it stood firm."*

Psalm 33:6

A psalmist wrote:

*In the beginning You laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of Your hands.*

Psalm 102:25

Reflection:

- If you were imprisoned in a cell which had only one small window, what would the view of the sky, moon, birds and raindrops mean to you?
- Imagine that you had to live in the concrete jungle of Kuala Lumpur for one month. As you step out of your apartment building, the lush natural greenery of a garden greets your eyes; the freshness of the morning air fills your lungs. What would you say to God?

Isaiah wrote:

"To whom will you compare Me?

Or who is My equal?' says the Holy One.

Lift your eyes and look to the heavens:

Who created all these?

He who brings out the starry host one by one,

and calls them each by name.

*Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of
them is missing.*

*Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from the Lord;
my cause is disregarded by my God'?
Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of
the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no
one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint."*

Isaiah 40:25-31

*"The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of
God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to
frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the
One who subjected it in the hope that the creation itself
will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought
into the glorious freedom of the children of God."*

Romans 8:19-21

Reflection:

- When was the last time you told God that your time, your resources, your family and your life are all in His hands?
- When was the last time you knew and felt that He is your Boss...wiser than you are...more able than you are...and yet also your gracious and all powerful Father and Friend who longs to let you know that He accepts you unconditionally and has the best of your wellbeing in His mind and heart?

2. Talking to Spider Orchids, Siput and Dogs

During some Quiet Retreats the retreatants are not supposed to talk to anyone except God and the retreat leader, the latter for a pre fixed period of time each day.

By the end of the second day of our Retreat, I was looking forward to communicating with someone freely. Before I knew what was happening, I was talking to the caretaker's dog with eye to eye contact, greeting the spider orchids in the lovely garden with a "Hi!" and conducting an interesting monologue with the thousands of "siput" by the seashore! I felt accepted by my fellow earthly creatures. I was thrilled that talking to them could

be so natural and meaningful. My loneliness instantaneously disappeared.

O Creator, Saviour, King of kings, when will Eden be again, when man and animals live in harmony?

"Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam...

Balaam answered the donkey....

The donkey said to Balaam..."

Numbers 22:28-30

I don't think the Lord minded...because He talked to the fig tree too...

"Early in the morning, as He was on His way back to the city, He was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, He went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then He said to it,

'May you never bear fruit again!' Immediately the tree withered."

Matthew 21:18-19

...They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden..."

Ezekiel 36:33-38

Reflection:

- If you had to choose not to talk to anyone for the next 24 hours (in agreement with them) except to God, how would you feel?
- If you were to talk to God, what would you say to Him? What would He possibly say to you?
- How would your answers above help you to better understand your relationship with Him?

3. He Takes the Trouble

After crossing Batu 2 Jalan Pantai, I began to stroll along the beach in mid morning. Gradually, I became aware that I was standing under a shady old tree by the sea side. As I gazed in the direction of the horizon, memories of the time when I last stood under the same tree began to flood my mind...

It was April 1983....I was carrying my first child in the first trimester. Weakened by nausea and tiredness, I had found relief in watching the waves ebb and flow...ebb and flow. I felt that the water before me symbolised the Spirit of God washing away all the tensions of church and

family life out of my being so that I could hear Him again and talk to Him once more. Previously apprehensive at the sight of any ocean, I was no longer scared of its immensity then. Instead, I stood soaking in the sight of the moving waters and feeding on the sound of swashing waves...That was the first time God showed me that a simple acknowledgment of His presence in nature could heal my emotions and my mind, could bring hope, trust, and a quiet rest in Him. It was a mystery to me then and often still is. But since then, I have learnt to seize any opportunity to feel His presence in a natural environment again.

"Father, the son You gave us is eleven years old now; thank You for taking the trouble to bring me back here after such a long time. When many other trees have been cut for development, thanks for keeping this tree to remind me of Your unchanging love that remains constant over the years!"

"...Remain in Me, and I will remain in you..."

