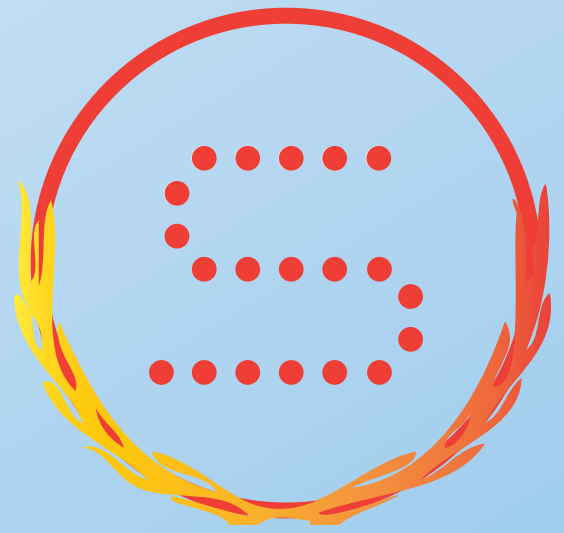


“Oh beloved aged saints of God or aged saints to be, with this blessed assurance of our status in Christ and the eternal glory that awaits us, we need not live in fear, but instead we can live out this stage of our lives joyfully before our Creator.”  
— Elder Leong Fai Chong in *Ageing Joyfully*

“And that same God who sent COVID-19 is the same God who strengthens us for it, and who gives us comfort and peace and thankfulness during this time which no one has experienced before.”  
— Emily Lanning in *Comfort During a Pandemic*

“Likewise, as Christians, we are not to treat each other based on academic performances or personal wealth but view one another as sinners saved by God’s grace.” — Ezra Tan in *Education*



# salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

Issue 60 | Jun 2020



## WELCOME TO THE 60<sup>TH</sup> ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

# CONTENTS

God Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children	3
Church Polity (3): The Office of all Believers and the Broader Assemblies	5
Work Ethics: Being Good to the Froward Master	6
Comfort During a Pandemic	8
Be Strong!	9
Teleios Academy (1): Starting Out	11
The Christian in the World: Healthcare Worker	13
Technology: A Threat or Tool?	15
Shift in Education Focus, from a Christian's View	17
In Darkest Day and Blackest Night	18
Aging Joyfully	21
News from the Churches	23

Dear readers,

Shining brightly from your screens (perhaps with a blue filter switched on) is our second issue of 2020! As the pandemic lingers around the world, the Word of God still goes forth through live-streamed worship services, Zoom Bible studies, and (in this case) this e-magazine. Savour the articles on your bed, sofa, or (as I would) on the floor!

We have received a good number of reflections for our upcoming special issue. Yet, we would like more! Please, spend this time to think back (even re-read!) our past issues, and pen (type) your thoughts down to us.

In Christ,  
*Yang Zhi*



## GOD VISITING THE INIQUITY OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN

>> Aaron Lim



*Aaron Lim* is a member of CERC and is the editor of the *Salt Shakers*.

Every Lord's Day, the stirring words of God's curse are declared from the pulpit in CERC. During the reading of the law, CERC is warned with the sobering words: "I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex. 20:5b).

It is easy to skip over these sombre words without giving much thought to them, especially when they are repeated week after week during the worship service. But when we ponder over them, these words are powerfully meaningful. These words contain God's curse — a declaration of His wrath and the awful judgment that accompany it against the objects of His wrath. God's curse is the expression of His hatred against sin and those who commit sin.

### **Visiting the Iniquities of the Fathers**

In the words of God's curse, He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. That means that He punishes sin with more sin. Sin develops from one generation to another. A drunkard of a father often produces a son or daughter who become drunkards in life. An abusive mother often leaves emotional

scars in her children that result in them being abusers themselves later in life. Righteously, God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children.

God's curse does not come only upon those outside the church. These powerful words are first of all addressed to the church. God intended that all of Israel hear these words when He gave them His law. He thus intended that these words be spoken to His church. Every church member must be warned that God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children — the parents in the church must take heed.

There are many ways in which God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children in the church. There are the sins of materialism and worldliness that slowly creep into the church unawares. Reformed parents, enjoying an abundance of material goods in this world, may soon give sway to the devil's lie that their life consists in the abundance of earthly possessions. Their talk and life reflect this. They are more concerned about pursuing the things of this life rather than the treasures of heaven. They indulge in all the material possessions that the world has to offer. When children see the lives of their parents, they are soon trained and brought up in those sinful ways. While outwardly they may be members of the church, inwardly they care not for the things of God: right and proper worship, true doctrine and godly living.

Another way in which God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the church is when they despise His truth and compromise with false

doctrine. When a church faithlessly refuses to stand for God's truth, He punishes the church by giving her over to spiritual indifference and doctrinal ignorance. When the children and young people of the church see that their parents and their leaders do not stand firm for the truth, they will have little reason to do so themselves.

Woe to that Reformed man who is indifferent to false doctrine. God visits the man's iniquities upon his children. Such a man may believe that a little compromise with false doctrine here and there has little consequences. He may deceive himself into believing that these compromises do not affect his faith or life very much. He may even allow himself to be deceived by his church leaders who teach that a false doctrine here or there amounts only to "non-salvific issues". But such a man is deceived. God proves that deception by visiting the man's iniquities upon his children.

The children, seeing their parents making "little" compromises with false doctrines, are bound to make bigger compromises. Where their parents only made compromises with a seemingly harmless false doctrine, the children make far greater compromises with the fundamental doctrines of the Reformed faith. They question man's total depravity, God's sovereignty, His love only for the elect, Christ's particular atonement, the irresistibility of sovereign grace, and the perseverance of the saints.

Seeing that the doctrines of the church can easily be compromised by their

parents, the children grow up with little to no love for the truth. They allow themselves to be deceived by the wicked philosophies of the world. They question the authority of the Scripture and the creeds. Soon man's philosophies dominate the church's thinking instead of the infallible authority of Scripture.

When a church receives not the love of the truth, God sends them a strong delusion, so that they believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:10-11). When the leaders of a church compromise with false doctrine, God gives them over to the lie, so that they believe it and suffer the devastating consequences of false doctrine in worship and life.

When leaders of a church compromise with false doctrines regarding marriage, for example, God sees to it that the next generation of the church believes those false doctrines concerning marriage. Believing those false doctrines, the next generation will no longer uphold the glorious doctrine of lifelong marriage between a man and a woman.

Principles always work themselves through.

God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children.

### **A Jealous God**

The reason why God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children is

that He is a jealous God. That God is a jealous God means that He cannot tolerate His people loving anyone or anything other than Him. He is jealous of His own glory, the glory that is due to Him alone and no other. God's jealousy is demonstrated by a husband's love for his wife. That love is a jealous love — so powerfully unique — that it cannot tolerate his wife loving any man other than him. Being a jealous love, it is an exclusive love.

Because God is a jealous God, believers must also be jealous in their love for God. They must bear in mind that God is jealous over them, so they may not give their love to any other in all that they think or do.

There is great blessing for the fathers and mothers who love the truth and stand firmly in it. God blesses their weak and imperfect efforts by working that same love of the truth in their children. Just as He visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, so does God visit the faithfulness of covenant parents upon their children.

The doctrines that we hold to today will fundamentally shape the thinking and life of our children. If a man believes in the sovereign, irresistible grace of God, and lives according to that doctrine, God blesses that faithfulness by imparting those doctrines to his children, and causing those doctrines

to bear fruit in their lives.

Reformed thinking must consider the next generations of the church. Believing that God establishes His covenant unconditionally with believers and their seed, a Reformed man or woman is always concerned with the spiritual welfare of subsequent generations. They are not self-centred in their thinking. They are not only concerned about their current generation, but they see to it that each generation grows stronger in the faith. They do this by insisting that the church continues to preach solid Reformed doctrine from week to week. They do this by insisting on catechism lessons for their children, so that they may be properly brought up in the truth. They do this by being godly examples to their children so that they will pattern their lives according to godliness.

CERC is entering a new and exciting phase of her development. The third generation arises. Covenant children aplenty are born, under the providence and blessings of God. These children are not ours. They are, foremost, the LORD's. He gifts them to us to nurture and raise in the fear of His name. He gives us the grace to do so, in spite of our sinful imperfections. He is pleased to use us to gather His church from among our children. From among our children, our prayer is that God will raise them to be faithful and strong soldiers for Christ.

