



# Vision

## Bedok Methodist Church



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### first words

## Discipleship and the Christian Community

### Editor's Note

Jesus says in John 4:23, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks."

We are all called to be authentic disciples – a people whose spirituality is real, true and sincere, as opposed to that which is false, bogus and counterfeit.

Authentic discipleship is an important theme, not only to end this year's meditation, but to sow seeds for our spiritual foundation for 2005. In this Vision issue, Rev Vincent Goh stresses the role of community in building strong disciples for Christ. We are also privileged to feature a contribution on character and discipleship by discipling pastor, Rev Edmund Chan.

Ps Joel Yong brings us back to the basics of understanding the Christ whom we follow. Judy Foo helps us take one step closer to practising obedience to the Lord. Susan Chan testifies about how God has transformed lives during this year's musical, "Love Lifted".

As BMC turns a grand 58<sup>th</sup>, may we take time this issue to meditate over the serious calling of being authentic disciples for Christ. Let us be found to be good and faithful servants to a gracious and deserving God.

Our Heavenly Father's **heartbeat** is discipleship. Likewise, I hope that every worshipper at BMC knows that our church mission is "**To Make Disciples for Jesus Christ.**" This is Jesus' commission to His church:

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*  
(Matthew 28:19-20)

Discipleship cannot be the sole business of one member. It is not an option if one is serious about his or her faith in Christ. Every Christian is called to discipleship and thus it involves the body of Christ. The Greek term, **koinonia**, depicts the strong dynamic fellowship of believers. A loving fellowship with other believers in the church is possible through a personal and intimate relationship with God.

Many Christians seem to have missed out on the essence of koinonia in the Great Commission. Jesus did not say "teach them what I commanded." He said, "teach them to obey everything I have commanded." Can you see the



difference? The former is about transmission of information, but the latter is about **transformation of life.**

No one can become the complete believer he ought to be outside the body of the church. Faith is more often "caught" than "taught". God has intended the discipleship process to be facilitated through the community of believers where personal experiences are shared and mentoring provided. Our role as a church is to help a believer learn to obey everything Christ has commanded by providing a conducive mentoring environment. Thus, both the content (information) and the context (Christian community) are important for effective discipleship. The Apostle Paul reiterated the need for the **community:**

*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*  
(2 Timothy 2:2)

*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*  
(Hebrews 10:24-25)

This is one key reason church members are strongly encouraged to join a Care Group, a Discipleship Track Group (*Masterlife, Experiencing God and On Mission with God*) or Interest Group at BMC. If you intend to join a group, kindly approach any of the pastors or church leaders. We would be happy to help you. Come, be a part of God's mission at BMC!

Reverend Vincent Goh  
Pastor-In-Charge

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# Character & True Discipleship

by Rev Edmund Chan

Rev Edmund Chan is the Senior Pastor of Covenant Evangelical Free Church (CEFC), which organised the Intentional Disciplemaking Church Conference from 6 - 8 September this year. He is married to Ann and has two daughters, Amanda and Belicia. He is an insightful expositor of the Word, a seasoned disciplemaking pastor and a mentor of pastors and leaders. Rev Chan's books, *Built to Last: Towards A Disciplemaking Church* and *Growing Deep in God*, have been well-received. Vision News is privileged to feature his article which stresses the importance of character in disciplemaking.



One of the greatest dangers in discipleship and leadership training is that of neglecting character formation. Character formation is at the heart of disciplemaking. A. B. Bruce calls this a task that is "at once the most formidable and the most needful" (Bruce 1971, 200).

The problem is not that we ignore character development altogether; rather, it is that we micro-manage it. Character development is given mere lip-service. More emphasis seems to be given to the content of materials to be covered, than to the character of the leader to be trained. If character precedes competence and being precedes doing, then the training of leaders goes beyond simply a mere transference of information. Character nurture in leadership development is vital.

## SIX VITAL CHARACTER TRAITS

What then are the needful character traits to be considered in our disciplemaking? There are at least six critical traits that arise from A. B. Bruce's and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's writings (see box on page 5). According to these profound writers, these vital character traits to be developed in the training of disciples include the following:

**Y**ieldedness  
**A**llegiance  
**H**umility  
**G**entleness  
**H**oliness  
**L**ove

## THE GODWARD DIMENSION

Authentic discipleship should, to a large extent, be measured by them. Instead of merely listing these character traits, I would like to propose a rather simple taxonomy for character-development in the training of disciples. We might organise these traits in a simple framework by examining them in the light of three major dimensions. These are the Godward dimension, the Inward dimension and the Outward dimension.

