

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a sunset or sunrise. A large, bright sun is partially obscured by dark, heavy clouds, creating a dramatic effect. The sun's light reflects on the water's surface, which is calm with some small ripples. In the foreground, there is a rocky shoreline with shallow pools of water reflecting the sky. The horizon is visible in the distance under a vast, cloudy sky.

Deepening Joy

*A reflection of God's grace by
a Malaysian Christian*

Lee Bee Teik

Special print-on-demand eBook 2020

The Christian, not uncommonly, begins his walk with the Lord in a burst of joy. The love of God fills his heart and he revels in his new friendship with his Redeemer. As time passes, that initial joy may fade and, at several points, seems to disappear altogether.

Nevertheless, the God of grace continues by his side. Through failure, discipline and disappointment, He is the Companion who succours, guides and provides. With gracious patience, He leads His child into a renewed understanding of His ways... and into a deepening joy of knowing Him.

This book reflects a renewed understanding of God's grace through the eyes of a Malaysian Christian.

Jesus says, "As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." John 15:9-11

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A Reflection on God's Grace by
a Malaysian Christian

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ebook Edition 2015

Reprint-on-demand (e-print) 2020

2015 Edition: Deepening Joy (2015 ebook Edition)

Author: Lee Bee Teik

Copyright: Lee Bee Teik 2015

Publisher: Cornerstone Corp Sdn Bhd (455936-X)
[www.cornerstone.my]

Original Edition: Deepening Joy

Author: Lee Bee Teik

Copyright: Lee Bee Teik 1993

1st Printing 1993. 1000 copies

Publisher: SU/FES Publication

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia Cataloguing in Publication Data

Lee, Bee Teik Deepening Joy:

A Reflection on God's Grace by a Malaysian Christian / Lee Bee Teik

ISBN 983-99982-0-X

1. Christian life. 2. God. I. Title. 248

2nd Printing 1994. 3000 copies

Publisher: Pustaka SUFES Sdn Bhd (ISBN 983-9843-00-1)

3rd Printing 2014/5. 1000 copies (special Print-on-demand)

4th Printing 2015. 2000 copies (special Print-on-demand)

5th Printing 2020. 50 copies (special Print-on-demand)

*Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE: INTERNATIONAL VERSION R. NIV R.
Copyright c 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by
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About this book

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Lee Bee Teik, the founding director of Reconre Ministries, graduated in medicine in the 70's and practiced medicine for 11 years in three continents. She is married to a theologian-cum-pastor and they have three adult children. Having been called to write instead of practice medicine in 1992, she has since published over 30 titles (Reconre Publications) on issues about what it means to be human and on prayer.

Having experienced intense culture and reverse culture shocks since 1971, she writes with passion about her fellow multicultural Malaysians.

Dr Lee enjoys facilitating seminars and guiding quiet retreats to help people understand that God loves them and is not against them.

REVIEWS FOR DEEPENING JOY, 1ST EDITION (1993)

"Hi Bee Teik, yesterday in Melbourne, I met a J.Cheah from Klang for the first time. He told me he had read your book 'Deepening Joy' and this was what he said, 'I remember every word from start to end of the book because I enjoyed reading it so much, although I did not know the author.'"

A. Lee, (Melbourne, January 2014)

"I am very angry with the author of Deepening Joy as she has a wrong theology of healing! How can she share that God still heals today? How can an evangelical say that!"

(Wife of a local evangelical Christian ministry staff, early 1990's)

"God used Deepening Joy to transform my life!"

(Member of Canning Garden Methodist Church Ipoh, late 1990's)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ORIGINAL EDITION 1993

I am grateful to God for my late parents, teachers and Christian friends. They have helped me to see Jesus with increasing clarity through the years. My thanks also reach out to those who read the initial manuscripts and made constructive criticisms. Professor D.A. Seamands, Professor R. Johnson, Professor D. Demaray and Professor S. Seamands of Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, U.S.A., are much appreciated for their wise counsel, prayers and encouragement in the Lord. Ngooi Chiu Oan willingly edited and typed the first presentable manuscripts while Mak Lin Yin printed the last before it reached the hands of the publisher. Goh Poh Gaik finally edited the manuscript with skill and sensitivity, while Goh Lay Hua's encouragement was a source of strength. Wong Kheang Wook needs special mention as he commits himself to publishing the reprints of this book for the Lord. Finally, without my family's loving support, this project would not have been possible.

My special thanks to those who gave permission for their experiences to be shared and to all whose pains are redeemed through these pages for His purposes.

Several details and names have been changed to safeguard privacy.

NEW EDITION 2014

I thank readers who encouraged me with news that God transformed their lives through ***Deepening Joy*** (1993 inaugural edition). I am also grateful to those who viewed its contents as controversial. While a charismatic bookshop owner was of the opinion that the book was not dynamic enough and therefore would not distribute it, a conservative Chinese publisher assessed it as too charismatic. If the latter had allowed it to be translated and published in Chinese, its more conservative supporters might not fund their publications. Was I a born loser? However, I will continue to receive the future opinions for this new edition with joy and a sense of humour; I shall also continue to follow my Master's 1992 call to "*Put down the stethoscope and take up the pen!*"

My heartfelt thanks to Lam Kuan Lock of Cornerstone Corp Sdn Bhd for his trust to follow through the publication of *Deepening Joy* for His purposes.

Thanks for reading. May His deepening joy fill you too!

Your sister in Christ
Bee Teik

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PREFACE

Deepening Joy was written in 1991-92 and first published in 1993 with two printings. Readers had requested for a sequel to *Deepening Joy*. However, I had no opportunity to write about my pilgrimage again for the last twenty years. Hence, in this 2014 New Edition, I have added a few fresh insights and two additional chapters as I reflect on my journey with Him since 1992. Chapters 10 and 11 reveal two major consequences of His detailed and deep spiritual-emotional-mental-social surgery on me (related in Chapters 8 and 9) as I entered middle-age. Into old age now, I often pause to reflect on many Malaysian and world events that have taken place in the previous two decades.

The advent of IT (information technology) has much affected our general *tidak apa* (Malay term for *taking things too easy or not being bothered*) Malaysian attitude. IT managed to be effectively instrumental in causing the 2008 General Election to become a watershed for the Malaysian human need to be free to express our thoughts more publicly, peacefully and responsibly. Another significant observation is that the USA is no longer the only Big Brother to the rest of the world. Perhaps there will be a number of Big Brothers in

the 21st Century. Yet the message for redeeming mankind stays the same:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”
John 3:16-17 (NKJV)

As age catches up and my eyes have seen and ears heard even more, God’s written word has become increasingly meaningful to me. For example, I discover that while John 3:16 is well memorized by most believers, most ignore John 3:17. May be that is why we continue to condemn each other in our damaged church community. Further, the Good News from God is actually not about a sinner knowing how to repent and pray in order to be forgiven by God. It is about the historical fact that *God has forgiven* the world (with warts and all e.g. conflicting distorted personalities due to sins and weaknesses in our fallen world) through what His Son Jesus did on the cross once for all. His atonement for sin is complete. He is ready to bring us home any time, whoever we may be. All He asks of us is to trust and follow Him home because we cannot do so

by mere human effort, sincere though any devout religious worshipper may be. This is the GOOD NEWS! Remember the last minute plea of the repentant thief on the cross and the resistance of the unrepentant one. God has swung open heaven's door for all mankind to return home. However, if we refuse to go home with Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, He will never force us. Such is His commitment to having created us with the gift of freedom to choose, just as the Son of Man was free to choose. Truly, we have been saved by grace through faith in Christ alone; not by works, so that no one can boast.

The purpose of this new edition is still to testify to the truth of God's grace. This truth will lead His children to experience His deepening joy. God is always faithful and gracious even when His people fail Him badly. His forgiveness of our sins & His healing & renewal of our lives are real & eternal. He gives the fullness of His joy! (1 John 1:9)

Increasingly, signs pointing to Christ's second coming are evident. Though we do not know the exact date or time, one thing is sure: He will come to receive a bride prepared for Him (Revelations 19:6-9), the church redeemed by His blood shed on the cross over 2,000 years ago. If we love our Lord Jesus, we will want to be

ready for Him. We will desire to know Him more and more in an ever-growing friendship. This friendship with Christ, shared in this book, is available to anyone: the growing child and ageing adult, the emotionally stable and unstable, the poor and the wealthy, the illiterate and the literate - anyone and everyone of whatever race, culture and nationality.

Just three days ago, another kind of sense of freedom filled my heart as a young local Malay graduate student fellow-commuter-train-passenger and I had one of the most delightful conversations I have ever had with a stranger. He spoke the Queen's English and showed his maturity in thought as we chatted. Both of us just missed the train...he, to his university for an important interview, and I, to Kuala Lumpur for a visit to a drop-in centre, which, by definition, has no fixed time for anyone to drop in. However, he was anxious as his meeting would make or break his opportunity to be accepted for a research programme. How would his professor view him if he were late? To lessen his distress, we talked about several issues happening in our nation, including the technological advancement in Malaysia, corruption, greed, wastage of funds, etc. till these words came out my mouth without a second thought,

“God says that we cannot worship God and money.”

He agreed without hesitation and we changed topic.

When asked, I shared that I stopped practicing medicine to nurture my children. He understood enthusiastically and replied that my medical experience would certainly not be wasted! I have yet to hear that from older folks.

Why was I so thrilled to have this dialogue with this student on the KTM train? It is because thirty years ago we could not have done that: the local young were not so widely read then. IT, as a morally neutral tool for communication, has opened their minds without having to study and live cross-culturally overseas! Wonder of wonders, in spite of its man-made negative uses!

As we journey through this book, please do not hesitate to stop reading in order to listen to Jesus, the Son of God. He may be speaking to you. Many people believe that God will only speak to them if they behave themselves or if they are extra-religious. This is not so. Jesus our Saviour waits for us to invite Him into our messed-up lives and longs to sit down and have a conversation with us over supper (Revelations 3:20). Malaysian indeed!

I have one request: If, in my enthusiasm to communicate with you, I have committed cultural or doctrinal blunders, please pardon and correct me with the straight-forwardness of a Westerner and the courtesy of an Asian.

Shalom

Bee Teik

INTRODUCTION

GUIDANCE

In January 1971, I left my homeland, Malaysia, to pursue the matriculation course in Melbourne, Australia. Just before my departure, a visiting local Scripture Union staff-worker challenged our local church to share God's love with fellow Malaysians. After the meeting, I asked him what he thought about studying overseas. He replied,

"It does not matter where one goes; the needs are the same everywhere. But where one serves Him depends on where He wants to send that person."

Since that conversation, I have discovered that people everywhere truly need Jesus even though the geographical intensity of people needs may differ. However, those words in his reply motivated me to seek the Lord's direction as to where I should eventually serve Him after my graduating as a doctor.

Therefore, during the initial years in Australia, I kept my eyes and ears open to information regarding the spiritual temperature of various countries. No matter how I weighed the pros and cons of working in different places as a missionary, I could not run away from the

fact that the Creator created me in a particular country at a particular time in history. For me, it was and still is Malaysia. Hence, I had to consider that as a major factor in my decision-making process. This led me to decide to return to live in Malaysia and serve Him here first before considering other places. If He should send me elsewhere, then it was best that my home church sends and supports me through prayer and practical provision. This inner conviction kept me from wavering during the late seventies when I had really felt at home in Melbourne. It also affected the choice of my future life partner. We would need to look in the same direction and not just at each other.

A VALID ALTERNATIVE

Having graduated in 1977 and worked as a houseman in 1978 in Melbourne, I had the privilege to observe Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees arrive by the hundreds at the new Government refugee centre in Springvale. Many migrant Asian Australian Christians reached out to them. Though a decision to stay and serve them from within an Asian community in Melbourne might have been valid, I had thought that it would be healthier for new Asian believers to fit into the Australian local churches rather than cling on to their own foreign subcultures in a Western country.

New migrants and local brethren could then better encourage one another in the same locality and learn from one another to live as biblically authentic communities, after the initial orientation to the new land, of course. However, I have since realized the need to live, worship and serve Him among those of a similar culture. Consequently, I have become more flexible in my views of migrant local church communities.

Then, the pull to remain in Melbourne was intensified as the Australian immigration policy, in order to cope with the inevitable refugee influx, would soon restrict potential professional immigrants. Many of my professional contemporaries obtained permanent residence without difficulty in 1978, as long as they had a job or were close relatives of immigrants. In 1979, after I left for England, where my husband, Yung, was studying theology, immigration opportunities to Australia actually decreased relative to the preceding few years. On reflection, I realize that it was God's reasoning, not mine, that made me burn the Melbourne bridge. Nevertheless, this does not mean that I do not like Melbourne. Even now, I subconsciously feel like Melbourne is my second home.

I also wish to state that I respect the views and convictions of others who have decided to live and

serve outside of Malaysia. It may be His will for them in our 21st century global village. But even with such conviction, the years of ministry in Malaysia were by no means easy going.

So there I was in October 1980, back in my country with my husband to serve the Lord.

In January 1971, I had left as a teenager, single, dependent on my parents and uncertain of the future; ten years later, in October 1980, I returned as a married woman seeking to minister to others through the practice of medicine as well as through the local church. For the first three years we lived in a parsonage. Since then, we have been on our own.

Almost eleven years after that, in 1991, both of us were slumped with exhaustion. Ministry had become automatic. My husband had served in a local church for three years and in a seminary for almost eight. I had worked in two government hospitals (full-time) and five private GP clinics (part-time). The blessing of three lovely children continued to bring joy and more work, as had the blessing of our extended families. We had shifted house five times (1981-1991). From 1984 onwards, each shift was preceded by an extensive search for a suitable place for family and external ministry.

Then at last, when August 1991 arrived, the opportunity for Yung's sabbatical leave came with it! Though eager to get away, we almost missed the plane at the Subang International Airport in Selangor, Malaysia.

Nevertheless, twenty-four hours from Singapore, our neighbouring nation, we landed safely in Lexington, capital of Kentucky in America.

Were we not glad to walk on land again! The children ran as if they had just been released from confinement. Away from our own people and familiar environment, I was ready to sit back and reflect once more. I was confused and burnt out. I needed God's affirmation, healing, restoration and direction before I would be ready to return to Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia.

I hope that the writing down of my thoughts may be a blessing to others in similar situations. It has been a deeply therapeutic exercise for me.

Even as I typed the original draft of this manuscript, major changes were occurring in the world. The U.S.S.R., for example, was in the process of becoming a conglomeration of the past. Doors were flung open for skilled foreigners to participate in the rebuilding of old yet newly independent nations. Great hunger for the

Word of God was evident. God sends His trained workers anywhere He chooses. As His disciples and children, we need to listen to what He is saying even more carefully these days, and do His will. For some, Malaysia will be a training ground before serving Him in other countries; for others, Malaysia will be that part of His vineyard He wants them to serve in. Let us be contented wherever He assigns us to (1).

As I share my struggles in Malaysia and proclaim His sufficiency, may you, the reader, be nourished by His sufficiency too.

Part I

Living as His child in Malaysia

CHAPTER 1: REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK



China Street in Penang Heritage Area, Malaysia,
where the author was born and bred

THE NEED TO IDENTIFY

Exotic Malaysia captures the imagination of visitors to Southeast Asia. Her multiracial and multicultural milieu brings forth a people of different languages, customs, taste buds and lifestyles. A constant hot and humid

weather inevitably ensures windows open wide unless embedded in air-conditioned buildings. Nevertheless, residents hold their doors ajar to welcome friends who often visit without appointments. To those from the West, we may sometimes seem to be prying into others' personal details. Actually, we are more interested in their cultures than in interfering with their private affairs.

When I first arrived in Australia in 1971, I thought the Aussies were cold and rather aloof. In time, I became accustomed to being left alone. Years later, I would have to readjust to being vulnerable again.

In 1981 when my husband Yung, a former chemistry teacher, and I started working in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, I assumed that there would be no great necessity to further prepare to be a pastor's wife and a full-time government doctor. God had allowed us to be trained in our various ways through our professions and church life. It was now time to serve His people, trusting Him to supply as we ministered His truth and grace. A local Methodist church in Sentul became our spiritual home. We warmed up to our Chinese and Indian brethren as they readily accepted this new young pastoral couple and welcomed us to their homes. A core group's hunger for God's Word

made teaching them a joy to Yung. Nevertheless, there were the usual few who held on to tradition for reasons known and unknown. At work I learnt to relate with Malaysian patients and staff.

In church, as their Mrs Pastor, I was most grateful to be left alone for a while to overcome my reverse culture shock. Quite often, after the Sunday services, I drove off to my hide-out at a nearby Jalan Ipoh *City Chemist* supermarket to unwind from the past week's struggles while enjoying some air-conditioned comfort. This continued for about two years. Then I was ready to crawl out from under my '*coconut shell*' to minister with the pastor and to offer whatever hospitality I could.

CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS



Melbourne, Australia

CASE 1

Meng and Sim had been married for just over a year. Their first-born was a few months old. According to custom, Meng's mother lived with them as his father was deceased. The household disagreed as to who should have the last say in methods of child-rearing.

One day, Meng requested me to discuss the issue with Sim. We talked about the meaning of nuclear and extended families; we also deliberated on love and forgiveness. The session was closed in prayer and Sim seemed willing to readjust for a happier home environment.

I did not know what transpired after she returned home. But, after one Sunday church service soon after that discussion, Meng called me out to have a word with him. I was shocked when Meng angrily accused me of interfering with their family life. He swore and insisted that his words were final no matter what the Bible taught. Taken aback (because Meng was up till then a diplomatic, gentle and smiling lay leader), I made an emergency call to the Lord for wisdom to respond.

"No matter what happens, Meng, we will be brother and sister of one heavenly Father,"

I replied within a second. He left in a rage.

Upset and nauseated with first trimester symptoms, I left the hall in a hurry, rushed into my bedroom in the parsonage and flung myself on the bed, sobing bitterly in anger at such injustice. I was only trying to help. When my sister-in-law found me there, I proclaimed in between tears,

"This may be the first time I am attacked for doing His work ... but it won't be the last!"

Little did I realize how true that was going to be in the years ahead. Thankfully, Meng later decided to take God's priorities seriously. Soon, his mother entered God's family and peace prevailed in their home.

Why do such complications frequently arise in Malaysian families? Take the Chinese as an example. It has been conditioned in our minds and souls that our natural family is to be protected above everyone else. Who forms the family? It comprises parents, children and extended family members, be they one or several generations away. Those having the same surname come next. In general, there is little caring for the wider community. Philanthropists, of course, would be an exception. Although ancient in its source, modern Chinese still basically hold on to this view. (How else could we explain the fact that many rich Christian parents will their assets to their already rich or richer children instead of giving them to the poor in the living church or in the wider society?) Yet God's heart is with the poor whom we will always exist on this earth; not because they are not helping themselves but because we do not share and there are so many of them.

Added on to this is the priority of the oldest living parent's position over all the younger generations, be they children or grandchildren, especially if they live under the same roof.

After coming into the family of Jesus Christ, a believer needs to rethink and renew his concepts of family life and his wider community commitment. Asians often accept Christianity as if Christ gave the mandate to make disciples for Him to the Westerners first, in time and in priority. It is true that much of the interpretation of Scriptures has been done by our Western brethren, but we must recognize that they look at Scriptures through their cultural lenses as much as we do ours. If we see God's Word through their eyes, then we have two sets of possible barriers between His Word and us. This is not to deny the fact that God has blessed us richly through all His people down through the ages. It is to persuade each other to seek the truth by laying aside the things that weigh us down so that we may run the race towards Christ more lightly and effectively.

Come to think of it, perhaps Asians find it more convenient to accept Christianity as from the West so that we may pick and choose what suits our us and discard that which threatens our self-interest. For example, when families in the West leave the elderly to

fend for themselves, some of us follow suit when it is convenient to our nuclear family needs, even though Scriptures specifically teach believers to care for needy relatives (1 Tim 5:8). As a consequence, many traditional Asian parents are afraid when their young children profess the Christian faith.

Nevertheless, it is a great comfort to know that God is the One who allows us to develop our different cultures as human beings. Yet He speaks the same message of His love, forgiveness, and reconciliation in a variety of ways to a variety of peoples. He alone transcends cultures which, when used wisely, will bring delight to Him.

Born and bred a Chinese within the Malaysian scenario, educated in English and Malay and soaked in one year of Western philosophy at university, I have had much to unlearn and relearn as I seek to distinguish between God's point of view as revealed in the Scriptures and man's point of view.

CASE 2

Then there is Chinese etiquette. When someone offers food to me, my immediate response is expected to be,

"No, no need to . . . "

I may accept it after several to's and fro's or I may be considered uncultured or greedy. In this context, I might have offended some church members who left our house with thirst unquenched because they insisted,

"No, I am not thirsty," when I offered them drinks.

As a pastor's wife, I was not supposed to take them at their word in matters of Asian etiquette. Thankfully, no one minded and some members could have followed my strange example later on.

If this applies only to food and drinks, it is not too difficult to accept. We will get used to such dialogue. But if this social pattern permeates ordinary life and even church committee meetings, then communication and mutual understanding may be seriously hampered.

CASE 3

In early January 1982, our house telephone rang. My sister in Penang was on the line. Our mother had been living with her since 1975 as our other siblings were too far away or had emigrated. Mum had been weakened by several strokes in the previous few years and could no longer walk confidently by herself. The maid employed to help my sister had resigned. Taking care of our elderly invalid parent was not easy. Sister insisted that Mum come to live with us as soon as possible after a conflict blew up in her household.

We were in a parsonage. Yung had a hectic schedule at the church and the seminary; I was a full-time medical officer at a government hospital, completing the three-year compulsory service with the government. We had no maid. What should we do? We loved Mum and wished her to spend her last years with us. We prayed and brought her over to Kuala Lumpur the following month. Even though Mum and I had different opinions of the Christian ministry, I had always desired to serve the Lord alongside her and prayed that she would live till we come home to Malaysia. God granted my request. Now it was time to be together again as His family in the spacious house provided by the local church.

Our church members were really considerate as we adjusted to a new lifestyle. Mum was so glad to have a change and we rejoiced in God's goodness to us. She was such an enduring woman and I had much to learn from her.

The nurses at the hospital were marvellous too. As fellow Asians, they understood the privilege yet heavy responsibility of caring for infirm parents at home. Finally, a maid was found through the help of the hospital social worker. In between, friends and even my mother-in-law who was by then in Christ, chipped in to help. According to Chinese custom, my mother-in-law did not need to help out as the husband's parents are socially above the wife's parents and thus should not be seen to be serving them. But she did. I thank the Lord for her courage and kindness. The non-Christian nurses heard of this and praised her.