**There is great blessing for the fathers  
and mothers who love the truth  
and stand firmly in it.**

**Just as He visits the iniquities of the fathers  
upon the children, so does God visit the faithfulness of covenant parents  
upon their children.**



## CHURCH POLITY (3): THE OFFICE OF BELIEVERS AND THE BROADER ASSEMBLIES

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



*Prof. Herman Hanko* is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. During his professorship and retirement, he taught and preached in CERC on numerous occasions.

In the last article on this subject, I described the relation between the office of believers and the office of elders. In this article, the last one on this subject, I want to discuss the relation between the office of believers and the broader assemblies. I am aware of the fact, of course, that CERC does not have congregations in Singapore with which it is able to form a denomination. But it does have an agreement with our churches that, if necessary, various cases in CERC may be adjudicated in our assemblies.

When the PRC began with three congregations, the only broader assembly was a Combined Consistory, which met periodically. As the denomination grew, it organised a Classis to adjudicate matters that involved the churches in common. The first synod met in 1940 after the churches had divided into two classes, and since then synods have met once a year in June. Some very large denominations have inserted between

classes and synods particular synods that meet to decide matters within a province or state.

The broader assemblies meet to decide matters that concern all the churches: mission work, theological instruction in the seminary, etc. But synods also meet to resolve problems that arise in the churches and cannot be resolved at sessions or classes. This latter is of concern to us for we are interested in the relation between these broader assemblies and the office of believer.

The key article in the Church Order that deals with this matter is Article 31. We cannot quote the article here because of its length. But our readers should read it: it is found in the back of our Psalters. The key phrase is: "If anyone complains that he has been wronged by a minor assembly he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly..."

To make clear how this works in the churches we will use a hypothetical case.

The basis for this article gives the right to the individual person to determine what is in conformity with the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions. Martin Luther was the first to emphasise this truth of Scripture over against the denial of the office of believers by Rome. Every believer has the Holy Spirit. John says in his first epistle that the believer needs no one to teach him (1 John 2:27, Heb. 8:10-11). These verses do not mean that the believer has no need of the preaching; it

means that every believer can and must study the Scriptures and learn on his own what they teach.

Hence the Reformed faith gives to every believer the right to interpret the Scriptures, but also the right to live in unity of the faith with his brothers and sister in the church. When one breaks that unity by disorderly or sinful conduct, he has the right and calling to admonish such a one (James 5:20).

Let me use a hypothetical case to explain the calling of a member of the church to illustrate the meaning the right of a believer when he must employ Article 31 of the Church Order.

A member walks in sin in the congregation and a fellow saint is aware of it. If the sin is not public knowledge, the fellow member must follow the injunctions of Christ laid down in Matthew 18. But if it is a public sin, he must report it to the session and ask the office bearers to begin the process of discipline with the sinner. But supposing the session says that what is said to be a sin is not a sin at all but acceptable conduct. Or the session, hearing the complaint, does nothing about it. The believer then has the right to appeal the decisions of his session or their failure to do anything to a broader assembly such as classis or, in the Presbyterian system, to presbytery. And if he is of the opinion that the classis made a wrong decision, he has the right to appeal to the synod of general assembly.

I might note here that our churches

speak also of “protests” although the Church Order does not mention that term. The church requires protests to be made to the body that has made a decision with which he disagrees. Article 30 of the Church Order requires that broader assemblies treat, not only ecclesiastical matters, but also matters which could not be finished in a narrower assembly. The point of this requirement is that every effort must be made to settle a disagreement on the narrowest assembly if possible. It is much better to settle a disagreement at the narrowest assembly — at a session rather than a classis; at a classis rather than at a synod. This is why many broader assemblies refer appeals back to the narrower assembly, for not every effort has been made to settle the matter at a narrower assembly.

If the synod does not agree with the man who appeals, he faces two options; he may either submit to synod’s decision, or he may leave the denomination. This latter is, of course,

an ultimate solution to his problem for it is wrong to leave the true church of Christ. He must be absolutely certain that he is called by God to leave a church that has made decisions contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. He must however, leave the denomination without penalty, for the church must be sure to protect and defend a man’s conscience; for a man is always responsible before God for his own conscience and consequent actions. Luther himself defied the Roman Catholic Church and the entire Holy Roman Empire appealed to his conscience enlightened by the Word of God. This was at the Diet of Worms when he proclaimed “Here I stand; I can do naught else. So help me God”. No believer may violate his own conscience, nor may any ecclesiastical assembly force him to violate his own conscience by threats of ecclesiastical punishment.

If a believer whose position has been denied by the ecclesiastical assemblies

makes propaganda for his position within the churches when the assemblies have spoken, he then becomes guilty of schism for trying to persuade others in the denomination of the correctness of his position even though the assemblies have decided against him. In that case he must be disciplined, but for the sin of schism, not for what he believed.

I have all my ministry warned people of the wrong of going against one’s conscience, but his conscience must be enlightened by the Word of God. It and the Reformed confessions are the basis of unity within the denomination.

I conclude these articles by saying what I said at the beginning of these articles: the office of all believers is the most important office in the church. But the believers have great responsibility towards their session and towards the denomination. And above all, they must submit, as the Scriptures teach, to their elders.

## WORK ETHICS: BEING GOOD TO THE FROWARD MASTER

>> Christine Ong



*Christine Ong* is a member of CERC. She is a civil servant who has been in 3 job postings and has worked under 7 direct bosses. As a supervisor herself now, she gets a flavour of the other side of the coin.

Scenario 1: What would you do if a director scolds you for no good reason, in front of your colleagues and subordinates?

Scenario 2: What would you do if someone instructs you one thing verbally, but writes another thing, then brushes off the inconsistency by saying ‘everything is relative’?

Scenario 3: What would you do if your boss gives a lot of work to you, and spends his time playing phone games in office while you are very busy?

Scenario 4: What would you do if you do a piece of work, and your supervisor takes the credit for it?

I have experienced these at work. My natural response would be to hold a grudge, complain, tell what happened to anyone who would spare a listening ear, and slack off. The thought process behind these actions - if a superior can behave badly, shouldn’t that be made known to others? If instructions are given in an unreasonable or unclear way, or if the superior isn’t doing his work, why should I work so hard?

Yet Peter exhorts in 1 Peter 2:18-20: “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.”

First, there are good as well as bad masters (employers). God, in His providence, may give us employers such as Boaz, who treated the reapers in his fields kindly and with respect, and instructed them to show charity to Ruth, a stranger (Ruth 2:6, 9, 15). In contrast, the Israelites suffered under the bondage of their Egyptian masters, who sought to kill their baby boys and make their lives miserable (Ex. 1:13-14; 3:7).

Second, I, as a servant (employee), am to be subject to my master (employer) with all fear. In Peter’s day, as in ours, the temptation is for Christians to imagine that we are not subject to unbelieving and cruel masters. Still, we are exhorted to honour and place ourselves under the employer’s authority, submitting to and respecting (or fearing) the employer as one whom God has placed over us. We are not to rebel, or override our employer’s authority.

In the hypothetical situation that an employer asks me to do something unlawful, being subject to the employer does not mean that I must obey. I have to obey God rather than man. This

could mean declining the instruction, and/or reporting to the relevant authority.

Third, the rationale for bearing with a bad employer. If I have made a mistake, it is expected that I should bear with the consequences. If I have not done anything wrong and am treated badly, I am to endure because of my conscience towards God. My conscience is literally, what I know together with God. Standing before God and knowing God and His will, I desire to be pleasing to Him. Therefore, even if my employer behaves sinfully, it does not justify a sinful response. I am ultimately answerable to God, not my employer. My employer is also answerable to God, not to me (Col. 4:1).

We ought to remember the origin of work difficulties. It was not so initially — God worked in creation, and saw every thing that He had made, and behold, it was very good (Gen. 1:31). God also put Adam into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. Adam named all the creatures. He worked! But after Adam and Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, God pronounced a curse, NOT the curse of labour which already existed before the fall into sin, but the hardship and frustration that is connected to labour. Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art,

and unto dust shalt thou return (Gen. 3:17b-19). This puts in perspective the difficulties we face at work, including a froward employer.

How then should I behave when my employer behaves badly? These are some suggestions based on my experience, and godly advice received.