John 15:4

*"...the Lord is good and His love endures forever;
His faithfulness continues through all generations."*

Psalms 100:5

"Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God,

how pleasant and fitting to praise Him!...

He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds...

He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name.

Great is our Lord and mighty in power; His understanding has no limit...

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor His delight in the legs of a man;

the Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their faith in His unfailing love."

Psalm 147:1-5,10-11

Reflection:

- Recall a time when you felt trapped by the circumstances of daily life. How did God comfort and free you?
- If He did, give thanks. If relief did not come, how would you like Him to help you? Tell Him about your heart's desire right now.

4. Watching Waves

Water and the blood cleanse us of our sins and carry the dirt of our conscience far away;

Water from springs quenches our souls that thirst for everlasting attention and love.

Water from the sea contains salt that heals our wounds;

Water cools our tempers and refreshes our minds for work anew.

"...one Lord, one faith, one baptism..."

Ephesians 4:5

"...and this water symbolises baptism that now saves you also not the removal of dirt from your body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ....."

1 Peter 3:22

Jesus said,

"You are the salt of the earth..."

Matthew 5:13

Jesus once answered,

"Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 4:13-14

Reflection:

- What did water baptism mean to Jesus the Son of Man?
- What does it mean to you?
- Are you aware that God's spirit is like spring water welling up in you? What difference would such awareness make in your daily life?

5. Bouganvillea Christians

One of the retreat leaders had never seen bouganvillea flowers till her trip to Malaysia. During corporate worship one morning, she commented:

"As I watched all of you these few days, I thank God that your abundance of talents and sincerity spreads over a wide range of life stages, personalities and vocations.

You have a simple trust and love that bubbles over like the lush beauty and firmness of the bouganvillea petals blooming in the garden outside!"

How energising were her words; how encouraging it was for us to be likened to the glory of fresh, bold coloured and yet soft and gentle Malaysian bouganvillea petals; how therapeutic were her creative observations to a bunch of overworked, moody and middle aged Christian workers suffering from a dose of low self esteem!

*"The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the Lord,
the splendour of our God."*

Isaiah 35:1-2

"I will be like the dew to Israel [symbolic of those redeemed by grace]; he will blossom like a lily..."

Hosea 14:5

Reflection:

- Do you sometimes wonder what God really thinks of you?
- Are you often bothered by what you think others think of you?
- Do you wonder whether God's or others' opinions mean more to you? How would your answers affect the way you think, feel and live from today?

6. Music Expresses the Presence of God

God Created music...and He loves it!

During meal and community times, our retreat leaders played some quiet meditative music for us. As I listened one afternoon, my mind recalled how the Lord once spoke to me and how I responded in prayer...

One evening, I felt dry and couldn't sit to write until my children and I watched a show about the life of Johann Strauss Senior and Junior. There was a part in a cathedral when a professor of music explained to Shani J.S. Junior the purpose of good music.

He said that God was invisible; but musicians like Beethoven and Bach saw God everyday and so could not help expressing the reality of God through their musical compositions. Each piece of musical composition had a title. Each told a story of God's love as themes emerged in the minds of the composer. As I sat there watching and listening, I felt my writer's block gradually melting away. Words flowed again, inspiration was back...and I could write freely once more...

"Almighty Creator, You have so wonderfully made us to be creative as well so that Your mind could be conveyed to others as we express Your creativity to one another...

The artist draws to express Your creative powers, the sculptor carves and moulds in imitation of the intricate movements of Your fingers, and the musician composes and plays to convey his perception of Your freedom, sorrows and joys!

Father, help us to express our praises and prayers to You through our giftedness, thus displaying some of the glories of the living God! O Lord, let the music in nature...music from birds, winds, rain, thunder, animals and peoples of all races and nations...declare Your utter beauty, magnificence, power, authority and presence in our midst! May music move us to put Your love in action in our society! Music...what a glorious creation, what a

mighty redemption! Thank You for this gentle reminder of Your presence with us each day."