CASE 4

October 1983 was a special month: our first baby was due. A lady from our congregation asked which gender I preferred my child to be. I replied:

"It does not matter whether a 'she' or a 'he' emerges; God makes us all equal. We have prepared two names."

She then responded,

"Huh, this is only what you are saying. I am sure that in your heart of hearts, you want a boy!"

What could I add to that? Her words just made me even more determined to treat our future sons and daughters as equals. Let me explain the implications of my friend's comment.

In Chinese tradition, a woman always belongs to someone else. She has no identity of her own.⁽²⁾

At birth, she is her father's daughter; when married, she is her husband's wife; if widowed, she becomes known as her son's mother. If she should remain single, she is under her brother's authority (even though he may be younger). For centuries, this has been accepted. It is no wonder, then, that a woman must get married at a certain acceptable age...and bear a son...or she loses face in the eyes of her husband, her in-laws, and the whole known community. In fact, the husband may legitimately take a mistress to bear him a son. This boy may then be considered his wife's son. I began to

understand why mothers are possessive of their sons even after they are married. He is her identity.

In addition, the concepts of sin and shame are not well differentiated in Chinese circles. Sin is often equated with shame. If no one else knows that I have done wrong, I may not feel ashamed of myself and not acknowledge my sin. But if I am ashamed that I have borne no son, I may believe and feel that I have sinned when in reality I have not. These are points to be considered when preaching the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to Chinese people. Is this why many Chinese Christians, for example, discard the visible idols at conversion but discard little of their old value system and lifestyles which contradict biblical teaching? Let us ask God to remove the blinkers from our eyes. Then God's light and truth will shine more directly into our minds to do its work of renewal and transformation.

INTO HIS GLORIOUS LIGHT

CASE 1

During the third year of our pastoral ministry, we shared the gospel with a friend's uncle, Lian. He was raised by his father since his mother died when he was in primary school. Three older siblings were not very close to him. Though his father had a steady job with the Malayan Railways, they were very poor. Through difficult circumstances, Lian led a rough life almost that of a criminal at times. Consequently, Lian used the powers of darkness to protect himself. Once, a Malay doctor at a General Hospital could not insert a needle into his arm vein for attachment to an intravenous drip. The doctor uttered a charm as an antidote to counteract the power that was controlling Lian's body. Following this, the medical device could be used. Later, he had needles removed from his body by the monk who had, several years ago, inserted them. One day, Lian made an emergency call at the parsonage.

His elderly invalid father was dying. A sister in church and I had been witnessing to this dear old man for several months. He claimed to be a Christian and was always welcoming even though Lian would be rambling or swearing in the background. Now Lian himself was in

desperate need. He was repeatedly running into accidents on his motorcycle. Tears ran down his cheeks as fear gripped his whole being. The imminent death of his father had triggered off memories of his wife's tragic childbirth experience a few years back. Due to a shortage of beds, she was sent home even after her water bag had ruptured, and instructed to return the next day. She soon developed septicaemia (generalized blood infection) at home. Both mother and child died in an ambulance on the way back to the hospital less than 24 hours later. Enraged Lian stalked and threatened to kill the medical officer in charge of his wife the previous day. The latter had to be hastily transferred out to a safer hospital and home!

Over the next few days after Lian came for help out of fear for his life, the new pastor, Yung, counselled and prayed with him. Finally Lian confessed his sins and was ready to receive God's salvation in Jesus Christ. He was baptized into Christ at the verandah of the parsonage. After a bowl of water was poured on him, signifying death to his old self and new birth into God's family, Lian saw a white mist-like substance falling on him. How great and mighty is the power of our Lord Jesus over the power of the enemy. To this brother who had played with black magic, God used whiteness to represent His holy power. Lian thus took his first fumbling steps into

God's Kingdom of light. Yung sought to disciple this man with some trepidation as he was not used to helping someone from Lian's background to read the Scriptures, pray, renew his mind and live a new life in Christ with a new language.

CASE 2

Wong had been suffering from terminal lung cancer for a few months. He was in much pain in the National Tuberculosis Centre ward and knew that he was dying. The initial attitude of boldness and aggression had gone. He looked more like a little boy caught in a trap of uncertainty. At this stage, two Christian staff members in the ward shared the good news of God's love and light with him. His immediate reaction was,

"No, I cannot become a Christian! I have done many bad things in my life. God will not accept me!"

As the truth of the Father's grace was explained to him, Wong was surprised that the holy God of the heavens and the earth could and would love him personally. He began to read a Chinese Bible given to him. What a joy to see him actually reading God's Word! A few days later, he received Jesus into his life and was baptized in the hospital ward. He became a changed man. Sleep

then came easily. A nurse exclaimed in disbelief after Wong took his last breath,

"Sister Tan, Sister Tan (the Christian nursing sister who had witnessed to him), since his baptism, Wong has not been in pain and slept so well. Last night, he was at peace when he was dying! Is it because of your God, your Jesus?!"

Sister Tan replied without hesitation,

"Yes, Nurse, yes ... it is because of our God, Jesus!"

Experiences like these are not rare in Malaysia. I relate this account because none of Wong's relatives had witnessed his baptism though they were informed and requested to attend. I had the impression that Wong had stubbornly offended them. They seldom visited him in the ward. When he died, they conducted a funeral for him according to pagan Chinese rites. They could have thought he was too bad to become a Christian or they could have feared offending his departed spirit.

Chinese tradition places a heavy responsibility on the eldest or only son in the family: he is to accept the responsibility of ensuring that the departed parents are respected and well provided for through the rite of ancestral worship. In this belief, the soul of the dead has

no assurance of a place to dwell. Hence, a symbolic home is made by the construction of an ancestral tablet (which could be placed in an ancestral house in the village of the ancestors or in the house of the son). Worship, respect or honour is given by the descendants through the bowing and placing of joss-sticks (incense sticks) or food at the altar where the tablets stand.

In contrast, a daughter, who usually leaves her parents' home after marriage (Genesis 2 states that the husband is to leave his parents though), is considered as belonging to her husband's parents. As such, she is to honour them as a matter of priority. Therefore, if a couple does not have a son, the predicament of the departed would remain a mystery and may cause much anxiety to the living.

A Christian funeral for Wong would have given His people an opportunity to exalt the Lord and to share His love with relatives. However, there was insufficient time for the pastor to meet Wong's relatives responsible for his funeral arrangements. Further, his action could also have been construed as an outsider's interference with their private family affairs. As long as we knew Wong had gone home to his heavenly Father, we rejoiced.

Recently, a similar event occurred to a man who received Christ in another hospital ward. The Christian

who witnessed to this patient was cautious and held back from arranging for the terminally ill man to be baptized when he actually asked for it. Sometimes we may be too cautious. We may decide that one can only come to Christ and be saved through certain fixed methods. We may want to wait to see the process of sanctification before we believe a terrible person can be saved by His grace through faith. But what if the good Shepherd wants to take His sheep home soon after his conversion? In a country where funerals are quiet affairs, it makes little difference. But in a nation where funerals attract the attention of neighbours, friends and even the media, changed beliefs of a person before he dies often create curiosity and may make an impact on the minds of the observers. They may then seek for God diligently and find Him as promised.

"Lord, please enable us to do it Your way."

Malaysians are generally a religious people. Foreigners can easily spot places of worship. Deities are often sought after for blessings such as health, happiness and riches. They are seldom worshipped, if at all, out of love and gratitude for who they are or what they may represent. Hence, many people separate their religious life from their daily routines. Most people want to run their own lives in peace times anyway. Pragmatism

seems to work most of the time. Of course, this is rampant in the post-Christian secular West as well.

When a person accepts the Lord Jesus as his Saviour and Lord, no matter what language is used, he tends to transfer his old pattern of thinking and functioning to the true God (3). Teachers of His word, therefore, need to be sensitive to their students' background so that they may help them see God as He is. He is their Maker, King, Shepherd, Saviour and Heavenly Father; He desires a mutual love relationship with His people based on His eternal friendship. This new relationship is to fill the lives of believers. From the moment they are reconciled with Him, their faith cannot be separated from their lives. Otherwise, many may go to see their pastors only when there is a celebration or a tragedy. If they do not receive instant answers, they may return to deities, thereby bringing harm to themselves and stumbling those who are younger in faith.

How do we then effectively disciple believers of our Lord Jesus Christ? We have to help them understand, when they decide to follow Christ, that it is a decision to be born into God's new family and they are to come out completely from the old family of God's enemy; it is NOT a decision about a change of idols. Wrong subconscious attachments and associations need to be

brought to light so that they may be discarded and replaced by biblical ones.

"Lord, grant us Your grace to so live Your life so that others will see You as You really are, not what man thinks You are."

PROSPERING NATION

In January 1975, Dr. Isabelo F. Magalit, then Associate General Secretary of IFES-East Asia (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students), challenged students at an Australian FES-OCF (Overseas Christian Fellowship) Conference in Melbourne,

"Asians, go home before it is too late, before the infection of materialism becomes incurable!"



On returning to Malaysia in late 1980, I was stunned by the material prosperity of my homeland, and the increasingly hectic rat race to obtain paper qualifications in order to earn higher salaries for wealthier lifestyles. University education was relatively common; overseas trips for tourism or fun were also "*No big deal-lah!*" Of course, Christians were also caught up in this race to succeed on earth at all cost! The infection had spread...

It was not uncommon for husbands and wives to be separated for prolonged periods because of job locations or opportunities. Small children were sometimes left with relatives or baby-sitters for days or weeks at a time. Older parents were usually proud that their children held good jobs. Mention of grandchildren rarely touched on their deep emotional needs. There appeared to be an over-anxiety regarding the type of powdered milk they consumed and the age at which these lovely children started to read. Initially, not yet desensitized to this lifestyle, I was grieved. In the West, such changes in family life had come about in decades. In Malaysia, the country of my origin, upbringing and citizenship, similar changes had developed in ten short years!

Please do not get me wrong: I am all for the development of our nation. I am only worried that it is being achieved at the expense of a relatively normal family life, which is the heartbeat and building block of any society. It has been educational for me to live with my women counterparts in the West for a number of years. Men and women there have begun to realize the emotional, social and spiritual poverty resulting from the breakdown of family life. Drastic changes, including revivals and renewals are prayed for urgently to bring families together again. This was common knowledge. Yet, back home, I was witnessing a rather rapid breakdown of a society in which strong family units and ties used to prevail. Change is inevitable in this world, but let change be constructive rather than destructive.

I was not personally involved in this dilemma till our first child arrived. I then decided to resign from full-time medical work as of 9th February 1984...three years to the dot of compulsory service. Comments reached my ears from various directions.

Older church friends thought I was foolish to throw away a secure civil career with a pension waiting at the end. Others thought I was crazy to throw away easily obtained car and housing loans. Younger couples made few remarks. I suppose they wanted to wait and see

whether my method would work out well. However, I did not regard my action as an experiment but as obeying a calling to ordinary motherhood. My colleagues could not believe that I would choose to be poorer as a consequence of my choice when home expenses would increase, not decrease. A number of them kindly offered to lend a hand if I wished to start a private medical practice in the city. They meant well. However, the pain of being misunderstood heightened when even some Christian members of my extended families could not accept my decision.

Surprisingly, however, among the few who were understanding and encouraging was an Indian Muslim professor of psychiatry at work. He had advised his graduate daughter to do the same even though she had had a good job. Presumably, he had seen so much brokenness in his patients' lives that he could identify with my conviction to take more time to watch my child grow. True, there is no guarantee that my child would turn out *'good'* except that as I seek to follow the Lord, He can be trusted to care for us. A five-week elective stint at a Child Psychiatry Clinic as a student had also shaped my understanding of how parental behaviour may deeply affect a child's basic personality traits positively and/or negatively.

I was to discover later that several other Christian women had also made the important decision to give up well-paying jobs in order to spend time with their children.

After the dust settled, I naively thought that life would flow smoothly. However, God allowed me to face the trials of parenting.

CHAPTER 2: STRUGGLES OF MOTHERHOOD



Juggling many things all at once

AN UPHILL TASK

Motherhood was anticipated with joy. Yung and I had waited so long to start a family. Little did I realize that it would, however, bring with it nights of insufficient sleep and anxiety over sterilized bottles and clean diapers while experimenting with breastfeeding. Bit by bit, responsibilities piled up. Motherhood replaced my roles as a doctor and a pastor's wife when Yung was soon

posted to lecture full-time at the *Seminari Theologi Malaysia* in 1984.

FINANCES

Like most parents, we faced strong social pressure to save enough funds for our children and our own old age needs.

After I resigned from full-time work outside the home, the reality of financial needs gradually dawned on me. A certain basic amount of money was required to maintain order and a sense of propriety in the home. Due to some bad experiences during student days, I had made up my mind not to depend on outsiders for daily necessities. I had a profession and I would use it.

In the beginning, I did not feel the pinch. But soon our old car needed repairs and our landlord raised the rental for his house. These changes forced me to face reality. I worried about our long-term needs. We were also caring for my aged mother who needed physical care. We loved her and wanted to ensure there was enough space for her as she was already home-bound.

I started looking for a means of earning some home-based income. It was such a thrill when the *New Straits Times* (a national newspaper) published one of my

articles and sent me a cheque of RM70. But I told myself that writing took too long and so ended up working eight hours a week as a locum (substitute doctor) at a nearby clinic.

This continued for six years off and on. I knew that our God would never fail us. Yet, I struggled. I did not want to depend on others and I was still not convinced that I should be away from my fast growing toddler son most of his waking hours. This did not mean that medical practice was a bore to me. I rejoiced to see my patients get healthier; I was grateful when the Lord opened doors for sharing Him. Given the opportunity, I would enjoy medical work again. However, I felt and knew that as a mother, I could not do this with unlimited freedom, especially when Yung's work took him away from home for days or weeks at times.

SICKNESS

Come the end of October 1986, our family was excited.

Baby number two was due anytime. Jerng waited impatiently for a little sister (so he hoped). In the meantime, we celebrated his third birthday at the end of October 1986. Eleven days later, Ping arrived, bringing laughter and joy which replaced grief over the loss of Mum who was ushered home to the Lord on

20th May 1986. Jerng adored and doted on his baby sister. He would repeatedly go near her to proclaim,

“Ping, you are the most beautiful girl in the world!”

Joy prevailed at home!

However, in late November, Jerng contracted a high fever which was followed by a dark pink facial rash that spread to his whole body. Initially, a family paediatrician treated him symptomatically as blood test results were normal. The rash subsided in mid-December. Meanwhile, my husband had a strange dream while at a conference in Penang, our hometown. The dream indicated that the evil one was trying to destroy Jerng's brain. Yung prayed for the Lord's intervention and protection without realising the meaning of the dream.

Nearer Christmas 1986, when the fever and rash relapsed, Jerng was admitted to the Assunta Hospital, Petaling Jaya, for further investigation. A second paediatrician and a dermatologist managed his illness. A short course of steroids cleared the symptoms somewhat but no definite diagnosis was found. When vague answers were given, I tried to still my suspicion of a more sinister illness such as an auto-immune disease. Deep inside I knew that my motherly heart was trying to deny that Jerng's illness could be serious. Hence, I kept

quiet when the doctors reassured me that they knew what they were doing and to bring him back if symptoms should return. At least, we could celebrate Christmas at home after his discharge.

However, in the following few months, our son repeatedly fell on his knees when we took him for short walks. Soon his knees and elbows were covered by elastoplasts or iodine after each fall. Attending a four-year-old pre-school made matters worse; he could not even hold a colour pencil for class activity without mother's help. Neither he nor I could fathom his lack of initiative when he had been a brave fast runner and talkative three year old boy. What was worse for us, the parents, on hindsight, was that we assumed he fell in order to receive more attention from us. How could we have been so hard hearted? Later, we apologized to him for our unfair assessment of his behaviour.

Agony mounted as we watched him lose interest in playing with other children and his sister. He became very irritable and would scratch his skin till raw patches appeared. Jerng was previously sociable, active and happy. The whole world seemed to belong to him when he ran on grass or scrambled up monkey bars!

By April 1987, he had lost his appetite and could hardly walk without extra effort or help. When a visiting British

pastoral couple, blessed with the gift of healing, was ministering at the Wesley Methodist Church Kuala Lumpur, we prayed that the Lord would meet our son's needs and heal him. They laid hands on Jerng's head and asked the Lord to shine His light on him to reveal the diagnosis.

The next evening, our own pastor visited us and recommended another paediatrician for Jerng. When she first examined Jerng, she was quite sure he was suffering from dermatomyositis. The UKM medical faculty to which she was attached had a visiting professor from Sydney. He was an expert in this disease and had been teaching the medical team about this rare condition. Hence, the alertness to a rare medical problem. Without hesitation, Jerng was admitted for a muscle biopsy after which he was put on a course of high dose steroids (30 mg daily for a 3 year old).

Dermatomyositis is a collagen or autoimmune disease which causes the patient's voluntary muscles, especially, to break down cell by cell. It is sometimes associated with an existing malignancy and causes widespread inflammation of skin and muscles. Thankfully, Jerng's cardiac and respiratory systems were spared. Prognosis wise, it could run in one of three courses: it could be a one-off illness with no recurrence;

it could be prolonged with remissions and relapses like asthma; it could also rapidly deteriorate, leading to death within a year or two. In the initial stage, no one could predict which course it would take for our son. However, the family of God surrounded us with intensive and continuous prayer and He upheld us all the way. Hundreds of brothers and sisters in Christ, some of whom we had not met, prayed with us. By God's grace, steroids arrested the disease.

Our family lifestyle changed drastically for the next eight years till he was 11. Ultraviolet light has a tendency to precipitate the illness. Jerng had to wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts during the day when outdoors, in a land where the average daily temperature ranged from 75°F to 85°F. When the sun was out, he hardly played outdoors with his friends. For an active carefree boy, he was self-controlled and submitted to medical treatment and other changes very well. We were so grateful to God our Healer.

The side-effects of steroids caused drastic changes to his appearance. Onlookers would turn and take a second look at him, and then at the parents, as they wondered why he had Caucasian-like features with the Cushingoid syndrome (pot-belly, moon-shaped face and hairy body and face with a generalized reddish skin

hue) while we had a more distinct Mongoloid appearance. Nevertheless, Jerng survived exceedingly well with his better sense of humour while we had to fight bravely to stand by him. For example, when parents of other kids at music class prevent them from mixing with Jerng for fear of getting his 'disease', I had to allay their unfounded fears as dermatomyositis is not an infection and cannot be spread by physical contact. Gladly, Jerng did not seem to be affected negatively by their behaviour and continued to enjoy his childhood. I knew then that God had endowed him with a keen sense of understanding of concepts which tied him over his kindergarten and primary school days. He took his medical conditions and its subsequent limitations of activities without a single grumble.

When first warded, he informed the other patients in the ward with a cheeky smile.

"I have Tomato-Old-Sitis. Tomato-because my skin is red; old-because my sickness lasts so long; and sitis-because the fighting between my soldier and normal cells breaks down my skin and muscles."

For a child of three and a half and in his condition, we could not thank God enough for His goodness to him in his adversity.

Personally, the emotional and mental stress accompanying the ordeal drained my energy. But the Lord understood. He held me and encouraged me with these words:

"Bee Teik, no matter what happens to your son, My work must go on. It is not for you to ask why this took place or what caused it; I will take care of that. You must trust Me even when you cannot see."

I hung on to those words dearly during the days, months and years of hospital visits. During Jerng's first admission, God comforted me with infant Ping's presence each time I returned from the hospital to nurse her. Because He had spoken, I could carry on living. He heard the cries of His people and brought us closer together as a family even though Yung's work still took him away from home frequently.

Further, when I was bogged down with worry over whether we could ever protect him enough from sunlight, the Lord spoke to me tenderly. He reassured me of His power to care for Jerng and I was literally lifted above the choking anxiety. Having relinquished Jerng and Ping to Him, the true Custodian of children, I then carried on with what needed to be done in our daily routines.

Of course, there were a few who blamed the mother when a child fell sick. A question such as,

"Was it due to a particular type of food you took while carrying Jerng during your pregnancy?"

was not only hurting but tended to load the tired mother with false guilt when she was already in pain.

Day by day, Jerng recovered. He has been in remission since 1987 till the time of writing and has been taken off steroids since July 1989. His understanding of the problem and co-operation with treatment and prevention was remarkable. Initially, he ate the tablets hidden in peanut butter sandwiches.

We were less anxious over his exposure to direct sunlight when his remission was prolonged. Soon, we were able to do many things together as a family. Still, Kuala Lumpur supermarkets like Hanku Jaya, bookshops like TIMES and MPH and parks, especially nearby Taman Titiwangsa, became our favourite haunts on Friday nights when Yung came home from a heavy seminary schedule!

The Lord our Healer is to be praised.

MUM'S SUPPRESSED EXPRESSION OF GIFTS

As Jerng's health improved and our third child, Ning, arrived in August 1989, I began to ask the Lord for new avenues to serve others once more. I became aware, from within myself, the need to release the energy God had given me through the practice of creation and spiritual gifts. This could only be effected if I had opportunities to meet other adults. At times, this feeling of suppressed creativity became unbearable. However, I did not yet have the courage to request church friends to baby-sit so that I could visit other adults regularly. A few close friends were already sacrificing time and energy caring for us. Several times, I sought the Lord. There was no immediate reply till years later. But the Lord did eventually speak to me.

Finite beings as we are; we still need challenge, intellectual stimulation, research and exchange of ideas. Staying at home with babies who goo and gaa and toddlers who leave a trail of objects each time they pass by may be fun for some mothers but a nightmare for others. Our children, aged three, five and eight at the time of my first draft of Deepening Joy, happened to be normally active kids who also chatter up a storm!

At one stage, I was talking in kids' language so much that I had great difficulty readjusting to my usual style of conversing with adults who demand proper behaviour and a correct manner of conversation. And I was married to a preacher! Gradually, I began to stay away from social functions.

I liked to take time to appreciate the environment and to savour good things. But everyone seemed to be in a rush in Kuala Lumpur. Then, also, mothers like me, exhausted at the end of the day, might fall asleep at parties! I began to lose touch with my former medical colleagues who did not think it worthwhile to contact a doctor who was no longer playing her medical role. Lonely, isolated, and confused, I wondered what God had to say to me.