*I bear in mind that we are all sinful.* My employer may have sinned against me, but I can also react in sinful wounded pride. In the first scenario, by God’s grace I put aside my frustration and resentment, and reflected that I could be clearer in my verbal communication. Unexpectedly, the director messaged me 2 hours after the scolding, to apologise and explain. I replied that I understood the importance of the issue, the concerns raised, and that I had not taken it personally. Imagine if I had gone around complaining in those 2 hours...I would have wasted my time, and have had a lot of badmouthing to undo.

*I commit my burden to the Lord, seeking wisdom.* He will not give me something without also giving the grace to bear it, or a way to escape (1 Cor. 10:13). In the second scenario, I coped by summarising what was communicated verbally in an email, for the person to respond to. I also tried having the discussions with more participants where possible, so that my recollection of the discussion could be confirmed by the others present. However, it became clear to me that I could not work with this person long-term as our worldviews were contrary, thus I sought a different

**We labour, not for ourselves or our employer, but for God.**



job posting, which God provided in due course.

*I continue doing what I am supposed to do.* In the third scenario, it was tempting to push the work back to my boss, to imply that he should do more. Yet in doing the work, I learned much, and was able to use the information gained when speaking up at meetings. My boss ‘smoked’ answers, and was found out when he could not address follow-up queries. Other colleagues also noticed that he played games, and came to their own conclusions about him. Through this I learned that we reap what we sow, and a good name is better than precious ointment.

The ant, described in Proverbs 6, also

provides inspiration. It has no guide, overseer, or ruler, but provides her meat in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. Its diligence is not dependent on having a master directing it.

What if the wrongs I suffer are not put right? What if my superior gets away with his bad behaviour? As Christ’s disciples, we look to His example. In Peter’s same epistle, he describes how Christ was reviled, yet reviled not again. He suffered patiently, bearing our sins, at the hands of wicked people. He even prayed that God would forgive them, for they know not what they do. Do we pray for our employers?

For those of us who have good

employers, let us be thankful, and be good stewards of the opportunities available. Yet we should not seek satisfaction in work such that it is our idol. For those of us who suffer under froward employers, let us draw comfort that our sufferings in this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18). Our light affliction is but for a moment, and works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4:17). We labour, not for ourselves or our employer, but for God, that He may say to us at the last day, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:21).

## COMFORT DURING A PANDEMIC

>> Emily Lanning



*Emily Lanning* is a youth in Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan, USA.

How do we have comfort during a pandemic that sets the world in utter panic? How do we have peace that the world doesn’t have? How do we have such peaceful minds and comforted hearts during the spreading of this virus?

Both we and the wicked world are affected by this pandemic. But what

is the difference in our responses to it? The world responds in sheer panic. They respond by shutting down the world from schools, sports, shopping, visiting, holidays, etc. They respond in terror. Now, in great contrast, we as Christians respond in *prayer*. We respond by talking to God and asking him for comfort. We can, and must, respond even in *thankfulness*.

How is it possible that, in the midst of a growing, harmful virus, we can be thankful? In Romans 5:3-4 we read: “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope.” With everything shutting down because of the coronavirus, we can be *thankful*. We are thankful because it works patience in us. We are thankful because it gives us experience for

tribulations in the future. We are thankful because in the middle of the virus, we have hope. We have the hope that Christ will come someday to stop our tribulations. Let us remember Romans 5:3-4 as we think of this spreading pandemic that completely stops our daily routines and that shuts down the world from their normal activities.

But, having God, we have yet one more thing that the world doesn’t have: comfort. Comfort from whom? We see the answer to that in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, where we read: “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God”. The God of



all comfort! *That's* who gives us our comfort in COVID-19, comfort that we can't possess on our own, comfort that is entirely dependent upon God.

What should COVID-19 and all its effects teach us? That we must respect and obey authority, even in times when we despise their decisions, dislike their actions, or think something different ourselves. And when they make decisions that we disagree with, or that we consider to be a bit naive, think of Romans 13:1, which says, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God". That government which makes the decisions regarding the COVID-19 situation was ordained by God the Father. 1 Peter 2:13-15 is another passage in the Bible that tells us that we must obey those over us. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing

ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men". Submit yourselves to authority for the Lord's sake, for so is the will of God.

How does COVID-19 sanctify you individually? For myself, this entire experience has made me look forward to Christ's return. It has made me pray more, "Come, Lord Jesus, yea come quickly". It has made me pray more also for the government, that God will guide them in their decisions so that they are good for the church of Christ. "Come, Lord Jesus, yea come quickly", we pray, and He responds to us, "Surely I come quickly" (Rev. 22:20).

As we look back over the past couple months, we see a dramatic change in our lives. It is a change that never existed in our minds before it all started: COVID-19, the circuit breaker, and the pause from work, school, and church. Since it never existed in our minds before, we may start to think that COVID-19 was some kind of accident, some kind of mishap that was never supposed to happen. But have you ever thought that God's will came to pass in

all of this? Have you ever thought that it was God's providential hand that sent COVID-19? We read of God's perfect work in Deuteronomy 32:4: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he". His work is perfect...just and right is He. What a beautiful verse to look at during the COVID-19 pandemic! God's work is perfect! He was just and right to send the coronavirus into our lives. He was just and right in sending it not only into one country or state, but throughout the whole world. Our God is just and right, and His work is perfect.

And that same God who sent COVID-19 is the same God who strengthens us for it, and who gives us comfort and peace and thankfulness during this time which no one has experienced before. Let us thank our God for His careful watch over us during this time, for the comfort that we have from Him, and for His perfect work in ordaining COVID-19.

## BE STRONG!

>>Lim Yang Zhi



*Lim Yang Zhi* is a member of CERC and the Chairman of the *Salt Shakers* committee.

"The youths ought to do more." "The youths ought to be more zealous." "The youths ought to be more mature." These are words we have heard in recent years.

Youths, as much as these words are enough, perhaps to make you want to turn the page to a different article, consider these words carefully in your heart. Are they true? Have you slacked off your personal devotions? Have you excused yourself for another hour of Instagram, phone games, or

entertainment? Have you lost control and shot back at your parents or siblings (or maybe the opposite—give the cold shoulder)?

Yet, let me add a note to the rest of our readers: If any of you have spoken the above quotes, consider them carefully again. No, don't just consider whether it's true. Consider whether merely saying those words—words of criticism—really helps our youths. I do not think any reader can say with

good conscience that criticism alone is the way to *deal truly* with our youths. We can all agree that to *deal truly*<sup>1</sup> with our youths is to not only criticize (admonish) negatively but also to help positively.

Turning back to the youths: Be strong! But what does that mean?

Let's sharpen our minds with Scripture to answer that question. One famous example of strength is David, when he stood against blasphemous Goliath (I Sam. 17:32-37). Goliath had issued his challenge to Saul's army. Hearing this challenge among all the cowardice, David volunteered to fight. However, Saul disagreed, as we will further examine later. Yet David insisted to fight, because David was strong. He had taken down a lion and a bear. Alone, by the power of God, he had taken down those wild, dangerous beasts. And he was a youth!

Also recall God's well-known words in Isaiah 40. There, God speaks in comfort to Israel by declaring his strength and wisdom in all creation. The conclusion of this? *Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall* (Is. 40:30). Wait—where's the strength? It's not always in young men and youths, for sure. But, in writing this, God is saying that he created youth to be strong, even though there are times youths will faint, be weary, and fall.

Turn your attention to the rich young man speaking to Jesus. Hear him seek for eternal life, and hear him describe his seeking this way: *All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet* (Matthew 19:20)? The rich young man was wrong in seeking eternal life in his good works. Nonetheless, he had the time, energy, and effort to

exercise himself to godliness, and to be consistent at it.

Then listen to John's words for youths of his day: *I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one* (I John 2:14b).

What are we to get out of these verses?

Youths, God has created you with earthly strengths. He has given you able bodies. Just as David could slay the lion and bear in strength, just as the young can run and withstand physical difficulties in strength, so are you strong. It is obvious that we are not all equally strong. Yet, compared to needy newborns and the aging elderly, you are strong. Also, he has given you sound minds. Just as the young ruler could study the Word, understand it, and apply it to himself, so can you use your mind to understand Scripture, understand it in doctrines, and apply them to your personal lives. This is the strength John speaks of in I John 2:16, and he even mentions how the young, in understanding and applying the Word, can withstand the devil!