*"It is good to praise the Lord and make music to Your name, O Most High,
to proclaim Your love in the morning and Your faithfulness at night,
to the music of the ten stringed lyre and the melody of the harp.
For You make me glad by Your deeds, O Lord;
I sing for joy at the works of Your hands.
How great are Your works, O Lord, how profound Your thoughts!"*

Psalm 92:1-5

*"...be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
Sing and make music in Your heart to the Lord..."*

Ephesians 5:18-19

Reflection:

- Have you ever been encouraged through a song or hymn before?
- Do you sing to God when you cannot pray with mere words, even if the song is a "secular" one?

- Why not try listening to peaceful music at the start of your time alone with God?

7. Hear the Shepherd in the Context of the Flock

When a retreat leader mentioned that sheep are nurtured in a flock by their shepherd, my mind flicked back to one occasion in 1992 when my family had the opportunity to watch a flock of sheep in their pen.

That particular flock was standing still in the middle of their pen with what seemed like apprehension to me as the shepherd had left his sheep dog there to ensure that they remained in that position. However, as soon as they were allowed to move, it needed just one of them to start off and all the others then had the courage to run in the same direction...Those American sheep had a type of "flock mentality" similar to the "herd mentality" of our Malaysian cows, I suppose.

No wonder, then, that when our Lord Jesus mentions that His sheep recognise His voice and follow Him, He uses the plural concept of sheep. I believe He wants us to feel that we belong to Him together and submit to Him together, as He supervises us minute by minute, day by day. Nevertheless, when one sheep gets lost, He is ever

ready to look for it, find it and bring it back to the flock again, never to be left on its own again. He says,

"I am the good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd."

John 10:14-16

Reflection:

- Is the saying "No man is an island" true in your life?
- How is individualism discouraged in the Kingdom of God?
- How may we hear our Good Shepherd's voice and follow Him together within a small group or local church context?

8. If I Were a Hibiscus

If I were a hibiscus, how would I feel...face to face with God? Would I thank Him for my five lovely petals and numerous rich yellow pollens or would I ask Him for half a petal and one pollen more?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the 'hibiscus flowers along the fence' grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even 'Miss Universe' in all her splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the bushes on the hedges, which is here today and tomorrow fades, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry..."

Adapted from Matthew 6:28-30

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learnt the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."

Philippians 4:12-13

Reflection:

- Are you satisfied with being who you are at home, in your church and in the world?

- How much of your resources are spent in longing for what is not yours in appearance, status, pleasure or material possession?

9. Palm Leaves

An elderly man felt much older and of lesser usefulness to God than the rest of us in the group.

"Perhaps," he thought, "I need to wind down my ministry now...I can't catch up with those younger ones...I am prepared to meet Him..."

Then, through a window of the dining room, he saw a palm tree...and God spoke to him....

A.

"Some leaves are fresh and young, in the process of uncurling themselves to face the sunshine.....

B.

Others in the middle are uncurled and firm, swaying gently in the breeze...

C.

Yet others are drooping and weaker, but still graceful to behold!

You know, My son, without these three stages of growth of its leaves, there would be no palm tree...every stage of leaves is needed in its created beauty"

That morning, the aging pastor felt loved and needed by God and His people again...and he returned to strengthen the others.

*"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;
planted in the house of the Lord,
they will flourish in the courts of our God."*

Psalm 92:12-13

Reflection:

- Where are you in the natural life cycle?
- What could God be saying to you at this stage of your life?

10. Keep Your Roots Deep

Keep your roots down...and deep into the intimacy of God.

There the roots find water the Spirit of the living God and food the Son of God.

Both water and food are found where the tree is planted.

Therefore, Blossom where you are!

"I will be like the dew to Israel;

he will blossom like a lily.

Like a cedar of Lebanon

he will send down his roots;

his young shoots will grow.

His splendour will be like an olive tree,

his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon....

I am like a green pine tree;

your fruitfulness comes from Me."

