

40.day 2018

to the ends of the earth

to the ends of the earth

JULY 1 to AUGUST 7
Solemn Assembly 2018 | 8pm
Central. North. East. West.

AUGUST 8
Day of His Power | 7.30pm
Singapore Indoor Stadium

AUGUST 9
Walk of Love | 4pm
St Andrew's Cathedral

OCTOBER 7
PraySingapore | 4pm
The National Stadium

OCTOBER to MAY 2019
Sow Far Sow Good | 7.30pm
Monthly Regional Prayer
Focus: Celebration of Hope

2019 | MAY 17-19
Celebration of Hope
The National Stadium

Did you know? Every major revival since Pentecost has produced a missionary movement. Acts is the divine template for this. God pours out his Spirit on 120 Galileans in the upper room. Powered by the Spirit, Peter preaches to pilgrims from every nation under heaven. The Gospel jumps ship from Galilean Hebrews to Greek-speaking Hellenists. 3,000 are baptised. The Good News goes viral. It spreads to the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Cornelius, and the Gentiles in Antioch. All of this is cross-cultural work, even before Acts 13. There the mission of God shifts into high gear.

Last year, the 40.Day Prayer Guide tracked this amazing march of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch. This year, we journey with Paul from Antioch to the ends of the earth. This 2018 Prayer Guide is presented in loving memory of two men who have done more to shape the spiritual landscape of Singapore than can be measured.

The first is Dr Billy Graham. During the time of his historic rallies here in 1978, there arose a stirring in the hearts of some of the organisers that Singapore is an Antioch of Asia (even if Billy Graham didn't say that). This year, 40 years on, Dr Graham passed away. He was followed a month later by Pastor Rick Seaward, the Apostle of Singapore. During the last 40 years, Pastor Seaward has almost singlehandedly made Singapore the Antioch of Asia. Under his leadership, Victory Family Centre has sent out more missionaries and seen more churches planted around the world than all other churches and mission agencies in Singapore combined. But still, we are not Antioch yet. Much unfinished business remains.

Dr Graham and Pastor Seaward have handed us the baton. Their departure has left a vacuum in this nation and the world that no man, woman, or church can fill. Only a mighty outpouring of the Spirit accompanied by sacrificial obedience can make up for our loss. May these 40 days of prayer and fasting in this 2018 Year of Prayer ignite a great awakening that will lift Singapore's missionary movement to the next level. Read and reflect. Fast and pray. Take up the mantle. Continue the journey—*to the ends of the earth*.

ACTS 11:26
For a whole year
[Barnabas and
Saul] met with the
church [at Antioch]
and taught a great
many people.

ACTS 13:1
Now there were
in the church at
Antioch prophets
and teachers...

2 TIMOTHY 2:15
Do your best to
present yourself
to God as one
approved, a
worker who has
no need to be
ashamed, rightly
handling the word
of truth.

2 TIMOTHY 4:3-4
For the time is
coming when
people will not
endure sound
teaching, but
having itching
ears they will
accumulate
for themselves
teachers to
suit their own
passions, and
will turn away from
listening to the
truth and wander
off into myths.

The Antioch Church was well taught.

The Early Church, including most Church Fathers, interpreted the Bible allegorically. This is a method that brushes aside the literal and historical meanings of Scripture in favour of 'spiritual' meanings. Every colour, character, and creature has a cryptic meaning to be decoded by the reader. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, for example, the victim is Adam, the Samaritan is Jesus, the inn is the Church, the innkeeper is Paul. The simple meaning of *love your neighbour as yourself* is drowned in allegory. And the Song of Solomon, originally a love story rated NC16, is read as an allegory of the love between God and Israel or between Christ and the Church. Otherwise, this graphic celebration of human love would not have made it into the Bible.

The Antioch Church opposed the allegorical method. Its most famous preacher after Paul and Barnabas was an elder by the name of John Chrysostom (347–407). John rejected any interpretation of Scripture that disregarded its literal meanings. Theodore, a contemporary of John, accused allegorical preachers of twisting the meanings of the Bible: *They dream up silly fables in their own heads.*

In place of allegory, the Antioch Church cultivated the art of biblical exegesis. This method seeks to discover the literal meaning of the text in its historical context. Antioch is also the home of expository preaching, which creatively applies the meanings of Scripture to the lives of the hearers. John Chrysostom was good at it. When he preached in Antioch, people pushed and shoved for a front row seat. After a two-hour sermon, they were still hungry for more.

But John knew that some came not to be taught, but to be entertained, *as though it were a play or a concert*, he lamented. Others came to judge and criticise. John urged his flock, not just to attend church and listen to sermons, but to feed themselves on the Word of God. After John died, he was named *Chrysostom* which means *Golden Mouth*. His sermons are still being read and studied today. They are not meant to tickle ears, but to stir hearts and change lives.

So there's more to Antioch than missions, as great as that is. Antioch was a well taught church and a great teaching centre. If Singapore wants to be an Antioch for Asia, we've got some homework to do.

In the world of trade and commerce, Singapore is rated the easiest place for doing business. In the world of public administration, Singapore is home to the Global Centre for Public Service Excellence. In the world of education, Singapore tops global rankings. But how do we fare in the world of theology and Bible teaching? Are we a Church well taught?

- On the positive side, the Singapore Church has produced some great teachers of the Word. You know some of them by name. You have benefited tremendously from their excellent teaching and expository preaching. Pause and give thanks to God. Acknowledge them as God's gifts, not only to Singapore, but also to Asia and the world. Ask God to raise up many more like them who are rooted in the Word and skillful in teaching the Word. May God put in them a noble desire to build a lasting legacy by mentoring a new generation of theologians, thinkers, and teachers. May their successors surpass them in influence and impact.
- On the negative side, allegory is still alive and kicking in the pulpit today, even in Singapore. In identificational repentance, ask God to forgive us where we have been careless and reckless. Where we have fallen for the fanciful, the sensational, the ear-tickling pep talks to please consumer Christians. Where we have misinterpreted the Word and mangled the Truth. Where we have exalted the authority of personal experience over the authority of Scripture. Where we have parroted bogus teaching from dubious sources.
- The Church in any nation is only as strong as its local churches. The local church is only as strong as its foundation in the Word. For the long-term good of Church and Nation, pray that we will think biblically and act wisely in this era of false teaching, in this *kairos* moment of generational transition. Competence in teaching the Word is one of the requirements of church elders (1 TIMOTHY 3:2). Pray, therefore, that we will be strict in selecting the next generation of elders. Elders who are well grounded in the Word. Elders who communicate the Word effectively—*teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness* (2 TIMOTHY 3:16). Elders who shepherd the church according to the Word. Elders who inspire believers to love the Word, live the Word, and spread the Word to the ends of the earth. May every local church become a centre of sound Word, excellent teaching, and expository preaching.
- Bible literacy is declining in Singapore. Will you be part of the solution? How is your Word life? Are you reading the Word? Studying the Word? Is it your reference point? Realise this: Ignorance of Scripture is a *great cliff and a deep abyss* (CHRYSOSTOM). The more we neglect the Word, the more secular, skeptical and selfish we become. Return to the Word. Ask for a genuine revival marked by a deep hunger for the Word. Ask God to start with you, your church, and your circle of friends.

ACTS 13:1-2
Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
² While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'

Sometimes Providence looks like an accident. Antioch of Syria hosted the first Gentile church. It was started by a bunch of refugees fleeing Saul's violent purge of the church in Judea. But now, Saul himself has switched sides and is co-leading the church that got started because of his persecution. An accident? With God's fingerprints on it! But who are these other four leaders working with Saul at Antioch?

We've met Barnabas the *Son of Encouragement* in Jerusalem. He's from Cyprus (ACTS 4:36). Simeon is new to us. His other name is *Niger* which means *Black*. He probably hails from Africa. Lucius comes from Cyrene, North Africa. And Manaen is an old friend of King Herod.

So what do we make of this spicy *rojak* at the helm of the Antioch Church? In the first place, they are all expatriates. Antioch was not xenophobic, but open to foreign talent. Secondly, their colourful diversity reflects the demographics of Antioch, a multiracial, multicultural, and largely migrant society. Third, they are an intercultural mission team establishing the Antioch Church. Barnabas was sent there for that purpose. Then he roped in Saul to help. Therefore, these are local church leaders wearing missionary hats. What more could you ask for?

But they were asking for more. Maintaining the status quo was not their thing. Luke says *they were worshipping the Lord and fasting*. What for? Given their missionary DNA and the situation at hand, it's quite possible that they were seeking God for the next step in missions. Jesus' last words had called for witness in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (ACTS 1:8). By this time, the Church was well rooted and growing in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and Galilee (9:31). So that stage of the mission was already accomplished. So the question is: What next? Where do we go from here?

Hint 1: Antioch stands at the crossroad between Jew and Gentile, between East and West. Hint 2: Antioch sits on the main highway that runs from Jerusalem to Rome. Hint 3: In the big picture of Acts, Rome is the beginning of the ends of the earth. Enough hints. What does the Spirit say? What is the Holy Spirit saying to the Singapore Church? Our demographics match Antioch's almost perfectly. But do we have the missionary DNA of the Antioch Five?

- Is it time to re-think the foreigner issue? Seven years ago, Singaporeans were angsty against foreigners. This led to a tightening of immigration policy and a curbing of foreign inflow. Today, more and more voices are calling Singapore to relook its position (TODAY ONLINE, 3 FEBRUARY 2018). The reasons are obvious. Singapore faces a demographic time bomb: a shortage of workers due to ageing, and a shortfall of babies due to declining birth rates.

Pray for our Government to do the right thing in the right way at the right time. Ask God to disarm the fears of citizens who want a *Singapore for Singaporeans* and who worry about social integration. Reflect on this good insight and turn it into prayer: *If we think back to Singapore's society, it was created from a collection of foreigners. Many of our forefathers were immigrants with no intention to stay and they made it their home. We are a multi-ethnic society, and we are special because of our multiculturalism. This differentiates us from others... The concerns are overplayed by a disgruntled group which are bordering on xenophobia, posting hate speeches online. This is not a reflection of all Singaporeans and may be a minority view. We have it in our DNA to be inclusive* (PAULIN TAY STRAUGHAN, SMU). For our own good and the good of those after us, pray that Singapore will warmly welcome foreigners to sink roots here and contribute to the shalom of our city. Open hearts, open Home!

- 2019 is our bicentennial. This is a good occasion to remember foreigners who have shaped our history. Thank God for Sir Stamford Raffles. He opened our doors to the Gospel. Thank God for the missionaries. They streamed in and pioneered churches, schools, hospitals, and community services. Thank God for Dutch economist Albert Winsemius. He worked with the founding generation of leaders for 25 years to propel our economy into the big league. Thank God for the Israelis. They helped build Singapore's army when our security and survival were in doubt. Thank God for Billy Graham. His evangelistic rallies in 1978 sparked a revival that forever changed our spiritual landscape. It would be uncouth, unwise, and unbiblical to say we have nothing more to learn from outsiders. Pray for big hearts to always welcome foreigners on the team—to fulfill God's grand dream for Singapore.
- Singapore stands at a crossroad between East and West and between the times. The recent demise of Billy Graham (40 years after his historic rallies here) and Rick Seaward (40 years after the founding of Victory Family Centre) marks the end of an era. What's next for Singapore as an Antioch for Asia? Ask God for a new generation of trail blazers like Billy Graham and Rick Seaward. Dreamers and doers who are strong in spirit, strategic in thinking, servant in posture, and sacrificial in lifestyle. May they forge deep Kingdom friendships. May they seek the Lord in unity, in prayer, and in fasting—until the Holy Spirit speaks and gives us a clear and compelling roadmap for the next lap of Antioch missions to the ends of the earth.

They were ministering to God.

The Greek word translated *worshipping* or *ministering* in Acts 13:2 is *leitourgeo*. This is the verb form of the word *liturgy*. The Greek Old Testament uses this word nearly a hundred times. It refers to the sacred rites and services offered to God in his sanctuary.

In Shiloh, for example, young Samuel ministered (*leitourgeo*) to the Lord without ceasing. Three times it says that Samuel was *ministering to or before* the Lord (1 SAMUEL 2:11; 2:18; 3:1). This was when the official priesthood had lapsed into immorality under Eli and the Word of the Lord was rare. But when Samuel ministered to God, the Word of the Lord came to him—and through him to all Israel (4:1).

This is an important biblical pattern. It's repeated in Acts 13: First, the Antioch Church leaders ministered to God. They had no need of stage presence or special effects. Nor were they trying to impress a crowd. Nor was it formless and aimless waiting. Definite forms were used. Based on what we know about the Early Church and how they borrowed from the synagogue, they probably sang hymns, chanted Psalms, and read from the Law and the Prophets. And they fasted. They ministered to God, the Audience of One. Second, God ministered to them through the prophetic word, as in the case of Samuel. And third, God ministered to the world through them—through their prayers and fasting and missionary work.

So what's the takeaway?

First, if you want God to minister to you, minister to him. If you don't feel *ministered to* in your church, don't blame the pastor or the worship team. And if there's an Eli around, don't blame him either. And don't go shopping for a swanky new church with gimmicks and gadgets. Stay put and minister to God, the Audience of One. Take your place as a priest before the Lord. Offer him worship in his holy place. He will minister to you so that you can minister to others.

Second, don't forget that little word *liturgy*. It's not a four-letter word. Nowadays it has become cool to reject all things old like hymns and *liturgy*. But the Early Church blended old and new (1 CORINTHIANS 14:26–33). In Antioch, the Holy Spirit spoke in a liturgical service. And the world has never been the same.

God was pleased to make worship and prayer and fasting the launching pad for a mission that would change the course of world history. Is there not a lesson there for us? It had happened before and it would happen again and again in history (JOHN PIPER). All things are possible when we are hungry enough to fast and desperate enough to centre down and seek God with *desperate, holy longing* (THOMAS KELLY).