But above these strengths, God has given you spiritual strength. Just as David had the courage to stand for God against Goliath's blasphemy, even to use whatever physical strength he had to fight Goliath, so do you have courage by God's grace to stand up to the addictions of entertainment, pornography, and a YOLO lifestyle. Just as the young ruler and the young men in the NT were not only "smart," but they were also spiritually strong to put those minds to know the Word, and then to obey the Word and overcome the devil; so are you strong to overcome the temptations of your heart to sin against God and \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup>.

Did you notice this is the most outstanding strength in all the passages we considered? David's courage for God, the rich young man's desire to please God is outstanding, the young men's strength to overcome the devil are outstanding. They are the highlights of God's Word.

If that isn't enough proof for you and I, then consider the weakness Scripture warns us of.

Maybe you are thinking back to Saul. He was upfront about weakness. He did not think David was *able*—David was but a *youth*, while Goliath was trained to be a warrior from youth (v. 33). Isaiah 40:30 also lays down the reality of life: *Even the youths shall faint and be weary*.

But the greatest weakness is what David speaks of so plainly in the Psalms: *Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions* (Psalm 25:7). My sins! Your sins! Our transgressions! That is our greatest weakness.

Wasn't Abraham crippled by the sin of u\_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup>, so that he lied to heathen kings about Sarah? Wasn't Dinah crippled by the sin of w\_\_\_\_\_<sup>4</sup>, so that she found friendships among unbelievers, one of which the man who would rape her eventually? Wasn't Simon Peter crippled by the sin of f\_\_\_\_<sup>5</sup>, so that he denied Christ thrice?

<sup>1</sup> Recall from one reading sermon which Proverb this is from!

<sup>2</sup> Fill in the name of the person that ticked you off this week.

<sup>3</sup> unbelief

<sup>4</sup> worldliness

<sup>5</sup> fear

So are you and I, youths.

David's words bring out a serious warning to us: However great your earthly strengths are, you and I are weak if we cannot stand against our sins. That straight-As report card, that beautiful make-up, and that six-pack body don't matter, if they are all used to satisfy ourselves.

---

There is strength. There are weaknesses. What do they mean for you, youths?

That means this: *Be strong!* Those are not magical words that will transform you into spiritual stalwarts. Those are the words God puts in his Word, daily to remind you who and what you are in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has given you his Spirit, so that you have that new life—a *strong* life that overcomes your sinful nature.

Because you have that new life, be

strong. Our activities and fellowship give us time to talk about godly living are God's means to make all of us strong. Use them! Be sure, at the same time, that your sins will cripple you. Laziness, an insincere love for God that constantly finds excuses, and zero self-control will haunt you.

As you take heed and grow in strength, find out what your other strengths are. Being strong spiritually involves fighting your sins; but it also means using your earthly strengths for God's glory. David exercised his courage in defeating Goliath physically. The young people of John's day exercised godliness using their intellect. In the same way, we exercise spiritual strength in and through our earthly strengths.

We said earlier that we are not equals in physical strength—the same goes for all other earthly strengths. Therefore, God's calling to us is to find our strengths, and use them for God's glory. Talk to each other for frank opinions. Talk to

older Christians for godly advice. Talk to God in prayer for wisdom to develop these strengths for his glory.

Lastly, realise that this is a calling *for you*.

Your parents might have argued with you about your sins. Older folks in church seem only to have criticisms for you. Listen, don't argue back, and examine yourself, whether you truly are weak spiritually.

At the same time, don't let the devil tempt you to say: "What's the point of being stronger, if all I'm told is that I'm weak?" You desire to please God, don't you? Let that God-given desire drive you to be strong. Even if others don't see that you are trying and land criticisms on you, keep working at it (and listen to those criticisms, of course).

With the Word of God, and the Spirit in you: Youths, be strong!

## TELEIOS ACADEMY (1): STARTING OUT

>>Cheryl Lim



Cheryl Lim is a member of CERC.

Galen stood a mere 10 paces from Teleios<sup>1</sup> Academy, the wind whipping his cloak around him. It was an imposing building, especially for a young teen as he was. Supporting the

triangular roof of the Academy's portico were three rows of colossal fifteen-metre stone columns. Between the roof and columns lay a horizontal stone panel, upon which was boldly inscribed: 'BE YE THEREFORE PERFECT'.

Galen shuffled uneasily on his feet and hugged his satchel tightly to his body. But he released it again almost immediately, recalling what it contained. Hurriedly, he unfastened the satchel and drew out a rolled parchment at the bottom. He unfurled it, relieved to see that it had not been damaged. He had received it only two days before and had

immediately heeded its instructions for getting to Teleios Academy. But more significantly, the parchment contained the King's insignia and these few brief lines:

BEGOTTEN OF THE KING'S  
WILL,  
WITH THE WORD OF TRUTH.  
BORN OF THE SPIRIT,  
OF INCORRUPTIBLE SEED.  
A NEW LIFE THUS BEGINS:  
GROWTH UNTO PERFECTION.

<sup>1</sup> Thayer's Definition: That which is perfect; of men – full grown, adult, of full age, mature.



Carefully replacing the scroll in his satchel, Galen looked up to see an older girl coming at a brisk pace from around the east side of the Academy. She slowed down a hint as the grandeur of the Academy's façade struck her, mouth agape. As she neared Galen, he could make out strips of purple dyed into the hems of her ankle-length yellow silk tunic. Galen perceived that she came from a wealthy family.

'Impressive, eh?' she marvelled under her breath, coming to a stop beside Galen with eyes riveted on the Academy. Up close, Galen figured that this girl was probably not more than a few years older than him. Her hair was tied in a simple knot behind her neck, and her tunic secured around her waist with a woollen belt.

Unsure if she was waiting for an answer, Galen lowered his eyes and mumbled 'Y-yes'. The girl turned her head sharply, as if noticing Galen for the first time. Her look of surprise disappeared quickly as she broke into a wide smile. She reached out and grabbed Galen's hand, shaking it earnestly. 'I'm Niko', she announced. Startled, Galen blinked a few times before replying, 'Uhh... I-I'm Galen'.

'You're starting in the Academy too, right?' Niko asked Galen. Without waiting for an answer, she pulled Galen forward by the elbow, urging, 'Come on!' They had just run past the last row of stone columns when, with a great shudder, the Academy's front doors began turning about their hinges. The massive bronze doors swung open slowly, revealing a tall, wizened old man standing in the middle of the doorway. 'Greetings children!' he boomed heartily, spreading his arms open in a gesture of welcome. 'Niko, Galen' he

smiled and nodded at each of them in turn, 'I am Headmaster Alexios, and it is my absolute delight to welcome you both to Teleios Academy'.

'Come now, we have no time to lose in your learning', said Headmaster Alexios as he turned and started walking back into the Academy.

The two young people trotted to keep up with his long strides, turning their heads this way and that as they soaked in their surroundings. The interior of the Academy was no less impressive than its exterior. It was shaped like a large dome, with an opening right at the top through which sunlight poured, reflecting off marble floors and pearl white walls. Galen noticed that all around the perimeter of the dome were doors. It was to the first one on the left that Headmaster Alexios seemed to be leading them now.

'You will begin your journey of maturity in this Academy', Headmaster Alexios introduced as he walked. 'Each of these rooms', he said, sweeping his arm out in a wide arc, 'offers a different means of growth, which our good King gives his citizens'.

As they reached the first door, the Headmaster turned around to face Niko and Galen and eagerly announced, 'Well then, let us begin, shall we?' He opened the door.

### **Reflection Room | Master Self-Examination**

An enormous looking glass hung from the ceiling, suspended inches off the ground. Framed in solid oak, it swivelled about the single piece of rope that held it, very slowly turning this way and that.

A sombre group of people stood in a

circle around the glass, looking intently into it. Niko and Galen could make out some who sighed, others that sniffed and dabbed their cheeks with handkerchiefs, and more yet that wept audibly. But puzzling to them was the sight of many too who smiled, and hummed joyful odes.

Facing this group was Master Self-Examination, a thoughtful-looking man, who had been exhorting the class. 'Did not our King say to the young ruler, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor"?' And to what end? Not that he could by this mere act attain perfection. But did it not serve to uncover his covetousness and idolatry? So too must we, if we are to grow in this life, be oft searching our hearts. And take heed! Be not like the man who looks and straightway forgets, but a doer of the law.'

And thus concluding, he walked over to greet the newcomers and warmly shook each of their hands in turn.