Hosea 14:5-8

"...And I pray that you, being rooted and established in

love, may have power together with all the saints,

to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the

love of Christ,

and to know this love that surpasses knowledge...

that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Ephesians 3:17-19

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches.

I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

Revelations 22:16

Jesus declared:

"Believe Me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. God is spirit..."

John 4:21-24

Reflection:

- What has been your life's nourishment in the last 5 years?
- What sort of fruits are you producing?

11. To Shine but Not to Burn

During one community time, candles were lit to indicate the presence of Christ our Lord. As I stared into the flickering flames, I wondered how many of us yearned for light to shine into our lives so that we might glow with Him and for Him...and yet how many of us would naturally recoil from the light lit, also by Him, to be the fire of discipline.

"Do not put out the Spirit's fire;"

1 Thessalonians 5:19

*"This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you:
God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all."*

1 John 1:5

NOT

*"...My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son...
No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a*

harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Hebrews 12:5-11

"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich..."

Revelation 3:18

Reflection:

- What comes to your mind when you read Jesus' words, "I am the light of the world"?
- Do you need both the light of God's loving presence and the light of the fire of purification?

12. Bitterness May Lead To Sweetness and Health

The effects of Chinese bitter herbs on man may be compared to the effects of God's graces on man:

Chinese herbal medicine often tastes **sweet** at the tip of the tongue and **bitter** at the inner back of the throat. The herb then gently produces its therapeutic effect when swallowed.

Comparatively,

Forgiveness by God is sweet if received with grateful hearts.

Repentance is often associated with godly sorrow.

Restoration is the therapeutic goodness of reconciliation with God.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."

2 Corinthians 7:10

"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life."

Romans 5:10 11

Reflection:

- What does repentance mean to you?

- Is God's forgiveness of sins real to you?
- What feelings and thoughts does the word "reconciliation" conjure in your heart and mind? A sense of longing or peace? Why?

13. The 1994 Klang Valley Haze

The Klang Valley was submerged initially in the prolonged haze of 1994.

As I pondered despondently on the bad effects of the stubborn haze, certain parallels in our life began to emerge:

- Unforgiven sins cloud our lives like the haze that hangs over the Klang Valley.
- Resentment is like the mucous in the chest that threatens to choke a person suffering from the effects of the dust particles in the haze.
- Distorted perspectives of the true God and His creation are like the pollutants that sting our eyes.

- Perfectionism is like our skin reacting to the pollutants in the haze, giving rise to the outward rashes of irritability due to the rejection of others and self.

Jesus said,

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles..."

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous..."

Matthew 5:38-45

Peter reminded us:

"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps."

'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.'

When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

1 Peter 2:21-25

Reflection:

- Are you readily critical of or easily irritated by others' actions or words? Why?
- What does God's grace and the spirit of the law mean to you?

14. A Shelled Butterfly

A nearly burnt out Pastor's wife shared:

"During a difficult patch of ministry life, I took a few days off to listen to God at a retreat.

We were asked to decorate our rooms as an expression of our prayers to God. One morning, as I strolled along the beach to look for shells, I found hundreds of empty siput like open shells decorating the sand at low tide.

As I took a second look at them, it gradually dawned on me that those shells actually appeared to be like butterflies!

The Lord seemed to explain to me: `You are like a beautiful butterfly that is made to fly with all the variety of colourful experiences on its wings. Therefore, no matter what you are going through, remember, you are still flying for Me...Cheer up!'"

I looked again and saw that the purplish lines on some of the shells were like the painful experiences affecting me so badly. However, the white background represented the fact that the Lord had never left me! I had thought that my family and church problems would never end...I had thought that I couldn't return to face the same conflicts...I had felt that even God had forsaken me. But now I know that He is always with me, always here for me, and will never leave me in a lurch! What a joy to be able to feel His love and faithfulness again!