True discipleship calls us to abide in Christ. Two fundamental traits, in the Godward dimension, arise out of that abiding: yieldedness and allegiance.

### Yieldedness

"When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."  
 - With these words in *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave us an understanding that character development in Christian discipleship begins with death: a death to self. This yieldedness is at the heart of Christian discipleship. *The Cost of Discipleship* is a compelling statement of this absolute demand of biblical discipleship.

Such yieldedness is nurtured by the act of renunciation, the decisive act of giving up our rights. Commenting on this in relation to hungering and thirsting after righteousness, Bonhoeffer wrote, "Not only do the followers of Jesus renounce their rights, they renounce their own righteousness too" (Bonhoeffer, 123-124). Indeed, "they who renounce possessions, fortunes, rights, righteousness, honor, and force for the sake of following Christ, will be distinguished from the world" (Bonhoeffer, 127).

# “ One of the greatest dangers in discipleship and leadership training is that of neglecting character formation.”

## Allegiance

It is possible to follow Christ superficially. However, that which is possible is not necessarily commendable. It is not the discipleship of the New Testament. An absolute allegiance to the Lordship of Christ is the basis of true biblical discipleship. As Bonhoeffer puts it:

***To follow Jesus means self-renunciation and absolute adherence to him, and therefore a will dominated by lust can never be allowed to do what it likes...making us sell our heavenly birthright for a mess of pottage (Bonhoeffer, 147).***

This uncompromising allegiance to Christ has two important roots: the cross and the Scriptures. First, true discipleship is borne out of gratitude. It is not the “grit your teeth and bear it” variety. Central to an uncompromising allegiance to Christ is the focus on the cross:

***And these works are none other than those which the Lord Jesus himself has created in them by calling them to be the light of the world under the shadow of his cross...Indeed, the cross is the differential of the Christian religion, the power which enables the Christian to transcend the world...(Bonhoeffer, 133, 170).***

Second, foundational to this allegiance to Christ is also a commitment to the Scriptures. Such a commitment to the Scriptures is clearly affirmed:

***Discipleship means adherence to Jesus Christ alone, and immediately...any adherence to his person that disregards the law is equally removed from the following of him” (Bonhoeffer, 136).***

As disciples of Christ, we have to choose between world-orientation or Word-orientation to govern our lives. The measure of character is based on the Scriptures, not human opinions. Thus, the Word of God is a core curriculum for character development in the training of disciples. Indeed, “we cannot follow Christ unless we live in revealed truth before God and man” (Bonhoeffer, 155).

## THE INWARD DIMENSION

The cultivation of the inner disposition of quietness is an important part of character development. As disciples of Christ, we are to be like Him. There are two characteristics that exemplified the life of Christ: humility (Philippians 2:7) and gentleness (Isaiah 42:3).

## Humility

We often underestimate our human tendency to overestimate ourselves. The Training of the Twelve confronts the arrogant spiritual topography of our time. The Church must recover its mantle of humility in an age of arrogance. The biblical wisdom literature uphold humility as the cardinal virtue; likewise the Sermon on the Mount extols the virtue of humility.

According to A. B. Bruce, there are four distinct marks of true humility. First, it has a child-like quality: “The first lesson taught is this: To be great in the kingdom, yea, to gain admission into it at all, it is necessary to become like a little child” (Bruce, 201).

The second mark of true humility is the humility in receiving the weak: “The next lesson Jesus taught His disciples was the duty of receiving little ones; that is, not merely children in the literal sense, but all that a child represents - the weak, the insignificant, the helpless” (Bruce, 203).

**“As Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ, likewise is discipleship without character development.”**

The third mark is a humility that does not despise others: “One thing more Jesus taught His disciples while He held the child in His arms, viz. that those who injured or despised little ones were entirely out of harmony with the mind of Heaven” (Bruce, 206). We injure others by words and actions. Humble people guard against thoughtless words and actions.

The fourth mark of genuine humility is forgiveness. This point is elaborated by Bruce:

***A lesson on forgiveness fitly ended the solemn discourse on humility delivered in the hearing of disputatious disciples... A vindictive temper, which is the thing here condemned, is one of the vices fostered by an ambitious spirit. An ambitious man is sure to be the receiver of many offences, real or imaginary. He is quick to take offence, and slow to forgive or forget wrong. Forgiving injuries is not in his way: he is more in his element when he lays hold of his debtor by the throat, and with ruffian fierceness demands payment (Bruce, 216).***

The inability to forgive is a severe character flaw. It betrays a proud heart that is untutored by the humility that marked the life of Christ.