- It's easy to fall into the performance trap. Many have, especially hardworking pastors and leaders in Singapore. After all, Asians rank as the hardest workers in the world. Singapore tops the chart, surpassing South Korea and Japan. We can get so driven running the church and meeting needs that we fail to centre down and live the spiritual life hidden with Christ, in quietness and in trust. Behind all the burnouts and scandals is this basic failure to guard our sacred space with God. May our first devotion be to the Lord, then to the work to which he has called us. May we live for Christ, *warm and close to the Center* (THOMAS KELLY).
- It's easy to fall into the busy trap. Many have, especially Christians in the marketplace. This is the enemy's scheme of distracting us from the greater work of prayer. Refuse to conform to the spirit of this age. Renounce the *tyranny of the urgent*. Resist the hustle and haste that make you feel so important and indispensable. Reject the lie that busyness is a virtue and a badge of honour. Turn away. Turn aside. *Turn your eyes upon Jesus*. Linger in his presence, where there is fullness of joy (PSALM 16:11). From this holy centre, from the spillover of joy, you will minister to others in his strength. You will be *stirred to be the means of their awakening* (THOMAS KELLY). You will achieve wonders in his name. Pray also for your circle of friends. *Draw near to God and he will draw near to you* (JAMES 4:6).
- Of all things, worship has become a bone of contention in the Church today. Congregations have split over it and pastors have resigned. So what's all the fuss about? One, the elevation of style over substance, technique over theology. Two, the commercialisation of worship where singer becomes entertainer and congregation becomes spectator. Ask God to spare the Singapore Church from all such craze and compromise. Pray that we will not discard the rich heritage of the Church in favour of all things contemporary—in the name of relevance. May we be Kingdom disciples who bring out of our treasure what is new and what is old (MATTHEW 13:52). May we practise a culture of honour, uniting the generations and diverse streams, both charismatic and conservative. Pray for an Antioch environment in which worship is centred in Christ, founded on the Word, and Spirit-breathed. May our worship be so acceptable to God that he will be pleased to rend the heavens and come down, and saturate our lives, our churches, and our city with his awesome presence!

ACTS 13:2
While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' NASB

1 SAMUEL 2:11
And the boy [Samuel] was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli the priest.

1 SAMUEL 2:18
Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy clothed with a linen ephod.

1 SAMUEL 3:1
Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord in the presence of Eli.

ACTS 13:3
Then after fasting
and praying they
laid their hands
on them and sent
them off.

Prayer is the work of God. The Early Church was a praying church. Where did they learn it from? You don't have to look far to find out. Luke the author of Acts tells us more about the prayer life of Jesus and the apostles than any other New Testament writer. The Gospel of Luke alone accounts for no less than ten episodes of Jesus at prayer:

- At his baptism, Jesus prays and the heavens open. The Father anoints him with the Holy Spirit and confirms his identity as the Son of God (3:21-22).
- When his approval ratings soar, he retreats to the desert to pray (5:16).
- He prays all night before choosing the Twelve (6:12-13).
- After praying alone one day, he draws from Peter's lips the confession that he (Jesus) is *the Christ of God* (9:18-25).
- When praying on the high mountain, his face changes, his clothes glisten, and his glory manifests. Moses and Elijah appear and speak with him about his death (9:28-36).
- When Peter is about to be tested by Satan, Jesus prays for him that his faith will not fail (22:31-32).
- After watching Jesus pray, a disciple asks him to teach them to pray. He gives them the Lord's Prayer and three parables on prayer (11:1-13).
- While praying at Gethsemane, his sweat flows like blood. An angel strengthens him for the torture and death ahead (22:41-44).
- Hanging on the cross, Jesus prays for his murderers (23:34).
- Before his last breath, he commits his spirit to God (46).

Thus Jesus fulfils his mission through prayer. At every critical juncture in his public life, ministry, and death, he is found praying. And Luke is not finished yet. His epic on prayer continues throughout Acts. Prayer precipitates Pentecost (ACTS 1). Prayer prevails over persecution (ACTS 4, ACTS 12). Prayer opens the household of Cornelius to the Gospel (ACTS 10). Prayer opens Peter's heart to bring it to them (ACTS 10). Prayer launches the Gentile mission from Antioch (ACTS 13). And so on. This amazing march of prayer continues to the end of Acts and the end of history.

- Prayer is the work of God. Are you doing the work of God? Prayer is dependence on God. Are you depending on God? If Jesus the Son of God relied so totally on prayer to complete his work on earth, how much more should we do the same? Whatever our vocation, it is extremely arrogant to think that we can do any real and lasting good apart from prayer. Remember Hudson Taylor. No one did more to open China to the Gospel than he did. It has been said that during his 50 years in China, the sun never rose without finding him on his knees. Like Jesus, he was on-the-job praying. Are you? Examine yourself today:
 - When your approval ratings soar, and all speak well of you, do you withdraw to centre your life on God and him alone? Or do you bask in human glory?
 - When recruiting new staff or choosing a successor, do you pray all night? Or do you rely on human wisdom, HR criteria, and personal preference?
 - When temptation assails you and Satan sifts you like wheat, do you fight back in prayer like a gladiator? Or do you fall for his lies and accept defeat?
 - When sweating blood and shedding tears in your Gethsemane, betrayed by friends and surrounded by enemies, do you call on the Lord? Or do you call the lawyer?
 - When hanging on your cross, relinquishing your rights and dying to self, do you pray for those who nailed you? Or do you retaliate with curses?
- Prayer precipitates Pentecost. *Every revival has been the child of prayer. There have been revivals without much preaching. There have been revivals with absolutely no organisation. But there has never been a mighty revival without mighty praying* (R.A. TORREY). 2018 is the Year of Prayer. Will you personalise the call? Be the contrite soul who pursues God: *As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you* (PSALM 42:1). Be the mobiliser who sets the pace: *Let us go at once to entreat the favour of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going* (ZECHARIAH 8:21). Be the watchman who won't keep silent: *Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds... Repeat them in our day* (HABAKKUK 3:2 NIV). Say Yes to God.
- *A man prays because his soul is hungry for God* (LEONARD RAVENHILL). Will you be the wise and hungry disciple who hears and does the Word? *Always pray and not give up* (LUKE 18:1). *I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands* (1 TIMOTHY 2:8 NIV). *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful* (COLOSSIANS 4:2). Remember, the Holy Spirit is a spirit of intercession (ROMANS 8:26-27): *Do not quench the Spirit* (1 THESSALONIANS 5:19). *Pray in the Spirit on all occasions* (EPHESIANS 6:18). Say Yes to God.
- Fathers and Mothers, be on-the-job praying. The family is under attack. The enemy knows that if he can destroy the family, he can destroy the nation. Will you contend for the future by restoring the family prayer altar today? Will you model a life of deep dependence on God? Lord, *make my heart a house of prayer* (CHARLES WESLEY).

ACTS 13:2-3
While they were
worshiping the
Lord and fasting,
the Holy Spirit
said, 'Set apart
for me Barnabas
and Saul for the
work to which I
have called them.'
³Then after fasting
and praying they
laid their hands
on them and sent
them off.

All of the missionaries in Acts come from local churches. Antioch is the first clear case. The Holy Spirit selects, summons, and sends out the missionaries. Their fellow-leaders set them apart and release them. The Holy Spirit is the Mission Director of the Church Jesus builds. But where do mission agencies come in? What is the relationship between local churches and mission agencies? Antioch is the answer to both questions. Take a closer look:

- The local church was born in Jerusalem through prayer and the work of the Spirit. Luke tells the story of the local church in Acts 1-12. This is the prototype for all local churches thereafter.
- The mobile church or mission agency was born in Antioch through prayer and the work of the Spirit. Luke tells the story of the mobile church in Acts 13-20. This is the prototype for all mission agencies thereafter.
- The Book of Acts showcases a seamless synergy between the local church and the mobile church. Paul gave his blood, sweat, and tears to build up the local church. And in return, he received both money and manpower from them. All of his co-workers came from local churches.

Mission agencies, therefore, are not a sign of a weak church but the fruit of a healthy church (PAUL PIERSON). Both the local church and the mission agency are vital parts of the Body of Christ. They need each other like hands need feet. The greatest missionary movements in history have occurred when local churches and mission agencies set aside their differences and worked together to reach the lost.

But here in Singapore, we've had a long history of tensions between local churches and mission agencies. Some churches complain that mission agencies siphon off their money and manpower, giving back little in return. And some mission agencies feel that local churches have written them off as irrelevant and unnecessary. There are many other gripes on both sides. Can you see how Satan is working overtime to derail Singapore's destiny as an Antioch for Asia?

Unless and until we resolve these tensions and make peace and reconciliation, we will never fulfil the Antioch mandate. But if we fast and pray until the Spirit moves again as he did in Acts 13, restoring unity and synergy between local church and mobile church, we will see a mighty move of God out of Singapore to the ends of the earth. Antioch arise!

- Ideas have consequences. *There are times when an idea takes hold in a nation in a way that becomes almost prophetic. It does not require complete agreement, or even acknowledgement as an absolute reality, but the idea is strong enough to rally a vision and to raise a standard. This is so with the title, 'the Antioch of Asia'... While some question the relevance and validity of the Antioch of Asia title, others read in it a prophetic intent from the Lord. One church leader, Colin, pointed out that the tremendous blessing received by the church in Singapore, has laid upon us a great responsibility: Because of the phenomenal success of Singapore as a nation, the verse of Scripture that weighs heavily on our hearts is the one which says, 'to whom much is given, much is required'. We have been the benefactors of missionaries who came to establish schools and raise disciples...and planted the seed of the gospel, which took root and bore fruit. How much more should we be giving that kind of blessing to another nation?* (W.M. SYN, ON BEING THE ANTIOCH OF ASIA).

How do we pay it forward? Quieten your heart. Talk it over with the Lord. What is the Spirit saying to you? Share with your pastors and your peers. Why not get an Acts 13 prayer circle going in school or at work? God speaks. Hear and obey.

- Leadership is influence. Research shows that in Singapore the *notion of being a 'career missionary' is virtually non-existent... many churches have simply ceased to challenge people for long-term service* (W.M. SYN). Who will take the lead to influence change and reverse this trend? Is God calling your denomination? Is he already nudging your local church? Within a seven-hour flight radius of Singapore are 66 major cities teeming with millions who have never heard the Gospel not even once! We owe these a debt of love: long-term incarnational ministry. May we seek to glorify Christ by living and serving among the unreached. Love is spelt PRESENCE.
- Vision is contagious. Singapore is the headquarters of many international and homegrown mission organisations. Collectively, they represent a world-class institution of specialised skills, cultural intelligence, field contacts, and time-tested best practices for mobilisation, training and placement. Pray that local churches will recognise this and willingly partner with mission agencies to fulfil Singapore's Antioch call. Where there have been misgivings and conflicts, pray that churches and agencies will forgive each other and reconcile. May they affirm each other's gifts, anointing and unique roles in the Kingdom. Welcome a new day of better and greater partnerships to synergise efforts. Take it a step further: Ask God for a new Antioch vision so big and so fresh that it compels us to get out of our silos and move us beyond our own goals and plans. May Singapore be a global example of how local churches and mission agencies can work together—joyfully, creatively, strategically, effectively!

ACTS 13:3-4
Then after fasting
and praying they
laid their hands
on them and sent
them off. ⁴ So,
being sent out by
the Holy Spirit,
they went down to
Seleucia, and from
there they sailed
to Cyprus.

Payer and fasting shape history (DEREK PRINCE).
The Church of Jesus Christ was born in a solemn assembly of men and women united in prayer in Jerusalem. The 120 in the upper room sought God with one mind and one purpose until Pentecost happened! In little more than ten years, churches were planted and flourishing *in all Judea and Galilee and Samaria* (ACTS 9:31).

Next, the frontier mission movement was born in a solemn assembly of prayer and fasting in Antioch. Before this, no local church had ever organised any cross-cultural missionary work. The Jesus Movement was primarily a movement of Jews reaching Jews. But now, through Antioch, *God opened a door of faith to the Gentiles* (14:27). Paul gave them the pure Gospel of Jesus without the DNA of Judaism. The Jesus Movement was transformed from a Jewish sect into a global faith for every people under heaven.

The solemn assembly in Antioch gave birth to urban missions. Antioch was the first metropolis to host a Christian church. In little more than ten years, the apostles of Antioch planted churches in key urban centres of four Roman provinces: Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia. These churches were city-based but not city-bound. They spread the Good News throughout their surrounding regions (13:49). During Paul's two years in Ephesus, for example, *all the residents of Asia* heard the Gospel (19:10).

By AD300, the Roman Empire was 10% Christian. And by the year 500, half the population of Antioch was Christian, along with the vast majority of Roman citizens. The Empire that crucified Christ between two thieves now hailed him as King of kings and Lord of lords. This amazing missionary movement continues to this day. And it all started in Antioch, in a solemn assembly of five men who ministered to God in prayer and fasting.

This fasting changed the course of history. It is almost impossible to overstate the historical importance of this moment in Antioch in the history of the world (JOHN PIPER). Lessons learned: We cannot do the work of the Lord in the energy of the flesh. We cannot achieve the Antioch effect without the Antioch environment. United prayer and fasting are God-ordained means for accessing the power of heaven to do God's work on earth—in God's way.

Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord (JOEL 1:14).

- God is working in amazing ways. He moved on the leaders of LoveSingapore, the National Council of Churches, and Festival of Praise to make 2018 an exceptional Year of Prayer with fasting. Praise God for the outcome: Solemn Assembly 2018. This is a historic first. As we fast and pray in one accord, ask God to intensify our hunger and sharpen our discernment. Pray for a mighty move of the Spirit. That with one heart, one soul, one mind, we will return to God in repentance for personal, corporate, and national sins. That we will consecrate ourselves to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. That we will cry out to God for salvation among the 80% unsaved in our city. That we will set apart this generation and every generation to fulfill Singapore's destiny as Antioch of Asia.
- God is working in astounding ways. Praise the Lord for the Fellowship of Missional Organisations in Singapore (FOMOS). God has been bringing mission leaders together for fellowship and prayer: *The Holy Spirit (the Director of World Missions) has been stirring us to move in the same direction for the same outcome—that the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea* (HABAKKUK 2:14). *We are no longer competitors but fellow servants. Our tagline is 'Many Streams One Direction'. FOMOS leaders also realise that we need to co-labour with the local church and the marketplace to fulfill God's calling for Singapore. The local church is equipped with resources and manpower. They also provide the spiritual covering. The marketplace is equipped with skills that can impact and transform societies. They give nations a better quality of life in every sphere. The mobile church (mission agencies) is equipped with cross-cultural expertise and a strategic understanding of the mission context in our 21st century world. They pioneer and keep the work going and growing long term* (JOSEPH CHEAN, FOMOS CHAIRMAN, YWAM NATIONAL DIRECTOR). Rejoice! Ask God to strengthen FOMOS to bond deeper and spread wider—for the glory of God.
- God is working in historic ways. *Whenever God gets ready to do a great work, he always sets his people a-praying* (J. EDWIN ORR). *There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer. God always hears the humble, desperate, united and repentant prayers of his people. Every step in the progress of missions is directly traceable to prayer* (A.T. PIERSON). Pray therefore: Lord, count me in. I want to be part of what you are already doing in and through our nation. I will pray. I will fast. I will lean in and listen to your Spirit. I will pull others onboard. Together, we will flow with your many streams in one direction—to shape world missions and make world history!