TIME ALONE WITH GOD

I fought a constant battle trying to find a quiet place and time to be with my Lord alone so I could be refreshed. Occasionally, I had to use another place outside the home or the children had to be out of the house with my husband. At times, for weeks and months, I could not receive the rest and comfort that I needed from Him. However, the Lord never let me be tempted beyond what I could bear.

In the heat of our tropical climate and under the burden of wearing several hats at one time, I yearned for Him to say,

"For a brief moment I forsook you . . . but with great compassion I will gather you. "

And He did. At the most unexpected times, He gathered me to Himself.

*"Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord all ye peoples,
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord all ye peoples,
Praise the Lord;
My soul, my soul thirsts for Thee O Lord,
My soul, my soul thirsts for Thee;
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord all ye peoples,
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord all ye peoples,
Praise the Lord!"*

(Lyric and tune by Lee Bee Teik 1992)

CHAPTER 3: HEALING OF MEMORIES



Time and tide waits for no man

DEATH, OUR LAST ENEMY

Grief was not experientially real to me before Mother died. When working as a senior house officer in the Mildmay Mission Hospital in London (1979-1980), where most patients were in their 60's to 80's, the nurses and I had the privilege of ushering a few into His kingdom near their deathbed. God had strengthened me to be a bearer of bad news to hopeful relatives. I

had comforted many left in a stage of shock, especially when the loss of loved ones was untimely. I felt their pains; I held their hands to console them. Those were unpleasant moments though necessary duties. After the initial tension, I usually put the thoughts of the deceased out of my mind. If the memories floated back, I did not feel the pain much, as they were not personal friends or close relatives. However, though others might find that I was a comfort to them in times of sorrow, I knew deep inside, that, really, I did not yet know what personal grief was all about.

However, there was something else that my husband and I noticed. During those times when he had to leave home overnight for ministry or for other purposes, I underwent an intense emotional upheaval. The first occasion was in Boxhill in Melbourne, Australia. I was completing a twelve-month internship employment without leave for fifty-two weeks. If we needed time off, we were to exchange shifts with our colleagues.

Yung and I had been married for just a few months. On a Sunday morning in 1978, Yung flew to Hobart in Tasmania to renew fellowship with friends whom he had not met since student days at the University of Tasmania. On that particular morning, I was totally exhausted from the previous week's night duty at the

casualty ward. I looked forward to a good rest. Yung would be back the next morning.

However, that Sunday night, as I stared at the empty space beside me on the bed, a strange feeling gripped my heart. It was a deep sense of missing someone, a loneliness that ached more than just ordinary longing for someone who meant a lot to me. I could not fall asleep. By Monday morning, my mind went blank. I could not bear to see the patients! On arrival home, Yung was surprised to find me in that condition. We sought out a private family GP's (General Practitioner's) clinic for advice.

The Catholic doctor was God-sent. Instantly, he diagnosed that while I was adjusting to marital bliss; I was also overworked at the hospital. A two-week medical leave was issued, together with the wise counsel to rest in Christ and let Him minister to me. (Incidentally, that personal encounter with a godly Catholic brother-in-Christ, for the first time in my life, removed prejudicial barriers that had settled in my mind about the spirituality of some of my Catholic brethren. I learnt then that ignorance did breed futile fear.) After a few days of rest and sound sleep, I recovered and resumed work within a week. If this sort of negative feeling had not recurred, I would have left it

alone. But this inability to cope with Yung not being on his side of the bed kept bothering me after we returned to Malaysia.

He thought that I was inconsiderate and hindering his ministry for God. I could not explain my ordeals. Further, at times, I could not even wave goodbye to him in public for fear of crying. We would have our farewells in private. While he left by the front door, I remained in the room. It became especially impolite when friends took the trouble to fetch him for the airport. It was getting irrational and uncontrollable. Otherwise, I was performing my daily mothering and homemaker roles normally.

What did I do? I repented, prayed and pleaded with the Lord to enable me to enjoy the full-time Christian ministry, believing it was His will for us. Before we married, I had already realized that it could entail long separations. But I had not expected such negative behaviour and response on my part. Then, in His gentle way, the Good Shepherd made possible the healing that I needed so much.

One day in early 1986, while carrying our second child in the first trimester, I was deeply unhappy and irritable for no known reason. Unable to contain those feelings, I called Yung at his seminary office. When he suggested

that the lady librarian come over to pray with me, I agreed. On arrival, this friend muttered,

"No wonder the Lord asked me to fast today."

We sat and shared for a while. Neither of us could fathom my pressing mood dilemma. Finally she commented:

"If this is unusually unreasonable, the cause is usually subconscious."

With that, she laid hands on me and prayed for His divine intervention and healing. There was no special enlightenment immediately though I was comforted that someone cared.

A few days after, while resting in the daytime, a surge of strong emotions overwhelmed me. It was like grief. I cried to the Lord,

"Please help me, please help me ... "

In my mind, pictures gradually appeared. There were three scenes:

First, I saw my old family home in Penang. A little toddler was wandering around the house. She was bewildered, lonely and mumbling to herself,

"Why doesn't anyone talk to me? Why is everyone so quiet and not playing with me? Why aren't we happy as usual?"

The others were dressed in black. I began to identify myself as the toddler and sought the Lord for clarification.

Then the second scene came into view. I saw a huge rectangular box in the open space of our ground floor family shophouse. The toddler was asking,

"What is inside that box? It is so big!"

Immediately after that, the little girl noticed that the place where her maternal grandmother used to sleep was . . . vacant. The little girl broke into tears, yelling,

"Who has taken Ah Mah (Grandma in Hokkien dialect) away, who has taken my Ah Mah away?"

Suddenly, the meaning emerged. I had been rather attached to my Ah Mah. She was already an invalid as a result of a severe stroke, and was partially blind at the time of my birth. She used to call me by an affectionate nickname. When God took her home, the household grieved. But they had forgotten that a tiny two-year old child needed some kind of explanation about dying and death. They must have assumed that she was too young

to understand and therefore should not be frightened by talks of death. The Lord assured me that it was not because they did not love me. It was because they were so sad that they did not know what to do or say.

It became clear to me then that Ah Ma's body was in that box in the hall. As the Lord took me to the third scene, He joyfully announced,

"Your Ah Mah is in heaven. The angels brought her to be with Me. She is happy and you will see her again!"

"Oh, I see. Then I won't be sad anymore!" I exclaimed.

But on that afternoon in 1986, I grieved for my Ah Mah and cried till I fell into a deep and peaceful sleep.

What followed this event? From that day onwards, I was healed of my version of pathological grief. There was no more whining and pining when Yung had to stay away from home overnight. The irrational sorrow disappeared. The Lord's miraculous healing did not only enable us to continue His work harmoniously, but also prepared me to face my first adult grief when my mother died a few months later. I shudder to guess how I could have reacted if He had not touched me before that. Many who suffer from unhealed pathological grief

may later develop adult clinical depression when faced with another severe and sudden loss of any kind.

*"Lord, Your face shines in the loss of death,
Having conquered it to give us Your eternal rest;
No longer need we grieve as those who do not know,
but as those on whom Your eternal grace is
bestowed." (Author)*

May 20, 1986.

After five months of increasing weakness, God truly sent His angels to take Mother home to His joy, comfort and health. In January and February, Mother already knew that she would be going soon. Several close friends prayed with us; together, we ushered her into His presence where we shall all meet again.

Our son was two and a half years old then. I took great pains to explain to him about death and God's life for us here and in heaven. I believe he understood. Before the funeral, on seeing my sister weeping, he comforted her,

"Sa-Ee (Third Aunt on mother's side), don't cry. Ah Mah is in heaven with Jesus. The angels came for her."

He too passed through grief with me and for a few months showed changes in behaviour. But the Lord intervened in my life and he was prevented from suffering as I did.

Wonderful Saviour, amazing grace, living Lord!

From this personal experience of loss of someone so close to me, I began to desire to more deeply understand the fullness of God's love for me. The Son of God loved me so much that He was willing to be separated from His Father for me, a slow-to-learn sinner.

One evening, just before Good Friday in 1991, these thoughts dawned on me. It was as if the Father and the Son were having a dialogue over the fall of man as described in Genesis 3. I write the following with reverence and awe, in wonder at His kindness to us.

Father:

We love them whom We have created in Our image. But they will now live in eternal suffering as they are separated from Our love, nurture and joy. They are made to be My children, My Son, and My heart cries for them. I long for them to come home to Me and live as My children again.

Son:

Yes, Father, I understand, for I too long to be with them forever. As You love me, so I love them. Will You give them to Me?

Father:

They are meant to be with us, My Son. They are ours. But they have chosen to reject Me as their God and Father. They have chosen to sell their birth right for a temporary fling in the world. They have fallen into the trap Our enemy set for them: the trap of pride and ambition, thinking that they can know as We know. I do not want to see them suffer in perpetual pain, humiliation, everlasting depression, and utter hatred of themselves and one another. But I am holy and cannot behold sin. They deserve to die, to be separated from Me forever. They will be eternally unfulfilled without Me. But My Father heart yearns for them. My beloved and only begotten Son, will You go to be one of them, to identify with them in their daily struggles with sin?

... to show them Who I am?

... to obey My word, every word, as Son of Man, so as to regain for them their birth right? If You obey Me, ask anything You want and I will surely give it to You. Then You will also show them how to love Me as You love Me.

... finally, to take the penalty of their sins upon Yourself, so that they may be forgiven, redeemed, set free from the guilt, penalty, power and presence of sin?

It will cause both of Us much pain. We will be separated when their sins are placed on You, My Son. Are You able to bear the pain, to be whipped, spat at, humiliated although innocent, and tortured to death as a common criminal on a cross? Son, You and I have never been separated before. Do You love them and Me enough to do this for them so they can come home to Me?

Son:

I do, My Father, for I trust You and I am secure in Your love. I know that what You say You will do. Will You then give me Your authority to lift Myself up from death to life to sit by Your side forever again? I pray that they will receive My sacrifice for them and trust Me to bring them home to You to be with Us forever, to enjoy Our love and constant companionship all over again.

"I was there when He set the heavens in place, ... and when He marked out the foundations of the earth. 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 8:27-31)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made." (John 1:1-3)

"He is the source of Your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." (I Corinthians 1:30)

Father:

Surely, My Son! They shall be joint heirs with You, and You will be their Elder Brother! But remember, Son, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. Nevertheless, where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. Come, let Us work to bring them home
(Galatians 4:25).

Consequently, God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, was born in the flesh and obeyed the Father till on the Cross He cried,

"It is finished."

The Son of God died for me: the just for the unjust, the sinless for the sinful. Because I have sold my birth right as His child, in return for sin and death, which is eternal separation from Him, I have lost the privilege of asking anything from the Father. Only He who has not forfeited His Sonship through disobedience can intercede on my behalf. No wonder then that I need to pray in Jesus' Name when I approach God my Father. Because of all that the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, I can now know with certainty that I will be with my mother and my Ah Mah again!

"Death is swallowed up in victory. 'O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO GIVES US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. (1 Corinthians 15:54b-57).

My heart breaks into song as He shows Himself to me:

*“Lord, Your face so shines upon me,
And Your love just floods my soul;
And Your blessings rest upon me,
Causing me to be made whole;*

*From my heart I want to Thank You,
For the things You've done for me,
And my love for You keeps growing,
As You show Yourself to me.”*

(Scripture in Song, Volume 3)

CHAPTER 4: LEARNING TO CARE



Fear of old



Faith in new

FROM FEAR TO FAITH

Medical and surgical emergencies do not usually alarm me. Somehow, I face them calmly. However, there used

to be one kind of emergency that I would rather not handle: one that had to do with an acutely psychotic patient. It was not due to prejudice, I believe, but due to my ignorance of the dynamics of mental and emotional disorders. Ignorance is often a major cause of fear in our interaction with those around us or the environment in general. Nevertheless, two events led me to apply for a transfer from a satisfying job at the NTBC (National Tuberculosis Centre) in Jalan Pahang, Kuala Lumpur, to work at the UKM-Department of Psychiatry (University Kebangsaan Malaysia), then based at the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital.

Firstly, in 1976, an African Christian psychiatrist shared about his service at a large mental hospital in his country. He impressed upon a group of Christian medical students from the Monash University in Melbourne that: if every human being had just one friend whom he could trust and with whom he could communicate his true self, there would be fewer patients in mental hospitals. He added that Jesus Christ is the only One who can fulfil that role of a lasting Friend for us completely. Did He not clearly indicate that to His disciples in John 15? Did He not continue to call us to friendship with Him in Revelations 3:20? How deaf, blind and unfriendly we are!

This perspective confirmed in my then young mind what I had concluded in my search for the essence of my life in Christ. Christian fellowship is precious and I hold it close to my heart. When missed, I long for it, but I need to hold direct fellowship with the Lord even more dearly. Out of the fellowship with the Son of God will flow my fellowship with fellow children of God. In 1 John 4:11-12, the disciple John taught the same. In Jesus alone will we find stability, peace and rest. The world needs to know Him as Saviour, Master and Friend.

Secondly, around 1981, I was invited to sit in the committee of Rumah Harapan, a new project of MCARE (Malaysian Christian Association for Relief and Education). Rumah Harapan sought to shelter and care for those with deep mental-emotional needs. They needed a medically-trained volunteer to help assess their clients. I was willing but scared. However, taking this as a signal to explore this field, I sought the Lord's counsel. He allayed my fears through the reading and meditation of 2 Thessalonians 1: 11-12:

"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His call, and may fulfil every good resolve and work of faith by His power, so that the Name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you

in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

There was a series of questions in a checklist that I had to answer:

1. HAS HE GIVEN ME A BURDEN FOR THE REJECTED AND NEGLECTED, THE SORROWFUL AND THE BROKEN-HEARTED?

Yes, He has. In my childhood, I had watched my father train teenage boys in his business while my mother taught them to obey their elders. Most of them were either unmanageable at home or were too young to obtain jobs after they dropped out of school. Most of them learned some skills and good behaviour before they left for better opportunities elsewhere. My parents would then rejoice with them. As I reflected on this, it seemed that my compassion for the less fortunate had been nurtured by my parents' actions. This sensitivity was imparted to me through osmosis. My heart rises to thank God for my parents' example - they acted when they were in a position to share though they themselves never had an opportunity to be formally educated in schools and started life very poor (4).

On my part, I did not realize then that, years later, lessons learnt walking the General Hospital psychiatry

wards would become useful in the practice of lay pastoral counselling to especially His workers from Malaysia and other Asian countries. Entry into such training also put me into contacts with doctors who would later accept cases referred to them. These were precious gifts of genuine relationships which more lucrative jobs in private practice might not have provided.

2. IS IT A GOOD RESOLVE TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE EMOTIONALLY AND MENTALLY WEAKENED?

I could not deny that it is both good and right as the Lord's heart is with the poor and weak in society, as shown in the Old and New Testaments.

3. WOULD SUCH WORK REQUIRE FAITH?

Certainly. Though this particular field was new to me, I had seen and heard enough during medical school days to realize that, ultimately, we have little to offer for the healing of damaged emotions and minds. Medicine may help some to live symptom-free and save lives in acute psychotic attacks. I thank Him for research, laboriously done in the last several decades, to lessen the suffering of fellow human beings. However, deep personality traits usually evade solution when problems arise.

Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's works might have enabled us to better understand the complexities of human nature. But it is God alone who is able to change His people for the better when they humbly come to Him.

Little did I know, however, that faith had to be tested rigorously.

4. WOULD HIS POWER BE REQUIRED?

The answer was 'Yes' again. At least, I was consoled that His power would be available.

5. WHAT WAS MY MOTIVE FOR SUCH SERVICE? WAS IT FOR HIS GLORY AND NOT FOR MINE OR SOMEONE ELSE'S?

At that time, it was so clear. *"Yes, Lord, it will be for You alone."* As matters developed, this very motive had to be purified beyond what I had reckoned.

6. HOW MUCH OF GOD'S POWER WOULD BE INVOLVED?

It needed the power of His grace, the amazing unconditional love of God to love the unlovable, help the helpless, and pray for those who unintentionally test others to the limit.

As noted in Chapter 1, Yung used to pastor a small congregation in Sentul, one of the most notorious areas of Kuala Lumpur before the 80's. This township once housed one of the most hard-core criminals of the land, Botak Chin. A social worker once commented that squatter areas in Sentul made some refugee camps appear clean and spacious. Broken homes and related problems of alcoholism, poverty and drug addiction made this part of the city unattractive to many who were concerned about possible negative influences on their growing children. Many local church members (born, converted and bred there) permanently shifted out of Sentul when they entered middle-class status. Yung was posted to a church located among these humble people, surrounded by a few cows and a multitude of toads which croaked muscally each rainy night. Coming from a quieter old Georgetown in the 50's and 60's, I thoroughly enjoyed such an enriching environment of sorts. My work place was just 5-10

minutes' drive away along Jalan Tun Razak, depending on whether traffic was heavy.

Ironically, a large part of the same area has now developed into an upper middle-class housing project called Sentul Raya. The rich and the poor, including hundreds of refugees, live side by side near to the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Centre (KLPA). I wonder whether the creativity of the poorer children is being nurtured as well.

In 1981, we were more prepared for members with spiritual and physical plights than those with deep emotional and mental needs.

However, soon after I was transferred to the UKM Department of Psychiatry, at least five former and new members, with severe disorders of the mind and emotions, became part of our church life. No one had asked for such a challenge, but confronted with their intense longing for attention and care, lip service was not worth much. I had expected to keep them at a professional distance, to be able to walk away for a break in tense situations. But,

"No, No," the Lord seemed to say, "I'll show you My way!"

The first two weeks of walking through the psychiatry wards proved overwhelming. Stories that patients related sounded so familiar and similar to those shared by church members: that of neglect, marital infidelity, jealousy, broken promises . . . the list went on. But why and how did some survive and carry on their daily lives as if everything and everyone was in place, whereas others become uncontrollably out of mood and mind? How did the former manage?

So I repeatedly asked in my mind,

"Lord, why...why...why do common problems of a sin-stained world affect different people differently, whether they come from similar or very different backgrounds?"

I wondered how the former managed their constant existential plight. There was as yet no answer. All I knew was that by the end of the second week, I was so affected by the sudden exposure to such voluminous human suffering, seemingly irremovable, that my feeble mind started to react to the shock of it all. I began losing grasp of the situation. While driving back to the parsonage one afternoon, I found myself feeling queer and becoming detached from my environment. People in the streets appeared unreal. The next day at work, my kind professor generously gave me a week off to

recuperate and re-orientate my feeble emotions and mind. As soon as I had had enough sleep and a change of atmosphere, back I went into the wards. When I related my experience to my colleague, another lady doctor, she exploded with laughter and exclaimed,

"You know what happened to me the first time I was here? I had 'nervous' diarrhoea for days!!"

I too broke up with a hearty laugh which was indeed medicine for my soul! Let me share with you what such caring may involve as our society has begun to see the need to care for the emotions and minds of those with such special needs.

HE ALMOST DID IT

Lian, mentioned in Chapter 1, had become God's child in 1983. A few months after his father died, he had to grapple with deep false guilt feelings of not having been a good husband to his late wife. Those emotions so overpowered him that he slid into a severe depression and harboured suicidal thoughts. He was angry with her sisters who accused him unfairly; it seemed as if he could never clear his reputation of having been a poor and bad husband. His in-laws did not help either.

One night, while working in a train, Lian pointed a Russian roulette at his head and...fired. Seconds later, he realized that he was still alive! Stunned by what could have happened, and then recognizing that his newly-found Saviour had prevented him from taking his own life, he returned home. Later that day, he rushed to the parsonage to seek Yung's counsel and prayer.

We thanked God for His rescue. Several thoughts ran through my mind. If he had succeeded in committing suicide so soon after his conversion, what would his non-Christian relatives have concluded about his faith or God's purpose in saving him? They would not understand the complicated psychological dynamics behind any suicide attempt. It was not yet given to them to grasp such researched truth anyway.

But God, the true God, who would not let His Name be trampled upon, saved him from such a tragedy to show forth His love to the unwanted, despised, ridiculed, and distressed. Later, with professional medical care, Lian lived to a ripe old age with his new Christian wife who cared for him. She was willing to accept him as he was. A few years after his salvation, three of his five independent children also received Christ. Years later, his rich sister, who used to ridicule him, also became his sister in Christ and welcomed Lian to her home. How

good it was to be found by God! Christ's ministry of reconciliation was rippling on.

"I AM GOING TO JESUS."

After Yung was no longer pastor of the Sentul church, my family stayed on for Jerng's and our later young children's emotional and spiritual stability. Meanwhile, Tan returned to his home church.

Tan was a thirty-two year old bachelor when we first met in 1986. He was usually respectful and complying, especially to older friends. Through the Boys' Brigade movement in the same Sentul local church, he had accepted the Lord Jesus into his life. Not long after he left high school, he worked himself up to a supervisory position in a supermarket in the Chow Kit area. However, he was drawn by business contacts into drug addiction. This cost him his job as well as his self-respect. He was ashamed to be with former friends, and stopped having fellowship with Christian brethren. Nevertheless, he was blessed with caring though understandably over-protective parents.

Sometime in 1983, our third year in Sentul, Tan returned for worship services in the church where he was converted. He was warmly welcomed back by those who had known him previously. As I observed his gait

and knew him at closer range, I felt that something was inappropriate. His thinking was clear though his mood appeared low. On referring him to a psychiatrist friend in another unit, the new doctor discovered that, for several years, he had been on medication for schizophrenia while he was actually suffering from a manic-depressive disorder, one with a much better prognosis. After seeing the new doctor, his medication was changed. His mood, behaviour and gait improved.

However, just as he was feeling better, his desire for companionship in marriage escalated to the extent that he would feel badly hurt whenever he was turned down for dates. Unavoidably, this caused a resurfacing of his inner turmoil and a deep sense of rejection.

Surgical correction of his congenital squint, however, boosted his self-esteem as his facial features improved. This lifted his mood for several months. However, the girl he hoped to befriend just could not accept his date. Meanwhile, several church friends continued to open their homes to him. But after a few months, he disappeared from the fellowship again. One brother closest to him thought he was more independent now and so left him alone for a while.