## **Gentleness**

In our competitive and aggressive world, we often miss the character trait of gentleness. One of the chief manifestations of a depth of character is expressed in the way a disciple of Christ deals with anger. Unresolved anger is “an offence against both God and his neighbour” (Bonhoeffer, 144). To Bonhoeffer, anger is idolatry.

***When we come before God with hearts full of contempt and unreconciled with our neighbours, we are, both individually and as a congregation, worshipping an idol...Not just the fact that I am angry, but the fact that there is somebody who has been hurt, damaged, and disgraced by me, who ‘has a just cause against me,’ erects a barrier between me and God” (Bonhoeffer, 144).***

A lot of harm in the ministry comes about because disciples of Christ have not been tutored in dealing with anger. It harms the body of Christ by causing strife and divisions. Thus, the cultivation of humility and gentleness which build unity are important (Ephesians 4:1-3).

## **THE OUTWARD DIMENSION**

Pursuing a right relationship with people is crucial in character development. It is not merely a matter of “how to win friends and influence people”. There is a character dimension to relationship building. The two key character traits are holiness (in relation to the world) and love (in relation to all humanity).

### **Holiness**

To many Christians, holiness is a dirty word. It connotes a puritanical restriction to life. However, the Christian disciple is called to be different for the Christian is “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16). This call to holiness is highlighted by Bonhoeffer:

***Now they must be what they really are - otherwise they are not followers of Jesus. The followers are a visible community; their discipleship visible in action which lifts them out of the world - otherwise it would not be discipleship” (Bonhoeffer, 132).***

## Learning From The Classics

*There are two significant books that I want to call your attention to. They have a lot to say about disciplinemaking and character development. These two books are Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship* (Collier Books, 1963. Original edition, Irmgard Booth, 1949) and A. B. Bruce's *The Training of the Twelve* (Kregel, 1971. Original edition, *The Training of the Twelve, or Passages Out of the Gospels Exhibiting the Twelve Leaders of Jesus Under Discipline for the Apostleship*, 1871).*

*The writings of Bonhoeffer and Bruce will greatly benefit contemporary disciples. Bonhoeffer examines the teachings of Christ, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount; and A. B. Bruce examines how the disciples grew as a result of their relationship with the Master. There is no substitute for a personal relationship with the living Lord Jesus.*

The emphasis of New Testament discipleship is on being a true follower of Jesus in the world. As Bruce laments, "Such unseemly mixtures of the godly and the godless are too common phenomena in these days" (Bruce, 213). Holiness is at the heart of the theology of separation. It is a character trait expected of the true disciple of Christ in his relationship with the world.

### Love

The apostle Paul calls love the "greatest" of Christian virtues (1 Corinthians 13:13). No character development is complete without the cultivation of love.

***Here, for the first time in the Sermon on the Mount, we meet with the word which sums up the whole of its message, the word 'love.' Love is defined in uncompromising terms as the love of our enemies. Had Jesus only told us to love our brethren, we might have misunderstood what he meant by love... (Bonhoeffer, 162)***

***The Sermon on the Mount speaks of an even deeper love. It calls for us to "love our enemies" as well (Matthew 5:43-44). From that vintage point, the disciple "can now perceive that even his enemy is the object of God's love, and that he stands like himself beneath the cross of Christ." (Bonhoeffer, 167)***

***A particular facet of love is that it is an action word. Good works issue out of genuine love. The love that is issued of Christ is not empty-handed. Indeed, "the good works are poverty, peregrination, meekness, peaceableness, and finally persecution and rejection. All these good works are a bearing of the cross of Jesus Christ" (Bonhoeffer, 133-134).***

## CONCLUSION

The righteousness of the Kingdom is radical. This is highlighted through the writings of Bonhoeffer. As "Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ," (Bonhoeffer, 64) likewise is discipleship without character development. Such a Christianity "remains an abstract idea, a myth..." (Bonhoeffer, 64). □

True discipleship is demanding. Christianity is not a comfortable faith. It measures life from the inside out rather than from external appearances. There is little esteem accorded to superficial status (one's title or office) or even stature (one's credibility or confidence). Rather, it is measured by one's substance, one's character.