*"My eyes fail, looking for my God...
Answer me, O Lord, out of the goodness of Your love;
Do not hide Your face from Your servant;
Answer me quickly, for I am in trouble...*

*I will praise God's Name in song and glorify Him with
thanksgiving....
The poor will see and be glad who seek God, may your
hearts live!"*

Psalm 69:3-32

Reflection:

- Have you ever been given a difficult pastoral role before? If so, how did God intervene? If not, are you able to help those in such positions in your local church or group?
- If you are near burnout now, what could God be saying to you? How would you respond to Him?

15. From a Peacock to a Rabbit

Day 1. to Day 5.

A Young Mother:

"After 5 days of listening to the Lord, He changed me from a proud, over confident and idealistic peacock into a quieter, gentler and more realistic rabbit. I realised now that my disappointments with others were due to my inability to accept myself as I am. I was also blaming God for my imperfections. His acceptance of me has helped me confess my sin of pride and desire to become perfect by my own strength."

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Proverbs 16:18

"Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice."

Proverbs 13:10

"The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honour."

Proverbs 15:33

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience..."

Colossians 3:12

16. From a Stone into a Chinese Fan

A Church Worker:

"Past hidden hurts had hardened my heart towards those I sought to help. But as I looked for a stone to represent those hurts so that I could symbolically throw them away through forgiveness, I came upon a shell that was shaped like a Chinese fan. As soon as this image struck my mind, the Lord said to me:

`My child, when you forgive those who have hurt you, your hardened heart of rock will be turned into a flexible fan of compassion for others...you will then fan others to refresh them for Me.'"

"They will return to it (Israel) and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

Then they will follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. They will be My people, and I will be their God."

Ezekiel 11:18-20

Reflection:

- Are you more like the hard shell or the flexible Chinese fan? Why?
- Do you think Jesus is interested to know your answer? If you are not sure, ask Him.

17. "Manja" the Good Shepherd

A Grandma Counsellor:

"Knowing that God accepts me as I am, I feel free to rub my sheep's nose on His body and snuggle closer to be embraced by my Shepherd's tender arms...It has taken me so long to realise that He really does love me so much. It seems as if, through my whole life, He has been preparing me just for this experience of Him. It's so good to know and feel that He cares for me!"

*"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne?
Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"*

Isaiah 49:15

Reflection:

- Do you long for God to be father and mother to you all over again? Why not talk to Him about it and allow Him to surround you with His gentle and secure embrace?

18. Resting in God's Palm

"When God showed Himself to me again, I felt as if His amazing understanding, love, forgiveness and restoration were being poured on me; I felt like a little lamb, secure and wanted in the Shepherd's palm!"

At the silent retreat that day, a disappointed, disillusioned, resentful pastor was forgiven, restored and recharged by the quiet presence of his faithful God.

*"See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands;
your walls are ever before Me."*

Isaiah 49:16

Reflection:

- Is there any way in which you can identify with the above pastor's experience in his pilgrimage as God's servant AND beloved child?

19. Of Hermit Crabs and Ceriths (Balitong)

"Actually, I am ashamed to say that I was near burnout at the start of the retreat, burdened with false and true guilt due to my own hang ups and others' hang ups about me as a result of the writing ministry.

For the first 2 days, I couldn't read the Bible or pray. All I wanted to do was sleep...and sleep...and sleep...till I took a long walk under the midday sun on the muddy beach at low tide. There, the Lord woke me up! What did I see in that one hour?

I saw snail like creatures called ceriths [they look like the balitong sold in Malaysian wet markets]...thousands of them lying lazily in the sun. At first I thought that they all looked the same. But then I found that some had trails behind them while others didn't have trails. Squatting down under my umbrella, and causing my arthritic left

knee to squeeze in pain, I began to scan the beach for clues...

Ah, there they were:

On a different patch of muddy sand I saw thousands of cerith shells running around madly! Those were not real live ceriths; they were empty cerith shells inhabited by hermit crabs...and, to my amazement, I saw thousands of hermit crabs all running around as if their houses were on fire! Their shells were beautiful to behold; they were of various shapes, sizes and colours! Just as I was about to give thanks for such lovely creatures, a horrifying scene caught my attention...