However, when another mutual friend cautiously informed me that Tan was seen asking passers-by for

money in the back lanes of Chow Kit, my antennae shot up. Was he resuming his old habits of hard drug usage and visiting of prostitutes? Was he suffering a relapse of his mood disorder. During the manic phase, a patient at times loses his self-control and moral discernment. Follow-up phone calls by caring church brothers only brought denials. But before anyone could check him out further, Tan, unkempt and restless, returned to a Sunday morning service held at the hall of the Methodist Boys' School, Sentul.

A few minutes later, Tan suddenly left his seat. Two of us rushed out with him. He was indifferent, wanted to smoke and insisted on leaving. We realised then that he was really suffering a relapse. One of the men who used to care of him finally persuaded him to be hospitalized. Indeed, he had defaulted medication and was in severe mood swings.

After about a week, Tan's mood lifted for the better. Unknown to relatives and friends, his doctor approved his home-leave on his request since he was behaving normally by then. We later discovered that he returned home to cheerfully inform his non-Christian mother that he was going to see Jesus. This roused no suspicion as he seemed so much happier. The next morning, his family reeled in shock when a policeman called by his home to inform them that Tan's body had been found lying at the foot of a block of the former Pekeliling Flats.

Two couples who opened their homes to Tan were shaken badly. One couple had earlier given him a room to use rent-free so that he could learn to live his renewed life as an independent adult, away from his parents who lived nearby. They had taken care of him conscientiously. At least, he could have responded to sincere godly love and turned to someone in his darkest moments.

On hindsight, I learnt that, at times, such deeply emotionally needy persons have a tendency to feel extremely guilty when *'loved too much'*. He probably felt terribly guilty for over-bothering his Christian friends who were, in fact, willingly, graciously and sincerely caring for Him as a brother. Hence, may be it would help, in future similar situations, to make them feel needed by us now and then. In this way, they may feel that they have something to give back to the carers, a subconscious indication of their self-worth.

Another lesson for people carers to be aware of is that suicidal ideas come to a recovering patient when he is feeling better. When down in deep depression, one is usually unable to think straight enough to plan a suicidal attempt. Therefore, recovery time is not time for us to relax yet.

For a number of years some of us found it hard to dare to be involved in such caring again. Gratefully, our new pastor bravely preached a funeral sermon that helped to lift many up from our pain and confusion.

His mother, nonetheless, was grateful to his Christian friends for loving him. Many of us, however, felt we had failed God and Tan.

"LORD, I CANNOT COPE ANY LONGER."

Deva was an Australian trained school teacher. A friend referred him to our church in 1983. God had just saved him from taking his own life. Deva had planned to jump from a block of high-rise flats too. As he was driving out of his residential area, a Christian friend greeted him by the roadside and invited him home for coffee. It was then that Deva confided in this friend who prayed with him. Subsequently, Deva received Christ's forgiveness for his sins and was delivered from alcohol addiction. From that instant, he drank Chinese tea instead of beer.

Here was a man who would not dream of hurting anyone. He used his talent in creative writing to pen short stories for his lower secondary male students. But his mind and emotions had been so battered by family members that he often felt nervous while relating with others. The slightest hurt brought intense feelings of

rejection. He often cried like a baby before sympathetic friends. But teaching and caring for his teenage students was his joy. This gift would have blossomed if not for hurting memories of having a manipulative mother who suffered from an unfulfilled marriage. Yet, he cared for his parents till their last days. His older siblings were only interested in getting a bigger share of the inheritance.

Brother Silva, a member of our congregation, walked with Deva through his bouts of depression and panic attacks. Not keen on cooking, these two bachelors usually dined at Chinese restaurants. Not many other Malaysian Indians do that by choice but the less spicy food suited Deva's gastritis-prone stomach.

However, as Deva increasingly leaned on Silva for emotional support, the latter felt emotionally exhausted. Both anticipated Deva's approaching retirement, due in March 1990, with the hope of a more relaxing routine for him. He would pursue his life-long ambition of writing. Further, he was relieved that tussles over the inheritance of parental property had been resolved. At last, his brother and sister would leave him alone. We too waited with him as his dream for better days drew near.

On the evening of December 31, 1989, at the watch night service in our church, Silva, tired out with the caring of his friend, prayed,

"Lord, I cannot stand Deva's leaning on me anymore. I cannot cope any longer...please relieve me of this task!"

At 7.00 pm on January 1, 1990, our home telephone rang. In a voice filled with consternation, Silva informed us that Deva had just died of a heart attack while on the way to pick me up for our cell group New Year party.

Once more we grieved, even though we knew he was in the best place of security and rest. We had lost another good friend. God's ways are truly beyond us. We were thinking of his earthly retirement; He was planning his eternal fulfilment. At times, He takes our words more seriously than we take His. Silva was quietly shocked that God had not taken him home instead...but thankful that God had allowed him to be Deva's brother and friend. God provides His grace through His community indeed.

"WHY NOW, LORD?"

Kim, a former accounts clerk, had been on medication for severe depression for the past 11 years. She belonged to a large family of eight children. Being the

youngest, however, had not enhanced the opportunity to receive more attention at home. Instead, she felt severely neglected after her mother died when she was only twelve. As her father also died when she was a young working adult, she had to live with older siblings who grudgingly took her in. Soon, a trusted brother gambled away Kim's share of the inheritance, supposedly in his keeping. Feeling betrayed, she withdrew further into herself and suffered from relapses of depression which drove her to several suicide attempts.

When I first met Kim in 1986, she was looking for work as she was able to perform simple household duties. We needed a temporary helper and thus employed her on the recommendation of a mutual friend who assured me of her normal behaviour. I was home most of the time and therefore could supervise her activities, having little idea that it was to be a period of rehabilitation for Kim. She appeared normal though a little slow in dialogue at the interview. Kim joined my household in September 1986. Her mood had been balanced by medication which she conscientiously took for years. A willing helper, she worked with us, laughed with our young children and celebrated birthdays. Over the months, Kim emerged from her dark and lonely years to enjoy social life again. Assuming the role of bigger sister

to many of our cell group members, she started to actively visit them to encourage and help wherever she could. Included in her agenda, on days off, was a long list of relatives and friends whom she sought to lend a hand to. Advice to slow down was not heeded. But at least she cared, I thought, while many others did not. The referring friend following up on her rejoiced that she was back to a relatively normal home lifestyle.

In March 1989, she had a severe relapse of her disorder. I was horrified to see her total change in personality after the usual weekend off. At the beginning of her stay with us, Kim assured me that she could sense an impending relapse and promised to inform me as soon as she could if that happened. I had no idea that she had schizophrenia instead of a mood disorder. Nevertheless, I was grateful that she frankly told me that morning,

“Bee Teik, I cannot work today.”

Later, I was to discover that her new alternative medicine ‘doctor’ had permitted her to stop her original long term medication as she was on his prescription of strong vitamins for the last three to four months. On hindsight, this explained her gradual over-religious behaviour preceding the severe relapse, though I was not quick enough to recognize it at the time, having our

infant Ning and two active pre-schoolers to mother. Kim had been doing so well.

For Kim, the last relapse was hardest to take as there was hope of her settling down in a home of her own. She secretly liked a fellow church member though she never directly mentioned her intention when well.

As a group of Christian women nursed her to recovery, our cell group brothers and sisters, for the first time, gathered together to seek the Lord's wisdom as to how we could minister to her in the long term. Just as our hearts were warmed up, Kim hanged herself in her landlady's house. A note left behind read,

"Die, no one to blame ... Lord, forgive me."

Once more, our local spiritual family reeled in shock and grief, repented and sorrowed that we had not been able to meet her deep and intense needs. Some resolved before the Lord and others that if He were to bring those in such suffering again, they would share their homes with them willingly.

Through the ministry of two close friends, I recovered from the shock after two months of intense anxiety. Each time I closed my eyes, my mind 'sees' Kim's body hanging under the staircase of her landlady's house

(which was like ours), though my children and I were advised not to view her body at all. Only those who have gone through the valley of severe depression or identified with such patients can perceive the shattering reality of their utter loneliness and helplessness. Their confusion and fears are staggering. Their worldview has become unreal! We had to experience it twice in three short years in one caring local church community. What was God saying to us? To point a finger at the carers is not edifying at all although we would readily admit that a thorough assessment may enable us to do better next time.

The late Dr John White once taught that it is best to care for persons with special needs as a community so that the care-givers do not collapse under the emotional burden (5). I cried in my heart:

"Lord, why did You allow this sister to take her life when our cell group members were just beginning to work together and care for one another?"

There was no clear answer yet. But one thing I knew: as we committed all that had happened to Him, He would redeem them for His purpose.

CHAPTER 5: WITH HIM IN THIS LAND



Childhood friends - Penang MGS reunion (Year 1969).

The author is second on the right.

LOVING MY NEIGHBOURS AS MYSELF

A vibrant community life is essential for our personal and corporate well-being. Realising this, I began to look at city life and church with a different eye; thankful for all yet constructively critical when necessary. How else can we be salt and light?

Counselling

When I first returned to Malaysia in 1980, I noticed a gradual shift in our society in Malaysia, especially in the city, from sharing our hidden problems with religious personnel to the caring physician. In the West, people have been seeing professional counsellors for decades as the confidence in the ability of religious leaders to counsel with wisdom, and help with power, declined. Ironically, just as they were waking up to the need for divine intervention for real and effective healing of emotions and minds, we were moving in the other direction towards secular counselling without discernment (4).

Non-Medical Abortions

Once, a young and innocent-looking sweet seventeen-year old girl approached me to induce the abortion of her baby in early pregnancy. Her boyfriend at the factory had jilted her. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she looked at me with pleading eyes; her parents must not know. While comforting her, I attempted to dissuade her from doing something that she might regret later and explained to her the worth of her baby. I gave her time to think it over. The next day, she passed by my clinic door. On questioning a nurse, my heart sank to hear that another doctor in the same clinic had performed the abortion for her.

As a Christian, what could I have done? How could I genuinely persuade her to keep her child if there were no guarantee of help for mother and child? Was there a home where she could be sheltered till the baby was born and adopted? Who would provide for her daily needs? How could she understand the sanctity of life if she had been treated like a plaything? I have agonized over this through the years. Surely, in order to help this young girl and others in similar situations, we need to be a caring community. For such projects, we need personnel and funds. We need to sacrificially give of our talents, time and/or funds. Genuine faith in Him has to show its fruits through continuous good work that point all to Christ and His much anticipated return (Revelations 19:6-9).

Incidentally, a misconception appears to exist in our society: some people believe that the doctor has to regard abortion on demand as ordinary medical treatment for illnesses. Hence, I am failing in my duty as a doctor if I do not comply with such requests. A few of my patients became upset or angry when I refused to agree with them over this issue. However, I must say that it was usually not the expecting women but their male companions who reacted this way.

On another occasion, an urban working mother asked to abort her baby as she was not ready for another child. I counselled her against the abortion. She was disappointed. However, after many months, the mother returned to inform me that she had given birth to a lovely baby daughter and was overjoyed that she had changed her mind about the abortion. That was one of those rewarding moments in medical work!

By the early 21st century, though, several NGO homes have opened their doors to take care of helpless single mothers until they deliver their babies. Even better, it would be such a joy when many more willing and suitable Christian families foster or adopt these children and nurture them for the Lord!

Many others in the city needed tender loving listening, acceptance, and, at times, concrete suggestions as they pour out their sorrow, frustrations and loneliness. Many have been hurt by casual romances and financial problems as they sought the bright lights of city life. Often, I long to be able to introduce my Lord of love, forgiveness, light and life to them, but had held back due to certain societal restraints; at other times, I know that a warm hug or handshake would be much appreciated though not always acceptable in an Asian context. Nevertheless, as my heart goes out to those

needy people, I know that only the Lord's heart and His compassion are the answers for them. Did He not say:

“Love the Lord Your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all Your strength and with all Your mind and Your neighbours as yourself”?

How we need to put our faith into action as His ambassadors in our needy and sin-sick nation and world.

Let me give you a glimpse of the community life my family was privileged to experience in Malaysia between 1986-1989.

TAMAN SRI GOMBAK

Situated on a low hill in a suburb of Kuala Lumpur, Taman Sri Gombak was one of the newer residential areas in the Klang Valley in the late 80's. For three years, we lived there. Our road had thirty homes. We had friendly Indian, Malay and Chinese neighbours. The main religions in our country were also represented, namely, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Christianity. The area was then away from the hustle and bustle of traffic jams and smog. We enjoyed the quiet and clean environment. In the mornings, housewives would hurry out to the call of

horns from the vegetable and fish vendors. Those with toddlers waiting at the grille doors zipped through their marketing at surprising speeds. Others chatted while they fumble through the provisions.

In the evenings, children cycled up and down the street racing one another, oblivious to the yells of their mothers. Bicycles and tricycles were often not their own; it did not matter, as long as the owners got them back at the end of the day. Women, waiting for their husbands to return from work or, having completed their share of household chores, sat and exchanged news at the gates. Our homes were open to one another even though our neighbours knew we worship the Lord Jesus. In times of emergencies, I could trust a number of our neighbours with our children because I saw the dedication and gentleness with which they cared for their little ones. Family life was generally high in their priorities. We borrowed one another's tools and ladders. When families and friends visited, the surroundings rang with laughter and chatter. Once, a neighbour's sister from her kampung (*village* in Bahasa Malaysia) accidentally locked herself in a bathroom. On hearing her yells for help, Yung and I went over with his toolbox and rescued her within a few minutes.

When my toddler-daughter-Ping accidentally cut her finger badly, I sent Jerng to call another mother for help. She promptly hurried over and held Ping while I bandaged her little finger which was bleeding profusely. What would we do without such caring neighbours?

In that context, geographically distanced and rather isolated from our vibrant Sentul Christian community for about three years, my heart ached for a deeper experience of sharing lives and homes with my brethren. How I wished that we could meet more often to pray and play, to give and to receive, as encouraged in Hebrews 10:23-25. I began to realise how easily we, in a prospering nation, may slide into an individualistic attitude and lifestyle. We then misrepresent the God we love and seek to represent and serve.

THE DIFFERENCE JESUS MAKES

Jesus' words from Matthew 28:18-20, known to us as the Great Commission, are usually used as a mandate for His followers to obey. This is good and right. However, what is it in this command that makes it different from other religious calls to make disciples? It is in His last promise,

"And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Even as He walked with His first disciples, He walks with us now. If we will listen, we will hear Him guiding us with His truth in the different situations of our lives. Our multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual society is not new to Him. The Palestine of His time was just as colourful and interesting! He lived, died and resurrected through it all so that there could be and would be peace on earth and goodwill to all with whom He is pleased.

How are we to please Him? We do so by trusting in Him: His existence in human history, His atonement on the cross for all sins and His resurrection. As the Advocate for those who trust Him since, He will bring them home with joy to His Father and theirs by grace, not by works, because no sinner can completely fulfil all His commands.

Jesus' specific new commandment for His disciples is to love one another as He has loved us. By this love, all men will know that we are His disciples. This does not mean that we are not His disciples if we do not love like He does (for then it would be a gospel of works, not grace), but that *the world has the right to say* that we are not His disciples. Do we dare not to try our best to love one another as He loves us if we love Him?

Recently, a speaker at a missionary conference gave a sermon on being a gracious minority in another country.

I found his thoughts timely and edifying. Let me share them with you. I have added some of my own reflections:

Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, was always gracious and not vicious.

When maltreated, He would in fact protect His 'oppressors', but not Himself. Imagine what hot-tempered Peter could have done to Judas Iscariot if Jesus had revealed Judas's plot openly. We need to feel secure in God-given basic human rights, stamped on all human beings made in the image of the Creator God, so that we may control ourselves in the use of those very rights. When we use them for the benefit of others, just as Jesus did for us (Philippians 2:5-11), others will see the humility that He has and search for Him.

Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, did not take revenge.

He did not feel good in making others feel bad. His life was entrusted to His Father who loved Him and sent Him on the mission to reconcile us to Himself. His joy was in talking things over with His Father and to know His approval, not in hurting others. No matter how painful the suffering He bore, as expressed in His prayer in *the Garden of Gethsemane*, He would rather have His

Father's pleasure (1 Peter 2:22,23). In this respect, James's admonition and exhortation for the controlled tongue has much value for us. (In today's IT world, controlled fingers would be appropriate too.)

Jesus worked with and led His disciples without lording over them.

This example was specifically handed down to us by His washing of the disciples' feet. Therefore, whenever we recall the Matthew 28 mandate, perhaps we need also to remember His desire for servanthood and oneness for us, as expressed in John 13 and 17. However, more often than not, we do the reverse – we care but with some self-interest thrown in. Probably, this is not due to too much work that hinders us from being mindful of others' needs, but due to the thinking that as our training and experience increase, our perks must also increase, irrespective of our real needs. This is the commercial pattern of service. One such perk is to be served and not to serve, to give orders and not to take them. Those of us in full-time Christian ministry are no less tempted to do so.

Jesus sang a hymn and did not scream when He was about to face His captors in Gethsemane.

He then made one last effort to be alone with His Father who loved Him so much and released all that was in His heart to Him. He knew that He needed that intimacy with His beloved Father in order to be sustained through that moment of darkness when He would be separated from Him. Because of God's faithfulness, we will never be separated from our heavenly Father again. But we do need that intimacy with Him to take us through the darkest hours of life that may come in any form. Even when we fail like Peter did, we can be assured that Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, is praying for us. And when we turn again, we too must strengthen our brethren in this land, and farther, as He wills (Luke 22:31--32).

Therefore, as we live with Christ in Malaysia or anywhere He places us, let us seek His:

1. intimate heart with the Father;
2. trusting heart in His God;
3. gracious heart towards His opponents; and
4. servant heart towards one another and all our neighbours.

CHAPTER 6: LORD, MY FATHER NEEDS YOU



Thankfully His Thoughts and Ways are Higher than Ours!

HIS WAYS ARE HIGHER

God's Word says in Ephesians 6:1,

"CHILDREN, OBEY YOUR PARENTS IN THE LORD,
FOR THIS IS RIGHT."

The Canon of Filial Piety in Chinese culture states:

"THE GREATEST KIND OF FILIAL PIETY IS TO
HONOUR ONE'S FATHER; AND THE WAY TO
HONOUR ONE'S FATHER IS TO BE LEARNED FROM
OUR HONOURING OF HEAVEN•."

As I share about God's mercy to my father, I struggle with the possibility that some readers may misconstrue that I am dishonouring him and thus dishonouring my Lord. Yet, I am convinced that since my father is now in the joy and presence of the Lord, he too would only desire to testify to God's grace upon him and his family.

My Papa was born in the village of Ch'ng Tao in Fujian province, China. At the tender age of two, his father died; at nine years old, Papa lost his mother as well. Close relatives brought him up. Two older brothers left the village and later headed for Malaya. In his early teens, Papa also left the village to hunt for jobs. Eventually, one Christian family took him into their home-based business and nurtured his fragile young

life. That was his first experience of God's love though he did not know the Lord personally yet.

At seventeen, Papa followed his brothers' footsteps to look for his fortune in Malaya. In Taiping, Perak, just before marrying Mama, a newly baptized Christian, he accepted the Lord Jesus into his life. The much anticipated wedding took place at the Chinese Methodist Church in town. Our family thus grew up in the subculture of a Chinese church, where there was a blending of biblical and non-biblical Chinese values and ethics. Sanctification takes time for anyone.

My parents were blessed with seven living children, three born before the Second World War and four after the war. By then we were living in Penang. In the mid-fifties, Papa was actively involved in our local Hokkien church. I recall many happy days in our home, including times of family devotions when Papa's workers in our shop-house joined in.

Tragedy struck when Papa took a certain direction in his life that led him far away from the Lord. Our local church leaders arranged for his excommunication. Papa was a very reasonable man who could discuss a wide range of topics with his friends. Yet, when this happened, he would not allow the matter to be discussed. Mama daily prayed for him. I was then in

kindergarten. Papa still loved us and did not let us lack any good thing we needed. But our emotions were affected. Personally, because of the fear of incurring his wrath, I did not know how to lovingly communicate with my Papa. Where Papa was concerned, unquestioned submission was the rule at home.

In 1969, my last year in high school, the Lord impressed upon me to bring Papa before Him each day. I had no idea when Papa would return to our heavenly Father to live for Him again. Mama had almost given up hope of him ever changing. The Lord, knowing my lack of faith, spoke to me from Habakkuk 2:3 and 3:17-18

"For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end and it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay . . . Though the fig tree does not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flocks be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

I clung on to those words as year by year, Papa seemed to go further from the Lord's ways. However, His thoughts were indeed higher than mine. In the last three years of Papa's life on earth, things began to change. Mama had died by then. I was given the

opportunity to build a more mature relationship with my Papa. We loved each other, but due to the problem mentioned, I found difficulty in verbally expressing my love to him. We also had a language barrier! Papa used Hokkien most of his life while I, though having grown up in a Hokkien speaking home and environment, could not communicate serious issues in our dialect. Papa had sent me to the local English-medium Methodist Girls' School. How did God open his heart and my mouth?

In early 1989, my sister and I worked on the idea of celebrating Papa's eightieth birthday. My sister, being Chinese-educated, realized the significance of a grand party more than I did. Papa's few surviving friends, relatives and former neighbours were invited. It was certainly a joyous occasion. What we did not expect was the impact this had on Papa. He repeatedly expressed his jubilation and sense of fulfilment to us over the next few months. We too were overjoyed that, at last, our father felt happy and contented again. The only lingering concern in my heart was whether Papa really has been reconciled with God. Only once was I able to urge Papa to worship God again. Other times, the Lord told me to simply love him in ways that he understood.

At 3.00 pm on 15 September 1989, I was meditating on this passage:

"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Twenty minutes later, the telephone rang. My sister stuttered between sobs,

"Papa has died ... he died in the hospital near his village in China ... after emergency abdominal surgery. He wanted to be buried there."

Both of us cried and consoled each other. My three-year old daughter, Ping, endowed with a beautifully sensitive nature, clung to me and wept in sympathy. Infant Ning looked earnestly at us, wondering what had happened. My heart entreated the Lord,

"Father, is this what You meant when You gave me those words of comfort just now? Father, I am grieved but I want to thank You so much that You have taken Papa home to You. I know this is true because of Your word to me."

Apart from God's assurance I had, as yet, no way of confirming my father's eternal position. However, later

in the year, our home church in Penang conveyed news to us that before Papa left for the long vacation in China, he had visited and confessed his particular sin to our local home church Pastor's co-worker. For Papa to do that at his home church, the one that had excommunicated him, meant that he had repented of his old ways and turned back to his God. He was saved!