Let's allow Bruce to have the final word: "We may learn from the discreet, loving words of the great Teacher to beware of hasty conclusions concerning men's spiritual state based on merely external indications."

Indeed, in developing disciples, let's first develop character!

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heart to heart

# Reflections

## The 'Love Lifted' Musical

by Susan Chan

*One of the big platforms this year for many to learn how to be authentic disciples of Christ was the church musical, 'Love Lifted', which was held at the Raffles Hotel Jubilee Hall from 4-5 September. The musical saw more than 450 adults and children come together to accomplish a God-sized task within a short span of 2 1/2 months. Here is that remarkable account seen through the eyes of Susan Chan, the Producer and Children's Ministry staff.*

It has been an extraordinary journey for the participants of the musical, 'Love Lifted'. Right from the start, we recognised that this was a project that was God-initiated. As we saw the hand of our God move and change mindsets and lives at BMC, we realised that this was to be another platform from which He would work His ways into the hearts of men.

### Hearts of the leaders transformed

The musical committee members were committed from the start to put God first in every decision that we made. Prayer was the key to all our operations. God gave us the directions and answers to all the who, what, when, where, why and how of the musical. He led us to the specific place, time, content and scope of the musical. We learned to seek Him together and hear His voice. We learned to grapple with our own prejudices and mindsets, and humbly yield to our Master's call. We learned to submit to one another in unity and love. In short, I quote a committee member's feedback:

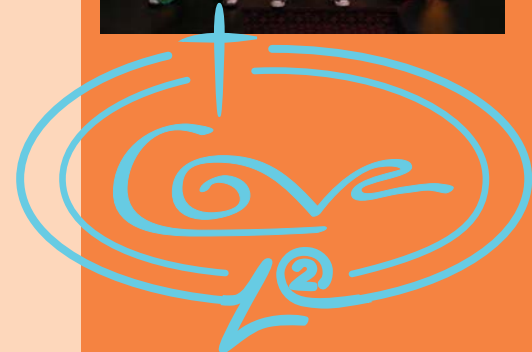
It's not a project. It's not about the deliverables. It's about the process. It's about changed lives as a result of going through this process. It's about God working and us following. It's about seeking God and listening to what He has to say - His will and ways, not ours. I've been changed. I've been humbled....Amen!

### Hearts of the participants transformed

God is no respecter of persons. Those He called came committed to serve. Many participants were very busy people but they attended the extra rehearsals faithfully and with little complaint. I have been humbled by the way they served God! Young or old, they all recognised that it is indeed God whom they were serving and gave their best to Him.

Grandparents were seen helping with hairstyling; CEOs served as garbage collectors; mothers and fathers took time out to handle

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about 300 children over the two days; stage-shy children, unwilling at first, gradually saw their contribution to God's 'Big Present' - the Musical, and did their best.

Many friendships were forged. There was a sharing of much joy and encouragement. As one mother testified, the 'fruit of the Spirit was evident'. To me, this is in essence, giving God glory, when we allow His character to be manifested in ourselves and in His church. He was lifted high in our midst because we learned to put aside our fleshly self and yield to His ways. It was a process of 'letting go and letting God' have His purposes fulfilled.

We also witnessed that our God is a God of impossibilities. The scope of the musical went beyond the Children's Ministry to involve the rest of the church - more than 450 persons. From the idea of a simple concert, it grew to such professionalism, indeed, nothing less than that which is fit for our King.

He multiplied the talents, resources, space and time! Many people were surprised that the actual training for children and adult performers was a mere 2 1/2 months. People simply came up to offer their services generously, both in talent and monetary forms. During the performances, the space to hold over 200 persons was multiplied miraculously, enhancing our comfort and fellowship.

To me all these reflected God's hand at work. There was no way that a single person or committee could have accomplished this God-sized task that only God Himself could have done. What excites me more is the many testimonies I have heard or read. Hearts have been transformed in the process. I believe that our God who has started a good work in us will bring it to completion.

### Hearts of the audience transformed

All the four shows were sold out. About 1500 persons came to watch 'Love Lifted'. The message of love and reconciliation was vividly portrayed through drama and music. We had word from our Lord that He would manifest His presence and meet the people at their points of need.