Four different, beautifully shelled hermit crabs were all fighting for a tiny one with a cerith shell! What was worse was that a rather large one was bullying a much smaller crab by clawing at it in order to get at that particular shell...which...for some reason, all the others wanted!

Then, the Lord gently and firmly whispered in my ears...

'Do you want to be like the ceriths or the hermit crabs?'

'What's the difference, Lord?' I asked innocently.

`Well, take a closer look,' He said. So I did, and this is what I discovered:

A Hermit Crab

1. Carries others' shells.
2. Fights for newer shells.
3. Runs wildly to attack others or to avoid attacks.
4. Leaves no trail.

A Cerith

1. Carries its own shell.
2. Is contented with its own.
3. Moves peacefully and securely at its own pace.
4. Leaves a trail for others to follow.

Guess what I chose?

O what joy to be given permission
to be myself,
to carry my own shell
to be real...
and even leave a trail that leads to Him!

Author

"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful

desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

1 Timothy 6:6-10

"Yes, Lord, I will be willing to crawl at the pace You give me from now onwards, no matter what others out there do in the marketplace or in here in church. Please keep me faithful to You alone, I pray."

Reflection:

- Is the above parable relevant to Malaysian Christians?
If so, how?
If not, why?

20. To Love Again!

As I tried hard to sum up what I had learnt from this retreat, my eyes caught sight of a little sea animal...a snail like cerith.

Symbol:

A snail like sea creature with a long shell

Meaning:

It dawned upon me that the spiral that goes round and round the shell to give it its lovely shape represents the different stages of a believer's life on earth.

Stage 1. New birth into the family of God...starts at the narrower end winding towards the wider end

Stage 2. A series of experiences that prepares the believer to meet Him face to face. This process makes the child of God feel as if he is going up and down in his fellowship with Him. In reality, he is drawn closer to Him...

Trial and temptations seem to dip deeper after each upward swing of faith, renewal and joyful bliss of friendship with the Lord. At times, it is like a remarriage after a prolonged widowhood that makes him exclaim:

"O, how wonderful to be able to love again!"

Stage 3. One day the saint will be lifted up and swung right into God's presence with inexpressible songs of jubilation and shouts of everlasting joy!!

"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

1 Corinthians 13:12

Reflection:

- How does the above symbol affect your perspective of life as a Christian in this world?
- Are we really in the world but not of the world in our understanding of who God is to us?

21. Emperor Penguins

Symbols of God's Love for His Children

It's amazing how the natural world and animal kingdom can teach us so much how to be more real as human beings...

Look at the emperor penguins that live in the South Pole. They have wings but do not fly. Instead, they dive to swim underwater, holding their breath for up to 15 minutes each time...before they need another gulp of air to

survive! Do you know their lifestyle? Let me share with you a documentary I saw two days ago on 25.10.2011...

Every year, without fail, about 7,000 male and female adult emperor penguins instinctively and literally climb their way out of the edge of the sea. Why? As the weather turns colder in late southern autumn, they get out from their water homes to walk or toboggan with their front paddle-like wings when their 2 legs get tired. Their journey would be long, about 70 miles to reach their place of birth as birds, the place of their egg stage of lives. It's amazing how organized and determined they are to walk that road, without boundary, in an upright manner or on their tummies while paddling with feet and wings on thick snow. I wonder how many of us humans are willing to do that for this purpose: ...to find a mate that each penguin feels is the right one so that it may conceive and bear a baby emperor penguin. Scientists call the process a survival of their specie. To God's people, a higher purpose is revealed in it. Let me tell you the lessons I learned from watching this 80-minute documentary of these wonderful creatures...

The determination to fulfill the purpose of reproduction, protection and nurture of each young one sometimes put us to shame. How do they strive to do that?