ACTS 11:26
It was in Antioch
that the disciples
were first called
“Christians.”

The Antioch Church produced a noble train of martyrs. Paul was beheaded in Rome under Nero’s persecutions. Peter, the first bishop of Antioch (according to tradition) was crucified upside down in Rome. He asked to be nailed down head first because he felt unworthy to die in the same position as Jesus. Peter’s successor, Ignatius, followed him in martyrdom. Lucian, the founder of the ‘school’ of theology at Antioch, was tortured and martyred in AD312. The Antioch Church, it seems, had a disproportionate share of martyrs.

Bishop Ignatius of Antioch was escorted to Rome under military guard to die for his faith. He saw this as an opportunity to imitate the suffering Christ. He had influential friends in Rome. They were ready to pull strings to get him off the hook. But he wouldn’t have it. Along the way he wrote them a letter begging them not to meddle with his martyrdom: *Now I begin to be a disciple. Let fire and cross, flocks of beasts, broken bones, dismemberment come upon me, so long as I attain to Jesus Christ.*

Dear Christian, have you begun to be a disciple? Christians are many. Disciples are few, and always will be few. But it was in Antioch, remember, that the disciples were first called Christians (ACTS 11:26). To be a true Christian, therefore, is to be a disciple. And to be a true disciple is to take up your cross and follow Jesus—first to Calvary, and then to heaven. There are no short cuts to glory. *When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die* (DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, 20TH CENTURY MARTYR).

But the problem with many of us today, is that we want shortcuts. We claim the crown without the cross. We avoid suffering at all cost. We seek glory from one another in this present evil age. We identify with the Risen Christ on his throne. But are we willing to walk with the lowly Jesus from Gethsemane to Golgotha?

Here in Singapore we want to be like Antioch. And why not? Every Church should be like the Antioch Church. But let’s not forget what that means. The Antioch Church was a community of cross-bearing disciples of Christ. Martyrs with a mission. *If we suffer with him, we will also be glorified with him* (ROMANS 8:17 CT).

First the cross. Then the crown.

The Antioch Church was a teaching church, a praying church, a fasting church, a worshipping church, a giving church, and a great missionary church. But history’s highest tribute to Antioch is the blood of its martyrs.

■ Dear Singapore, sleep well tonight. Martyrdom is not on our radar, even though we are the most religiously diverse country in the world (PEW RESEARCH CENTRE STUDY 2014). We are not anywhere near the gallows. We have lots to be grateful for:

First of all, acknowledge God for a very wise government that is unwavering in its vision and commitment to build a multi-racial, multi-religious society where all are treated as equals.

Thank God for Article 15 of our Constitution which says *every person has the right to profess and practise his religion and to propagate it. Every religious group has the right to manage its own religious affairs; to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and to acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with law.*

Thank God for the Religious Harmony Act which compels us to be wise and winsome in sharing our faith, *without causing feelings of enmity, hatred, ill-will or hostility between different religious groups.*

Thank God! Because of these righteous laws and right values, Singapore enjoys an exceptional level of social cohesion and religious harmony unheard of around the world. This is a divine blessing, a remarkable achievement which allows us to *lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way* (1 TIMOTHY 2:2). May we never take this for granted. When controversy arises on sensitive issues, pray that the Church will contribute to the conversation rigorously and robustly with the overriding aim of reaching the right conclusions on the best way forward, in the best interest of Singapore—for the glory of God.

■ As we continue to make the most of our opportunity in peace-loving Singapore, ask God to awaken us to the end time reality of persecution and martyrdom around the world. Since the year 2000, some 1.8 million Christians have been killed because of their faith. That’s an average of 100,000 martyrs a year. *Sympathy is no substitute for action* (DAVID LIVINGSTONE). Will Singapore’s sons and daughters join the ranks of the martyrs? Most of our missionaries today serve in communities that are open to Christianity. Thank God for each of them. Pray that their labour of love will bear lasting fruit. But look farther afield. Take the long view. Think biblically. Pray deep into the future. Is the Lord of the Harvest calling a new generation of cross-bearing disciples from Singapore to bring the Gospel to unreached communities where evangelism is illegal, where conversion is punishable by death? Seek the Lord. His ways are higher than ours (ISAIAH 55:9).

ACTS 13:6-12
When they had gone through the whole island [of Cyprus] as far as Paphos, they came upon a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet named Bar-Jesus.⁷ He was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God.
⁸ But Elymas the magician... opposed them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith.
⁹ But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him
¹⁰ and said, 'You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?

God sent Saul to open the eyes of the lost (ACTS 26:17-18). Ironically, Saul's first miracle on his first missionary journey is to blind one man's eyes in order to open another's. Sergius Paulus, the governor of Cyprus, wants to hear the Word of God. His conversion could impact the whole island. If he were only an errand boy, he would be just as important and precious to God. God wants all people to know the Truth and to be saved (1 TIMOTHY 2:4). That's why he sent Saul to Cyprus.

But Elymas, the governor's guru, stands in the way. He is not at all pleased that Saul and Barnabas now have the governor's ear. He does not welcome the competition. His other name, Bar Jesus, means *son of Jesus*. But he is a *son of the devil*, a false prophet. The ultimate power play here is not between Saul and Elymas. It's between God and Satan. The devil blinds the minds of pre-believers to keep them in darkness (2 CORINTHIANS 4:4). He always seems to have an Elymas on the ground to resist the Gospel. But God has his man in place. Saul takes authority and blinds Elymas for a season. Back in Damascus, Saul's temporary blindness led to his conversion (ACTS 9). Perhaps he hopes the same for Elymas.

The governor of Cyprus probably never saw a miracle before. Now he witnesses the spectacular blinding of his spiritual advisor. But Luke makes it clear that Sergius Paulus was more impressed with the Message than the miracle: *for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord* (ACTS 13:12). Are you astonished by the teaching of Jesus? Or have you become more enamoured with signs and wonders?

Miracles don't save. The Message saves (ROMANS 1:16). But miracles are as important as road signs on a highway. Besides relieving human suffering, they attract attention. They point people to Jesus as the Way of salvation. And they bear witness to the truth of the Gospel (JOHN 10:25, 38). It is not wise to downplay miracles in favour of the Message. Throughout the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and Church History, miracle and Message have worked hand in hand to bring people to faith and wholeness in Christ. Sometimes we get excited about the wrong thing. Or too excited about a good thing. We rave and crave for manifestations as ends in themselves. But are we just as eager to share the Message of salvation with the lost? If we were, we would probably see more miracles.

- One of the signs of revival is a high regard for the Word of God and a remarkable eagerness to respond. During the First Great Awakening, for example, Jonathan Edwards observed that the minds of the people were *wonderfully taken from the world*, and yet they did not neglect their secular duties. May it be so in First World Singapore! May such a great awakening start with you and your church. May it reach a tipping point and spill over into the marketplace. May men and women of influence and intelligence like Sergius Paulus be wonderfully captivated by the Word. May they hear the Message clearly and be astonished! May their conversion trigger a turning point for the Gospel movement in our city.
- Ask God to expose *Elymas-types* in every sector of our society: False teachers and false prophets who pervert the ways of the Lord. Post-modern thinkers who dismiss biblical Truth. Fake news mongers who discredit the Church. Activists who promote liberal ideologies that keep men and women in deep bondage. Pray by name for any *Elymas-types* you know. Ask God to foil their clever schemes that confuse the public, polarise society, and incite religious distrust. Cry to God for mercy. May they and their fans encounter Christ in dramatic ways, experience the power of the Gospel, and be marvellously saved. *Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see.*
- Here's one thing the Singapore Church should get excited about! 2019 is the Year of Proclamation—a God-ordained *kairos* moment coinciding with our bicentennial. Reflect on this insight from Bishop Rennis Ponniah. Agree with him in fervent prayer: *Over the last year or so, God has placed on my heart and on the hearts of several pastors... that he is visiting our land with grace and mercy. A vital expression of this is that God will bring an amazing number of people to saving faith in Christ Jesus... this will take the shape of 'Celebration of Hope' rallies at the National Stadium from 17-19 May 2019... Is this wishful thinking or a vision to be embraced with faith? Is it possible, that in the midst of increasing strife and flux on the one hand, and moral darkness, ethnocentrism and hardened secularism on the other, God is preparing a mighty harvest? I believe it is, because with God nothing is impossible* (LUKE 1:37, JEREMIAH 32:17). Today and every day until May 2019, prepare the way of the Lord. Ask God to visit Singapore in manifest presence and power. Pray for mighty miracles that will cause Singaporeans to sit up and listen to the Message, turn from darkness to light, and become practising disciples of Jesus.

¹¹ And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.' Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand.
¹² Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

ACTS 12
¹² [Peter] went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying...²⁵ And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem [to Antioch] when they had completed their service, bringing with them John, whose other name was Mark.

ACTS 13
⁵ And they had John to assist them.
¹³ Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem,¹⁴ but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia.

COLOSSIANS 4:10
 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas.

John Mark starts well. But when the mission team reaches Perga, he goes AWOL, *absent without leave*. Why? Luke doesn't say. But there are clues. The following 'answers' are speculative in a good way, as an exercise in self-examination. They represent the kinds of issues we also face in ministry relationships and team dynamics today. So what was Mark's problem?

Was it homesickness? Mark is young. His mother hosted the prayer meeting in Jerusalem that resulted in Peter's miraculous release from prison (ACTS 12:12). Perhaps he misses his matzah bread and lamb chops. Or was it his love for the Holy City (PSALM 137:6)? If God sends you out on missions, will you give in to homesickness? Or will you stay the course to the end?

Was it culture shock? Or a theology crisis? Mark left a conservative Jewish church in Jerusalem to join a new batch of uncircumcised Christians in Antioch. Down there they eat anything. Then he sees that spooky spiritual warfare at Paphos involving Elymas the sorcerer. On top of all that, the Roman governor of Cyprus converts to Christ without embracing Judaism. Too much for Mark, perhaps. And you? Will you abandon your team because of cultural and theological differences?

Or perhaps it was politics that sent Mark packing. At first, Barnabas was calling the shots. Barnabas is an ideal pastor—the *Son of Encouragement* (ACTS 4:36). But ever since the power encounter at Paphos, Paul has taken charge (13:13). Paul's leadership is more directive and demanding. Perhaps Mark misses the good old days when *Cousin Barney* was in charge. Yes, they are cousins. Will you abandon ship when a different breed of leader takes the helm?

So was it homesickness, culture shock, a theology crisis, spiritual spooks, politics, or what? We cannot say. But we can be sure of one thing. Whatever wore Mark down could happen to any of us today—whether in church, in the marketplace, or on the mission field. Pondering some possible reasons for Mark's untimely exit can help strengthen our resolve to stay the course.

This is not the last we hear of John Mark. He started well. He finished well. We meet him again, not just in Acts, but across history. He wrote the Gospel of Mark. He didn't let one mistake, as bad as it was, derail his destiny. Will you?

■ Human resource is the most important asset of any organisation. John Mark's story calls for serious reflection. Why do people go AWOL from work or church or the mission field? Pause. Ponder. Pray. First, examine yourself as a leader or follower. Allow the Holy Spirit to surface the root issues and real motives. Is it selfish ambition? Is it a power struggle? A personality clash or a workstyle difference? Is it a lack of mutual understanding? Unruly team mates? Unfair expectations? Fear of failure? Lack of confidence? Monotony? Doubt and despair? Or is it because you wanted to be the leader but someone else was chosen? Wait on the Lord. Write down what he shows you. Be honest. Turn it into prayer.

If you have made a wrong turn, pull over and recalibrate. First, heed this warning: A track record of wrong and selfish choices will ruin your character and derail your destiny if you don't repent (JEREMIAH 18). Now be encouraged: A few mistakes, no matter how bad, will neither define you nor determine your future, as long as you confess, repent, and make amends as soon as possible. Draw hope from the happy ending of John Mark's story. Pour your heart out before the Lord.

■ Think of the *John Marks* in the marketplace. The fickle ones who are forever job-hopping. The fresh grads who need room to fail, and a second or third chance. Or those who have been written off by strong leaders who esteem the work above the worker, rightly or wrongly. Pray for each one by name. Walk out on a limb and extend a helping hand, as Barnabas did for John Mark. Reflect on Acts 15:36-39.

■ Singapore's missionaries are our most valuable export. Like John Mark, they all face tough challenges on the field. Pray for newbies who are reeling from culture shock. For others who are homesick. For those who worry about ailing parents at home. For others who are hurt because they feel sidelined and silenced by policy and protocol. For those rattled by relational conflicts within the team. For others who are tempted to go AWOL. For those who have already come home disillusioned. Ask God to refresh all our missionaries with a second wind, restore the demoralised and heal the wounded.

■ Human capital is our nation's most precious asset: *Singapore's strength lies in our people, dedicated workers and capable leaders; not just individual stars or a few top bodies, but a cohesive society and a strong Singapore team. Each person giving his best for the nation, doing things together that none of us could have achieved on our own. This is our greatest asset and this is the secret of our success* (PM LEE HSIEN LOONG). In this age of selfish genes and global disruptions, retaining human capital is like trying to *hold a moon beam in your hand*. Are you a quitter who will take the first flight out at the first sign of trouble? Or are you a stayer who will lay down your life and fight for Singapore come hell or high water? Pray.

ACTS 13:42-52
As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath.
43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.
44 The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.
45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.
46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.'
47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles,

The Truth seemed too good to be true. It's always an honour for a guest speaker to be invited back. But to repeat his sermon? That's rare. When Paul spoke in the synagogue in Antioch at Pisidia, they begged him to come again next week—to preach the same message! How do we account for such a favourable response?

The Roman world was full of Gentiles searching for truth and meaning in life. Many attended synagogues and worshipped the God of Israel. But most stopped short of conversion to Judaism. This required four things: male circumcision, baptism, animal sacrifice, and submission to the Law of Moses. In other words, if you want to be saved, you have to *proselytise*—give up your ethnic and cultural identity and become a Jew like Moses.

That was too much for most seekers. But now, says Paul, they can be saved without becoming Jews. How? *Through [Jesus], forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you* (ACTS 13:38). By his death, Christ has torn down the wall between Jew and Gentile. Members of every ethnic group can now be saved without becoming Jews, without *proselytising*.

No wonder Paul's sermon became the talk of the town. Next Sabbath, almost the whole city was crashing the gates to get in. They listened to the Word. They received the Word. They believed the Word. They glorified the Word. And they spread the Word throughout the region (:48-49). Good News goes viral.

Where the Gospel of Jesus is preached and disciples are made, the Church of Christ emerges without fail. The Word does the work when we pray and preach. The apostles said: *we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word* (ACTS 6:4).