When I received this piece of good news, my whole being sang with thanksgiving and praise to the Lord our God for His patience, faithfulness and love to us! Not only did He save Papa, He also made possible a Christian funeral in his village. No one there knew the Saviour yet. The Pastor, who rode all the way from Amoy (present Xiamen), preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to about 500 villagers who listened out of respect as well as curiosity. I believe that His word will not return to Him void. After the funeral, two families were added to His Kingdom through the Amoy pastor who graciously conducted Papa's funeral. Truly, though God could not use my father in life, He used him in death. Thanks be to God our Father!

Twenty years seemed so long to wait for the fulfilment of His love in my father's life, but it was worth waiting for. If the Lord had called me back to Malaysia just to witness this act of grace, I would be satisfied. Even one

lost sheep is precious to Him. The Lord's mercies further reminded me to love others in ways that they understand and to love them without strings attached. God is often more gracious than I am.

CHAPTER 7: MY HEAVENLY FATHER CARES FOR ME



On Reflecting...

ON REFLECTING HIS FRIENDSHIP

In February 1990, a young man in church made a request for me to share a personal testimony of the Lord's goodness in my life. That made me pause to think of an experience in which God had specially touched me. I often have difficulty, when asked for quick testimonies, to know what to share because God touches so much of my everyday life that it does not seem right to pick out just the dynamic events.

Nevertheless, I tried. The testimony was never given then, but this book of reflection is a testimony to God's amazing grace to those who wait on Him.

At that particular stage of my pilgrimage, however, the request woke me up to become aware that, for years since our first child arrived in October 1983, I was hardly able to seek the Lord's direction for each new year. I just did not seem to have the time. With the march of commitments to families, local church, and the wider world, I barely had time or focus to stop to assess afresh where I was in His will for me. I felt like I was kept going each day according to what He has shown me the last time I spent prolonged time with Him alone.

At times I felt as if I was a beginner on the skating rink; when I thought I could roll on, I would fall. I was weary of trying and came near to giving up doing His will. For long periods I could not feel His joy. Often, I cried to Him,

"Lord, I know You are not a hard task-master. Please let me delight to obey You, not drag myself to do so."

I felt like a seed that had withered. Why did He not answer me? Other times, my mind wandered off to years past when He had led me as a shepherd leads His little lamb.

REMINISCENCE - AWAKENING OF PERSONAL FAITH

"Lord, remember how You blessed us with Christian parents who disciplined us to attend weekly Sunday School classes? How glad I am now for the teachers who faithfully taught us Your kindness, love, commandments and provisions of reconciliation with You. Their lives were good examples to us, especially that of Siok Bee-Chi (Chi means sister in Hokkien). That was the beginning of my thirst to be close to You. I wanted to be like my teacher to You. When visiting evangelists and revivalists spoke of Your love, I wanted to raise my hand to indicate that I yearned to respond to You. Yet, I did not have the guts to do so as everyone knew or assumed that I was already Your child. What would my pastor or parents say?!"

"But Lord, do you remember that occasion when one of Your servants from Hong Kong preached at the Assembly of God church in Rangoon Road, Penang? Many adults from various churches attended those evening meetings out of curiosity because of the outpouring of Your Holy Spirit in convicting many of sin, bringing them into Your family, delivering them from evil spirits and healing them of diseases. Mama took me with her. It was there that we first heard the language of tongues. We were thrilled."

"Then one night, the lady speaker gave an altar call for those who acknowledged that they were like the prodigal son who desired to return to our Heavenly Father. Your hand was upon me, Lord; there was no running away. I was one of Your wayward children - arrogant, excessively talkative, wanting my own ways, and loving the things of this world more than You. I cannot recall what I did exactly except experiencing the conviction of my personal sins against my holy heavenly Father and that I stood up with tears flowing down my cheeks. But You certainly knew an eleven year old girl's heart cries; You took me into Your all-embracing acceptance and filled me with Your love. I have never been the same again. I knew who I was and am - Your beloved child, forgiven and cleansed for Your purposes. No one in my family knew about this at first. I was unsure of their response and scared if they would not or could not believe me. Further, when someone laid hands on several of us, the others could speak in unknown tongues but I could not. However, from that night onwards, I knew that something deep had happened in my life. Whether it was a conversion or a step in the process of sanctification is not important now. The fact is that, since then, I have known I belonged to You. It was as if You had given me new eyes. The whole world looked different: my view of self, others and possessions

(including stamps and little purses of various designs) that I had held on so dearly, had changed!"

"After that, each time I was about to say something out of place, I felt as if there was a block in my mouth. You gave me time to think and control myself before I spoke. I reckoned that as a miracle even though I could not speak in tongues. (Twenty-one years later, at thirty-two years old, I too received this gift at a time of deep need).

Mama soon noticed my changed behaviour. Up till then, Papa usually took the family for movies on Saturday nights. After Your special touch, Lord, I refused to go with them, explaining that it was futile to pay to watch something that was fake and usually unhelpful. Initially, Papa and Mama insisted that I submit to their wishes. So I went but I could not concentrate during the show and kept repeating a Bible verse I had memorised from Sunday School. Finally, they gave up trying to persuade me; we had alternative entertainment instead. Lord, I am sorry where I had been insensitive to my family's tastes."

"Lord, remember that day when my dear Mama sent me to buy a packet of 'Char-Koay-Teow' (fried flat rice noodles in Hokkien)? I stretched out my hand for money as usual, but no money came. Mama then challenged me,

'Why do you need money from me? Just trust that God will give it to you!'

I was hurt and dumbfounded. I was also sternly told I had been hypnotized by the lady speaker. I cried to You in silence, my Lord. All I knew then was that I cannot love both money and You. I was deeply distressed especially when it was Mama who brought me up to know You. I had no answers then and could not share my secret with anyone at home, Sunday School or school. I did not know how to express my inner thoughts, feelings and questions!"

"From that incident onwards, I learned to hide those precious things You taught me about Yourself. Thanks, Lord, that You did not let me slip through Your fingers. I could not fathom, then, why Mama would not allow me to follow You all the way. There were many things that I still did not know, but didn't You say that those who desire to follow You must love You more than our families? Then why did that conflict with Mama have to occur since we use the same Bible and trust the same God? I did not want to hurt her. But how, my Lord?"

The answers would only come in the years ahead as the Lord revealed more of His ways to me. Meanwhile, I submitted to my parents because it was right to do so in God's eyes.

Nevertheless, Mama was my first conscious model of faith in the Lord. I admire the discipline she had in her daily reading of the Romanized Hokkien Bible. She used to run a finger under each line and let me repeat the words after her. The twenty-third Psalm was her favourite passage. Watching her prostrate and kneel in her room daily to pray for every member of our family taught me that God was in charge of our lives. Given a second opportunity, I would certainly appreciate Mama's expressions of faith better. I trust the Lord will explain to Mama that though there were many actions I had taken in contradiction to her ideas, it was not because I did not love her but because I sought to love our Lord Jesus more. In time to come, our relationship was strained to agony over the issue of obeying God's call to full-time Christian work. Yet the Lord enabled Yung and me to show Mama that we would always love and care for her. I believe Mama finally understood and accepted God's choice of vocation for us. Thus the Lord comforted me also.

TEENAGE YEARS OF UPHEAVAL

In the wake of the crises of adolescence, I lost conscious effort to keep up in my walk with the Lord except to recall that He heard and answered my childlike requests for help. An example was the pubertal over-self-

consciousness over body changes. I was often afraid that my classmates would notice when I had my monthly menstrual periods. So I prayed that the periods would arrive after our weekly physical education classes so that my shorts would not be accidentally stained. The Lord saw to that. I felt so safe then. He cared for me, young though I was.

Like most other teenagers, I was also infected with the common affliction of infatuation. My object of admiration was an older Christian boy whom I adored for his gentleness, faith and firm leadership qualities. However, the frequent appearing of his face in my mind so affected me that I could not concentrate on my studies. I was afraid that Mama would blame my involvement with our church youth group for the deterioration in school work. Again, I sought the Lord's intervention.

In August 1968, the Lord then spoke to me through a talk on Revelation 3:14-22 at a Youth Conference I was attending in Kuala Lumpur. He reminded me of His love for me and the commitment I had made to Him back in 1963. I could not run away from facing my lukewarm spiritual condition. I had now allowed distractions to replace my first love for Him. Sitting under a tall tree outside the conference venue, I repented and pleaded

with Him to fellowship with me again. He graciously did. I learned again to look to the Holy Spirit as my Mentor and Teacher. On waking up one day in January 1969, I was so relieved that the infatuation had disappeared.

In August 1969, three months before that all important series of secondary school examinations set by the School Certificate Examination Board, something happened that was to change the way I related to my Lord Jesus. Our Penang Wesley Church's youth fellowship invited a freelance Christian intercessor and local missionary Miss Lim, to conduct a weekend retreat for our group. She was filled with the Lord's unction and we watched her every move, eager to discover her secret of such closeness to the Lord.

The retreat started on a Friday afternoon. Miss Lim slept by 9:00 p.m. that night. Most of us who shared her room chatted in the lounge till way past 11.00 p.m. We could not understand why she did not choose to spend time with us. When we questioned her, she just gave us a smile. Since we talked till exhaustion overcame us, we inevitably woke up late but on time for breakfast! However, where was Miss Lim? No one knew. Later in the day, one of us gathered up enough courage to ask her.

"Well," she replied, "I was sitting under that big tree facing the other side and talking with the Lord." She had been there since dawn.

That really got me. Sitting and talking with the Lord? You mean that we, His disciples, were allowed to do that with Him? I thought that we unholy creatures had to prepare ourselves before we could go to Him in prayer! I thought we needed to be serious and try hard to read His word the *Scripture Union* (a Christian organisation) way, pray the *Daily Bread* (systematic Bible reading notes) prayer and walk the straight line or we might be immediately checked for indiscipline?

After that observation, my heart yearned to know God in such an informal yet intimate way ... I needed His friendship more than anything else. Somehow, my whole future seemed to depend on whether I could know Him like that.

Within the same year, 1969, the Lord Jesus graciously met me with the same words that He had spoken lovingly, yet sadly, to Philip. He asked,

"Have I been with you so long, yet you do not know Me, Philip?" (John 14:9. RSV)

In Philip's case, our Lord was upset that Philip had not understood that He and the Father are one, and that seeing Him was like seeing the Father. In my case, I knew that I had hurt Him deeply by not understanding His longing to be my Friend, not just my Saviour and Lord. What an awesome truth! From that day, I began to learn to talk with the Son of God specifically, as well as to the Father. It was such a joy to be able to express to Him the happy and painful moments of teenage life. The newly found daily devotional book, *My Utmost For His Highest*⁽⁷⁾ helped me draw closer to the Lord each day. The author, Oswald Chambers, permanently impressed upon my heart and mind that either God has all of me or none at all. The crisis of conversion is but the beginning of a process of change and growth into His likeness. The Chinese Church that nurtured me was doctrinally sound and strict. Yet I had many unanswered questions in my searching mind that I could not communicate seriously in Chinese with my Sunday School teachers and youth leaders. They had faithfully taught me the essentials necessary to plant my faith in Him. However, I found that I could not put the knowledge into practice in my daily struggles at home and in school. I could not answer my non-Christian friends' queries about the true God.

Later, still in August 1969, another book that was instrumental in helping me hear God's call to vocational Christian ministry was *John Sung: Flame for God in the Far East* (8). This young Chinese man from mainland China, who made it as a chemistry top scholar in the United States of America, intrigued me. I was gripped by his determination to set aside personal success, fame and self-fulfilment in order to obey Christ in the path He chose for him. His dedication to reach the Chinese people of his days warmed my heart even though I could not even write my name in Chinese characters well. Further, my grandmother and parents had heard him preach in the Hokkien Methodist Church in Penang in the 1930's. Mum often sang hymns used during those evangelistic meetings. This assured my then young mind that God does use Asians to minister as well. This task was not only for Westerners, although most books in the local Christian bookstalls were about Christian leaders of the Western world. The missionaries whom I met in Penang were also from the Western world. It was exciting to discover that '*in Christ there is no East or West*'. Maybe, one day, God will make me a missionary too!

I distinctly recall one afternoon, while reading about John Sung's life, that the Holy Spirit came upon me. I knew without doubt that the Lord wanted me to tend

His lambs and sheep. The specifics of a particular ministry were not clear. I knew little of other areas of full-time Christian work apart from becoming a pastor, getting married to one, or working as a staff worker with students like our British OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) missionary, Rev. Flateau. This caring and gentle pastor used to drop by our SCF (School Christian Fellowship) meetings. I tried to look for affirmation but my parents would not hear anything about my attending a Bible College. My school principal, Miss N. Moreira whom we respected and adored, encouraged me to serve Him through tertiary education.

“University campuses are mission fields,”

she gently advised without further discussion. In the 70's, her words proved true at the Monash University campus in Clayton, Melbourne.

At a December 1969 youth retreat, Rev. Flateau wisely and gently counselled me that time would confirm the Lord's guidance: if it were not God's call, the enthusiasm to prepare for His work would fade with time. If it were His voice, then I had to obey. The result was that I submitted to my parents' wishes to obtain a professional degree first. Even when I was too immature to figure out what to do, the Lord provided His shepherd's crook to keep me in His paths. Future

medical training did prove extremely useful in my mothering vocation and current calling to write, counsel pastorally and to facilitate silent retreats.

Even though the Lord speaks to me mostly through His written word, which is living and active, He sometimes speaks to me in symbolic images or through circumstances. The following incident stands out clearly in my mind. These were avenues to lead others to Jesus, not to others or self.

Then one evening in May 1971, in my little rented room in Melbourne, I had felt cornered, frightened and confused. The time had come for me to fill in the application forms for university entrance. I did not have any other option except the medical course. But my first term results in the matriculation class were poor. I felt lost and panicked. What would my parents, friends and teachers back home say? They deemed me almost brilliant. My mind was all knotted up with intense turmoil. I came to the Lord, knelt down by the bedside and cried in utmost confusion and fear.

"Father, I am at a dead end. I cannot imagine myself training to do anything except to practise medicine. Yet, Father, all I desire is to be with people so that I may share Your love with them. Why, why am I so trapped?"

Medicine is only a tool. Please, Lord, please get me out. I'll do anything You wish. Just let me know what it is!"

On hindsight, I realized that I was near to having a nervous breakdown. My head began to spin. For a few seconds I felt as if I was on a merry-go-round. My hand reached out for my daily devotional book, *Streams in the Desert*, Volume 1. The reading for that day was,

"God, Who does not lie, promised ... " (Titus 1:2).

That was all. But it was enough. The Lord spoke to reassure me that it was He who called me to be His child. Hence, He would always care for my welfare, which is not necessarily getting a medical degree. I did not have to live according to others' or my own expectations, good though they might be. More than that, the Lord taught me how to differentiate between His will and man's will.

I sobbed in great relief and got up from my knees, a freer person: free to be myself, free to live as His child according to He revealed truth and more relaxed about accepting my failures and weaknesses. God had accepted me as I was. He wanted the best for me and would always love me. If I did not fulfill my family's expectations of me, then He would handle that on my behalf as well.

Little did I realize how slow I would be to trust Him when things got rough again. What a beginner I was, and still am, in His school of loving discipline.

Not long after that incident, my high school grades improved though they were still not good enough for my idealistic self. My self-esteem plunged all over again; loneliness engulfed me. One night in September 1971, sitting in my rented room in 18 Benjamin Street, Parkville, Melbourne, to have my Quiet Time with the Lord, in my mind I saw a picture of a dark, long and isolated road...with tall trees on both sides. I was walking hesitantly towards the end of the road, which faded into the shadows of a forest. At the same time, a thought came:

"There you are, left all by yourself to walk this lonely path. You are trying very hard to please God, but you will never make it...and He does not care about you. Why bother then? Say 'No' to Him and go your own way!"

I began to circulate this thought in silence while I argued with myself that God was not like that. I seemed to be struggling for peace alone. Perhaps I was not good enough for the Lord, and He really did not care. The temptation to give up the Christian life of faith and obedience was strong. It seemed futile to be following

someone who left me in the lurch when the crunch came. Once more, I reached out for my devotional book. My eyes fell on the page for the day routinely... Jesus said to Peter,

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sieve you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren."

(Luke 22:31-32)

What? Could this be true? Did my Saviour know exactly what I was experiencing? Had He seen me, a bruised reed and a flickering flame, and had prayed for me in advance?

"Lord Jesus, is it You, really You? How can I say 'Thanks' for what You have done for me? You truly want me to know You will always be faithful, even when I fail. It is Satan's lie that You will leave me in the lurch. I know now that Your word is truth, that You will never leave me or forsake me. Please keep me faithful to You, for I finally see how weak I am."

Since that event, whenever I cannot fathom the mess in my life and I begin to sink, the Holy Spirit has always

lowered Luke's words for me, like a life boat for me to climb into. No wonder the psalmist reflected:

"I think of God and I moan; I meditate and my spirit faints. I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

I consider the days of old, I remember the years of long ago.

I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit,

'Will the Lord spurn forever and never again be favourable?

Has His steadfast love forever ceased?

Are His promises at an end for all time?

Has God forgotten to be gracious?

Has He in anger shut up His compassion?'

And I say, 'It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed.'"

But he did not stop there.

"I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord; yea, I will remember Thy deeds of old. I will meditate on all Thy work, and muse on Thy mighty deeds."

Eventually truth prevailed.

"Thy way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?(6) Thou art the God who workest wonders, who has manifested Thy might amongst the peoples, yet Thy

footsteps were not seen ... Though Thou didst lead the people like a flock." (Psalm 77:3-20)

So the Lord Jesus taught me to wait for Him for He will speak to me, His disciple and child.

*"Father, Father, I rest in Your love,
Father, Father, I rest in Your love,
Trials and pressures I may not understand,
But I know You're with me,
You hold me in Your hand ...
Father, Father, I rest in Your love,
Father, Father, I rest in Your love."*

(Scripture in Song, Volume 3, 1984)

Part 2

Rediscovery of His joy

CHAPTER 8 : A SEED MUST DIE



Death and Life

GOD BROKE THE SILENCE

March 1990. God broke the silence. This time, His word came through His gifted servants from America and Canada. I had the opportunity to attend the Power Encounter Conference held in Singapore. John Wimber, from the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anaheim, California, led a team to teach and minister God's word and visible power to the conferees. Since Jesus did say that what He did while on earth His disciples would be able to do and even more since He has gone home to

the Father, I wanted to learn from them. What actually took place and ministered to me deeply?

First, during one of the ministry times, the leader called for someone with a finger problem to come forward for healing, I felt edgy in my seat, as I had both a finger nail fungal infection as well as a usual reluctance to believe that God was picking me out and not someone else for a blessing. Later, I understood the reason for this attitude. Deep inside, I just did not feel important enough for Him to notice me though in my mind He was the God who notices and loves all. My low self-esteem, due to my wrong view of my relationship with Him, had caused a disconnection between my head and my heart.

Finally I told myself,

"Nothing to lose, maybe this time He will bless me,"

and walked forward to queue up for my turn at the front of the hall. Blessing? God, the great Physician, not only healed my finger within a year and four months when it could have taken several years, but also showered me with messages that met my specific needs! Those who prayed for me were strangers. As I related the reason for my coming for ministry to two unknown men, I cried unceasingly for what seemed a long time. When two young girls from the ministry team

saw that I was not relieved, they came near to join in the prayers. Then the words of one of the older men, a drummer in their music team, hit target:

"The seed has been sown in your heart long ago. You will pray, play, heal with your hands...like a butterfly bursting out of its cocoon. You will fly with the Lord."

"How did this bearded Caucasian drummer get the message so fast?" I wondered.

Silently, I talked to God,

"Lord, that's how I am feeling right now, like a seed all hidden, dried up and dead. I feel like a failure in every area of my life and don't understand why. I am willing to die for you, but I never knew that the dying process is so painfully long! Are You telling me that as I crucify all ambition, bury all individualism and glory only in You, Your word planted in me will bear fruit for You? It's comforting but I still cannot feel Your joy."

Sensing that joy had not filled my heart, the drummer continued to put his hand over my head and shouted,

"More! More! More!"

Meanwhile, the two girls held my hands and continued to weep with me. Then suddenly, I went faint and fell gently backwards, awake but peacefully tired and sobbing now and then. However, I felt a little upset when the drummer uttered to me,

“Better than seeing a psychiatrist, right?”

My immediate silent inner response was,

“Though you are doing your part well as His messenger, you are not sensitive to the depth of my sorrow. I still cannot feel His joy and I don’t know why!”

There I lay on the floor of the Wesley Methodist Church, Singapore. I was not sure how long I was up front but by the time I got up to return to the YWCA (Young Women’s Christian Association) hotel across the road, the hall which seated hundreds was almost empty.

As I pondered on God’s word to me, the past painful years began to make sense.

HIS AFFIRMATION

Second, God spoke to me through one of the four workshops called End-Time Ministry led by the pastor-theologian Dr. Jack Deere. I had expected to listen to theories and speculations as to when the Lord would

come again as I had so often heard from visiting speakers in my church. I chose the topic by a process of elimination as the other topics were even more familiar. However, a pleasant surprise awaited those attending Dr. Deere's sessions. He centred on the Holy Spirit's powerful movement in the lives of some of their team members and families, and above all, on the call for intimacy with Christ *"as the day draws near."*

After one of the talks, Dr. Deere instructed us to be silent for a few minutes in order to listen to God. Then he announced that the Lord wanted to minister to those who had spiritual gifts of dreams, visions and interpretations, etc. in childhood. They had tried to express their gifts but when adults did not believe them, they hid the gifts and did not use them openly. Though unaware that I had subconsciously waited for my Master's affirmation and vindication since 11 years old, at 38, I did not have to wait. I got up and rushed down the steps of the theatre-like steps to be prayed for. As I glanced right and left, I noticed that there were a few others waiting for someone to pray for them. Within a few seconds, while waiting, I sobbed uncontrollably for more than 20 minutes, I reckoned, bent over and kneeled on the floor. After a while, I felt someone praying for me from behind on my right. I looked up and saw a middle-aged Caucasian man (whom I later

discovered was a Canadian pastor) praying quietly. Then he said to me so softly yet audibly,

“As I am praying for you, I saw a picture of a mother hen sitting on its eggs. The eggs have life. They are not dead. They will hatch. The Lord wants you to know that He has given you faith. You must remain faithful. Do not give up. You must be faithful.”