'Master', queried Niko eagerly, 'What do these people see in this looking glass? Why do some weep as if some great burden were upon them, while others appear ready to burst forth in song?'

Master Self-Examination smiled, as if expecting the question. 'Come with me', he said, leading them towards the looking glass. The students parted, allowing the group to the front.

'Look for yourselves, children', Master Self-Examination said, as he gently laid a hand on each of their shoulders.

Galen gazed keenly into the looking glass, which at the first, revealed little more than his smudged face and dusty



cloak. But as he looked, he began to see too, the filth that was within. He grew conscious of his stains before the Spotless One. He was as one engulfed in darkness, unable to approach the Light. Surely, he was a leper, calling ‘Unclean, unclean!’, and retreating from him who was Whole.

Galen would have fallen to his knees (for the strength in his legs was gone) if not for Master Self-Examination who pulled him up firmly, breaking his gaze from the looking glass.

‘O Master!’ Galen moaned, ‘What shall we do? For the King is sore displeased!’ ‘Our foolish ways have set us far from him’, teared Niko. ‘Whither shall we find him again?’

‘Look on, children, and despair not’, Master Self-Examination replied tenderly, for the looking glass was now swivelling around so they could see its other side.

This time, to the children’s surprise, they saw not themselves but a crown of thorns, a cross upon a hill, and an empty tomb with linen grave clothes.

‘Our good King has paid for all our transgressions’, explained Master Self-Examination. ‘He has fully cleansed us and healed us. Filthy rags for robes of righteousness! Scarlet sins washed white as snow! Enemies no longer, but citizens!’

‘Indeed, great are his tender mercies’, affirmed Headmaster Alexios. ‘Sorrow we must, for separation from our King is death! But for him who repents and turns to the Light, his sorrow is changed to everlasting joy.’

And thus were the children comforted and their hearts uplifted.

‘Come now, for we must be on our way’, said the Headmaster, guiding them to the door.

## THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD: HEALTHCARE WORKER

>> Koh Hui Yi



Hui Yi is a member of CERC and works as a physiotherapist.

*“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” - 1 Cor. 10:31*

We are called to glorify God in all that we do. For those of us who are working, most of our weekdays are spent at work. The time we spend with our colleagues is probably more than the combined time spent with our family and friends every week. Considering how work life

takes up such a big part of our lives, it is profitable to examine how we can glorify God at work.

It has been about 2.5 years since I started work as a physiotherapist in a women’s and children’s hospital and yet every day I still struggle with how best I can serve God in my daily calling. At work, as with any other aspect of life, there are difficulties which can make me complain and murmur, temptations which threaten to lead me away from God. Yet, these same situations can be used as opportunities to glorify God as well — difficulties can also remind me to rely on God alone and temptations can also remind me to draw closer to God.

As a physiotherapist, part of my job involves getting patients mobile after

a major operation. Imagine having to convince someone who is in a great amount of pain, cranky from not having slept well and probably nauseous from the side effects of medication to get out of bed and walk around. And then imagine having to do that at least 15 times over and over again in a day while having to deal with their families as well. Interactions with patients can often be both physically and emotionally exhausting and there is often the temptation to complain and do my job unwillingly.

However, we are reminded in Colossians 3:23-24, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ”. This means that I am to do all

aspects of my job as if I were serving God Himself and to do it willingly and joyfully — to the glory of God!

Part of my job as a physiotherapist also involves interacting with patients who are very ill, possibly at the end of their life. In my course of work, I've had to see young children, some just a few months old, with multiple lines and attachments running out from their tiny bodies, hooked up to a ventilator pumping air in and out of their lungs to help them breathe, their parents at the bedside looking on anxiously. I've also seen ladies with cancer, the disease and treatment having sucked almost all the life out of them, every breath a struggle, every movement painful.

**It is worthwhile to try to use lunch time conversations as a way to glorify God instead. One way to do that would be to introduce non-Christian colleagues to the faith.**

Seeing such suffering, it can be tempting to ask God — why? If God is a good God, why does He allow such horrible things to happen? Why must a young child whose life has barely begun face such misery? And if that child dies, does he truly deserve hell just because his parents are not Christians? What wrong has the child done?

Such questions can threaten our Christian worldview and make us question our faith. However, as with all things, we need to look back to God's Word to answer our questions. Deuteronomy 32:4 speaks of how God is perfect and without iniquity. God

created this world perfect and without sorrow and it is by men that sin and its devastating effects entered the world (Rom. 5:12). Man is to be blamed for all the suffering in this world — so who are we to question God? And yet, despite our unworthiness, God has chosen in His everlasting grace to have mercy upon us. He sent His son to die on the cross such that we have hope beyond the grave. This means that even in the face of such suffering, we can still rejoice. In my experience, I have found it comforting to say a word of prayer before or after seeing such patients, committing them in God's hands and being thankful that I have Him as my Saviour.

Another area of work in which I am often tempted to sin is in my relationship with my colleagues. This point is probably applicable to all of us working, and not so specific to being a physiotherapist. For me, there is often the temptation to gossip and talk about other colleagues or speculate on office politics over lunch. The idea of finding out "drama" going on in other peoples' lives so often appeals to our sinful natures. However, the Bible is clear about how we should use our speech to edify one another (Eph. 4:29) and how destructive gossiping can be (Pro. 16:28).

Hence, it is worthwhile to try to use lunch time conversations as a way to glorify God instead. One way to do that would be to introduce non-Christian colleagues to the faith. It could be something as simple as sharing how we spent our Sunday in church to get the conversation going. Another way to bring God into the conversation would be share your views on certain issues from a Christian perspective. Even though we may not get the chance to explain our faith in an "in-depth" manner, expounding the truths of the gospel, short conversations like these can still be seeds sown in our colleagues' hearts which bear fruit one day.

All jobs have their challenges but thankfully we have our great almighty God to turn to. Not only do we have His Word to teach us how we should go about our earthly callings, He also places people in our lives that help point us back to Him. These people may be family, church friends or even colleagues who are fellow believers. Indeed, God is a gracious God! May we lean on Him and strive to glorify Him in our daily callings.

## TECHNOLOGY: A THREAT OR TOOL?

>> Cornelius Boon



*Cornelius Boon* is a deacon in CERC and works in an IT department of a government statutory board under the Ministry of Defence.

Have you ever wondered what your life would be like without technology? Would you be able to check where you were on Google Maps? Would you be able to take a bus to get to places? Or would you even be able to read this *Salt Shakers* article that you are currently reading? Technology, as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary, refers to “the practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area” (for example, computer/medical/space technology). If we use this definition, we soon realise that technology is all around us, from home appliances to transportation, communication, financial transactions, and in our homes. We cannot go one day without technology helping us in one way or another.

Even in the Bible, technology was used. The first instance where technology was used is right in Genesis. We read in Genesis 4:21-22, “And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and

iron: and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah”. Jubal used his knowledge to make instruments that could make music, and Tubal-cain made tools out of brass and iron. This has probably been mentioned many times, but it still bears repeating: technology is not in itself evil. It is the use of technology that matters. Technology can either be used for the service of God or for the service of man. Back to the example of Tubal-cain, the tools that he developed would have been used by Solomon to build the temple. But the same tools were used to build the tower of Babel. In this we see two very contrasting uses of the same technology, one for the glory of God and the other for the glory of man and his own pleasure.

What is technology being used for today? Would ungodly men develop technology with the glory of God in mind? Herein lies the very real danger: technology today is used to improve the ease and comfort of men and for their own pleasures. Although I mentioned earlier that technology is in itself not evil, we must always be mindful that different kinds of technology were developed by ungodly people with the intent of serving themselves. Take the television, for example: it was developed so that men could have entertainment from the comfort of their own homes, so that they could enjoy the pleasures of immorality in the shows that were broadcasted. Yes, there are ways that the Christian can use the television properly, such as to enjoy the creation of God in documentaries, but those uses are few and far between. The point is that the television was not invented

for the primary purpose of watching documentaries, but rather to try to sate man's unending thirst for sin and depravity.