The Protestant Reformer Martin Luther preached Jesus without the cultural baggage of the Holy Roman Empire. No one was more amazed at the results than he. Looking back on his trial at Worms, he wrote: *See how much [God] has been able to accomplish through me, though I did no more than pray and preach. The Word did it all.* For 70 years, Billy Graham prayed and preached Jesus. No rhetoric. No money. No tradition. No controversy. No denominational branding. Hundreds of millions listened. Hundreds of thousands believed. He just gave them the pure Gospel of Jesus. *The Word did it all.*

■ Singapore is ripe for harvest. Over 80% are yet to believe in Jesus. Pray for Celebration of Hope 2019. This is not mass evangelism. This is personal evangelism on a mass scale, climaxing in the public proclamation of the Gospel at the National Stadium from 17-19 May. Agree in prayer with Bishop Rennis Ponniah, Celebration of Hope Chairman: *There is good news to be shared with everyone. Are you ready to be messengers with 'beautiful feet and burning lips of love' to go and tell others that God's wonderful salvation has come in Christ Jesus? The time has come for us to do so with courage, joy and winsomeness.*

Today and every day, pray for the Church to overcome apathy. May we return to our first love—no longer living for ourselves and no longer preaching ourselves but Christ (2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-15, 2 CORINTHIANS 4:5). Ask for a fresh revelation of Christ's sacrificial love for sinners. Ask for eyes to see the lostness of the lost. They are *harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd* (MATTHEW 9:36). Ask Jesus to overwhelm us with his compassion for the lost. He is the good shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to track down the stray until he finds it (LUKE 15:4).

Today and every day, pray for pre-believers by name. Start with those at home. Widen the circle to include unsaved families in your block, colleagues at work, and friends on campus. Pray for divine appointments. Declare Isaiah 61:1: *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim Good News anywhere and everywhere, across all class divides, online and offline. Cry for open heavens. Ask for open hearts, even among the irreligious. Dream big. Expect Good News to go viral. Envision a great homecoming, turning the heart of Singapore Godwards. Ask in faith. Give thanks. Pray for divine favour to mobilise many more to be Gospel messengers with 'beautiful feet and burning lips of love'.*

■ Is there a secret to winning souls? What can we learn from Billy Graham, the world's most famous evangelist? Simply this: Be plugged into the power source via prayer and the Word. *His colleague, T. W. Wilson, called him 'the most completely disciplined person I have ever known'.... Even under the pressure of travel schedules moving him from city to city, often through many time zones, he strove to study and pray each morning* (CHRISTIANITY TODAY). Pray. Jesus says: *I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing* (JOHN 15:5). Listen. Learn. Live.

that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'
48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.
49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.
50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.
51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium.
52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

ACTS 14:1
The same thing occurred in Iconium, where Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers.
NRSV

MATTHEW 5:13
You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

They spoke in such a way (ACTS 14:1). What does this mean? In the first place, Luke says that the *same thing* happened here in Iconium as in Antioch of Pisidia. There we see how Paul spoke in a way that was both radical and relevant; both Christ-centred and culturally sensitive. And from Paul's letters we also learn that he rejected rhetorical frills and thrills. He spoke the naked Word of God with full conviction in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 CORINTHIANS 2:1-5; 1 THESSALONIANS 1:5).

Do we speak in such a way? Or do we bend over backwards to pander to certain groups in the name of relevance? We should pause and examine our current notions of relevance. For a selfie generation, whatever is comfortable and convenient is relevant. Whatever meets my needs and suits my style is relevant. If it serves my career goals and prospers my business, it's relevant. If it boosts my self-esteem and strokes my super-ego, it's relevant. Ridiculous! Jesus and Paul were the most relevant communicators of Truth in history. But they never watered down the Gospel in the name of relevance.

Nothing is more relevant to the human race than the saving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It meets the deepest needs and longings of every person in every culture and in every generation. And it also calls for radical repentance and a deep change of heart.

On the one hand, Paul tailored his message for different people groups. He spoke as a Jew to the Jews and as a Gentile to the Gentiles (1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23). On the other hand, the substance of Paul's message was universally convicting. It cut clean across cultures and races, genders and generations. It called people to repentance and conversion. He *spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers* (ACTS 14:1).

Billy Graham spoke in such a way. His message was simple. It was clear. It centred on Jesus Christ and the Good News of the Kingdom. Repentance. Forgiveness of sins. Peace and joy. Both here and hereafter. Pastor Rick Seaward spoke in such a way that a great many people all over the world and from all walks of life became believers.

Do we speak in such a way?

Charles Spurgeon spoke in such a way. He was one of the greatest preachers of the 19th century. He began his career as a teenager preaching to a hundred people in a 1,200-seater sanctuary in London. Within two years they shifted to the 6,000-seater Metropolitan Tabernacle which remained full for the next 30 years. When asked to describe his preaching method, Spurgeon said: *I take my text and make a beeline to the Cross*. Today, Spurgeon is fondly remembered as the Prince of Preachers.

- In a world where consumer is king, we have lost the art of expository preaching. Often Scripture verses are plucked out of context and strung together to address a feel good topic. May we return to the ancient path of the Antioch Church. Pray for a renaissance of expository preaching that brings out both the literal meanings and the practical imperatives of the biblical text. Pray: Lord, forgive us our sloppy treatment of your Word. We have fallen for a *fast food ideology* of quick fixes. We often reduce your Word to *tidbits of pop psychology* to keep listeners happy and coming back for more. Fill us with *divine discontent*. We want to delve deeper. *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart* (HEBREWS 4:12).
- In a world gone graphic and visual, we have lost confidence in the power of the spoken Word of God. We have forgotten the biblical fact that God prefers to be *heard and not seen* (ALBERT MOHLER). We rely more on PowerPoint than the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray: Lord Jesus, Your Word is like fire. Like a hammer that breaks a rock (JEREMIAH 23:29). Forgive us for pouring cold technology on your fiery Word. Renew our confidence in your spoken Word, naked and unvarnished.
- In a world of cynics and critics, we desperately need help from heaven. Pray for every preacher to be freshly anointed by the Spirit each time they step up to the pulpit. Repent of any bias you have against the younger ones. Their little experience or limited exposure is not a handicap. They might be a Spurgeon-in-the-making. Ask God to loosen their tongues to speak with authority in Jesus' name. Ask God to favour them with a double portion of fire and faith, wisdom and courage. Pray also for every believer to experience the Spirit's anointing each time they share the Gospel with disinterested family and friends who never come to church or who are bias against Christians.
- Pray the Word: *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses* (ACTS 1:8). *Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, 'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth'* (JEREMIAH 1:9). *Our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction* (1 THESSALONIANS 1:5).

ACTS 14:8-18
Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. ⁹He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, ¹⁰said in a loud voice, 'Stand upright on your feet.' And he sprang up and began walking. ¹¹And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, 'The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!' ¹²Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. ¹³And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. ¹⁴But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, ¹⁵'Men, why are you doing these

Signs and wonders are not a cure-all. They can create new problems. In the remote town of Lystra, Paul preached to a pagan crowd for the first time. God raised a cripple to his feet. Paul was not prepared for what happened next.

Years earlier, Peter worked a similar miracle in Lydda and the whole town turned to Christ (ACTS 9:32-35). So you might expect the same results here in Lystra. But instead of confessing Christ as Lord, the crowds confess Paul and Barnabas as gods. So what went wrong?

It's all about context. Back in Lydda, Peter was addressing fellow Jews who shared his assumptions and drew the right conclusions. The Lystrans, however, see the miracle through pagan eyes and draw pagan conclusions (14:11). They take Barnabas for Zeus, the top god in the Greek pantheon. And Paul they mistake for Hermes, the god of words, because he was a good speaker.

Paul and Barnabas hastily resort to damage control. Just when they're about to be worshipped, they rip their clothes apart. Bad move, folks. This is a thoroughly Jewish gesture. It makes less sense to the Lystrans than the miracle. But what happens next is a textbook example of cross-cultural communication at its best.

Paul gets a grip on himself, escapes his Jewish reflexes, and brings the Truth down to earth. No Christian jargon. No chapter and verse. Not even the Ten Commandments. He uses creation and nature as his text, as Jesus often did—with no compromise! Paul confronts idolatry head on, using cultural forms that the Lystrans well understand.

So now the mass conversion as in Lydda? It should have happened. But Satan called in reinforcements. A persecution party from Iconium came in and swayed the Lystrans to stone *Hermes* and *Zeus* (Paul and Barnabas). You win some. You lose some. But not all was lost. Paul made enough disciples in Lystra to form a church (ACTS 14:20-23; 16:1-5).

Lessons learned: Don't idolise speakers, foreign or local. Don't idolise yourself. Don't let others idolise you. Don't idolise miracles. Interpret them. Above all, understand and address wrong perceptions about Christianity on the part of the pre-believing community. Present the Message *in such a way* that is clear, compelling, and culturally sensitive in multi-cultural, multi-religious Singapore. We call this *contextualisation* or cross-cultural communication. In places like Lystra and Singapore, anything less is confusion.

■ Thank God that the Singapore Church has long enjoyed tremendous freedom and favour with our government and society. Rightly or wrongly, however, certain perceptions have formed in the community that need to be addressed, first of all, in prayer. For example:

- Christianity is good for heaven but irrelevant to Singapore.
- Christianity is irrational and out of touch with reality.
- Christianity is a western religion better suited to the English-educated.
- Christianity is for the *atas*. The poor feel out of place in church.
- The church seems more like a variety show than a holy place.
- Foreign preachers come here and denigrate other religions.
- The church is after money and talks too much about money.
- New converts stop supporting the family in order to support the church.
- The church drags religion into debates on public morality.

Some of these are unfair allegations due to no fault of our own. But in certain cases, we are guilty as charged. Either way, damage control must begin in the house of the Lord.

Pray: Father in Heaven, your name is great among the nations (MALACHI 1:11-12). We confess that we have done things that tarnish your great name in our nation. Have mercy on us. Hear our cry. Forgive us our faults and follies. We repent. Come, put your house in order. Give us keys to communicate with pre-believers in culturally sensitive ways—without coercion, without compromise, without condescending.

■ Someone once quipped: *The Gospel came to Greece and the Greeks turned it into a philosophy. The Gospel came to Rome and the Romans turned it into a system. The Gospel came to Europe and the Europeans turned it into a culture. The Gospel came to America and the Americans turned it into a business.* And then, the Gospel came to Singapore, and we turned it into a _____ .

Sober up: In what ways and to what extent has American culture infiltrated the Singapore Church? Do we flock to fancy venues to be charmed by cool singers or celebrity pastors? Do we run to and fro from one conference to the next chasing after our favourite speakers? This trend must stop! Otherwise, the Singapore Church is doomed. John Calvin said: *The human heart is a perpetual factory of idols.* Turn to God in identificational repentance. *You shall have no other gods before me... for I the Lord your God am a jealous God* (EXODUS 20:3-4).

things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. ¹⁷ Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness. ¹⁸ Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

ACTS 14:21-27
When they had preached the gospel [at Derbe] and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord....
²⁴ Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia.
²⁵ And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia, ²⁶ and from there they sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had fulfilled. ²⁷ And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Paul didn't count decisions for Christ. He made disciples of Christ. Having survived a stoning in Lystra, he went on to Derbe and *made many disciples* (ACTS 14:21). Derbe is not far from Antioch, where this long journey began. And just about 25 kilometres along the way is Tarsus, where Paul was born and once found refuge from persecution (9:29-30). How tempting it must have been for Paul to set his GPS for Tarsus. A warm kosher meal with family and friends would be something to die for.

But Paul had something better to die for. Risking life and limb, he followed the Gospel Positioning System back through places where he had recently made disciples at the cost of severe persecution. His apostolic instinct told him that his mission there was not complete. Disciples needed strengthening and encouragement in the face of opposition. Suffering is the hallmark of discipleship: *Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God* (ACTS 14:22). Christians who cut their teeth on triumphalism and the prosperity gospel are most likely to backslide under persecution (MATTHEW 13:21).

Where the Gospel is preached and disciples are made, the Church of Jesus Christ emerges without fail. During Paul's brief absence, new churches had already formed in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia (ACTS 14:21-23). But churches are not complete without elders. There are no leaderless churches in the New Testament. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church. Leaders you can trust. Not self-ordained. Not self-anointed. But well-chosen and appointed by apostles with prayer and fasting (:23).

On returning to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas *called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles* (:27). Before Antioch, the Early Church was for the most part a conservative Jewish community. But after Antioch, the Jesus Movement stripped off its Jewish clothing and became a universal faith that appeals to members of every race, religion, tribe, and tongue.

This is the legacy of Antioch. Will it be the legacy of Singapore? Will we de-westernise the Gospel for members of other faiths who reject it in its western forms? Will we take the hard way home?

- Paul is an apostle with a pastor's heart. He would not rest until he saw Christ formed in his disciples (GALATIANS 4:19). Who is a disciple according to Paul? Three things stand out in his writings:
 - A disciple dies to self and imitates Jesus (GALATIANS 2:20, 4:19; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1).
 - A disciple follows Jesus and participates in his mission (ACTS 22:14-15; 2 TIMOTHY 2:2).
 - A disciple suffers with Jesus for the sake of the Gospel (ACTS 14:22; 2 TIMOTHY 2:3).

This is no different from what Jesus said: *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me* (MATTHEW 16:24 NIV). What is the state of the Church? Are we producing disciples? How is your walk with Christ? Are you a practising disciple? If you have not taken discipleship seriously, turn to the Lord in repentance and prayer: Lord Jesus, I repent. I am a bundle of contradictions. Part of me wants you and part of me wants life on my own terms. I am guilty. Forgive me. I fall for what is convenient. I flee from what is costly. I confess, I am half-hearted. I am double-minded. Forgive me, my wishy-washiness. I want to go beyond the motions of Sunday church. Beyond merely knowing *about* you in my head. Come into my heart. Be Lord of my life. I want to grow in intimate friendship with you. Give me courage to be your disciple. To bear my cross. To die to self. To live for you. To imitate those who imitate you until I bear your image.

- Paul was a disciple-maker par excellence. Like Jesus, he practised relational discipleship in community. We busy Singaporeans, however, are reluctant. We make excuses. We claim we have no time. No time to be disciplined. No time to disciple others. No time to be relational. Ask God to forgive us our wrong perspectives and our misplaced priorities. Ask him to renew our minds to think his thoughts and re-fire our hearts to practise relational discipleship his way—in community. For the long-term good of the Church, pray for Fathers and Mothers to lead the change and restore the family as the basic unit of discipleship.
- Think biblically. Act responsibly. New Testament churches were led by elders who were under apostolic authority. In our postmodern world, however, we now have a range of fashionable alternatives: organic church, internet church, starfish church, leaderless church. Where is accountability? The problem is not with the form, but with the fundamentals. Revival is a return to the blueprint of the Church Jesus builds according to the Gospel and Acts. Pray for genuine revival.
- The harvest is plentiful (LUKE 10:2). Locally, for the longest time, we have been fishing in the same pond of English-speaking Chinese Singaporeans. Globally, we have been going for the easy pickings, the low hanging fruit. Ask God to open our eyes to see the neglected harvest all around us. Pray for open doors among the hard-to-reach peoples in Singapore and our region. Let's take the hard way home.