O the great relief to hear that God had not forgotten His childhood calling for me! He alone knew that I was not lying when I tried to explain to my loved ones what was happening to me. Mama had scolded and accused me of having been hypnotized; she was afraid of giving me too much allowance for fear that I would give them all away! After marriage, my own God-fearing husband thought the revelations came out of my neurotic imaginations! Now God has affirmed His gifts through a total stranger who was faithful to the usage of His gifts from Him. O how honoured I was to be a surprised receiver of such affirmation from the God of love and faithfulness, the Giver Himself!

When the pastor and I sat down, I confirmed his message as from the Lord since it met my years of

waiting for God to vindicate me so I could let His gifts flow. He then prayed for me again and comforted me,

"Bee, on behalf of your beloved mother and husband, I want to assure you that I believe that God's gifts and calling to you are true. You must remain faithful to Him."

Therefore, by faith, I received God's comfort and word that He is still in charge and will make everything work for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

Repentance, forgiveness, and a deep assurance of His unchanging love, faithfulness and direction followed (Romans 8:37-39).

At the end of the series of workshops, Dr. Deere called for those who desired to have their first love for the Lord restored, to stand where they were. Like Mary, we would be indicating our hearts' desire to pour the perfume of our lives on Him; like John, we would be near to Him. Many stood up, with tears rolling down their cheeks. I was one of them. As soon as I rose to my feet, I found myself crying out:

"Lord, please give me back the first love for You. I'll do anything. I'll scrub the floor, I'll take care of my children

willingly, I'll even endure my husband's idiosyncrasies; please, please let me love You like before again whether or not You show me any other job description!"

At that point, the love of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit constrained me. I realized afresh that to love Him meant to obey Him. What that obedience entailed might not be the greatest task on earth, but it was His task for me. I needed to be found faithful to Him alone.

A missionary once preached,

"There are some things which, if you do not do, many others can do. There are some things which, if you do not do, nobody else can."

My priorities must correlate with those planned especially for me. Hence, for as long as my children were still young and at home, mothering was the main task for me, whether Yung was home to help out or not.

I returned from the conference forgiven and cleansed of my sins. In my subconscious rejection of His current primary role for me as a full-time homemaker, I had been impatient to fulfil His yet unknown job description and thus been subconsciously discontented to be at home full-time though I had chosen to be so. At the

conference, I had been encouraged by the Lord's approval, reassured of His spiritual gifts and renewed in the security of His grace. As a reminder, these words often ring in my mind:

"And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not. " (Jeremiah 45:5).

Indeed, pride in wanting to achieve something for God by one's own abilities and methods is harder to give up than families, friends, prestige, comfort, pleasure and money. Adam's sin is also my sin.

HIS FATHERHOOD

Almost a year after meeting the Lord in this special way, He spoke to me again. This time He chose a seaside in Pulau Pangkor, on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. My husband and I were on a retreat by ourselves.

One night, while I was enjoying the cool breeze, my mind went back to another seaside location - the Gurney Drive in Penang, my home town. My parents had often taken the family out for fresh air and fun. A sense of restfulness and contentment flowed over my inner being as I recalled those happy times. The Lord then assured me,

"It is all right now. It is all right now. I know everything, see every wound and I love you. Therefore, you have nothing to worry about."

As I walked along the beach, I sensed that the Father was hugging me by the shoulders and walking with me. By healing my damaged emotions related to my family, God has enabled me to deepen my appreciation for my parents.

The next evening, moonlight flooded the sky. A group of teenagers built a campfire by the seashore; we sat in a quiet spot further away. As I dug my toes into the fine cool sand, my heart reached out to our heavenly Father who had remained faithful to us. What a joy to be His child! I received and absorbed His love. I basked in His security. I wanted to shout out into the starlit sky...

"Father, thanks for loving me! I love You, Father, I love You!!"

Through this incident, I became experientially aware that just as my perception of my parents' love for me was distorted, deep in my heart; my concept of the Fatherhood of God was distorted in several ways too. As a sinner from conception, I could not see God as He is. When my parents brought me to Christ, He opened my eyes of faith as He revealed Himself to me. However,

upbringing as well as social factors acted as lenses through which I viewed and experienced Him. My old self was like a cataract filled lens that needed replacing! Through the process of repeated repentance, forgiveness, healing of damaged emotions and renewing of the mind by His Word. Thus the Lord enables me to see Him a bit clearer each time. However, He requires my cooperation in this work of changing my character and personality, not because He cannot do it all by Himself but because He loves me enough not to force change on me.

How can my mind be renewed? The basic ingredient is by soaking and renewing my thoughts with His written Word. However, in the interpretation of His Word, we need to know that errors may arise from the idiosyncrasies and denominational interpretations of pastors and teachers. Where then are the safeguards? I believe the Word of God records these for us.

Jesus shared with His early friends,

"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray to the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth. You know Him, for He dwells with you, and will be in you." (John 14:15-17)

He further said:

"... He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:26)

Does this mean that the Holy Spirit explains and shows to us only that which is written in the Bible? Will God be restricted by the very means of grace He has given to His people? Let us look at John 21:25

"But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

I think I may safely conclude that many of Jesus's words and deeds on earth were not recorded in the Bible. This is where I believe those who desire their lives to be transformed need to sit at His feet regularly, in solitude and, as much as possible, in silence, so that the sent Counsellor may reveal and explain more of our Saviour's words and actions to us in the quietness of our inner beings. Then,

"... we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness, from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)

It is no wonder then that Jesus, as the Son of Man, was able to reject all types of temptations while on earth. He met with His Father constantly to consult Him, to feel secure in His love and then to obey Him till the task was finished. Dare we do less?

Not long after the seaside encounter, I was shocked to discover another of my distorted images of God.

MY WOMANHOOD

A few days later, as I was silent before the Lord, the thought came suddenly:

"Accept your womanhood".

That was all. I gathered it had something to do with the acceptance of my position as a woman. On reflection, I discovered that during my primary school days, Mum would allow my three older brothers to enjoy themselves with friends outside our home but I had to stay back. Often, I felt frustrated and could not understand that she did it out of concern for my welfare.

Added to that, my parents did not cease to remind me to follow in my eldest brother's footsteps, that is, to become a successful and efficient doctor. I have three

older sisters but my parents did not ask me to imitate them. They too were successful in their endeavours as professionals. As a result, though I could function in my different daily family roles in marriage and motherhood, they had been uphill for me. I had not been trained in household chores because my parents had always expected me to have maids. However, apart from financial restraints, I had wanted to train myself to do housework so that I may in turn train our children. But often I saw myself as better suited for tasks outside the home. I wanted to be like my big brother and sometimes wondered why God did not make me to be a boy. Again, the Lord had to help me.

First, the Lord showed me Mark 3:31-35. When informed by a crowd that His mother, Mary, and His brothers were there to see Him, He replied,

"Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother."

This implies that gender and position in the natural family play no part in our standing before His Father. All men and women are equal in status before Him. He died for all and will save all who receive Him in accordance to His Father's will. My worth rests in God's unchanging and unconditional love for me and nothing else. In resting in this truth, I, as a female child of God,

am freed from having to prove that I am equal to a male child of God.

Then the Lord helped me to understand the basic differences in the male and female personalities. In his book *The Gift of Feeling* (9), Dr Paul Tournier discusses the human need for subjectivity, tenderness and interest in the person. Though these are qualities traditionally attributed to women, they were significant in the life of Christ. At the same time, Christ displayed, with equal depth, the ability to be objective and intellectual in His dialogue and relationships with others. Jesus indeed was the complete human being. We admire Him for His calmness in the midst of chaos and His ability to make decisions with fairness in the face of prejudice. Yet, He was able to weep with those who wept and rejoice with those who rejoiced.

Women, generally, have more of the gift of feeling. Hence, Dr. Tournier wrote his book to persuade women to share this gift with men in the hope that men will then share their stronger gift of objective thinking with women. Men and women will then be enriched individually and as God's human community created in His image to reflect His glorious nature to all creation.

In marriage, for example, the call to use these gifts of feeling and thinking is often put through the severest

but most realistic testing. Many couples in our modern society find it difficult to accept the teaching in Ephesians 5:22-33. As I struggled to understand Paul's emphasis on love for the husband and submission for the wife, my heart seemed to play a tug-of-war with my mind. I had yearned for oneness of heart and mind in my relationship with my husband. Then, after about twenty years of searching the Scriptures deeper and fourteen years of marriage in 1992, I was finally able to submit to Yung with my heart and mind, as equals in our Father's eyes. The way Scriptures are interpreted to us and, of course, our own growth as persons will help us receive God's Word in this matter.

Further, when I placed the essence of the message in Ephesians 5:21-33 side by side with that of Ephesians 4:11-32, I began to see why the emphasis on love was given to men and that on submission to women. It was not only to symbolise the unique Christ-church relationship; it had much to do with our fallen nature that caused the mistaken hierarchy in a marriage relationship. Therefore, the thinking-orientated man was reminded to use his weaker feeling function to show his love for his wife. The feeling-orientated woman was urged to use her weaker thinking function to show her submission to her husband. The message, it seems to me, is to bring out the best in each person

through the exercise or stretching of their weaker gifts. Her submission (a matter of one's will) makes it easier for him to express his feelings to her; his love enables her to relax and to think clearly about him and his point of view. It is so wonderful to see both partners opening up like flowers and leaves reflecting the beauty of the Creator!

Finally, it matters little where we express our gifts, as long as we remain where He places us. Some may use them in the office, others at home; some may use them while shopping for groceries, others while teaching students; a few may be in positions when decisions for a nation are made; while most will be in situations where they are unseen and unknown except by those whose lives they have touched for Him.

I am amazed at the gentleness of the Master as He inspires me to be a woman for Him. With awe, I begin to perceive feeling as the tendon attached to the muscles of thinking that move the limbs of families and society. In as much as women need to use their special gift of feeling for the good of men and not to manipulate or destroy them, so men need to use their special gift of thinking to serve women and not to tyrannise them. Together, they will be one and beautiful in the presence

of the God Who made them to be one with Him. He is indeed wise to have made mankind male and female!

CHAPTER 9: DETERMINED TO GIVE ME JOY!



Jesus said, *"In the world you shall have tribulation but ..
be of good cheer ... for I have overcome the world!"*

STREAM IN THE DESERT

August 1991: Wilmore, here we come! At last, the rest and change our family longed for was in sight. As Yung settled in with his books for his course at the Asbury Theological Seminary, our children adjusted to their respective school and day care programmes. Then I jumped at the opportunity to audit the *Pastoral Care and Counselling Course* taught by Dr. D.A. Seamands. He

was a former missionary to India and a pastor-turned-professor when he returned to America. I looked forward to sitting in his lectures.

More doors were open for refreshment as a night course in spiritual formation started in late autumn. It was called *Deepening Your Wells*. How appropriate for my thirst. Our teacher, Professor R.Johnson, led us through the process of finding our basic God-given temperament or soul print in the hope that we would accept ourselves with our giftedness as well as our infirmities. This gave us insight into the multiple possibilities of worshipping and serving Him as He has made us and not according to what others dictate to us, other things being equal. Many of us were blessed to have our false guilt removed with respect to the way we meet with the Lord during our Quiet Times. Some of my fears and doubts of such a course also dissolved as I began to see that this newly-labelled subject was not so new after all. (Although I do still have some hesitation over a number of meditation methods unintentionally used by undiscerning facilitators of silent retreats, in their endeavour to help others draw nearer to God.) (10)

Added to this blessing was the permission to use the main chapel pipe organ as I enrolled for a short course

in organ playing. Professor A. Whitworth, a keyboardist and church organist, was one of the most encouraging teachers I had met. Spurred on by his enthusiasm, I was very soon able to praise the Lord with pipe organ music, thus fulfilling a childhood dream. Ever so often, nothing expressed my cries of joy or pain to Him better than through music. Great indeed was the Lord's timely provision of a seemingly unimportant desire. I am contented even though, since leaving the seminary, I have not had an opportunity to touch a pipe organ in Malaysia.

KANSAS CITY

Come October 1991, my daughters and I received an invitation to visit Kansas City. Having read about a Vineyard Church with prophetic gifts in the locality, I prayed to meet up with their ministry team. Though the senior pastor was away, God led a middle-aged couple to pray for me. I explained why I needed His word - Yung was on a study sabbatical leave in Kentucky and I was so confused and tired emotionally and mentally that I feared returning home when the time came in August 1992. I could not describe my feelings in any other way. They have never heard of Malaysia before. However, as they prayed, the man saw our country and shared that God's light will explode in this nation and

some of us will be part of that light. Once God had spoken, hope rose in my heart that we were not going to decay in despair of church or nation. Since He was not done with us yet, He will heal and direct us a step at a time. We must trust and remain faithful to Him. Tight as we were, the US\$50.00 taxi fare was indeed worth the search for His servants in a new place. My hands and knees were strengthened, my spirit lifted up (Hebrews 12:12)

THE TRAP OF PERFORMANCE

Those attending the Pastoral Care and Counselling course were told from the beginning that it was meant to be a time of transformation, not mere intellectual stimulation.

"Good," I thought, "let me see what will happen."

Dr. Seamands commenced the lectures with the first of a series, entitled *Healing of the Distorted Image of God*. He proposed that many of us possess and retain wrong ideas of and feelings for God because of our inherited traits, environmental influences and effects of our personal sins. He then listed some of the attributes of God. God is:

- **STEADFAST AND RELIABLE;**

- *GIVER OF UN-EARNABLE GRACE;*
- *GIVER OF GOOD GIFTS;*
- *NURTURING AND AFFIRMING;*
- *HOLY, JUST, FAIR AND IMPARTIAL;*
- *ACCEPTING;*
- *PRESENT AND AVAILABLE;*
- *GOOD AND MERCIFUL.*

As I ran a finger down the list, I felt I could agree with all the attributes except one: the Giver of good gifts. Something closed up inside my heart. In my mind, I could accept that He wanted to give me good gifts but I could not feel His generosity and kindness in the depths of my soul. I was guilty of having wrong feelings and beliefs about Him.

"Why, Lord? Why don't I really believe You do give good things? I did not purposely churn up this feeling which has affected my thinking. Please do not condemn me," I prayed.

Over the next two weeks, I read a book called *Healing for Damaged Emotions* written by the lecturer. In Malaysia, I had owned a copy which I lent to friends but had not read it myself. Anyway, I had gone through enough of that type of literature or so I thought. It was also not at the top of my time priorities. At Wilmore, I bought a new copy and sheepishly went through it page by page. Finally, I reached Chapter7, *The Symptoms of Perfectionism*.

"I am not a meticulous person,"

I mused.

"This will not apply to me."

How wrong that presumption proved to be. As each symptom of perfectionism was described, my hope for self-discovery rose. There were several areas in my behaviour and thinking that I could not comprehend for decades. One of them was this particular type of reasoning whenever something really good came my way,

"It won't be long before something bad takes place; I don't like or understand the sequence of events. Maybe God is purifying my family and me through repeated trials."

God was either an excessively strict father or a sadist to me or,

"I can't be that good to deserve this goodness from the Lord. I am just not conscientious enough in my service for Him. He will probably correct me soon."

God was like a hard-to-please Master. I was afraid to dwell in His goodness and joy.

Those thoughts at the back of my mind were occasionally erroneously confirmed by wrong accusations that came my way because Yung and I were involved with broken people like ourselves in our ministries. Now the Lord was placing His finger on the sore spot, and it was becoming terribly sensitive.

Through the next few weeks, the Master Healer gently reminded me of past hurts that I had repressed. One particular type of stress stood out.

During my early adolescent days, a financial crisis had hit our family. This dragged on till my university course commenced. Though there was enough finance to cover every dependent's daily expenses, three of the younger children were caught in the middle of a '*who should pay for what*' sort of tussle among our older siblings who already had their own families to support.

Consequently, for years, the messages that came across to me were:

1. *If you as yet cannot earn enough to support yourself, do not take a holiday. You do not deserve it.*
2. *Taking piano lessons is a luxury. So stop them. (By then, music had become part of our family time together as I often played the piano for my parents to help them unwind from the demands of the day's business.)*
3. *The amount given to you is the amount, to the cent, deprived from the giver's own family.*
4. *If you do not attend one of the top universities in the world, you do not deserve the money spent on you, because you could have gained admission. You have not tried hard enough.*
5. *To give all your talents and time for vocational (commonly labelled full-time) Christian service is to opt for a second-class occupation, a waste of time and money.*

Consequently, for seven years as a student in Melbourne, I would either be studying, reading or working in a factory during each long vacation. I kept

the Sabbath and allowed myself only a week or two off over each 3-month summer long vacation. Even if I returned to Malaysia for a few weeks, I planned a programme. My fellow overseas student friends thought I was extremely tight financially when I would not even go sightseeing with them. Work had to be included into holidays, such as attending a conference. But in the 1980's, examinations were over and I was self-supporting. Why did I still feel as if I was not eligible for rest and recreation?

As I ironed clothes in our apartment, the Holy Spirit explained to me the dynamics of my wrong and unbiblical perfectionistic-idealistic attitudes.

I had subconsciously transferred the discipline of studies to the discipline of Christian work. Each time I really let go to relax, the old tape recorder in my mind played,

"God has given you His ministry to fulfill. If you have not completed all your tasks, you are not worthy to take a break, not even to enjoy His beautiful creation with your family. You may relax only if you are ill or exhausted."

"So, Bee Teik, no play for you. If you really feel great, then either you are lazy and therefore should return to work or God will see that something crops up to stop your happiness."

God was a Kill-Joy, not a generous Giver of Good Gifts!

"Lord, how could I have thought of You like that?!" I cried. "Please forgive me. I do not want to live under the law again. I have had enough of that. Please heal my damaged emotions and mind so that I may see You as You are and live in Your joyful grace always. You are a generous God!"

The Lord forgave me at that moment. I knew that He also started me on the road to healing. My worldview and relationships with my family, work and rest were changing. I felt as if I had been churned inside out, as if I had just woken up from anaesthesia after a 100% successful major surgery. I was overcome by tiredness but also filled with a sense of well-being and great relief! Joy rushed into my life. A great burden was lifted off my back. The old way of thinking had taken years to develop. By His grace, the new way might take a shorter period to form. I had been striving for the *ideal* best... perfection. God showed me I must learn to strive for the *personal* best...excellence, while still on this earth. As this renewal was happening in me, unknown to me then, there was yet one major piece of unfinished business in my heart.

FORGIVENESS

The local Methodist church that we attended in Wilmore ran an adult Sunday School class called *Seekers*. Leaders of this class reached out to minister healing and renewal to its members. As I entered the classroom one Sunday morning, two days after God's dealing with my perfectionistic attitude, the leader read from Micah 2:13. He added that he felt the Lord wanted to open prison gates for someone present. The class continued by singing a song composed by the pianist. The words touched me:

*"I say Yes! Yes! Yes! I say Yes! Yes! Yes!
Lord, the cry of my heart is to make a clean start.
Even when I can't see, I trust You to lead me.
Lord, when my means are gone,
Your resources are strong.
Slapped by hurt and disgrace
Your love covers each trace.
I say Yes! Yes! Yes!"*

(© Ginny Phillips Allen, BMI, 1991)

As the music continued, I saw a picture of the Lord Jesus strolling with a small girl in green meadows. Jesus was the Big Brother taking Little Sister for a walk. I knew instantly that He would further free me to know His

deeper joy. The pianist played another piece of music and we sang:

*"I will change your name,
You shall no longer be called wounded, outcast,
lonely and afraid;
I will change your name,
Your new name shall be confidence, joyfulness,
overcoming one, faithfulness, friend of God,
one who seeks My face."*

(D.J. Butler, Mercy Publishing, 1987)

"Lord, thank You for Your love. All my life, I only want to see Your face. I really need to cling to You alone, not others. I need Your new name for me,"

I uttered under my breath as my hand copied the words of the songs excitedly while tears of gratefulness welled up in my eyes. The speaker then announced that the topic for that day was *Forgiveness*.

"But Lord," I queried, *"I have forgiven those who intentionally or unintentionally hurt me."*

However, I was wrong. I still held grudges against them. After the class, before two witnesses (Yung and the leader), I asked the Lord to forgive me for harbouring resentment against specific individuals, and willed to forgive them from that moment.

The Lord further revealed to me the symptoms of my unforgiving spirit. My buried resentment against someone in the past had been showing itself in the form of anger. As family stress increased in the previous few years, I found myself throwing my anger at those closest and dearest to me. Without realising the connection, I had also been angry with those whose personality or behaviour triggered off memories of those who had hurt me badly long ago. In this respect, I repented and apologised to my husband and son. He also instructed me to forgive and to go apologise to a former Malay Muslim professor of psychiatry in the hospital where I last worked in Kuala Lumpur. Though he did wrong me administratively, I was also wrong to express my resentment by shouting at him publicly. On our return home, I made an appointment to meet up with in his office. I explained to Him that my God instructed me to apologise to him. He had forgotten about the incident and replied,

“The past is past, we respect pastoral counsellors.”

His gracious attitude and mutual respect touched me deeply; I knew God was with us though we could not see Him with our eyes of sight.

The Lord nipped the diseases of perfectionism and prolonged anger in the bud. As He healed my wounds,

specific hostile feelings have disappeared too. The process is ongoing and I need to cooperate with Him. Now and then, the old self sneaks into my daily life. But since the Holy Spirit has the upper hand in me now, He alerts me to either reject the temptation to become resentful, in Jesus' Name, or to repent if I have become so. Daily life has become lighter, more joyful and humorous!

"Thanks, Father!!"

Further, through this experience and Dr D.A. Seamands' lectures, I began to understand that to forgive someone is not:

- overlooking the wrong,
- excusing the wrong,
- psychoanalyzing the wrong, or
- taking the blame for the wrong.

It is **a crisis** whereby I:

1. face *the wrong* (intentionally inflicted or not), like Joseph did with his brothers' maltreatment of him
2. face *my hurts and pain all over again*, instead of hiding them (the effect of the wrong on me)

3. face *my resentment* (as exhorted in Ephesians 4:25-31) so that the pus of my emotional abscess can be drained as I seek His forgiveness (my response to the wrong doer)
4. face *the cross of God's Son* (Ephesians 4:32) and believe that when Christ forgave me, He had no more debt to collect from me. When I forgive others, I have no more debt to collect from them also and
5. apply my will to forgive. If I find it difficult due to unhealed emotions, He allows me to ask Him to make me willing (Mark 9:14-29).