There are technologies that we rely on in everyday life that might not have such a great potential for sin as compared to the example that we mentioned earlier, such as the humble vacuum cleaner that we use once a week or the stove that we use to cook our food. These innocuous items are often used without much thought, and one might think, “What harm is there in using these tools?” But the danger comes in another form. Are they just tools to be used, or have they become status symbols? A \$10 Casio watch serves the same purpose as a \$1000 TAG Heuer watch, but people are still buying the \$1000 watch. There is nothing wrong in getting better tools, but a Christian must be a good steward of the money which God has given him. Especially in this time and age where marketing is so advanced, a Christian must always question the motive behind buying anything. Do I really need the 300 functions that this cutting-edge rice cooker provides? Or is a pot sufficient? Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

For the next part of the article, I would like to devote some time to highlighting a problem that is not commonly talked about but is becoming increasingly prevalent with the use of technology. In Asian societies, pornography is often a taboo subject. If you ask someone if he or she watches porn, you would probably get a denial and the topic

would be diverted away. I will not spend much time arguing why porn is wrong, but suffice it to say, watching porn is wrong for anyone in any situation. Matthew 5:28-29: “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell”.

Pornography has been around for a long time, but it is only in the recent two decades, with the rise of the internet, that it has become so widespread and easily accessible. A study in 2018 revealed that 57% of teens search out porn at least monthly, and the average age of the first exposure to pornography among men is 12 years old ([www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats](http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats)). In February 2020, out of the top 50 most visited websites in Singapore, about eight were porn websites. A popular porn website flaunted (this is the world that we live in today, where sin is openly embraced) that in 2019, there were 42 billion visits to the site and 6.83 million new videos were uploaded. But that is not the scariest statistic. The website also revealed that 83.7% of all traffic to the site came from mobile devices. This is great cause for concern, because everyone has a mobile phone today. To put it simply, a mobile phone with internet connection (be it Wi-Fi or 4G) can access porn. Sin is just a few taps away. Are you alone in the bedroom and no one is watching? Or have all your family members gone out, leaving you alone at home? There the temptation comes. No one is spared, and one ought not to think that he or she will not be tempted.

Men, if you are struggling with this sin, confess to your girlfriend or wife; there needs to be openness and accountability. There ought not to be any secrets between couples, and hiding your struggle will only make you miserable and will in time affect the relationship. If you are single, find someone in whom you can confide. It is easy in our pride to say, “I can handle this temptation, and this will be the last time that I will commit it.” But time and time again, we as weak creatures will fall back into it. We all need help in our struggles, and God has placed us in a church with fellow brothers and sisters for a reason. Although I have been mostly referring to men, as we are the ones more likely to fall into this temptation, women are not spared either. If you find yourself in such a situation, the same advice applies. Above all, we must also confess our sins before God and pray for his strength to help us flee from this temptation. 1 Corinthians 10:12-13: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”. The comfort is that we do not rely on our own strength, but when we pray and rely on the strength of God, He is able to bring us out of it.

Parents, this should also be a cause for concern. We must be mindful of how technology can be used by our children for sin and take steps to prevent it. It could mean that we set strict rules on the use of handphones; for example, by only allowing usage in the living room where there is supervision, and even to the extent of looking through our children’s messages or blocking various

functions on the phone. There are also applications available that help to monitor our children’s activities on the phone. Parents should consider using such applications. These measures also apply to other technologies like the computer or the television. There is a need for more supervision at the start, and we can relax the rules gradually when the child has proven himself or herself trustworthy. And before we think that only our children need supervision, we as parents would do well to consider such measures for ourselves as well. Temptation does not stop once we reach the age of 20, and we as adults are equally susceptible to it as well.

A good portion of this article was spent highlighting the negative aspects of technology, and almost half of the article was devoted to one problem that technology brought. This was deliberate. Improvements in technologies are not only making our lives easier, but they also make sinning so much easier. The future will only bring more challenges, and we must be prepared for them. Upcoming technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) will feed images straight to our eyes without anyone else being able to see what we are seeing. And if AR is built into our spectacles that we use to help us to see, we will be wearing it all the time, making the temptation to misuse it so much greater. A Christian must be able to understand the threat that technology brings in order to properly use it as a tool. May God grant us wisdom in the use of the tools which we have.



## SHIFT IN EDUCATION FOCUS, FROM A CHRISTIAN'S VIEW

>> Ezra Tan



*Ezra Tan* is a member of CERC.

In 2016, Ministry of Education (MOE)<sup>1</sup> announced that there would be changes to the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE) and Secondary One (S1) posting systems from 2021. Grades will be awarded based on student's individual performance instead of a raw score. Another MOE policy change in 2019<sup>2</sup> was to remove streaming in secondary school and the introduction of subject-based banding from 2024. The reason for these changes is to provide students with more flexibility and space to develop their passions and move away from the over-emphasis on academic results. Students will also be given more opportunities to interact and make friends with different educational backgrounds.

Growing up, I was considered above average in my academics. However, I was surrounded by peers in church who did extremely well in their academics. We had a streaming system at Primary 4 (age 10) then and I was in EM2 (average stream) while some of my church peers were in EM1 (top stream). Eventually, we had to sit for the PSLE at 12 years old. Some of them qualified for the top secondary schools in Singapore. Despite the difference in academic results, I did not feel humiliated or inferior to them.

We continued to treat each other as equals, catching spiders, playing soccer and catching during the breaks before Sunday school. We occasionally discussed about the English Premier League and the frailty of life. The good old days before handphone technology came.

In Singapore, the PSLE is a milestone achievement where a student moves on to secondary education which also determines the "direction" where the student goes. Many parents will do their utmost to ensure their child gets a head start, e.g. spending on tuition (extra lessons)<sup>3</sup>. There is a stereotype that those posted to "elite" schools will be groomed to be future leaders of the country and a stigma that those posted to "technical" schools will be blue-collared workers. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths" (Pro. 3:5-6). God's Word directs our path as seen in Psalm 119:105. Not our own understanding of the situation, not our academic performances, not our school's posting results. What does it mean to direct our path? Where are we going? Heaven is our end goal. Not climbing the corporate ladder to be the next director of the Fortune 500 companies, a millionaire, or even being the top in school. In Philippians 3:14, Paul reminds us to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus". And we entirely rely on God even as we look heavenward.

Whenever the National Examination results are out, there is talk in church about, "how did your child perform?". In

a close-knit church community this can put pressure on the student, sometimes, even on the family. We are reminded in James 2 that our Lord Jesus Christ does not show favouritism to the rich and partiality to the poor. He reminds us to "love thy neighbour as thyself". If we fail to do so, we are transgressors of the law. Likewise, as Christians, we are not to treat each other based on academic performances or personal wealth but view one another as sinners saved by God's grace.

Even with the educational policy changes, parents are to treat their children as gifts from God. "Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD; and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate" (Ps. 127:3-5). We do not view our children differently based on their academic results. Jesus even points out in Matthew 18 that children are the "greatest in the kingdom of heaven". Sometimes, a child may be doing his utmost but be unable to perform in school. Even so, we give thanks to God for His goodness. However, when a child is lazy and disobedient, the parent disciplines the child out of love (Pro. 13:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.moe.gov.sg/news/press-releases/updates-to-psle-2021-scoring-system--enabling-students-to-progress--regardless-of-starting-points>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/education/no-more-streaming-for-students-full-transcript-of-speech-by-education-minister>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/households/hes201718.pdf>

24). This shall “deliver his soul from hell” (Pro. 23:14).

As a trainee teacher in the public school, I often see students faced with the struggles of life. Many are distracted by the vanities of life and do not pursue godliness. As students, the calling is to be diligent in your work. Do not be lazy and give excuses to avoid work. If you are given work by your teachers, be responsible and do it to your best of your abilities. The consequence of laziness in the book of Proverbs is poverty (Pro. 20:4; 24:33,34). The meditation and instruction of God’s law will also endow one with wisdom (Pro. 4). This wisdom will give life and health to those that find it.

Each of us has been given different talents.

The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 reminds us that we are to use our talents wisely for the kingdom of heaven or else they will be taken away. The talents given to each of us are different, but all serve one purpose: the glory of God. Romans 12:1-8 teaches us that we must be committed in the service of the church: “a living sacrifice”. Some of us may not have a stellar education while others may have top honours in the best universities with the ability to understand difficult concepts, excel in examinations and even write in-depth theses on a subject matter. The members in the church have different gifts and we are to use them for God’s kingdom. Everyone has a role to play. Some will be office bearers, some teachers, and some hearers.