ACTS 15
 1 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' 2 ...Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question... 5 some believers who belonged to... the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.' 6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ...13 After they finished speaking, James replied, 'Brothers, listen to me...19 ...we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. ... Please continue reading to verse 35 in your Bible.

It was bound to happen sooner later. A theological earthquake threatened to split the Church between Jews and Gentiles. The right wing Jewish conservatives insisted that Gentile converts must undergo circumcision and keep the Law to be saved (ACTS 15). The left wing liberals, including Paul and Barnabas, lobbied for a Law-free Gospel of justification by faith. They are liberals in a good sense, standing up for the freedom of the Gospel of Christ.

If the fundamentalists had won the debate in Acts 15, the Good News would have become bad news for Gentiles. The Jesus Movement would have been confined as a sect within Judaism. The Gentile mission would have shipwrecked. Thanks to good apostolic discernment and leadership, the opposite happened. The pure Gospel of Jesus escaped Judaism and took flight, spreading from people to people, culture to culture, nation to nation—to the ends of the earth. That's why we are here today reading about this story.

The issues of Acts 15 remain as relevant now as they were back then, especially when we make disciples and plant churches in unreached peoples. What is the relationship between the Gospel and culture? What forms and practices of the Singapore Church are appropriate for the new churches on the field? What do we mean when we say they should have the same DNA as ours? Must they dress like us, eat like us, worship like us? Must our converts become westernised Christians just like us? Are we practising a new form of Judaism? (MATTHEW 23:15)

Equally relevant for today is the apostolic model for resolving conflict and controversy without splitting the church. You don't see the top leaders huddling behind closed doors only to come out later and impose their decrees on the rest of the church. Far from it! The whole church was involved. How did they go about it?

First, the apostles and elders *gathered together to consider this matter* (ACTS 15:6). Second, there was *much debate* (:7). Third, Peter rehearsed how Cornelius was saved without the Law (:7-11). Fourth, before the whole assembly, Paul and Barnabas appealed to the miracles God worked among the Gentiles (:12). Fifth, James appealed to the Scripture—very important (:13-18)! And finally, after listening carefully and patiently and publicly to all parties and to the Holy Spirit, James reached a decision that seemed good to the whole church (:19-29). Is this how we resolve conflicts and make decisions in the church today?

- An Indian evangelist said: *Do not bring us the gospel as a potted plant. Bring us the seed of the Gospel and plant it in our soil.* Another wise Indian said: *Give us the living water in an Indian cup and we'll drink it.* This reflects the wisdom of Acts 15:19: *We should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God.* Meaning, don't impose Judaism on them. Just make them disciples of Jesus. Pray that Singapore's missionaries and sending churches will *not trouble the Gentiles* by imposing western forms of Christianity on converts from other faiths. As Paul and Antioch de-Judaised the Jesus Movement for the Gentiles, pray that Singapore will de-westernise Christianity for the unreached peoples of Asia, and so become a true Antioch of Asia.
- Conflicts are inevitable. No church is exempt. What are some hot potatoes? Charismatic gifts. Women in ministry. The role of the senior pastor. The role of the church board. Who has the final say over church direction, church discipline, church budget, and leadership succession? More recently, we see inter-generational conflicts over worship styles. Also the genre of worship services. Do we keep it inter-generational? Or should young people run their own service separate from the main congregation? Conflicts don't solve themselves. They fester. They deepen. They divide if we do not deal with them. Pray for pastors and leaders today. The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 is a model of Christian unity, leadership, and conflict resolution. James, the first among equals, listened to all sides of the debate before he reached a decision. Most of all, he listened to the Holy Spirit: *it seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit* (ACTS 15:28). Ask God to grant pastors and leaders courage to address all conflicts head-on—patiently, passionately, publicly, prayerfully—for the good of the Church and the glory of God!
- Conflicts can be resolved. Will you lead by example, whether in church, workplace, or home? Examine yourself. Respond honestly to each question below:
 - Do I include everyone who should be involved?
 - Do I bring a calming presence to the group?
 - Do I allow honest dialogue and robust debate?
 - Do I listen deeply to all sides with an open mind?
 - Do I consider all the relevant facts, evidence and precedence?
 - Do I listen sensitively to what the Holy Spirit is saying?
 - Do I switch off when certain persons and parties argue their points?
 - Do I skirt around the issues to avoid confrontation?
 - Do I ask questions to clarify opinions?
 - Do I accept correction when given sound input?
 - Do I strive to bring resolutions that are both scriptural and Spirit-led?
- *Conflict is an opportunity for the triumph of grace* (DAVID MATHIS). And truth. Pray.

where Christ is not named

3

ACTS 16:6-10 [Paul and his team] went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

The Gospel Positioning System never fails.

Well into his second missionary journey, the Apostle Paul kept bumping into closed doors. Visa problems? No. Spiritual warfare? No. It was God directing him to Macedonia. The clearest signal came in the port city of Troas, where Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man calling for help.

The *Macedonian call* has been misunderstood as the *call of God* to missions, or to a certain country for life. For example, *I'm called to China. Or God has called me to India.* This misguided notion has discouraged many Christians young and old from stepping out in simple obedience to the Great Commission. Why? Because they are still waiting around for a vision in the night or a voice from heaven sending them hither or thither.

In the Book of Acts, however, John Mark, Silas, and Timothy didn't wait for blood moons and blue moons before stepping out in missions. They simply responded to Paul's bidding. And as for Paul, he had already received the call of God in his mother's womb. He heard the call in his youth at Damascus. Then in Antioch, some ten years later, he was set apart for the work to which he had already been called (ACTS 13:2). The Macedonian call, therefore, was not *the call of God* to the ministry or missions. It was a one-off instance of divine guidance, re-directing a seasoned apostle to the continent of Europe where Christ was not named.

I was never called, wrote Dick Hills, founder of OC International. *I was never called to China, although I served there as a missionary for eighteen years.... I saw no flash of light; I heard no voice from heaven. My call is the call to be a teacher. I used it in Asia for years. I can use it just as well at home.*

So, are you still waiting for a mysterious vision, voice, or dream? You may be waiting till the stars fall from heaven. God has spoken: Go into all the world. Preach the Gospel to every person. Make disciples of all peoples to the end of the age.

Duty calls. Don't wait till you need a walking stick. Step out now while you still can, on your own two feet. The *Macedonian call* assures us that God will guide you as you go. The Gospel Positioning System never fails. But it works better when you get moving.

Martin Luther admitted that *although he received great insight into God's will for his life from the Bible and from the counsel of friends, he never received a dramatic call to his life work. Often, he said, circumstances simply propelled him into God's assignments* (BOB SJOGREN, BILL AND AMY STEARNS).

- All are called. But many are mistaken. They assume that only pastors and full-time church staff are called. Truth is, every Christian without exception is called: We are called to be *disciples* (ACTS 11:26). We are called to be *holy* (ROMANS 1:7). We are called to be *saints* (1 CORINTHIANS 1:2). We are called to be *witnesses* for Jesus (ACTS 1:8). We are called to be the *salt of the earth* and the *light of the world* (MATTHEW 5:13-16). We are called to *do the work of the ministry* (EPHESIANS 4:12). And some are called to be *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ* (EPHESIANS 4:11-12). Pray: Lord, forgive us. We have neglected and despised the basic callings that apply to every believer. To be disciples. To be saints. To be witnesses. To be salt and light. We have grieved our spiritual leaders who must account for our souls (HEBREWS 13:17). Today, we surrender our lives to you. We pledge to submit to our pastors and leaders. You have placed them over us to disciple and train us for the work of the ministry—until we are fully developed and flourishing in our basic callings wherever you have placed us. May we be found faithful in little, faithful in much.
- All are called. But some are making excuses. Just because we're not sure which specific ministry we are called to, we sit around doing nothing. Dear Disciple, just do whatever your hand finds to do, and do it with all your might. Go to your pastor and volunteer. If your heart is in the right place, you will be just as happy sweeping the floor backstage as you would be preaching onstage in the Sports Hub. It really does not matter. Brother Lawrence who wrote *Practising the Presence of God* spent 15 years washing dishes. He was as happy as a little child. Pray, therefore: Dear Lord Jesus, by your mercy, I present myself a living sacrifice on your altar. I consecrate my body, soul, and spirit to you. My time, my talents, my sphere of influence, and all that I have are yours forever. Come, live in me. Walk with me. I open my heart to follow you. I present my hands to do your work—whatever, wherever, whenever you please. I am ready.
- All are called. But some are bouncing off closed doors. Don't be hasty to blame the devil. It might be God. Pray: Lord, you are the Mission Director. Thus far you have helped us. Lead your evangelists, pastors, mission leaders, and missionaries to the fields that are ripe and ready for harvest. Use the Singapore Church to break new ground in the least evangelised cities and peoples across Asia and beyond. Open doors of faith that no one can shut. In Jesus' name. Amen.

ACTS 16:11-15
So, setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace, and the following day to Neapolis,¹² and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days.¹³ And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.¹⁴ One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.¹⁵ And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us.

It turned out to be a woman.

The vision at Troas had featured a *man* of Macedonia. Had it been a woman, Paul may have had second thoughts. But he came to Philippi in good faith. And he wasn't disappointed when his first contact turned out to be *Lydia*, not *Linus*.

Paul's first stop in a new place was almost always the synagogue. There he would find, not only Jews, but also God-fearing Gentiles who usually proved most responsive to the Gospel. But apparently there was no synagogue in Philippi. Roman law required at least ten male Jews in a city to form a synagogue. Falling short of this, they sometimes held services outside the city limits. That's where Paul met Lydia—at a place of prayer outside the city gate, complete with a river for baptism.

Meet Lydia. She's a business woman. She worships God, not money. Her name is as Greek as *Linus*. She is typical of the many God-fearing Gentiles in Acts who respond to the Gospel. Paul spoke the Word. Lydia paid attention. And the Lord *opened her heart to listen eagerly* (ACTS 16:14 NRSV).

Only God can open hearts to hear the Gospel. Our part is to open our mouths and share God's love with the lost. Until we do that, we'll never know who's willing to listen and whose hearts the Lord has opened. Some will refuse to listen. Others will listen only with their ears. But there will always be some like Lydia who listen eagerly with open hearts (16:14).

Where the Gospel is preached and disciples are made, the Church of God emerges without fail. Paul opens his mouth to preach the Word. Lydia opens her ears to hear the Word. The Lord opens her heart to listen. Lydia and her entire household believe and are baptised. Lydia opens her home as a base for the missionaries. God opens the heavens. And before long, the proud Roman colony of Philippi becomes the first city in Europe to host a church.

And not only that, the church in Philippi also became the first ever on record to support Paul or any other missionary. As soon as Paul makes his next stop in Thessalonica, the Philippians are already sending him money (PHILIPPIANS 4:15-16; 2 CORINTHIANS 11:9). Thanks to Lydia.

- Never underestimate the Father heart of God. His will is that none should perish. He works on both ends of the conversion process. He simultaneously prepares the witness and the pre-believer. Then he brings them together. And there is a harvest. It happens five times in the Book of Acts: Phillip and the Ethiopian (ACTS 8). Ananias and Saul (ACTS 9). Peter and Cornelius (ACTS 10). Paul and Lydia (ACTS 16). Paul and the Philippian jailer (ACTS 16). This is amazing grace. In Singapore, many are shunning religion (THE STRAITS TIMES, MAY 2016). But don't despair. Look up. God has the last word. Ask in faith, hope, and love. He is already preparing the Church and Singapore for a bumper harvest. Towards Celebration of Hope 2019, pray for open heavens, open hearts, open homes, open harvest. Ask the Spirit to lead you—not just your pastor or cell leader, but YOU—to hearts that he has opened in answer to your prayers (16:9-10). Make the most of every opportunity.
- Never underestimate the drawing power of Jesus. There are Lydias in First World Singapore: Women who realise that *life does not consist in an abundance of possessions* (LUKE 12:15). Women who want more than fashion and fortune. Women who have had enough with vanity fair and realise their deep need for God. Look for the *Lydia-links* in your sphere of influence. Perhaps it's a relative or a former classmate who has become a successful entrepreneur. Maybe it's someone you admire from a distance. Perhaps a VIP, a high official, a newsmaker, or a social media influencer. Talk to God about each one. Contend for their salvation daily. Pray for divine appointments. Ask God to cause every Lydia to pay attention to the Message and the messengers he sends their way.
- Never underestimate the power of the Gospel on your lips. The promise of Pentecost is that *everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved* (ACTS 2:21). But—*how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?* (ROMANS 10:14). Ask God to free us from indifference and inertia. Pray for greater urgency and confidence to speak up. Through the foolishness of preaching, God saves the lost (1 CORINTHIANS 1:21).
- Never underestimate the power of God through women disciples. *Women such as Lydia were not at the margins in the first decades of the Jesus' movement. They were not silent in the churches or ineffective in evangelism. They cared for local congregations and were vital and strategic players at the forefront of the expanding Christian mission. A church was established in Philippi because of Lydia's open heart and her open home, and it grew because of her patronage, her initiative, her courage, her ministry* (MARGARET MOWCZKO). From generation to generation, ask God to raise up marketplace leaders like Lydia to open homes, communities and cities to the Gospel.

ACTS 16
¹⁶ As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.
¹⁷ She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation."
¹⁸ And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her."
 And it came out that very hour.
¹⁹ But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers...
²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.
²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon

The place of prayer was getting popular. A slave-girl with a spirit of divination gave the missionaries free advertisement. But Paul needed no publicity from hell. He delivered the girl of the fortune-telling spirit. When her owners saw their fortune gone with the wind they retaliated.

Paul and Silas paid a high price for their obedience. They were mobbed, stripped, flogged, and placed in a maximum security prison with their feet in stocks. These instruments of torture fasten your feet into a board with holes, forcing your legs apart and causing excruciating pain and muscle cramps.

Put yourself in their stocks. How would you respond? Some people won't sing in church if the aircon breaks down. Or if their favourite band isn't featured. Much of what we call 'worship' nowadays is increasingly generated by the sensational. We are moved by what we see and hear on stage—the visuals and the vibrations. What on earth would we do in a deep dark dungeon with our feet in stocks?