God gave us the promise of Jubilee. It was not only realised amongst the participants, but the audience as well. Many were moved and seen to have shed tears during the musical. The presence of God was manifested in our midst. I believe that our God, the ultimate Agent of change, has touched many hearts and called many persons back into His kingdom. Of those who returned the response slips, many rededicated their lives to Jesus or indicated that they said the sinner's prayer.

Personally, what I have seen with my physical eyes has greatly encouraged me and strengthened my faith. I cannot imagine the victories that are won in the spiritual realm! Although the journey of the Musical has ended, our journey with our King has not. There is still much we are to be and do. Through the many lessons that I have learned from the process of the musical, I want to continue my pilgrim's journey here on earth holding fast to our Triune God. Our God whose love for us will lift us up to places beyond our imagination! In Him we will ride above our circumstances. In Him, we will let His love impassion us to become and to serve. May God be glorified at BMC!

# Obedience

## Lesson from a Korean Soap Drama

by Judy Foo

*One of the key challenges we face in being real disciples of Christ is in the area of obedience. Submission, surrender and sacrifice are qualities we may grapple with on our journey with the Lord. We invite Judy Foo, the lay ministry staff for the Youth Ministry, to share her insights.*

I am a fan of Korean soap drama. Imagine my delight to find one with rich theological content!

**The story is a typical one about a pair of lovers. The male lead struggles with his call to become a priest in the Catholic church and his desire to be with his sweetheart, who is stricken with fatal heart disease. At a mass, a narration of God calling Abraham to sacrifice Isaac at Mt Moriah marks the start of the man's inner struggle towards surrendering to God's will. He watches helplessly as his sweetheart lies in a coma in the hospital. He repeatedly bargains with God, and is willing to do anything in exchange for her healing. Climax. In the quietness of the night, alone in the chapel, a touching exchange of love takes place at the altar. The man confesses his love for His Master, and humbly receives God's love for him expressed through his lover and loved ones. He bares his desire to share God's love with the world, and bowing down in a posture of surrender, he gives himself totally to God, that His will be done. A bright clear day marks the end of his struggle. The man steps out of the chapel, exuding inner peace, moving into God's destiny for him. Miraculously, his sweetheart comes out of her coma. (That is not the end of the story, but it suffices for my reflection on the subject of obedience to the Lord.)**

Obedience can be simply stated as our submission to God's authority. It is funny how obedience is not an issue when we have no problems following God's command. The problem only arises when what we want differs from what is expected of us. And the journey of a disciple is marked by many 'signs' of surrender - the surrender of our will in every aspect of our lives, in obedience to God.

Tough as it may be, the main challenge we face concerning obedience is a battle of wills - God's will versus ours. Yet it is a journey that is enveloped in and tempered with love. Obedience finds its beginning and ending in love.

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." (John 14:21)

The Korean drama I described brings out this lesson on obedience so well. I would like to draw out some reflections from it.

### Obedience concerns a Covenant

We often think of obedience as a process where we have to "grit our teeth and bear it". But really, obedience is all about staying true and faithful to the covenant of love we made with God when



we first knew Him. Because we were first touched by His love, we pledged or promised to love Him in all circumstances, just like a marriage vow. We've heard the saying, "if you love me, prove it to me". This is so with an important scriptural principle. Did Jesus not say, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:15)

Obedience is an expression of love for God who first loved us and proved it by giving us His most precious thing – His one and only Son, to die for us. Obedience is not about a set of dos and don'ts we have to abide by for fear of punishment by a tyrannical master.

The issue of obedience is an issue of love. The scene in which the Korean protagonist expressed his love for God, before finally surrendering to God's will for his life, demonstrated this truth powerfully. He did not obey God's call for him to become a priest because it was the right thing to do. He obeyed because he loved God and he knew that God loved him. Period. There was no other way except the way of obedience to a loving God.

Beloved, whether you are walking in obedience to God or struggling to obey Him today, remember love. If obedience has become like a set of rules and regulations you live by, then return back to your "first love" (Revelation 2:4). If you are struggling to obey God, remember God loves you and has the best for you - He has plans to prosper you, to give you hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). You can trust and obey Him.

Obedience is about fulfilling a covenant of love. We love Him, and show it through our obedience. God loves us and wants us to experience His love through obedience to His perfect will.

### **Obedience calls for a Choice**

Obedience is a choice to trust in God and His perfect plan for you, even when you do not fully understand it. This choice is being made every day, every moment when we choose between what is godly and reject what is not; between accepting what God requires and rejecting what the world promotes, no matter how attractive it may be.