It is also a **process** whereby God heals my feelings. I learnt to:

1. resist the attacks of old negative feelings in His Name
2. abandon the old ways of thinking and adopt new ways
3. assume responsibility for my future actions instead of blaming the past
4. receive God's forgiveness expressed through forgiving myself

5. work towards restitution, confrontation in love, or-reconciliation (whichever applies- may involve more than one action) and, finally,
6. discover God's purpose in all things, as in Joseph's statement in Genesis 50:20 (the spiritual 50/20 vision):

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

To further impress upon me His determination to heal me fully, the Lord gave me His words from Hebrews 2:11-12:

"Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers (or sisters: Author). He says,

'I will declare Your Name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing Your praises. '"

How grateful I am that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not ashamed to be my Brother. Each time negative thoughts return to tempt me to be depressed, to feel despised and forsaken, the Holy Spirit reminds me to use His Word to drive them away.

All this while, His joy kept bubbling more and more from within my soul, like streams in the desert, like gushes of cool breezes on a hot humid afternoon. However, one more question, a conscious one, had to be answered.

GOD'S PURPOSE - RECOMMISSIONING

Over the next few weeks, I cried to my Lord and God,

"Lord and Brother, why, O why was the medical training You gave me wasted? Why did I have to agonize over my stewardship of that gift? I thought You wanted me to be a missionary doctor. I can't even differentiate between true and false guilt now!"

I made an appointment to discuss the responsible use of spiritual and creation gifts with Professor Reginald Johnson at the seminary. For almost two hours, he listened attentively and patiently as I poured out my frustration, confusion and heartaches. As he asked how I usually help others, I could only share that it was very clear that when I walk with a depressed or confused person and he/she finally was able to pray to God directly, I would rejoice and leave him/her with the Master! Further, when I play hymns on the piano, any congregation would feedback that they could worship

God and feel His presence. He seemed to understand my dilemma but had no clear answer till the very end...

Suddenly, his face lit up with a broadening smile,

"Bee," he exclaimed, "don't you see what God has been doing? He was training you to develop a one-to-one relationship with your patients for a purpose! It does not matter whether you actually practise medicine again. He may want you to do something else using that doctor-patient relationship skill."

"It is not wasted then?"

I asked with joy and delight and yet fearful that it could still be wasted. I had waited so long for His answer to this painful mystery hidden in my heart.

As I strode home that afternoon, I wanted to tell the whole world that my God has a purpose for my life on earth! He re-commissioned even one who had misunderstood His gracious intentions for her life and who thought He had almost forsaken her.

A few months later, the Lord told me that *"I AM"* is enough for me and for those I seek to minister to. My goal must be to know Him and to make Him known to them. Indeed, care for the sick and helpless through the practice of medicine is only one of many vehicles to

convey His love and power. But, like all other vehicles, it is not indispensable. I must learn to hold these aids loosely so that I will not be preoccupied with the means of ministry.

In August 1992, I knew that I could then return to my homeland, Malaysia, and share Him with others according to His perspective, not mine. I felt like a child who has just received a surprise parcel from her parents. It was mine to unwrap and to enjoy. In a similar fashion, I did not know what the future would be like for us in terms of ministry in Malaysia. But He had given me courage to proceed. There were many unknown factors; the Lord did not guarantee an easy life. However, now that He had spoken, I could rest in the assurance of His words:

"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

He who saw me through the pain and waiting will continue to stand by me through thick and thin. My awareness of His love for me has increased and with it, my gratitude. He is the faithful God whose love will never let me go.

Someone once attested that a person who is sure of his God is not afraid to smile and laugh with Him.

I know now that He is determined to give me joy!

I asked Him to make me like Mary; He persuaded me to be transformed like Martha was. Let us compare the Martha of Luke 10:38-42 with that of John 12:2-3. After the Lord showed her that He is the Resurrection and the Life in the latter verse, she appeared to have stopped grumbling!

Waiting on Him was once more turned into delight as my attention was diverted from personal duty to the fact of His eager waiting for me. It was so good to feel totally forgiven and accepted by the beloved Son of God. As I pilgrim together with others to meet Him face to face, I am encouraged that I can converse with Him and He with me, for in this fellowship alone dwells the fullness of joy! It is a joy like that of a bridegroom with his bride. God is not the only God worth knowing; He is the God worth knowing at all cost.

My identity as a person lies in belonging to this God and Father of all mankind. It does not matter whether He made me Chinese or Indian, an Easterner or a Westerner; a male or a female. It does not matter whether I am richer or poorer, healthy or sick. It does

not matter whether my church is Pentecostal, Charismatic, independent or traditional. It does not even matter whether I am labelled a good or a bad Christian. All that matters is that this one and only true and living God made me in His image. He revealed Himself to me in His beloved Son, Jesus. He went out of His way to show His holiness and His mercy to me, a wayward, helpless, sinful creature. He will not let anything or anyone take me away from His love, ever! (Romans 8:37-39)

Great is the joy of one who has and knows that she has such a God as her Father!

No wonder that the hymn writer proclaimed...

*"The love of God is greater far
than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair, bowed down with care
God gave His Son to win,
His erring child, He reconciled
And pardoned from his sin.*

*Oh, love of God, how rich and pure,
How measureless and strong;
It shall for evermore endure
The saints' and angels' song.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill.
And ev'ry man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above .
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

*When hoary times shall pass away
And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,
When men who hear, refuse to pray,
On rocks and hills and mountains call;
God's love so sure shall still endure
All measureless and strong,
Redeeming grace to Adam's race
The saints' and angels' song."*

*(Lyrics by P.M. Lehman. Arr. by Claudia Lehman
Mays. No. 134 Youth Hymns (1,2,3,4). Pub. by
The Alliance Press)*

Part 3

Fulfilling God's calling

CHAPTER 10: UNWRAPPING HIS FIRST GIFT



Gifts for a daughter!

WORTH THE DELAY

November 2013

Twenty years later, I feel I need to update my readers on how God my Father has shown His faithfulness to me, one of His daughters still on earth...

Before we left America in 1992, God's word to me in March 1990 continued to ring in my ears:

"I have given you faith; you must be faithful."

Since no job description came after God's healing grace touched my inner being at the Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, and my family would return to Malaysia in August 1992, I finally blurted out my agony of a happier waiting.

July 1992:

"But Lord, faithful in doing what? I have waited so long! If nothing shows up, may I return to part-time medical practice p-l-e-a-s-e since Ning will be in kindergarten...? That is something I can do well for you to show patients that God loves them. It would help our family income too."

Then in the same month and at the 1992 Annual Missions Conference at the seminary, He replied so clearly that I gladly obeyed, strange as it was,

"Put down the stethoscope and take up the pen."

What was my initial reaction?

"Wheewh! At last I know what to do! But I am no English graduate, I write only to express my heart cries or joys. What and how shall I write?"

Then I remembered that I had typed the first draft of the original *Deepening Joy* as a release to my soul, not realising where it would lead. Suddenly, I discovered that I was holding in my hands what seemed like treasure to me then! O yes, I would reach Malaysian Christians and the world for Christ! I would show them that life in Him is a process of ups and downs, not a pie in the sky experience. Nevertheless, He remains faithful and would see us to the end, i.e. till we see Him face to face!

August 1992, my family arrived in Kuala Lumpur, exactly 366 days after departure. Armed with a calling and a script, I assumed others would feel as exhilarated about my writing as I since God had ordered me to write! I was in for a shock. My naiveté caused me years of heartaches thereafter. I could not understand why He did not allow His words to be conveyed fast!

Christian publication may not be as Christian as it seems. No matter what the message in the script may be, to most Christian publishers and distributors, money is still the bottom line. At a later stage, sponsors did surface for Reconre Ministries (See Chapter 11) to publish many of my books but why didn't sponsors fund the established Christian publishers instead so that His books may fly to local target readers? Then the writer

did not have to become the fund-raiser, publisher and distributor as well! As an Asian author, I was not used to selling my own books, passionate though I was about the messages God has implanted in my heart! If I did so too often, the Christian public may even assume that I was using my husband's role in the Malaysian church to my favour when I was just trying to obey God, my ultimate Boss! I had no ulterior motive; profits from the books went back to run Reconre Ministries, anyway.

"Lord, Why do you do this to me? I need Your continuous affirmation and comfort!"

One friend once told me off,

"Bee Teik, they have to believe in what you are doing!"

"Fine, Lord, I give up. I cannot make them believe. You've got to do that. Yes, I am willing to live lonely days writing and writing and writing at home and leave the consequences to You. But please give me Your motivation and ideas as I cannot create them! All I know is that I do believe in the burdens and joys You want me to share. Help me to trust You more!"

Then, the inevitable happened precisely because God was faithful to His word to me.

1994: When invited to my first small group silent retreat at Port Dickson, He spoke again. Joyce Hugget (*author of Listening to God*), her husband and a nun from New Zealand were our facilitators. I was then so angry with the lack of proper local Christian publishers and too many competitive Christian distributors that I did not know I was angry with Him for ordering me to write and not be able to get the books out. Emotionally exhausted and near burnout in striving to obey my Lord, I was glad for a few days' of silence, away from house chores... to unwind and think clearly again.

On the second last day of a five-day retreat, Joyce requested that the retreat guests find some object or idea to express what God has said to them. After lunch, I walked out to the beach across Jalan Pantai, Port Dickson, to see what I could find. Below is what I discovered about *Hermit Crabs* and *Ceriths* (*small snail-like creatures*) ⁽¹¹⁾

(Actually, on hindsight, I was in early 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 two 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 mid-day 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 looked like miniature '*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. 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, thousands of cerith shells were running around as if their houses were on fire! Those were not real live ceriths; they were empty cerith shells inhabited by hermit crabs. On looking further, I discovered more hermit crabs...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. What I found astonished me:

A Hermit Crab	A Cerith
Carries others' shells	Carries its own shell
Fights for newer shells	Is contented with its own
Runs wildly to attack others or to avoid attacks	Moves peacefully and securely at its own pace
Leaves no trail	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 to leave a trail that leads to Him!

"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 grieves." (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 'Christian' marketplace. Please keep me faithful to You alone, I pray."

CHAPTER 11: HIS SECOND GIFT



Double portion for the Master's use"

START WITH THE PASTORS

[Adapted from Chapter 9 of Behold, Your Pastor!]⁽¹²⁾

God is indeed more keen to show us His specific will for us than we are keen to know and obey Him. But if we

will wait without demanding a dateline, He can be trusted to show us His will.

A second job description came in the following manner when I thought one was enough. Let me continue to share.

A DESIRE (University Days)

Back in the 1970s, some of us Malaysian students were attending an evangelical Australian church in Melbourne. One day, we were saddened to hear that the members were sending second-hand clothing to their overseas missionary children. Why were the rich sending churches not giving them new clothes? We resolved that when we graduated and worked, we would ensure that our Christian workers would receive what we would give our families and ourselves. That observation was a seed of desire to do something for God's servants who serve Him faithfully. That desire grew into a burden when I became personally involved in vocational (full-time) Christian work.

A BURDEN (Earlier Ministry Days)

Having been in the vocational Christian ministry with my husband since 1981 in Malaysia, I have noticed an increasing need for pastors to have someone to confide

in and some place in which they may hide or retreat to, so that they may recover from the intensity of spiritual and human organisational warfare. Some are simply exhausted from the constant demands from members and friends alike. Overworked pastors often carry on serving out of an obligation to fulfil their duties to God and man. They are often unable to resolve this problem on their own. Sometimes this is due to some personality peculiarities. At other times, it may be due to a lack of training and experience in relating to others at work and home.

Further, if the respective spouses are also caring, their houses may often be full of people and their family members may not have any unhurried time by themselves. However, in more traditional or rural churches, this is more acceptable and enjoyable as many members still hold their pastors in high esteem and will care for them materially, at least. Rural Christians, for example, will share their harvest of crops with their beloved pastors. Instead of living with or near natural extended family members, the pastor's family merely adjusts to living with the church extended family, though with more tip toeing. But the lifestyles of our society and church have changed in this aspect.

According to Dr M. Barker's (a retired British Christian psychiatrist who used to have many pastors and their spouses as patients) definitions of the **Servant-Type pastor**, such a pastor's wife may get depressed because the couple does not find enough time for themselves, for their children or for the Lord. Of course, the spiritual-leader husband ensures that they keep going because they are in the Lord's work. That the work may not be carried out in God's ways does not seem to register because everyone is so busy. Burnout is the usual result even if they are gifted to run open homes. Some widows of such pastors withdraw from church work altogether after their husbands are not with them anymore. They find great difficulty in adjusting their lifestyle to being suddenly left alone as ordinary church members after their husbands' death. Others do all they can to keep away from former parishioners. Church members' attitudes often contribute to such consequences, of course.

Then Dr Barker's **Leader-Type** of pastors zoom from church to church on speaking engagements or meetings and seminars. They often leave their poor wives, lonely and isolated, at home. I can deeply identify with them. Too frequently, such wives cannot even worship with their husbands on Sundays. They feel isolated because if the pastors are away, the members seldom visit them.

Some members consider them so spiritual that they do not even need basic human friendship. If they have needs, they will just have to wait for the Pastor to return. When they do return, such pastors spend more time with church members than with their waiting wives. The income of a majority of pastors is also insufficient for the family to have a few weeks of annual vacation on their own. The few days of annual leave are often spent visiting relatives during festivals, which are not the best times for rest, recreation, meditation and interpersonal family communication. In the West, many such wives visit psychiatrists or clinical psychologists for help. I feel for wives in this position and hope that help will be on the way to them soon. God knows and cares for them still. Miracles still happen today. Our God is definitely not a hard taskmaster though others or we may be so.

Yet a third group of pastors, the **Opt Out-Type**, behave differently. When pressures of the ministry mount beyond their ability to cope, they opt out by way of emigration or a change of vocation. They have cried out to the Master for answers but none seems to have come. Perhaps He has spoken but they could not hear because they have decided to leave. More often, unhealed wounds and/or sins in their lives hinder the reception of His counsel and direction. Many wives

would rather see their husbands leave and be reasonably intact than stay and deteriorate mentally and emotionally. This may happen even at a later stage of the pastoral ministry. But for the deep conviction of God's calling and the fear of stumbling our brethren, my husband and I could have opted out at one stage too.

What alternative steps can we take so that many more may become pastors and continue in their calling? Do these problems have solutions? The burden to help has gradually turned into a dream as I struggled for answers.

A DREAM (1991)

On our family's arrival at the Asbury Theological Seminary in August 1991, I heard the Lord speak as I wondered how we could ever help local church members live the abundant life in Christ.

He stated,

"Start with the pastors."

Further research about the joys and sorrows of pastors and their families confirmed to me that it was really His voice. However, I had thought and hoped that He would call someone else to care for pastors since I was already so exhausted emotionally.

I shall put His strategy for the nurture of His people and pastors below:

I dream that one day pastors and members of local congregations will live as equally loved brethren and indeed they are brethren with Jesus Christ as their Big Brother (Hebrews 2:11-13).

If Jesus so willingly calls us brethren, why should we be afraid to treat one another as brethren? Brothers and sisters in an earthly family are to live in harmony via open communication, sharing of needs and forgiving one another whenever necessary. This increases joy and lightens burdens at home. If pastor and people are able to see one another as Jesus Christ sees us, I believe that most of the problems described above may be solved.

Then the caring, teaching, preaching, counselling, administrative, socialising and financial aspects of God's work and workers will be shared. When this happens, they will definitely be enriched by the re-channelling of emotional and spiritual energy from coping with idiosyncrasies and squabbles into neglected areas of shepherding. When pastors and their families experience trials and temptations, they will have willing members on whom they may unload some of their

inner pains and needs. These brethren will not laugh at them, insult or despise them for their weaknesses and sins, but instead, surround them with acceptance and love till the crisis is over, be it financial, personal or family. Each person will be expressing his spiritual gift so that the whole church may be edified (13).

Is this impossible? No, because this is what Paul urged the church to do in Ephesians 4 and in other portions of the Epistles. What joy this will bring to our Father God and our Brother Jesus! In fact, God has gone ahead of us and brought up many Malaysian churches by Jethro's principle (Exodus 18). Today, increasingly more lay people are carrying much of the day-to-day caring of one another through e.g. the Cell Group Movement. (The Cell Group is similar to the parish group found in churches within, for example, the Anglican and Methodist denominations. Though not all may agree on the manner in which today's cell groups are run, the need to care for members in small groups in churches is biblical and wise, especially if modelled after John Wesley's small accountability groups.)

I dream of groups of trained (by formal teaching or experience) supporters of pastors who will minister to these brethren and their spouses as their priority so that

God's mission of reconciliation may be strategically accomplished.

These workers themselves may be unknown and unseen to the public eye, but they are willing humble workers who do not mind staying out of the limelight just so that the frontline workers will be strengthened to minister to the body of Christ. Working alongside these groups will be teams of people praying day and night that the grace of God will reach out to others through them, bringing salvation and healing to the church and the nation. No one need to fear that pastoral work would leave them neglected (by friends, relatives or fellow church members) and overlooked in their time of need.

I dream that there will be a Malaysian retreat centre to care for wounded Christian workers, pastors and all (1993).

A place to be alone with God, to listen to Him again; to know His love and acceptance when rejected by man. A place to hear anew His call and receive His approval, to dwell so securely in His grace that sins may be confessed before true friends as witnesses, so that they may be forgiven, cleansed, healed and re-commissioned as Peter was.

A place where confusion over roles and hang-ups in one's personal, marriage, family and vocational life may be removed through faithful and godly counsel of those called to minister to them, through music, cds, dvds and books, through the unhurried study and meditation of God's word.

A place where marriage partners are reconciled and children begin to feel and know, through their parents, that God really exists and loves them.

A place where the beauty of God's creation will bring healing to tired minds and bodies.

A place from which the pastor may return humbled, forgiven, moving on in the process of healing, restored,

renewed and empowered with Christ's compassion, wisdom and understanding. He will be willing to serve again or feel free to change the direction of his ministry, as the Master directs.

Was this dream far-fetched? I had hoped and prayed that Christians in Malaysia would make this a reality according to the ability that God gives. His sheep will then be tended and fed with joy - till He comes.

THE REALISATION OF A GOD-IMPLANTED DREAM

THE UNEXPECTED FOUNDING OF RECONRE

In February 1995, by God's grace, God led me to three friends who were willing to share this dream, who feel that they could share in this work to minister to tired Malaysian vocational Christian workers, be they pastoral, missionary or organisational families. The discovery that God had given a similar desire to others was deeply encouraging. Today, if a pastor or his family needs help, we may be able to refer them to the appropriate resources available in Malaysia. This was not openly so in the 1980s. For those who may want to be helped by those unknown to friends and relatives locally, we may be able to refer them to personnel outside our known circle of counsellors.

Even when the Lord showed me that the strategy to help church members was to help the pastors first, I had to be dragged into the work of caring for pastors and families. I felt inadequate for several reasons, chief of which was that my family was also a sort of a pastoral family though we were more isolated on account of having to live without a parsonage and off campus from the seminary. We too had at times felt near burnout and confused. With limited resources, how was I to help others in the same boat? But God has a sense of humour.

NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

Having shared the above dream through a local denominational magazine in 1992-93, I received feedback from pastors that they felt vindicated. However, the response from lay leaders was not so exciting. A rich friend, who deemed the idea a financial desert, exclaimed,

“What? A retreat centre for pastors only? We can’t even make enough money from them to maintain the centre-lah!”

That statement really hit hard on someone who needed such a hideout, especially when it was true. Once, when I was under much pressure and exhausted, how I

wished I had enough cash to just rent a hotel room to sleep for two days! Of course, that did not eventuate. At another occasion, one pastor's wife wanted to 'hide' in my home and I had to say

"Sorry, I can't help you...but I can refer you to someone who can..."

as I too had felt like running away! The idea of opening retreat centres specially set apart for God's messengers seemed commercially ridiculous! When the Gethsemane Retreat Centre (later renamed Reconre Sdn Bhd for accountability) first started in 1995, I had hoped that ReconRe could become financially independent through income-generating projects such as the sale of books. But eighteen years later, it is still a commercial '*near disaster*'. We still depend on God's faithful and gracious donors. That friend was realistic but was not one who had supported Reconre at all.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

However, God is faithful. That vision seeded in 1991 has become a mission. By early 1994, God had given me a 1,058 square feet apartment through my late mother. Feeling insecure cash wise, I sought the Lord as to whether it was the right move and timing to keep it for pastors' quiet retreats and hiding place. Our children's

educational needs was top in my mind though they were still in primary school. However, as I expressed this anxiety to my Master while looking at the almost completed apartment block located off Jalan Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, He replied clearly,

“Start first and I will take care of the rest.”

In His surprising ways, by February 1995, the Lord provided three good friends from the Klang Valley to get the mission going. Together, we formed a protem committee to hold one another accountable for His mission. They were Ling Khoon Chin, Wong Saw Chan and Jeyasingam Sinnaduray. By June that year, the first *Gethsemane Retreat Centre* for full-time Christian workers, in particular, the pastors, was born. It was the *first ripple* that led to the formation of Reconre Ministries. Though I had thought the name *Emmaus* would be appropriate for the centre since it was to be a place where His workers may hear Him speak (in silence and solitude), the Lord Jesus said clearly in the early hours of 1st January 1995,

“No, it shall be called Gethsemane because I want my workers to go through Gethsemane with Me here...that they will learn to believe that in the security of My love, they can obey Me.”

In the late 1990's - 2000's, other brothers and sisters in Christ have responded to His vision and offered their properties to be used by His vocational workers (like Levites) as hide-outs for personal rest and retreat. (By 2013, borrowed venues have since been returned to owners, with grateful hearts, since God has given the ministry *RECONRE HOUSE* in Seremban in 2002. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Praise be the Lord!)

These initial small and quiet non-denominational retreat centres act as oases for those who labour faithfully in God's harvest fields and for those who have been called to be their supportive families. There, they may rest in peaceful surroundings till they are ready to listen to Him again. Though slow and quiet goes this ministry, the Lord has healed a number of pastors, redirected others and also brought reconciliation between them, their families and congregations. Reconre is upheld by the intercession and funds of friends of Jesus. These men and women believe in the need for Christ's ministry of reconciliation, as stated in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, to be implemented at the human horizontal level once we have been reconciled with God vertically. This is His command and our witness for Him (John 13:34-35; 17:21).