How did the apostles respond? Instead of dwelling on themselves and giving in to despair, they defied the impossible. They magnified God above every problem and pain. In the pitch of night, with backs bleeding and muscles cramping, they prayed and sang hymns to God. This is not a normal human response to oppression and injustice. It expresses the deep conviction that, no matter how bad things go, Christ is King, he is in control, and he is working all things together for good. This gave Paul the moral right to remind the Philippians later on to *rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice* (PHILIPPIANS 4:4).

How did God respond? He listened. He acted. As Luke shows repeatedly in his Gospel and Acts, spiritual disciplines trigger spiritual power. Prayer and praise in the Philippian prison set off a seismic demonstration of God's awesome deliverance. The foundations of the prison were shaken. Chains fell off. Doors flew open. And most importantly, the jailer and his entire household opened their hearts and home to the Gospel and the missionaries. That hard-nosed warden who was accustomed to torturing prisoners now washes the wounds of Paul and Silas and feeds them at his table. Prayer and praise opens prison doors, sets captives free, and brings positive outcomes from impossible situations.

- Wake up! Tradition has it that Satan was once the worship leader in heaven. He lost his platform because of pride. He wants it back. He retaliates. He mutes the praise of the saints. He reduces our singing to a mere Sunday ritual, a programme filler to satisfy our religious conscience. He promotes songs so unsingable that people barely move their lips. Songs so unfamiliar, we no longer hear passionate voices rising from the pews, harmonising praises to God. Songs so complex they are more suited for solo performance than corporate praise. Congregational singing has become congregational staring. This is a great loss to the Church. Christianity is a singing faith. To what extent has your church fallen for this folly? In brokenness, ask God to forgive our lack of discernment. Pray for godly zeal to put our house in order.
- Shake up! Songs of praise and worship are God's mighty weapons of warfare against the devil. Mary Slosser, missionary to China wrote: *I sing the Doxology and dismiss the devil*. Amy Carmichael, missionary to India said: *I believe truly that Satan cannot endure it and so, he slips out of the room when there is a true song*. Are you feeling lousy today? Defy the gloom. Magnify God. Dismiss the devil by giving God your highest praise. Sing aloud a true song of seismic praise. Exalt God above all else! *All hail the power of Jesus' name, let angels prostrate fall!*
- Rise up! 2018 Year of Prayer. 2019 Year of Proclamation. This is a God-thing. For that reason, we face intense spiritual warfare. The enemy hates it when we unite in prayer-evangelism. We will not be intimidated. This is not the time to hold back. This is the time to throw the enemy into utter confusion with our seismic praise. One Name, One Hope! Prayerwalk your block or workplace. Rejoice over the coming harvest with songs of praise from the depths of your being. *To God be the glory, great things he hath done! So loved he the world that he gave us his Son...*
- Shape up! We witness with our lives. Like it or not, trials bring out our true colours. If we haven't been practising the disciplines of Word, prayer, and praise in all circumstances good and bad, more likely than not, we will blow our top when things go wrong. Reflect on your life over the past half year. Were there more meltdowns than victories? If you have failed miserably, tarnished God's name, and lost your testimony, repent. Ask God for a second chance. Surrender your life fully to him—so that come what may, even in your darkest night, you are a worshipper, you are a witness, you are a winner. Shine brilliantly for Jesus.

them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened.

Acts 17:1-15
They came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. ² And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.'...
¹⁰ The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.
¹¹ Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. ¹² Many of them therefore believed, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.
Please continue reading to verse 15 in your Bible.

Reason is *faith seeking understanding*.
In his apostolic work, Paul persistently used reason to engage both believers and pre-believers with Divine Truth.

For example:

In Thessalonica, *he reasoned with [the Jews] from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead* (ACTS 17:2-3). In Athens, *he reasoned in the synagogue... in the marketplace every day* and with the city council (17:17-31). In Corinth, *he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks* (18:4). And that's not all.

On his first visit to Ephesus, *he went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews* (18:19). On his second visit, *he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God* (19:8). When opposition arose, he drew the disciples aside and reasoned with them in a lecture hall every day for two years (19:9). In Troas, he reasoned with believers through the night until Eutychus tumbled out of a window (20:7-9). In Caesarea, he reasoned with Felix the governor of Judea *about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment* until Felix trembled (24:25).

Faith and reason, therefore, are not mutually exclusive. Both are gifts from God. Truth transcends reason. But it doesn't contradict reason. Usually, it's when God wants to punish a person or nation, that he deprives them of reason. The Bible calls this *hardness of heart*.

There was a time when believers were more open to reason, like the Bereans, diving into the Word day and night, seeking pearls of wisdom and knowledge (17:11). In those days you could actually reason with people from Scripture. You could even allude to some obscure text or story and they would get it.

Those days are gone. Biblical literacy has declined. The Bible is no longer our reference point. Social media is our new reference point. New Age relativism has crept in. The ultimate value is self. The only authority is me—*how I feel*. Complacency and compromise have replaced spiritual hunger and the search for Truth. There is no point praying for revival if we don't repent and return to the Word of God as our reference point, as the *Logos*, as the basis of all Truth and Reality—before we lose our capacity to reason.

I believe that the greatest threat to Christianity is the anti-intellectualism that permeates the church. For about a century now, Christians have largely retreated from the intellectual arena and entrenched themselves in a version of Christianity that emphasises feelings, experience, and pragmatism, and have ignored the life of the mind. We have adopted a view of faith that sees it as opposed to reason. The result has been the marginalisation of the church from the larger culture and our inability to be salt and light, and the increasing secularisation of our society (STEVE B. COWAN).

■ A pastor was asked why his church attracted so many young adults. His answer: *I think it is because we are willing to welcome a lot of questions*. Fact is, secularism is on the rise, powered by social media. Our young struggle with doubts about God and faith. More and more, they are made to feel stupid for believing in Jesus. They want answers to their questions. They want to know how to respond to the criticisms, objections, and attacks of skeptics they meet online and offline.

Have we been slow to recognise this crisis? Have we underestimated the warfare ravaging young minds? Are we misreading their felt needs? Have we shortchanged them? Wake up. Ponder and pray this warning from apologist Nancy Pearcey: *Instead of addressing teens' questions, most church youth groups focus on fun and food. The goal seems to be to create emotional attachment using loud music, silly skits, slapstick games and pizza. But the force of sheer emotional experience will not equip teens to address the ideas they will encounter when they leave home and face the world on their own... Teaching young people to engage critically with secular worldviews is no longer an option. It is a necessary survival skill*.

■ Pray for a radical mindshift in the Church. That we will arm our young with thinking skills to defend their faith. Acknowledge the mind and the power to reason as gifts from God. We are commanded to love God with our minds (MATTHEW 22:37). We are commanded to be ready always to give an answer to anyone who asks (1 PETER 3:15). Pray for a culture of learning and reasoning to grow a thinking faith. Where our young can freely express their doubts. Where their questions are welcomed and *seen as faith-forming opportunities rather than freak out moments of failure. It's not doubt that's toxic to faith. It's silence* (FULLER YOUTH INSTITUTE).

■ To our young, the leaders of tomorrow in our post-truth world: Pray for hunger pangs that drive you to search and scrutinise God's Word, like the noble-minded and teachable Bereans. Dig deeper. Test all things. Discern truth from error. Pray for hunger pangs so intense that you will not let a day go by without feeding on God's Word. Devote yourself to serious Bible study as a spiritual discipline to renew your mind—so that you will be confident and articulate, knowing what you believe and why you believe Christianity is true, rational and credible.

ACTS 17:16-21
Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, 'What does this babbler wish to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities'—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?' ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.' ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

Athens. It had once been the education centre of the ancient world. But by the time of Acts, it had lost its former glory. Athenians now occupied themselves with superstitions, pagan festivals, and trivial debates. Like social media addicts, they spent all their time just *telling or hearing something new* (ACTS 17:21).

You might think a seasoned apostle like Paul would have outgrown culture shock at this stage of his career. Not completely. In deep solidarity with the God who is *Jealous*, Paul was shaken to the core by the idolatry of Athens. His spirit was *provoked* within him when he saw the city overgrown with idols (:16).

The word *provoked* here means *deeply distressed, irritated, exasperated*. Are we likewise exasperated by the darkness in our city and world today? Or have we become so indifferent that we don't even notice it anymore?

While Paul was provoked, he didn't react. Alone with God in a forest of idols, he engaged the city and confronted its darkness with the Light of the Gospel. Like a skillful farmer, he sowed seed in every field. First, he *reasoned in the synagogue* with Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. Then every day in the marketplace with anyone who would listen (:17). And next he engaged the Areopagus on their own turf and terms (:18-22).

The Areopagus was not a benign debating society. It was both the City Council and the Supreme Court of Athens. It could intervene in all areas of corporate life. It had judicial authority to try any crime and inflict the death penalty. The Areopagus presented Paul with his greatest challenge yet as a communicator: *May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean* (:19-21). Like Socrates before him, Paul was accused of introducing foreign deities to Athens.

Paul was ready in season and out of season. The challenge of Athens drew out the best of him. Much was at stake. The speech that follows is not only a textbook example of cross-cultural communication. It's also one of the greatest tributes ever to the One True God whose name is *Jealous* (EXODUS 34:14). Let the Supreme Court of Athens hear his voice. Come what may.

■ We live in a garden of gods. Have we become numb to the idolatry around us? Many of our churches are not as evangelistic as they once were. Why? Below are some possible reasons (adapted from a poll). Review them carefully. Respond to each one honestly in terms of *very true, quite true, or not true*.

- 01 Christians are not gripped by the reality of judgment and hell (REVELATION 20:15).
- 02 Christians have lost their burden to reach the lost.
- 03 Christians lack a sense of urgency to reach the lost.
- 04 Christians do not befriend and spend time with the lost.
- 05 Christians are lazy, indifferent, and apathetic.
- 06 Christians are known more for what we are against than what we are for.
- 07 Churches have an evangelistic mindset of *you come* rather than *we go*.
- 08 Christians think that evangelism is the role of the pastor and paid staff.
- 09 Christians see Church as meeting my needs rather than reaching the lost.
- 10 Christians are in a retreat mode as culture becomes more secular.
- 11 Christians hold back from sharing the Gospel for fear of offending others.
- 12 Christians don't really believe that Christ is the only way of salvation.
- 13 Churches are no longer houses of prayer with a passion for the lost.
- 14 Churches have lost their focus on training disciples to reach the lost.
- 15 Churches have theological systems that do not encourage evangelism.
- 16 Churches have too many things going on, and so they have no time and no energy for what really matters like evangelism and world missions.

- Reflect deeply on each reason. Highlight those that apply to you and your church. Pray over each issue. In brokenness, pray for a mighty awakening. May we see and hear the cries of the lost going into eternity without Christ (HEBREWS 9:27). Lord, soften our hearts to love and win the lost with a great sense of urgency.
- Life and death hang in the balance. Bring pre-believers before the Lord. Pour out your heart for each one by name—that *they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will* (2 TIMOTHY 2:26).
- Pray for a revival of evangelistic passion among Christian students and thinkers in the world of academia. That whenever they open their mouths to witness, they will experience a new anointing to proclaim the Gospel clearly, disarming all arguments, touching the heart and the intellect of skeptics and seekers alike.

ACTS 17:22–28
Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth.... ²⁵ ...gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'

Paul was not idle among the idols. While waiting for Silas and Timothy, he did some serious prayer walking and spiritual mapping in Athens. Vexed as he was in a forest of idols, he didn't call down fire. Nor did he hide away in a backpacker hostel. He went around the city, forcing his Christian eyes to scrutinise the idols and read their inscriptions (ACTS 17:23).

Why would Paul, a monotheistic Jew, so thoroughly repulsed by idolatry subject himself to such a horrid ordeal? Because he is a witness. He not only has a big heart. He also has a brain between his ears. He understands a thing or two about humanity, about non-Jewish peoples, and about their religion too. He knows the heart of God in relation to all the peoples of the earth.

First of all, God is not Israel's tribal deity. Just as he is at work in Israel and the Holy Land, he is forever and intricately involved in the history of all peoples, including the Athenians. Including the migrant workers of Singapore and the unreached peoples of Asia. *From one man, says Paul, God made every ethnic group on earth and determined their times and borders* (:26 CT). Because God is involved in the unreached peoples, Paul gets involved. Do we?

Second, Paul knows that God *has not left himself without witness* (ACTS 14:17). Our God desperately wants to be found. Like Hansel and Gretel dropping bread crumbs in the forest, God leaves clues pointing to himself in every religion, in every people, even in their poetry and on their artefacts (17:23, 28).

Third, Paul understands that Jesus is the fulfilment of every religious quest. The deepest longing of every heart is satisfied in Jesus. The desperate search for well-being, meaning in life, and hope in the face of death has its end in Christ alone.

So that's why Paul scrutinises the idols of Athens. He is looking for clues that God has left behind. He finds one. *For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you* (ACTS 17:23).

Go, therefore! Follow God's footprints into every community of Singapore, Asia, and the world. Find the clues that point to heaven. Proclaim Jesus.

- Are you idle among the idols? Is your heart *deeply distressed* by the sight, sound and smell of idolatry? What can we do? Start with prayer: deep, intimate *beseeking-prayer-in-brokenness* (BISHOP RENNIS PONNIAH). Then do like Paul. Go out and prayerwalk your community. Ask God to show you the clues he has left behind to open hearts and minds. Confess the Truth: Jesus is the fulfilment of every religious quest. Jesus satisfies the deepest longing of every heart. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. *Salvation is in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved* (ACTS 4:12). Declare: The simple Gospel on my lips is the power of God to set captives free from idolatry and sin. I am God's chosen instrument to shine his light where there is darkness. Online and offline, I am anointed to publish Good News (ISAIAH 52:7). And I will. Boldly, wisely, and in love.
- Beyond religious expressions, how else does idolatry show up in Singapore? Someone confessed: *The biggest idol is self. Myself. Once upon a time, I was a nobody. Suddenly, social media turns me into a star. The world is my parish and social media is my pulpit. Swooning fans prop me up with their endless likes, shares, and retweets. I love the attention. I'm addicted. It drives me to constantly check the status. This sounds weird but I seriously want to know how I am being 'worshipped' and adored and admired through my social media kingdom.* Pause and think. How real is this phenomenon? Are you part of the trend? If so, turn to God in repentance. He does not condemn. He convicts. He forgives. Because he loves. Pray especially for Millennials, the digital natives. They are most vulnerable.
- God is a people mover. He orchestrates the migration of peoples so that they will seek him, reach for him, and find him. Three in ten of Singapore's population are foreign nationals. They live, work, and study here for a season. They are a vast mission field on our doorstep. Pray that we will be impartial to all—regardless of their nationality, history, culture, race, language, religion, and socio-economic status. Pray especially for the blue-collar migrant workers, the unsung heroes of our economic progress. They work hard at building, cleaning, and greening our city. They represent some of Asia's mega unreached people groups. Ask God to burden our hearts for their salvation and move us to seek their welfare. Look for God's signature acts of grace among them. Follow his footprints into the harvest. On behalf of Singapore, speak life: Lord, we welcome all foreigners into our city and churches, our hearts and homes. We bless them in Jesus' name. Pour out favour and fruitfulness beyond measure on churches and ministries that are actively reaching out to them. For those who are passive, ignite a passion to do something. Birth new congregations to disciple new believers and train new leaders. Let a Jesus People movement arise from within every migrant group!