Sometimes, the choice can be a hard one.

In the Korean drama, the man agonises between choosing love and vocation. One would have wished for the story to be set in a Protestant context, so that the protagonist could have fulfilled his calling to serve as a minister and marry his sweetheart! (Then again, it would not have been a soap drama!) Nonetheless, we see how the man surrenders himself to God's will. There is a deep sense that God understands his struggle and love for the woman. But what matters more is his obedience to God and trust in His perfect knowledge.

Hard choices are often set in the context of our relationships with people. After all, the "greatest" commandment disciples are called to obey is that of loving God and loving our neighbours. It involves choosing to love and forgive, to let go and let live over and over again.

We can make such choices because we ourselves have been chosen by God (John 15:16) and because God asks us to. Just as He asked Peter, "Do you love me?" (John 21:15-17), we learn to answer like Peter did. Our choosing to love others is our saying "yes" to God.

### **Obedience results in Carefreeness**

Finally, as we learn obedience, we become carefree people - free from all cares. Such people exude a kind of inner peace and calm because they know that God is God and they are not; that God is in control and they don't have to bear the unnecessary burden of being in control. This is expressed in the drama by the dawn of a new day. The man steps into his future, still uncertain, but at peace with God and with himself.

And so it should be for us as we obey God in the things and relationships He has called us to. We don't have to worry anymore. We don't have to fight Him or ourselves anymore because the One who calls us already knows the end from the beginning, and He is powerful to work all things out for good. We just do our part to obey Him, and live each moment by His strength, grace and enabling. We don't have to try to work everything out. After all, He is God, and we can trust Him to map for us an abundant life here on earth and for eternity. All we have to do is remain carefree in His presence.



#### **A Prayer Response**

Beloved, may you take this moment to commit your relationship to the Lord in the area of obedience.

Dearest Heavenly Father, I often feel like Paul in Romans 7:15, "what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." I long to live a life of obedience under Your sovereign will. Help me die to my pride and selfish ambitions so that Your Holy Spirit may reign over my life. Help me obey the Scriptures, Your written word, and be sensitive to listen to Your spoken word everyday. This is my covenant: I choose to surrender everything to You and I know You will set me free. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

# who is the **Christ** we love?

by Ps Joel Yong

*Jesus is our great and wonderful risen Saviour. But have you ever pondered about the other roles He took on when He entered this fallen world? And as we catch a glimpse of the Christ who inspired so many to love and follow Him here on earth 2000 years ago, may we do the same in our worship of Him today.*

“ In all these things, Jesus showed a great disdain for pretentious classiness and arrogance, preferring rather, the humble and lowly in life. ”



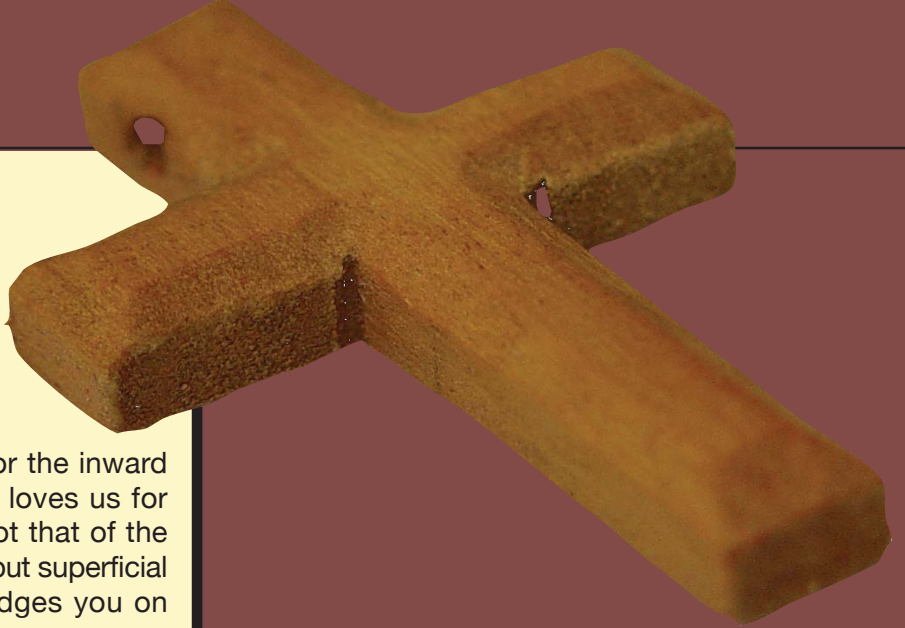
## Jesus was a carpenter

It has always been of great interest to me, that our Saviour came not as a mighty general, nor as a knowledgeable doctor. Amongst all the things He could have been He chose to be a carpenter.