Even as young students, we hone our talents in school so that we can serve God with them. The young girl hardworking in school will be able to raise her children in the fear of the Lord, teaching them the statutes of the Law. The boy who reads the Bible diligently and discusses God’s Word with his family will be able to lead in Bible studies and be an office bearer.

These educational policy changes do not change the way we view education. Education still serves its purpose in moulding a child’s growth as the child learns more about the world God has created. The church also educates the child in the faithful preaching of the gospel, the Catechism lessons and the fellowship of the saints.

## IN DARKEST DAY AND BLACKEST NIGHT (1)

>> Beverly Tan & Jemima Lee



*Beverly* and *Jemima* are members in CERC. Beverly is a psychologist with over 8 years of working experience in the social and mental health services. She has worked with adults that have family and relationship problems, workplace and financial stressors and even health issues.

### What is Depression?

One day, a good friend of mine told me that she felt depressed and worthless at work. These are just two symptoms of depression, based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The remaining symptoms include:

- loss of interest or pleasure
- decrease or increase in appetite
- moving or speaking slowly
- feeling tired
- difficulty concentrating
- thoughts of death

My good friend eventually did not meet the criteria for depression. A person with depression experiences five or more symptoms nearly every day during the same two-week period,

and at least one of the symptoms must be either a depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure. The person’s functioning in social gatherings or other important areas would also be affected (American Psychiatric Association, 2019). Children may exhibit a more irritable mood rather than a depressed mood.

It is common to know of a friend who has depression. The latest nationwide study shows one in seven people in Singapore has experienced a mental disorder in his or her lifetime (Institute of Mental Health, 2018). Major depressive disorder (MDD), alcohol abuse, and obsessive compulsive disorder were the top three mental disorders in Singapore. One in sixteen people in Singapore had MDD at some point in his lifetime. Think about it: if

our congregation has 160 people, about ten people may have suffered from depression at one stage in their life.

### Do Christians Get Depressed?

In my (Beverly) work as a psychologist, I have met Christians who struggled with mental health issues. The opposite of feeling depressed may be feeling happy. According to a psychologist, Sonja Lyubomirsky, happiness depends on 50 percent genes, 10 percent circumstances, and 40 percent intentional behaviour. As for depression, there are various causes, such as genes, life events, and even medical issues like hypothyroidism. Anxiety disorders (for example, panic attacks, social anxiety, and phobias) may lead to depression.

Just as we are prone to physical illnesses, we can also be prone to mental illnesses. The Bible acknowledges that mental illnesses such as depression are real. There were several godly people in the Bible who suffered from mental distress.

One of them was Job, who suffered tragic life events and serious medical issues. "My soul is weary of my life...I will speak in the bitterness of my soul" (Job 10:1). Amidst his despair and desolation, Job seemingly could not find God: "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him" (Job 23:8-9). In Job's darkest hour, it seemed like God had deserted him too, along with his friends and wife, who already provided little consolation to him. Everywhere Job turned, God was ostensibly just not there with him. Job's loneliness and grief were so deep that he could not even express them with

words and tears: "Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!" (Job 23:2-3).

Another biblical example was David, who repeatedly lamented, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" (Ps. 42:5) when he was on the run from his enemies for many years. In addition, Heman the Ezrahite penned Psalm 88, a vivid passage of Scripture that details the anguish a depressed person goes through: "My soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave" (v. 3); "Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction" (v. 9); "Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction?" (v. 11); "I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted" (v. 15).

As Christians, we may have experienced extremely low points in our lives: for example, postnatal depression, negative family relationships, grief of the loss of a loved one, and many more. Personally (Beverly), it has been a tough journey waiting upon the Lord for children in a covenant family believing church. At times, I am spiritually uplifted by God's Word. For example, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD" (Ps. 27:14). Other times, my old man takes hold of me.

Depression, like any other physical illness, is a trial sent from God to His people. Many times, we do not understand why God would send such a disabling illness, where our days are dark as nights and our nights sleepless. We might question God's sovereignty and what He does. During times like these, when everything is desolate and

we do not see God's way at all, we would echo with the psalmist: "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known" (Ps. 77:19).

### Encouragement for the Broken

"I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God" (Ps. 69:3).

What then, when we are stuck in the depths of our hopelessness and agony like the psalmist, when we feel as deserted as Job felt in loneliness and grief? Is God really not there? Have we lost all hope?

To begin with, we can take comfort in that, while we do not know the reason for what God is doing, God *knows!* Job acknowledged and confessed this after lamenting that he was not able to find God: "But he knoweth the way that I take" (Job 23:10). In love, God has already foreordained to give us a trial like depression because He knows what is needful for us. "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways" (Ps. 139:1-3). There is not always going to be an explanation for God's mysterious ways and how they work for our good. We are reminded though that God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts not ours. If the almighty God does not allow a sparrow to fall without His will and even numbers the hair on our heads (Matt. 10:29-30), who is to say that God has left us alone in our depression and is nowhere to be found?

In addition, the power of God's grace in the lives of His people shines through



such a grievous trial. And God does it in such a way that we will learn from our trial, so as to refine and sanctify us. "For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried" (Ps. 66:10). Job acknowledges this as well: "when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Through this refinement process, we learn more and more to see our need for God and where in life we need to grow in grace. We realise that our pride and self-sufficiency will lead us nowhere. We discover how vulnerable and weak we are. God sends us trials to bring us to our knees to fervently seek and rely on Him for strength. God matures our faith and increases our spiritual growth. Through this, we are prepared to face even more difficult trials and maybe even help others in their trials in the future. "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:3-5).

We also learn to have a deeper relationship with God and how to live in the Spirit. In any relationship, communication is key. By turning to God in prayer and supplication, we are communicating with Him in our darkest moments. We are reminded to "be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6). We can call out to God for help! Even when we cannot utter any words, we can thank God that the Holy Spirit in us prays for us. And the Holy Spirit reminds us of the unconditional love of God towards us even when we seem to doubt God's goodness. In the midst of our

physical and mental illnesses, we can be persuaded "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39).

Personally (Beverly), having gone through a miscarriage three years ago, it was one of my darkest moments. This experience of loss made tears fall out of nowhere, and only after some time did I realise I developed a sense of distrust in God's ability to give me good things. However, I am thankful to those who encouraged me, and by God's grace I could look towards His faithfulness and not my measure of faith. I can now pray and ask God to work a miracle.

Moreover, we can be assured that God is near the depressed and hears our cries. "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:18). He will definitely preserve us through our darkest days and deliver us from them. "I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Ps. 34:4).

While we can acknowledge that depression is a God-given trial to draw us nearer to Himself, how can we find and live in true joy when we are still struggling in our darkest moments?

The psalmist declares in Psalm 43:4-5: "Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my

God". The psalmist acknowledges that his exceeding joy and hope are only found in the triune God. He initially struggled with his trials and felt that God had forsaken him. However, the psalmist confessed that what he needed most was not a change in the situation he was in, but God alone, who was his source of comfort, hope, and joy. Without God, he had nothing. And thus the psalmist could conclude that God was his exceeding joy.

The apostle Paul also confesses in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 that the gift of salvation he received in Jesus Christ far outweighed any of the pain he was experiencing. Because Paul knew that he had received the eternal hope which is in Christ, any earthly trial and pain seemed minimal in contrast. It did not matter then that his physical body was waning, because the sanctification he was experiencing through his trial was far more important.

Can we then confess with the psalmist and Paul that in spite of our struggle with depression or any other trial, we still can have exceeding joy? Yes! Because Christ has earned for us the most precious gift of salvation, we can have fellowship with God and truly know Him. This enables us to have true joy. We also have an eternal home to look forward to when this body dies. Therefore, we do have hope in our physical and mental limitations! As He says, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

In our next article, we will explore practical ways in which the congregation can give support to saints who are going through depression.



## AGING GRACEFULLY

>> Leong Fai Chong



Leong Fai Chong is an elder in CERC.

Psalm 90:9-12: *For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

Psalm 71:18: *Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.*

Covenant is growing into her thirty-third year of her calling to proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some of us growing along in Covenant are also coming to age. Possibly 30% of the congregation is already in their 50s. Though aging is common around us, for Covenant, we are the first batch of first-generation Christians that has entered or is going to enter into this stage of our lives. Inevitably we will be facing some important questions on ageing as Christians and also as members of Covenant. Ageing

is something we cannot avoid, so the more important thing for us to consider is how we can age joyfully. In order to prepare ourselves to walk into this stage of our lives and to live joyfully, we need to look at this subject carefully so that we will not be caught unprepared, or worse, fall into despair or enter into depression. To prepare ourselves we must first deal with it from a spiritual perspective. We need to see ageing as a spiritual condition with respect to our God. Having done that, we also need to understand some of the difficulties we have to face with ageing and even the reality of death. But most important of all, we want to consider how we can be sanctified vessels used by God for His glory even when we are stricken with age.