ACTS 18:1-8
After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus... ⁸ And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.

Dear Singapore, We have a lot in common with you. We are multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural. We have a Jewish synagogue and plenty of temples, shrines, altars, and gods to choose from. We're a sprawling metropolis and a thriving commercial centre. We are a busy port city too, linking trade between East and West. Homer called us *Wealthy Corinth*. We are super-efficient, self-sufficient, and super-rich. We work hard and play hard. Tourists and traders come here from all over in search of profit and pleasure.

You have your five Cs. And we have ours: Clout, Cash, Comfort, Chian wine, and Corinthian girl. That last C is a euphemism for a prostitute. *Not for every man the journey to Corinth*, says an old proverb. Meaning you might squander all your money in the red light district. Aphrodite, the goddess of free love and patroness of prostitutes, has her temple on a hilltop 500 metres above our city. We are Corinth. This is how Paul found us in AD50.

At first he joined our workforce, making tents and addressing our synagogue once a week. But when his friends arrived with gifts from Macedonia, Paul quit work and went to preaching non-stop about Jesus Christ (2 CORINTHIANS 11:9). His message was both simple and reasonable. Not in lofty language, but with strong conviction and signs and wonders. Many of us believed, knowing deep inside that faith in Jesus is not based on human wisdom, but on the power of God.

Paul was proud of us. We were his most charismatic church. We excelled in all the gifts of the Spirit. But we lacked spiritual discipline. After Paul left, we quarrelled. We sued each other in court. We formed cliques around foreign speakers. Some of us went back to temples and ate food offered to idols. One of our members slept with his stepmother. Others visited Corinthian girls. When Paul heard about all this, he tore into us with a series of letters. It took a long time, but we eventually got our act together, more or less.

We really do have a lot in common, Singapore. And by the way, we hear that you aspire to be an Antioch for Asia. That resonates with us. Paul came to us from Antioch of Syria. We really hope you make it. But please, read Paul's letters to us. Just make sure you don't become the Corinth of Asia.

With faith, hope, and love: Corinth

Dear Corinth,

Thank you for the timely reminder. The close match between your demographics and ours is quite striking. We are virtually twin cities. We share a common set of temptations and vices, as you so diplomatically pointed out in your letter. Your word of warning was not lost on us.

As for the Antioch of Asia, yes, that is our big dream. But not all of us agree. Forty years ago we too were visited by a great evangelist who changed the spiritual landscape of our city, as Paul did yours. His name is Graham. Billy Graham. While he was here, some of our leaders felt an inner witness that Singapore is to be an Antioch of Asia. Some say that Graham actually challenged the Singapore Church to be a missionary sending Church, and *prophesied that Singapore would be like Antioch in the New Testament, sending missionaries to all of Asia* (SELAH MAGAZINE).

Others, however, who were with Graham during all his meetings, insist that he said no such thing, and that the claim has no basis in history. On hearing this, some of us who have been waving the Antioch flag over Singapore were humbled into silence. Have we been living a lie? Dreaming a pipe dream?

Well, even if Mr Graham didn't say it, somehow, the conviction that Singapore is an Antioch for Asia has taken root in the hearts of many, especially our young. There seems to be a prophetic witness that our nation is destined by God to play a crucial role in world evangelisation—as Antioch did in the first few centuries of Christian History. Is there anything wrong with that? Are we being proud and triumphalistic like the Corinthians? I mean... Oops. Sorry, a slip of the pen.

Dear Corinth, please pray for us. Something deeply troubling is happening in our city. Up there you have Aphrodite, the goddess of free love. Down here we have Pink Dot, a movement promoting the *freedom to love*, so called. Today is their 10th anniversary. Their ambassador has openly divulged their real motive. He said that Pink Dot has *always been a social movement to change hearts and minds* in favour of homosexuality. Their agenda is first to get rid of our law (377A) that criminalises homosexuality. And then they will push to legalise same-sex marriage.

Pink Dot has inspired copy cats around the world: Hong Kong, Montreal, Toronto, New York, Okinawa, Utah, Anchorage, London, Malaysia, Taiwan. To our shame, we are exporting trash! Some of us see this as a perversion of our Antioch calling. So, what are we becoming? Antioch? Corinth? Or Sodom? We repent. Please remember us in prayer. Just know this: we are not against homosexuals. They need Jesus. We want them to know Jesus—the ultimate definition of what true love is.

With faith, hope, and love: Singapore

ACTS 19:1-10
Paul...came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ² And he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.' ³ And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' They said, 'Into John's baptism.' ... ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all. ⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Have you heard of the Holy Spirit? Paul encountered twelve disciples in Ephesus who never heard of the Holy Spirit! This may not be as strange as it sounds. There was a tradition in Judaism that Israel had grieved the Spirit until he finally withdrew from the land. So the Prophet Malachi had no real successors—until John the Baptist. These Ephesian disciples had received John's baptism. But they had never heard that the Spirit of God had returned to Israel with earth-shaking power, as John the Baptist had predicted. Like Apollos before them, they were pre-Pentecostals (ACTS 18:24–28).

Paul didn't lecture them on Pneumatology, the theology of the Spirit. He introduced them to the Holy Spirit in Person. The initial evidence that they had received the Spirit was tongues and prophecy (19:6). The ultimate evidence, however, was power and witness, as Jesus promised in Acts 1:8. Within two years, *all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks* (1:10). Ephesus became the next great centre of Christianity and missions after Antioch.

Ever heard of Azusa Street? We all have. Our problem is not *ignorance* of the Spirit but *ignoring* the Spirit. We are not pre-Pentecostals, like Apollos and the twelve Ephesian disciples. We are post-Pentecostals. We embrace the doctrine of the Spirit. Some of us make a big deal of *initial* evidence. But where is the *ultimate* evidence of Acts 1:8 and Acts 19:10—power and witness? How often do we encounter the overwhelming presence and power of the Spirit in ways that the great physicist Stephen Hawking could not have explained?

Some years later, Paul had to remind the church at Ephesus to stop drinking wine and to drink deeply and constantly of the Spirit (EPHESIANS 5:18). One generation later, the Ephesians had drifted away from their first love and their first works (REVELATION 2:4). From then until now, the vast majority of Christians have never experienced the gifts and miracles of the Spirit that empowered witness and missions in Acts.

The Spirit has not withdrawn from us. We have withdrawn from him—not in principle, but in practice. The modern Pentecostal-charismatic movement grew out of a deep dissatisfaction with this great omission and a fervent cry for the fullness of the Spirit: *O God, fill me with yourself and your power or I die* (GORDON FEE). May this be our cry!

- Something is missing. Who can deny it? The Early Church experienced the Holy Spirit as an overwhelming presence that empowered evangelism and world missions with signs and wonders. But for most Christians today, the Spirit is little more than a line in the Creed or a *quiet, unobtrusive presence* (GORDON FEE). Pause. Ponder and pray. Are you pre-Pentecostal or post-Pentecostal? Being baptised with the Holy Spirit means *being filled with God. It is not 'getting high' on God, a sort of euphoric, giddy happiness, all froth and bubble... He does not come to give us an emotional experience. But make no mistake about it: his presence is heart-moving... He is the original life force meant to empower us to live victoriously, abundantly and to be a witness to the world* (REINHARD BONNKE). Ask God to fill you to overflowing with his Holy Spirit again and again.
- Something is amiss. We like to sing *Holy Spirit, you are welcome here*. Do we really mean it? Pray: Lord, forgive us. We are often oblivious to your Spirit's promptings in our gatherings. Even when we sense your promptings, we sometimes ignore them. We foolishly think our well-thought scripts and event run sheets are better. We are hard of hearing. We are void of power. We are empty. We repent. We desperately need a new Outpouring. Fill us again to overflowing. Fuel our prayers. Fire up our hearts to turn the world right side up as in the days of Acts. Confirm our witness with signs and wonders following.
- Something is brewing. Many sense that *we could well be on the cusp of a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit* (BISHOP RENNIS PONNIAH). God always has his catalysts. *It only takes a spark to get the fire going*. Paul was the spark for Ephesus. Will you be a spark for your church? In the revival meetings at Azusa Street, the one-eyed preacher, William Seymour, would keep his head down in a shoebox and commune with God until the Holy Spirit moved him to speak. Miracles were happening all around him. But that was not enough. He waited on God for the Message to be birthed within him like a fire in his bones. Pray! What the Church needs today is not more media frenzy or clever theatrics or goofy parties, but more shoeboxes, and more self-emptying servants whom the Spirit can fill to the max for his purpose.
- Somethings are worth repeating. Such as this declaration adapted from the Lausanne Covenant: *We believe in the power of the Holy Spirit....The Holy Spirit is a missionary Spirit. Evangelism arises spontaneously from a Spirit-filled church. A church without missions contradicts itself and quenches the Spirit. World evangelisation will become possible when the Spirit renews the Church in truth and wisdom, faith and holiness, love and power. Therefore, we call on Christians everywhere to cry to God for a visitation of the Spirit. Only then will the whole Church become a fit instrument in God's hands to take the whole Gospel to the whole world*. Turn this declaration into intercession for the Singapore Church.

ACTS 19:11-12
And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

Ephesus had a dark side. It was a centre of magic arts and home to sorcerers, charlatans, and various cults. But God took the initiative and did *extraordinary miracles* through Paul (ACTS 19:11). Most people have never seen an ordinary miracle, let alone an extraordinary one.

Cure by contact was a dominant feature in the ministry of Jesus. Countless people were healed by touching the hem of his garment. Jesus promised his disciples that by faith they would do even greater works than his (JOHN 14:12). And so it happened. After Pentecost, healings and exorcisms occurred in Peter's shadow (ACTS 5:15-16). Bible Scholar C.K. Barrett considers this *the most astounding piece of miracle-working* in the New Testament.

Similarly, handkerchiefs and aprons carried from Paul's body brought healing and deliverance to the sick and demon possessed (19:12). It seems strange that God would use this form of miracle in a centre of magic like Ephesus. But God knows how to play his cards. When charlatans try to get in on the act, they are exposed and dismissed, while the name of Jesus is glorified (:13-20).

Miracles point to Jesus. Miracles confirm the Message. It is about saving souls and so much more. The Incarnation demonstrates God's absolute solidarity with the whole range of human misery, not just the spiritual part of us. God does greater works through his servants, not just to upstage charlatans and sorcerers, but to heal broken hearts, minds, and bodies.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (HEBREWS 13:8). His healing touch is available to all who touch him in faith and touch the sick with compassion. John G. Lake was one of the greatest healing evangelists of the 20th century. His *Healing Rooms* in Spokane, Washington saw more than 100,000 medically confirmed healings in five years. And in the ministry of Smith Wigglesworth, handkerchiefs taken from his body brought healing and deliverance to hundreds of people.

God does extraordinary miracles through ordinary people who trust in him, abide in him, and reach out in compassion to those who are hurting. *Greater works than these shall you do* (JOHN 14:12).

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION).

■ Health is wealth. Did you know that access to healthcare is a basic human right? Are you aware that this is one of the most critical issues facing humanity today? Singapore is blessed. We enjoy quality and affordable healthcare, thanks to our good government for doing a great job. There is more to be done and our government knows they cannot do it alone. Due to our global status as a travel and trade hub, we are extremely vulnerable to new infectious diseases. Due to ageing, dementia is on the rise, and more will suffer chronic ailments. Due to bad habits and First World anxieties, many are sick or at risk. Diabetes, cancer, stroke, heart attack, and depression are constant threats. More children today are thinking of suicide (THE NEW PAPER, 30 MAY 2018). Are we not concerned?

Will the Church help shoulder this national burden? Pray that we will go beyond the medical and usher in a new way from the Gospel perspective: One, miracle healing is available in the name of Jesus. Two, access to miracle healing is a basic human right because Christ has paid the price for all. Three, miracle healing is the most underutilised power available to the Church today. Four, the ministry of healing is God's universal health coverage to ensure that no one is left behind. Five, the ministry of healing is people-centred care that should be restored as a priority in every local church. To what extent has the Singapore Church embraced or violated any or all the above? Pray for strong convictions that lead to strong action. Lord, make Singapore your oasis of healing in a world of sickness.

■ Think biblically. Act rightly. The power-promises in the Gospels and Acts are almost always in the context of evangelism and missions (STUDY MATTHEW 10:1, 7-8; LUKE 9:1-2; 10:1, 8-9; MATTHEW 28:18-19; MARK 16:15-20; LUKE 24:47-49; ACTS 1:8; JOHN 20:21-22). *As you go, proclaim the good news.... Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons* (MATTHEW 10:7-8). Jesus promised power to go. But we want power to stay. We camp out in the upper room and bless each other with words and wonders. Pray: Lord, forgive us. We've been content to live without your healing power. We've settled for less. Towards Celebration of Hope 2019, we want more. Make us your healing evangelists everywhere to touch and reach the lost. Anoint every local church to be your house of miracles. Make every extraordinary miracle a stunning headline, turning Singapore Godwards.

■ Ponder this: It is not wrong for Christians to receive medical help if they fall sick. But we grieve God's heart when we seek medical aid without first seeking him for healing, either directly, or through anointing with oil and prayer by the elders. Please read James 5:14-15 and 2 Chronicles 16:12. Pray.

ACTS 19:13-20
Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.'¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?'¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.¹⁷ And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus.... And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.¹⁸ Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.¹⁹ And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.²⁰ So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Who are you? Apart from Acts 19:14, history knows of no Jewish high priest by the name of Sceva. His name is not even Jewish.

He may have been a quack. But in any case, his seven sons made a career of exorcism.

Jewish exorcists cast out demons using various formulas and incantations. They invoked the names of angels such as Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and dozens more. Excited by Paul's successful cures and exorcisms in Ephesus, the seven sons of Sceva decided to try out the name of Jesus on a demon. The spirit answered back: *Jesus I know, and Paul I recognise, but who are you?* (ACTS 19:15)

The ritual backfired. The demon singlehandedly expelled all seven exorcists. The news went viral. The name of Jesus was exalted throughout the city. Magicians renounced their arts and set fire to a mountain of magic books worth a fortune. So what's the take away?