Furthermore, being omniscient and all-knowing, I wonder if He winced each time He hammered nails into each piece of furniture He was constructing, in anticipation of the day when He would feel the cold metal pierce His hands and feet upon the cross.

Firstly let us note that the chosen profession of a carpenter finds its echo in Jesus' humble birth in Bethlehem, the parents He chose to care for Him as He grew up, the eventual men He chose as His first disciples, and even the crowd He hung around with - prostitutes, beggars, lepers, tax collectors and the like.

In all these things, Jesus showed a great disdain for pretentious classiness and arrogance, preferring rather, the humble and lowly in life.



To me, it speaks volumes of God's love for the inward man, rather than the outward facade. He loves us for who we are inside, and His standard is not that of the world's, which is often easily swayed by all but superficial standards. So the next time someone judges you on something shallow, like your appearance, age, or educational background, look up into the skies, my friend. And thank God He doesn't. He loves you for who you are, His child.

Secondly, in this profession of a carpenter, I find Christ's own allegory of His own identity to this world. When we see a chair, we would logically link it to having been made somewhere, having been designed somewhere. Where there exists a chair, there exists a carpenter.

Similarly, where there exists a human being, there exists a Designer, or rather a Creator. To me, His being a carpenter indirectly speaks of His true identity, being the One who creates out of nothing, God Himself!

### **Jesus was a dutiful son**

Jesus loved not just His heavenly Father, but was a filial son unto His earthly parents as well. As a boy, in the temple, He was obedient unto His earthly parents.

Upon the cross, He called out unto His beloved disciple and entrusted His mother unto his care. In His filial example as a son, unto both His heavenly Father and earthly parents, Jesus showed us the epitome of humble submission and obedience.

In this world where free will is a right we often campaign for, choosing to submit is often a difficult issue. To submit as Christ did is to reflect a servant's heart.

Have you ever pondered the great paradox of Christian living? In submission, we gain not captivity but rather freedom. In dying, we experience not death but life in Christ.

God's world often works in opposite standards to what this world often sets. Therefore, while this world may view submission as an act of weakness and restriction, God speaks of our surrender to Him as being that which will gain us freedom.

Christ came to die so that we might all be set free. In the same way, we too must die to our sinful selves, so that we may be resurrected to new life in Christ.

### **Jesus was a baby**

Jesus came from heaven high above down to earth below, not just on a mission to save, but also so that we might know that God loves us and came to be with us as Emmanuel. And so the Word of God became flesh and dwelt amongst us.

You see, Jesus wants us to know that God is always with us and that we need not live like people without a hope, who spend their entire lives groping in darkness.

Have you ever pondered what Mary might have thought as she nursed the baby Jesus? Perhaps she pondered something like this: 'Is this the Maker? Are these His hands, His feet? That which made the universe, that which walked this universe before anything existed?' The awe of knowing He was right there with her must have brought her much courage even when they had to flee Herod's persecution.

Are you pressured by the difficulties of this world as well? Lean unto Him, know that He cares because He bothered to come and be made flesh so that we might know we matter to Him.

### **Conclusion**

These are but three brief thoughts on Christ's alternate roles when He stepped into this world. Each spoke of His qualities and nature. Each shows without a doubt that He is indeed a God of love. A God who came, so that we might know, He is love.

*Pastor Joel Yong serves as the Assistant Pastor in Bedok Methodist Church.*



**Just do it.**

**No, not to stock up on Nike's latest sports apparel, but to be conquerors of the world.**

**That was the clarion call sounded by Reverend Wee Boon Hup, East Zone District Superintendent for the Methodist Church in Singapore, as he delivered a stirring sermon during BMC's 58<sup>th</sup> anniversary service.**

**It was a timely reminder to get back to basics. Having been saved by Jesus Christ, we have the power to overcome the world and its trials and temptations. More importantly, we are now part of His ongoing rescue plan to make disciples for Christ. And armed with the grace that's been given to us by Christ, we can claim the victory. Not only that, it is our faith that will shape BMC's legacy for generations to come.**

**– Amy Lee**

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