Ageing in our condition after the fall is not natural, but is due to the corruption of sin. When our first parents disobeyed God and fell into sin, their whole nature became depraved. Death, both spiritual and physical, was pronounced upon man. The curse of God has caused the physical well-being of the human race to be corrupted so that man deteriorates and finally dies. The deterioration can be seen in the shortening of the lifespan of the human race. From the records in the Bible, man could live up to nine hundred years or more just after the fall. However, by the time of the psalmist who wrote Psalm 90, the average age of mankind was seventy, or by reason of strength eighty (Ps. 90:10). Ageing is no more a blessed fellowship that man can enjoy with one another and, most importantly of all, with God. Instead, the experience of man after the fall is

as the psalmist put it: “for all our days are passed away in thy wrath” (Ps. 90:9). Without the grace and mercies of God, it is indeed the most miserable experience of man when we see our bodies wasting away in old age and then finally laid in the grave, and face our final condemnation before the holy God. What kind of joy can we have in such a miserable condition as we age? Indeed, there is none if we are without God (Eph. 2:12).

But beloved, thanks be to God, we need not face the terrible judgment of God and are delivered from the wrath to come because of the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ. What better way to describe this blessedness than these words from Ephesians 2:13-19: “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God”. Oh beloved aged saints of God or aged saints to be, with this blessed assurance of our status in Christ and the eternal

glory that awaits us, we need not live in fear, but instead we can live out this stage of our lives joyfully before our Creator. Death, our last mortal enemy, has lost its power over us. Like our confession puts it, “Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 42).

**It does not matter how old we are or what state we are in; our calling is to show forth God's strength and declare His power in whatever state of our lives, including in our old age.**

Having been assured of the hope we have in Christ, we still need to deal with the realities of the physical and mental difficulties we have to face through ageing. They are two areas which will affect us most. When age catches up with us, we will find our physical and mental health diminishing. Each one of us may have to go through different degrees and timings of these conditions as the Lord in His providence leads us into them. We may be stricken with a disease, or our mobility may be impaired, or our ability to remember and think may be slowly drifting away. These can adversely affect many aspects of our daily lives. The other area which will affect us is loneliness. Since we are growing old, our children have also grown up and set up their own families

or moved away for study and work. This changes the whole demographic of the family unit. In some cases, under the providence of God, our spouses may be taken home to be with the Lord, and we remain here waiting upon the Lord's timing for us. In other instances, some in our midst have been called to singlehood, and at certain times when most of our responsibilities are done, we may need to manage our lives differently. As the Lord wills, each one of us will age differently and will have to deal with different circumstances and have to bear through different infirmities as we sojourn the last part of our journey on earth.

The important question is how we, in each of the circumstances of our lives, can live joyfully before the Lord. The answer lies in the word of the psalmist in Psalm 71:18: “Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come”. The joy of the creature is to fulfil the calling of his Creator. Beloved, it does not matter how old we are or what state we are in; our calling is to show forth God's strength and declare His power in whatever state of our lives, including in our old age. We are called here to show forth the salvation He has wrought in our lives and to declare His power and glory in leading us from our youth till we arrive at this stage of our lives. When we live in this manner, we can be sure that we are walking in the blessedness of His will.

How then can we show forth His strength and His power? If the Lord continues to give us strength in our old age, we must continue to actively serve Him in His church. Though we may have retired from our earthly vocations,

we must not think that we can also retire from our spiritual callings to serve our God and Saviour. We should actively serve in the ministries of the church, using these occasions to show to our brothers and sisters in Christ God's goodness and mercies in our sojourn. Another area in which we can be useful for the Lord is that we can actively visit and encourage those who need encouragement. And what is more, we can take opportunities to share the gospel with others. Even if, in the providence of God, we have to go through the last part of our lives full of infirmities, we still can declare His strength and power in the midst of God's people and even to the world. We can still pray and write to others who need encouragement in their lives. We have already witnessed how some of our brethren who are called to go through difficult trials in their lives yet in their infirmities declare forth His strength and power when they continue to live in quiet trust in the God who has saved them and will keep them to the end. Surely when we can live our lives to show forth His strength and declare His power, we can live with quiet joy, knowing that we are doing the will of God.

Finally, I end this article with some suggestions of how we can assist one another to age joyfully. Maybe we can start a mobile prayer ministry for the elderly. The ministry would facilitate those who could visit others who need encouragement and pray for them. This ministry could also visit and pray for those who need and want to hear the gospel. Another area, maybe a wild dream, is that we can have a retirement village for the elderly. This would give opportunities to have fellowship among the elderly and in some ways assist one another.



# News from the Churches

The COVID-19 virus continues to spread world-wide, affecting all of our lives. We rejoice with some of our fellow saints in the PR congregations who have begun and may begin worshipping publicly again, albeit with tight restrictions (e.g. smaller numbers, masking). Singapore, too has finally ended its circuit breaker period and we hope to be able to start public worship once more as circuit breaker measures are progressively eased. We pray that the Lord grant us grace to wait on the Lord and to be content in His way as we await the easing of these restrictions. May we also continue to worship faithfully, whether it be from church sanctuary or home.

## Singapore

The council of Grandville PRC has formed a new trio for minister-on-loan to Singapore consisting of Rev. G. Eriks, Rev. E. Guichelaar and Rev. R. Kleyn. However, CERC's Session has requested for the calling process to be temporarily put on hold as Singapore's Ministry of Manpower will not approve any new Employment Passes during the pandemic period. We continue to wait on God's will for us in His provision of a minister for our congregation.

Seminarian Josiah Tan and family have returned to the USA and will begin his internship with First PRC (Grand Rapids, MI) on 1 July. We pray that the Lord will keep our dear brother and his family in his final year of his studies. May God continue to guide him in his training to be a minister, God willing.

## USA

The entire collection of Psalm Choir videos and CDs is currently available free. You may find the playlists on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/user/prpsalmchoir/playlists> and the Psalm Choir CDs may be found at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/OB00duusE3z4RSmh5bEZIYkFyQOE>. During this time where many are worshipping at home, these are valuable resources that can also be used for family or personal devotions, providing us with personal comfort and peace in this time of fear and distress.

Certain issues of the Standard Bearer and Beacon Lights are available online for free due to difficulties with printing in this COVID-19 period. You can find them on the RFPA website and the Beacon Lights website respectively. During this period where many of us find ourselves spending much time confined at home, may we spend our time wisely by reading more Christian literature to enrich our spiritual lives.

## Northern Ireland

The British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) has sadly been postponed to 10 – 17 July 2021 due to the uncertainty and travel restrictions caused by the coronavirus. It will have the same theme: Union with Christ; with the same speakers: Prof Engelsma and Rev Lanning with John Perkins giving a special lecture. Please visit <https://www.britishreformed.org> for more information.

## India

The super cyclone Amphan swept through East India and Bangladesh in May 2020, affecting our fellow saints in Kolkata. The cyclone caused blackouts and damaged many buildings, causing flooding in some homes. We are thankful that the Lord has kept our brothers and sisters in Kolkata safe and we pray that He will provide for them in this difficult time.





Glowing Candles womens Bible Study



Encouragement letters sent to CERC, from Zion PRC. Thank you, Zion!



Living Stones Bible Study group



Mustard Seeds Bible Study group celebrating a birthday over one of their weekly Zoom sessions



Fun and fellowship over skribbl.io



Preschooler's Sunday School singing

**Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church**

We are a Reformed Church that holds to the doctrines of the Reformation as they are expressed in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt.

Place of Worship  
11, Jalan Mesin #04-00  
Standard Industrial Building  
Singapore 368813

Time of Worship  
Morning Service:  
9:30am to 11:00am  
Afternoon Service:  
2:00pm to 3:00pm

**Editorial Policy**

Every writer is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions are welcome at: [cksaltshakers@gmail.com](mailto:cksaltshakers@gmail.com)

**Reprint Policy**

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided:

- that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full;
- that proper acknowledgment is made;
- that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our church address.