In October 1996, after being registered as a company, the vision of the Gethsemane Retreat Centre was widened to Christ's ministry of reconciliation. Since then, side by side with the provision of quiet venues to meet with God alone, ReconRe also offers one-to-one pastoral counselling and guidance for quiet retreats on request.

We have seen lives transformed by the amazing love of God. For some pastors suffering neglect, rejection or confusion in ministry, the mere reminder that God remembers them as precious, still cares for and accepts them, and has a role for them to play in His body, brings much tears of gratefulness and joy.

However, the ReconRe Team sees its mission as being catalytic only. The needs of pastoral families are too great for a few people to meet. Our hope and prayer is that ReconRe will one day work itself out of this part of the job as local church members regard their faithful pastors and their families as fellow members of God's one large extended family. In such community living, by the enabling of the Holy Spirit, not only will pastors and people be mutually nurtured, they will more importantly become the witnesses that Jesus Christ, our Mentor of mentors, commanded us to be.

God is faithful to His word that He would do the rest if we started off the mission through the offer of the first apartment. Over the years, Reconre have supervised eight different borrowed Gethsemane Retreat Centres before owning one. Whether Reconre continues as a ministry or not, His vision has been shared, His pastors will be cared for and when the Lord gives and takes away once more, we will still sing,

“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, praise be to the Lord our God!”

Reconre is God’s idea, not ours!

In 2002, God gave Reconre Ministries a permanent home, named Reconre House, and an apartment in Seremban, to continue His work. Until he shows otherwise, Reconre Ministries will prevail through thick and thin. He who called us is faithful and He will do it! At times I become impatient when no one suitable has as yet turned up to take over, as osteoarthritis slows me down (2013).

Who has heard His call? Who will continue His desire, His burden and His dream to care of His workers as they face increasing pressures? May the Reconre Team be kept faithful to Him alone till His new team takes over from us or the ministry is surrendered back to Him.

Please pray with us. Reconre Minsitries cannot run without His intercessors' faithful work. Thanks for praying!

REDEMPTION OF LIVES, FAMILIES AND MINISTRIES

For hurting vocational workers, God's remedy for them is to forgive those who have wronged them, seek His forgiveness for any misunderstanding of His unfailing love, and allow the God of grace and truth to speak to them afresh, as He did to Peter.

There is no greater contentment than to know that their Beloved is with them through thick and thin, for their hearts' desire is to always go where He goes, live where He lives and move when He moves, even at the expense of temporal personal loss.

Meanwhile, Reconre continues to stir up the hearts of various ordinary church members to quietly care for His pastors here and there, independent of serious human co-ordination. The call is not meant to be a declaration of a unilateral decision to care for pastors; it is to remind His people of what His heart's desire is regarding His assistant shepherds and His sheep. It is His desire that His specific strategy for the preparation of His bride is fulfilled by all His children, particularly in Malaysia. It is also to enable further networking to care for God's workers, to scratch where it itches.

Examples of God's Rest, Refreshment, Renewal, Restoration and/or Re-commissioning through Reconre Ministries (names and details have been changed):

(1) Mrs Raju has been suffering from asthma for many years. She could not travel with her pastor husband to camps as she was afraid of being allergic to dust at the campsites. She also saw herself as unimportant in the eyes of wives of other pastors. She commonly kept away from the VIPs in church. Finally, with many praying for her, she was persuaded to attend a small group retreat for wives of pastors at the Gethsemane Retreat Centre-Port Dickson. She left thanking God for a good rest as she didn't have any asthmatic attack. She was also affirmed in her gift of hospitality through discussions with the other wives and has begun to understand that God really cares for her and can perform miracles in her life.

(2) Mrs Ng, young and beautiful, has been a pastor's wife for four years and a mother of two small children. She came to a retreat feeling frustrated and trapped in marrying someone who did not have time for her ... and all *"for the sake of God's work"*. But was not she important to God? As she made a lovely bouquet out of thin wire and crepe paper, God showed her that she

was like the wire...fine and flexible in His hands. Just as she created the bouquet, she realised that God was using all her painful experiences to turn and twist her life into a blessing to others. How relieved she was to know that God had not forgotten her and if being a busy pastor's wife was still His purpose for her, then so be it!

(3) Mrs Chin was feeling low at a stage of her husband's ministry. She too had a theological certificate but could not use it as she wanted to be a full-time homemaker. Lately, as her son grew older, she was feeling restless and angry; she wanted to be recognised for her past training by aspiring to be in public ministry like her husband was for the last 13 years. At a retreat, God showed her the lower and top branches of a cempedak tree in the garden. He explained to her that just as the obscure lower branches are as important as the higher more prominent ones, she, like the lower branches, was as important to Him as her husband. She went home feeling contented to play a background supportive role in her local church.

(4) Mrs See, married to a pastor for 15 years and a church worker herself, had never had a proper vacation all those years in ministry. Further, she was the one who shouldered the bulk of nurturing two active boys. Angry at God and her husband and confused over the meaning

of living as a ministry couple, she broke into tears the first night we met. After a four-day retreat, she shared that God ministered to her and she felt like a chronically pressed coil of spring that had suddenly been released ... and laughed!

(5) Mrs Naidu came to a retreat reluctantly. The rest of us were surprised to hear from her on the last day that she came planning to commit suicide. She could no longer cope with the mental and emotional stress of being a new pastor's wife. Her husband was a teacher when they were married. They were happy till he was appointed pastor to their own church. She was a recent convert and felt terribly small in the midst of lay people who seemed like spiritual giants. Some expected her to lead in prayers publicly. Unknown to the others, she came planning to keep walking into the sea till she drowned. How did God save her? On the last morning of the retreat, she was squatting outside the bungalow and crying. As she wept, she saw a row of black ants moving along the side of a drain and these words came to her mind,

"If God takes care of those ants ... and they are so small, how much more God must love and care for me!"

With that, the months of deepening depression lifted from her burdened soul as she continued to thank God

for His deliverance from an untimely death! A renewed wife met her pastor husband after she called him to pick her up. What an experience of God's grace!

(6) Pastor Yau has been a pastor to ex-drug addicts for several years. He arrived at one of our retreat centres exhausted. The host who welcomed him simply told him to do nothing but sleep for as long as he needed. Then he prayed for Mr Yau who expressed his surprise later,

"I have never felt so loved by God before!"

(7) Pastor Lim frequented the Kuala Lumpur Gethsemane Retreat Centre to prepare his sermons even though he had to travel from a smaller town to Kuala Lumpur. Somehow, he felt that he could listen to God better while at a place set apart for His servants to meet with Him. The actual location was not really relevant to him i.e. whether the surrounding scenery was beautiful or not.

(8) Pastor and Mrs Hiew were facing problems in their marriage when we first met them. At one of our retreat centres, they were shielded from the gaze of the church till God resolved the problem for them. They conceived at the retreat and returned to their flock ready to minister as a family for His glory and praise.

(9) Pastor Li was urgently referred to Reconre by his concerned retired pastoral friend who had noticed and observed Li's pastoral behaviour for a few months. Li just did not know how to preach effectively and did little personal visitation of his members. His friend wondered what else he had been doing for the previous 20 years as a pastor.

Through listening to Li, the pastoral counsellor and spiritual director discovered that he had no motivation to be a pastor, was inefficient and lethargic. This was traced to a lack of childhood parental guidance and a later lack of pastoral-theological mentoring when he was a trainee pastor. The church committee was about to sack him as no improvement was observed after repeated corrections.

What could we do?

- Helped him receive paid leave for 3 months so that Reconre could take him in for ministry which were:
- Provided deep pastoral counselling for 1 month
- Provided a silent retreat for 1 month guided by a male spiritual director, together with the

auditing of his Pastoral Ministry Course at a nearby seminary

- Provided him time with his family for 1 month during which we included a session of marital counselling and ministry to his wife

Li was repentant, humble and ready for change. His relationship with God deepened as he began to view Him as He is. His childhood emotions were healed and his theology, less distorted. He did all his '*homework*' and was finally restored to pastoral ministry in the same denomination. His firm and compassionate bishop was a great help. We ministered to his wife who had no understanding of the pastoral calling or an authentic Christian life till then. Hence their marriage was also restored. All praise be to God alone!

(10) Pastor Lily is a single lady pastor for over 15 years. She was referred to Reconre after a relapse of a mood disorder which started 10 years ago while in seminary. Due to ignorance, she was allowed to enter the pastoral ministry then. Since working as a pastor, she often experienced seemingly unresolvable relational conflicts with her pastoral colleagues and was also unable to preach or help her members fruitfully when in relapse.

Her church leaders put her on a year's sabbatical leave to sort out her life.

Lily suffered from a mood disorder rooted in childhood family abuse and inability to sort out her true and false guilt feelings. Consequently, extreme perfectionism tagged her personal and ministry life to her detriment.

What could we do?

- Provided pastoral counselling through sessions and recommended books.
- Accepted her as she was led to her accepting herself and others as they were. Previously, her extreme introverted temperament and insecurities were often misunderstood as being unspiritual when she stayed away from friends. Her opening up to them led to better mutual understanding and enriched fellowship
- Advised her to be reassessed by a trusted Christian psychiatrist who re-adjusted her medication
- Provided an opportunity for the renewal of her mind with biblical truth of God, herself and others

- Encourage her in her carefree holidays with relatives and friends to enjoy herself so as to experience the truth of God's grace and not demands

With joy, I just received news that Lily has taken up the challenge to return to pastor a local church of about 200 members though we have advised her to abstain from people work for the time being though. We just have to trust Him to complete His work in and through her. May the Good Shepherd lead her all the way! Miracles happen all the time if we have eyes to see...

SUGGGESTIONS FOR THE CARING OF PASTORS SO THAT THEY TOO WILL TASTE OF HIS DEEPENING JOY

- Ask each pastor and his spouse what he/she needs while regarding them as friends, members of the household of God, not enemies or competitors.
- Pray for and with them regularly. Pray in a small group for more personal issues. Thank God for them regularly. Correct them lovingly when they err and give them another opportunity to serve the same God as you do without the whole church knowing about their struggles, unless they themselves wish to share.
- Allow emotional and geographical space, especially when they are introverts, so that they may be refreshed to serve you better.
- Ensure that they take time off for personal silent retreats as part of sermon preparation so that they will be able to listen to God clearly and pass the right messages to you.
- If funeral preparations need to be done for a church member when the pastor is on leave, please take turns among yourselves to help the bereaved. Believe that the pastor genuinely cares and he can visit the grieving family when he returns.

- Grant him three straight weeks of leave each year because all people workers need that. In the first week, they are just unwinding and cannot really relax to enjoy the holiday yet; in the second week, they will be able to have fun more realistically; by the end of the third week, they will be feeling ready to return to work willingly. Some cross-cultural mission organisations make such leave compulsory for their missionaries. On top of that, the missionaries usually return to their homeland once every three to four years for three to twelve months. However, as usual, the less glamorous local pastors are assumed not to need such rest, recreation and renewal when they may need them even more. Prophets are often not accepted in their own hometowns!

- Grant him regular sabbatical leave (long term missionaries call such leave furloughs) of at least three months after each term of three to four years' service. This is to allow him to be refreshed in the Lord. Pastors find great difficulty in telling you they are spiritually dry because you may accuse him of being lazy or sinful.

- Be ready to offer help in babysitting, caring of their aged relatives or in emergency situations without being asked to help. Many pastors and their spouses are

afraid to receive help not because they do not need it but because not many church members offer help generously without being patronising. One wealthy lay leader used to tell off pastors, when they did not tow his line, that they needed to be grateful to those who fed them! Who would want to receive help from *'friends'* like this!

- Finally, when the pastor is not preaching on a particular Sunday, give him the liberty and blessing of sitting with his wife and family wherever they want in church to worship and listen to the sermon. Does not the love described in John 13:34-35 still hold true today?

CONCLUSION

Will you share with me in this vision for more gracious caring of God's faithful workers in our land? Without mature shepherds who constantly listen to Him, will Christ's bride be prepared with joy? Will we allow God's vision of a mature eternal church be crowded out by the temporal ones in this fast track stage of our nation's history? Remember: Our Lord Jesus's primary concern was to pray for His disciples, not those of the world (John 17). Will we be part of the Father's answer to the Son's intercession for us?

May God our Father and our beloved Lord Jesus Christ continue His ministry of reconciliation in and through our lives to the end that His glory, truth, grace and compassion will be increasingly revealed in this land. As we work, wait and watch, let us be exhorted by the Lord's answer to Habakkuk:

*“Write down the revelation
and make it plain on tablets
so that a herald may run with it.
For the revelation awaits an appointed time;
it speaks of the end and will not prove false.
Though it linger, wait for it;
It will certainly come and will not delay.”
Habakkuk 2:2-3*

**Remember that,
ABOVE ALL ELSE,
Nothing can separate us from the love of God in
Christ Jesus our Lord!
Therefore,
JOY to the WORLD,
For
The LORD Has COME INDEED!**

EPILOGUE

THE REST OF HIS GRACE

By 1988, when God blessed us with our third child, we perceived that we had been upheld in our individual and family life, as well as in the ministry, only by the grace of our God. Therefore, we named our second daughter En Ning. In Mandarin, En means Grace, and Ning means Tranquillity, Calmness, or Quietness. Three years later in 1991, as I reflected on the trials and temptations that had befallen us from 1981 to 1991, the word of the Lord through Isaiah rings true:

*"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness
and in trust shall be your strength" Isaiah 30:15*

"And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever."
Isaiah 32:17

Amidst giant upheavals of nations in our world, propelled by personal and corporate human frailties, men and women have nothing to boast about except Christ's righteousness given to us freely and unconditionally in exchange for our unrighteousness. There is nothing that gives lasting joy except that living and secure relationship with Him. Only this realization

will bring true comfort and rest to the children of God; only this appreciation will enable us to strive for excellence and yet be content. He requires of us only our share of the total task He gives to mankind. He rested, so can we.

He who cried,

"It is finished!"

on the cross, is able to prepare His Bride by Himself. Yet, He gives us the privilege to make ourselves ready as an expression of our love for Him (Revelation 19:6-8). Let us rejoice then, not because of our works but because of His grace (un-deserved and un-earnable mercy) to us. Did Jesus not say:

"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven"?
Luke 10:20

GOD STILL SPEAKS TODAY

27 Nov 2013: I came away from my first visit to a Brickfields Drop-In Centre (for street people) stunned,

amazed and encouraged, rejoicing deeply that God still speaks to individuals when they remember to cry out to Him in their times of desperation or joy!

During a session for role playing, the volunteer leader asked each person in the circle to share about any happening in their life during the previous week. One woman in her thirties excitedly shared with us how her husband and she heard God talking to them separately after they had an aggressive argument the previous night. He had walked away, sure that he would commit suicide as they were frequently fighting. She struggled to control her temper, ready for the nuisance of a husband to die!

But no death occurred. How? The husband suddenly heard an audible voice telling him not to do so. Recognising this as God's voice, as they both had heard about Jesus at the centre and experienced the love of His people there, he humbly returned to her. Meanwhile, the wife heard God's voice telling her to calm down and accept him. Reconciliation ensued. She was bubbling with such joyful reality at that morning session, exclaimed repeatedly,

*"It is true...God can speak to me!
I heard His voice! I heard Him two times!!"*

WHAT JESUS' FRIENDSHIP MEANS TO ME

(From *In Search of the Beyond* by Carlo Correto)



"As for me, I began to know Jesus as soon as I accepted Jesus as the truth; I found true peace when I actively sought His friendship; and above all I experienced joy, true joy, that stands above the vicissitudes of life, as soon as I tasted and experienced for myself the gift He came to bestow on us; eternal life.

But Jesus is not only the Image of the Father, the Revealer of the dark knowledge of God. That would be of little avail to me in my weakness and my sinfulness: He is also my Saviour.

On my journey towards Him, I was completely worn out, unable to take another step forward. By my errors, my sinful rebellions, my desperate efforts to find joy far from His joy, I had reduced myself to a mass of virulent sores which repelled both heaven and earth.

What sin was there that I had not committed? Or what sin have I as yet not committed simply because the opportunity had not come my way?

Yet it was He, and He alone, Who got down off His horse, like the good Samaritan on the way to Jericho; He alone had the courage to approach me in order to staunch with bandages the few drops of blood that still remains in my veins, blood that would certainly have flowed away, had He not intervened.

Jesus became a sacrament to me, the cause of my salvation, He brought my time in hell to an end, and put a stop to my inner disintegration. He washed me patiently in the waters of baptism, He filled me with the exhilarating joy of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, He nourished me with the bread of His word. Above all, He forgave me, He forgot everything, He did not even wish me to remember my past myself.

When, through my tears, I began to tell Him something of the years during which I betrayed Him, He lovingly

placed His hand over my mouth in order to silence me. His one concern is that I should muster courage enough to pick myself up again, to try and carry on walking in spite of my weakness, and to believe in His love in spite of my fears. But there was one thing He did, the value of which cannot be measured, something truly unbelievable, something only God could do.

While I continued to have doubts about my own salvation, to tell him that my sins could not be forgiven, and that justice, too, had its rights, He appeared on the Cross before me one Friday towards midday...

I was at its foot, and found myself bathed with the blood which flowed from the gaping holes made in His flesh by the nails. He remained there for three hours until He expired.

I realized that He had died in order that I might stop turning to Him with questions about justice, and believe instead, deep within myself, that the scales had come down overflowing on the side of love and that, even though all, through unbelief or madness, had offended Him, He had conquered forever, and drawn all things everlastingly to Himself.

Then later, so that I should never forget the Friday and abandon the Cross, as one forgets a postcard on the

table or a picture in the worn-out book that had been feeding one's devotion, He led me on to discover that in order to be with me continually, not simply as an affectionate remembrance but as a living presence, He had devised the Eucharist (the Lord's supper).

What a discovery that was!

He led me to understand that the sign of bread testified to His hidden presence, not only during the Great Sacrifice, but at all times, since the Eucharist was not an isolated moment in my day, but a line which stretched twenty-four hours: He is God-with-us, the realization of what had been foretold by the cloud that went before the people of God during their journey through the desert, and the darkness which filled the tabernacle in the temple at Jerusalem.

Jesus was not only bread, He was a Friend.

*A home without bread is not a home,
but a home without friendship is nothing.*

Jesus did not overcome the insuperable obstacle presented by the divinity and enter the human sphere simply to be our Saviour. Had that been all, His work would have remained unfinished, His mission of love unfulfilled.

He broke through the wall surrounding the invisible, and came down into the visible world to bear witness to 'the things that are above,' to reveal to us 'the secrets of His Father's house', to give us in concrete form what He called eternal life.

What exactly is it, this 'eternal life'?

He Himself defined it in the Gospels: 'And eternal life is this: to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent' (John 17:3). So eternal life is, first and foremost, knowledge. It is a matter of knowing the Father, knowing Jesus. But it is not a questions of any external, historical, analogical knowledge which we could more or less imagine, possess perhaps, even now; it is rather a question of real, supernatural knowledge which, it is still surrounded here by the darkness of faith, is already the same as the knowledge we will have when the veil is torn aside and we see God face to face. It is a question of knowing God as He is, not as He may appear to us or as we may imagine Him. This is the heart of the mystery I have tried to describe as the beyond, and which is the key to the secret of intimacy with God and the substance of contemplative prayer.

In giving us 'eternal life', Jesus gives us that knowledge of the Father, which is already our first experience of living, here on earth, the divine life; which is a vital

participation, here and now, in the family of God; and which means that while we remain children of man, we are at the same time children of God....

Jesus is the image of the Father, the centre of the universe and of history.

Jesus is our salvation, the radiance of the God we cannot see, the unquenchable fire of love, the one for whom the angels sigh, the Holy One of God, the true Adorer, the eternal High Priest, the Lord of the Ages, the glory of God.

Jesus is also our Brother, and, as such, He takes His place beside us, to teach us the path we must follow to reach the invisible. And to make sure that we understand, He translates into visible terms the invisible things He has seen - as man, He acts as God would act; He introduces the ways of the family of God on to the earth and into the family of man."

THE WORKS OF OUR FAITH

1992: Winter seemed unending in Wilmore, Kentucky. Behind our apartment block sat a row of berry trees. From the back windows, they appeared dry and lifeless after months of frost and snow. As I took a second look at them through a pair of binoculars, a pleasant surprise

awaited me. At the tip of almost every twig there was a little shoot. Thousands of them. Spring had come! In a few months, buds would appear. These buds would become fruits. On pondering this miracle of life, I was reminded of another miracle: God's peculiar ways in changing a seemingly bleak and hopeless experience into an event of hope, joy and new life. He did it at Calvary; He did it when Lazarus died; He did it when Mary urged Him to do something to help an embarrassed host in Cana. He will do it again for us in our personal and church life; He will also do it for the Malaysian church and nation. The question is:

"Are we willing to view difficult situations through lenses of faith or are we allowing ourselves to view them only with the eyes of sight?"

The answer we choose will determine whether we dwell in paralysing sorrow, fear and darkness or live in His exhilarating joy, peace and light.

When a hen sits on its eggs to hatch them, it patiently waits in the hope that chicks will emerge. The eggs have life in them; they are not stones. If the hen quits its job, the eggs will not hatch. Similarly, as the Lord has given us faith in Him, we need to show that faith through the works that He has given us. We need to do this with humility and faithfulness, in the hope that His new life

will also be born in others and grow in all His children. Ultimately, it is He Who is faithful to the calling He has for us. Therefore, He will fulfil His purposes through us (I Thessalonians 5:24). Let us listen to Paul once more:

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift ... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children (most of us in Malaysia are still first or second generation Christians), tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love". (Ephesians 4:1-7,12-16 | re-paragraphs by author)

**May the Holy Spirit increase our understanding of
His Word.**

NOTES & SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Introduction

True enough, for example, God caused a mini-revival at the Monash University off campus Clayton Bible Study Group in Melbourne. Hundreds of mostly Malaysian (and several Singaporean) students received Christ through other Malaysian Christians from 1972 onwards. A few Malaysians became Singaporeans, many remained in Australia and have been involved in Asian migrant churches. Others emigrated to other countries. But most returned to Malaysia in the following years. Some have taken up leadership roles in the Malaysian local and national churches in lay, pastoral and theological ministries. Others were instrumental in stamping the tide of liberal theology for the return to biblical faith. All praise be to God on High! He alone knows we need such servant leadership at such a time as ours today.

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BELOW IS A LIST OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES THAT THE AUTHOR FINDS HELPFUL IN THE PATH OF DEEPENING JOY IN CHRIST.

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