- Together with hundreds of other penguin couples, each couple makes that long journey (of 70 miles one way, taking two months) to and fro from the iced sea edge to their mating ground. They do this three times per mating season. Mother penguins take turns with their respective fathers and wait for the partner to return before they go for seafood in their water homeland. The sequence goes thus...
- Each takes up to 2 weeks to find a suitable mate on arrival on the thicker safer land area covered with snow and ice. They each mate with only one partner. Soon an egg is hatched. From then on, all their energy is focused on taking care of that egg. How?

At first Mum holds it under its body between her legs. It is kept warm by the natural fleece of the thick turf of hair below her body. After a while, Mum very carefully transfers the precious egg to under Dad's turf of fleece. When Mum moves on so that it is freed to walk that 70 mile back to the sea to eat. It then stores up enough food for Dad and coming baby emperor penguin. By the time Mum returns, Dad has not eaten for four months. Yet the whole male colony huddle together by standing up in temperatures that may reach -80 degrees centigrade. Not only that, they seem to be able to take turns to shift to the centre of the huddle, where it is the warmest,

without fuss or fight IN ORDER THAT THE EGG WILL BE PROTECTED!

When Mum returns, it opens its beaks to let Dad enjoy the seafood from its throat! Talk about consideration and loving tender care. Those eggs, which somehow got too far from their hideout accidentally, freeze and die. Then, as in an imperfect world, sometimes, the Mum tries to get another penguin's egg but would be shooed away by the other protective parent in charge at the moment, as well as neighbouring penguins who would flap their wings to slap the "thief" on its back! This really beats even our Rukun Tetangga's actions as it is done instinctively 'correct' and 'accurate'. I wonder who designed all these to keep baby penguins safe?!

PS:

Mum and Dad now and then are seen to embrace each other at the beak to neck level. This shows how they care for each other!

Food for thought:

Why do intelligent humans intentionally abort their foetuses or discard and neglect their children? I think the one who created them both requires an answer when they meet Him.

22. Pigeons in a Backyard

Perth – in a friend's house at 10 a.m. on 13.12.11.

One cold morning, four pigeons were looking for seeds under the shade of gum trees.

As I watched, the cutest one of them walked around till it seemed to have found a patch of earth which it scratched repeatedly. Having made a sofa for itself, it sat on the patch and nicely manoeuvred itself into a most comfortable position. With stomach full and soul contented, the chubby pigeon sat and watched while its companions continued looking for seeds.

Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after spiritual food, for they shall be satisfied.

23. A Family Compassionate Dog

A friend just sent a short homemade video clip to my hp. It shows how, when we stubbornly dishonour Jesus by hurting others, He may have to speak to us via animals. The natural world full of examples...

A young father angrily vents his displeasure at his toddler son. We are not told what the little one did but the way his father was scolding him was definitely too severe. Their dog, which witnessed the scene, was sitting behind the child. It could not tolerate the berating and moves forward to the child to hug him, thus shielding him from his father's wrath! Finally, the father walks away. I wonder who is more Christlike...

Let us ponder...let us pray...

End of Book V

Epilogue

Jesus Laughs!

A Retired Contractor, who was a newborn babe in Christ,
shared with his Spiritual Director:

"Since Jesus found me,
His presence so fills me with joy that
I do not know how to express our relationship except
to portray Him as laughing with me.
Here, take a look at what I have sculpted...
it's the portrait of a laughing Jesus!"

**"Then I was the craftsman at His side.
I was filled with delight day after day,
rejoicing always in His presence,
rejoicing in His whole world and
delighting in mankind."**

Proverbs 8:30-31

Such is the Jesus whom we serve!

SUGGESTED READING

1. New Prayers by Michel Quoist p.92 [The crossroad Publishing Company 1990]
2. Hidden Art by Edith Schaeffer [Tyndale House edition 1972]
3. The Contemplative Pastor by Eugene H. Peterson [Christianity Today, Inc.]