First, God does extraordinary miracles to exalt the name of Jesus, to set captives free, to relieve human suffering, and to spread the Gospel. The bottom line reads: *So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily* (:20). Most miracles recorded in the New Testament occur in the context of evangelism and missions.

Second, the story makes a fundamental distinction between those who invoke the name of Jesus as devoted disciples and those who use his name to make a name for themselves and a buck on the side. Jesus warns those who work miracles with one hand and iniquity with the other. Come Judgment Day, they will stake their claim on charismatic manifestations: *Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?* But Jesus will say, *I never knew you* (MATTHEW 7:21-23).

Have you ever greeted a dear old friend who didn't recognise you? How did it feel? It's one thing not to be known by a demon. But to be unknown by Jesus? Devastating! Those who love and obey God are known by Jesus and feared by devils. Do the demons of Singapore know you? They know Billy Graham. And Rick Seaward too. But who are you? A social media star? Who cares! Does Jesus recognise you? You may even run a big ministry and work great miracles. But if Jesus doesn't know you, you're just a great unknown.

■ Memorise and pray the Word: *God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity'* (2 TIMOTHY 2:19).

■ Search deeply. *There's room at the Cross for you.* But is there room in your heart for Christ? Are you neglecting your precious one-on-one time with him? Are you and Jesus becoming strangers? Gently he knocks on the door of your heart. He does not push. Softly he calls. He does not shout. Has your soul grown so overcrowded and noisy that you cannot hear his knock and call? How is it that we can waste two or three or four hours a day on social media but find it so hard to spend 20 minutes alone with Jesus in quietness and stillness? Are we losing our sanity?

Pray: Lord Jesus, I confess I hardly know you. I hear about you in sermons and blogs, facebook feeds and tweets. But my conversations with you are touch and go. I am embarrassed. Forgive me for neglecting my relationship with you. I long for change. Real change. Deep change. Inside-out change. Lasting change. Help me to cultivate a genuine friendship with you. I sincerely want more of you in my life. *More of your voice in my ear. More of your tears on my face. More of your praise on my lips. More of your death in my life. More of your dirt in my hands. More of your hope in my grief. More of your fruit in my service. More of your love in my heart. More of your courage in my convictions. More of your nearness in my loneliness. More of your answers to my prayers. And more of your glory on my knees* (ANNE GRAHAM LOTZ | ADAPTED). Come, Lord Jesus. Be the centre of my life.

■ Act biblically. Paul said: *Earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way* (1 CORINTHIANS 12:31). There is absolutely nothing spiritual about putting down miracles in the name of love, the more excellent way (1 CORINTHIANS 13). It's not either-or. It's both-and. Thank God, the more excellent way does not rule out the higher gifts. Thank God, it's not love *versus* gifts, but love *validates* gifts. Love and only love validates all spiritual gifts and Christian virtues (RUSSELL SPITLER). We owe Singapore a huge debt of love: the Gospel of Love. Pray for more churches to move in the power gifts to heal the sick, lift the lame, raise the dead, cast out demons—and in this way open the hearts of pre-believers to the wonders of Jesus' love. Pray that the whole church will *earnestly desire the higher gifts as we reach out to Singapore in a more excellent way—to proclaim the One Name that gives the world solid hope* (CELEBRATION OF HOPE 2019).

■ Plead strongly. Some who began in the Spirit are now veering off in the flesh. They pursue charismatic gifts without character. Like the sons of Sceva, they crave spiritual power for personal gain and fame. Ask God to deal with them and redeem their lives before disaster strikes, before their private sin becomes a public scandal.

I must see Rome.

Paul is not a tourist hankering for a holiday. He's a missionary homesick for the frontier. His third missionary journey is winding down. So what next? A sabbatical? A pastorate in one of his local churches? No and No. Paul's letter to the Romans, which was written about this time, reveals his pioneering spirit: *But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for many years, to come to you when I go to Spain* (ROMANS 15:23-24 NRSV).

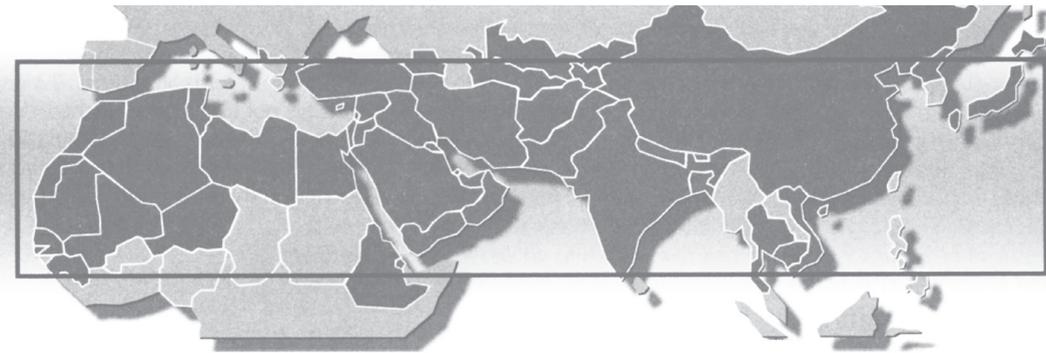
No further place in these regions? How can that be? There were still many unevangelised cities and unreached peoples in those regions. But Paul considered his work there complete. Why? Because he expected the churches he founded to continue evangelising the East, while he broke new ground in the West.

Paul could have made a career of nurturing churches. No one did it better. But as an apostle, his highest priority was reaching the unreached. He would leave 99 sheep in the wild to seek and save one that is lost: *Thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named* (ROMANS 15:20).

But first, Paul had unfinished business in Jerusalem. Early in his career, Peter, James, and John encouraged him to *remember the poor* (GALATIANS 2:10). Paul didn't need reminding. Leading scholars agree and Paul's letters confirm that during his last mission trip in Acts, he went round the churches he had planted, collecting alms for the poor in Jerusalem (ACTS 20:25; 24:17-18; ROMANS 15:23-29; 1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-4; 2 CORINTHIANS 8:3-5, 19; 9:1-2, 12).

The seven men listed in Acts 20:4 represent the Gentile churches from which Paul took up the collection. They go with Paul to Jerusalem now, not just to keep an eye on the money, which is wise, but also to demonstrate and preserve the unity of the Spirit between the Jewish and Gentile Church *as fellow heirs and members of the same body* (EPHESIANS 3:6). This would put the finishing touch on Paul's ten plus years of apostolic work in the Eastern provinces: *When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain* (ROMANS 15:28).

God's mission is holistic: saving souls and saving bodies; preaching Good News and doing good works; loving God and loving neighbour. Remember the poor. Remember the unreached.



■ Remember the poor. Remember the unreached. The world's poorest of the poor are also the least reached peoples today. Where are they? Not far from us, actually. Most of them live in cities within a seven-hour flight radius from First World Singapore. Take a good look at the map above. We call this the 10|40 Window. It stretches from Morocco in the west to Japan in the east. 69 nations in all. Home to 4.4 billion people. 40% have never heard the Gospel, not even once! Every major religion in the world has its roots right here. This is where Christians suffer the worst persecution. This is where children are 'disciplined' to terrorise the innocent in the name of religion. With eyes of faith, ask God for the humanly impossible: Abundant Gospel sowing. Divine visitations. Unprecedented turnings to Christ. Effective discipling. Church-planting movements. Community transformation. Human flourishing. Lord, pour out your Spirit on the 10|40 Window!

■ *Unreached peoples are unreached for a reason. They are hard, difficult, and dangerous to reach. All the easy ones are taken* (DAVID PLATT). Instead of just going to the same old easy places where churches are already planted and blooming, pray that we will pioneer new works among Asia's unreached peoples. Today, offer to God Singapore's best and brightest for a new era of Good News and good works in the 10|40 Window. Pray for divine favour. Ask for wisdom from above. Pray with godly imagination. Who knows? Through high-level Memorandums of Understanding, some may become nation-builders like Joseph and Daniel. *Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings* (PROVERBS 22:29). Call out pioneers with a new spirit of enterprise to mind our Father's business: In healthcare and biomedical. In education and human resource training. In housing and urban planning. In media and communications. In trade and commerce. In law and governance, and so much more. Pray that in so doing, we will alleviate poverty, we will make disciples who make disciples. We will contribute to the unfinished business of world missions. Let God hear your passionate, visionary prayers today.

ACTS 19:21
Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, 'After I have been there, I must also see Rome.'

ACTS 20:1-5
Paul...departed [from Ephesus] for Macedonia.
2 When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece.

3 There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.

4 Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. 5 These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas.

ACTS 24:17
Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings.

Remember the Lord's Day.

Paul's last visit to Troas marks the first account of Christians gathering together on the first day of the week to celebrate the Lord's Supper and hear the Word of God. This is where the Eucharist begins to replace the Passover, and Sunday begins to replace the Sabbath as the sacred day of rest and worship. Luke tells the story using the first person pronoun, *we*. So here we have a medical doctor's first-hand account of the dramatic death and revival of Eutyachus, whose name means *good luck*.

This was Paul's last sermon in Troas. He made the most of it. Three times our eye-witness author says that Paul went on and on (7, 9, 11). Perhaps Luke himself found it hard staying awake. Oil lamps were filling the stuffy room with smoke and fumes. Eutyachus was lucky enough to *chope* the coveted window-seat for a little ventilation.

But after midnight, the young man fell asleep and tumbled from his perch to his unfortunate death three floors below. Cutting his sermon short, Paul went down and raised the boy from the dead in the style of Elijah and Elisha (1 KINGS 17:21; 2 KINGS 4:34). By morning, Eutyachus was ushered out alive and wide awake. Fortunately.

This is one of the few miracles in Acts that occur in a church setting rather than in an evangelistic setting. The end result is not conversion but comfort (20:12). The story confirms that signs and wonders are not exclusively for evangelism and missions. They also happen in church. And why not? Our God is *the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God* (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4).

The fact that Eutyachus could sleep during Paul's preaching may console speakers today whose long sermons cause drowsiness. And those who sleep in church can also draw a little comfort from this: Anyone caught napping in the Qumran assembly, a strict Jewish sect in Paul's day, could be expelled for 30 days. The Church is more magnanimous. But still, try not to sleep through sermons, even if your name is Goodluck.

Remember the Lord's Day. Keep it holy.

The humorous side of the Eutyachus episode is charming and irresistible. But Luke wasn't trying to be funny. The story gives us a sober glimpse of community life in the Early Church. They gathered together on the Lord's Day. They listened to the Word. They celebrated the Eucharist. They communed and conversed all night long.

■ Remember the Lord's Day. Hebrews 10:25 says: *Do not abandon the assembling of yourselves together as some are in the habit of doing, but rather, encourage one another all the more as you see the day approaching* (CT). This was written during persecution, when church attendance could cost you not just a tithe but everything (HEBREWS 10:32-34; 11:26; 13:13). Even that was no excuse for skipping church. What's your excuse? Look at Eutyachus. *Though a young man, [he] was not indifferent, and though being overtaken by sleep, he did not leave* (JOHN CHRYSOSTOM). Pray: Lord Jesus, forgive me. I use the slightest excuse to absent myself from the regular gathering of your people. You created us for community. To do life together in mutual care. I confess my independence and indifference. I confront the root issue: I have taken you for granted. I have taken your Family for granted. I really don't love you deeply enough to care about your Family. I repent. Help me, Lord!

■ Remember the Lord's Word. After midnight, Paul *conversed with them a long while, until daybreak* (ACTS 20:11). The Greek word for *converse* is *homileo* as in *homily*. This carries the meaning of formality as well as intimacy. This was no small talk. They communed and conversed on the things of God, deep calling unto deep. When was the last time you engaged with friends all night long on spiritual things that really matter? Nowadays, this is extremely rare. Virtually extinct, especially in our virtual world of screens and streams. Pray: Lord Jesus, *you are the silent listener to every conversation*. You hear all our gripes and gossip, our endless chatter about food and fashion, trash and trivia. You record every idle word. You mark those whose conversations are centred on you: *Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name* (MALACHI 3:16). Forgive us our silly conversations and shallow digital relationships. Guard our hearts. Cleanse our lips. Lord, remember us.

■ Remember the Lord's Supper. The stated purpose of the gathering in Troas was to break bread (ACTS 20:7). The Early Church observed the Eucharist with holy awe. Some who failed to do so paid with their lives (READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:29-30). Pray: Lord Jesus, forgive us for times when we take Communion casually and carelessly. Although we are unworthy, help us to always approach your Table in a worthy manner—examining ourselves, repenting of sin, preserving the unity of the Body, and honouring all members of your Family regardless of status. Let every celebration of the Eucharist be a feast of forgiveness and love.

ACTS 20:7-12
On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together [in Troas] to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered. ⁹ And a young man named Eutyachus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third storey and was taken up dead. ¹⁰ But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.' ¹¹ And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. ¹² And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

Life is a mission.

The Apostle Paul devoted the best years of his life to *servicing the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials* (ACTS 20:18-19). These are three gifts that nobody wants: humility, tears, and trials. Paul wasn't in it for the perks. He knew a little saying of Jesus that isn't found in the Gospels: *It is more blessed to give than to receive* (:35). Paul was more blessed because he gave more. He gave all. He held back nothing that would benefit the Church and bring the lost to repentance and faith in Jesus.

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, he says to the Ephesian elders (:20). Paul was honest and comprehensive in his teaching and preaching. He didn't avoid hard truths in favour of pet topics. He covered all the bases and connected all the dots. *I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God* (:27).

This was Paul's last trip home. He describes himself as a man tied up in the Spirit: *The Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me* (:22-23). *In every city* means that Paul had been receiving these 'edifying' prophecies in churches he visited on this journey. But his heart was fixed. Like Jesus before him, he set his face to go to Jerusalem to be rejected by the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles (MARK 10:33; ACTS 21:11).

We say life is precious. But Paul says life is worthless if it does not fulfill God's purpose. *I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God* (:24). Life has meaning when it serves God's mission. When you complete your race and fulfil your purpose in life, death is gain.

Pastor Rick Seaward was a man who, like Paul, gave his all for God's mission. Through his leadership, more than 1,800 missionaries went out from Singapore, and more than 10,000 churches have been planted around the world. His sudden demise on 24th March 2018 has left a void that only God can fill. *Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit* (JOHN 12:24-26). Life is a mission. Fulfil it.

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (ACTS 20:20-21). *I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God* (:27). Think biblically. The *whole counsel of God* includes the moral and ethical demands of the Gospel. Jesus and Paul insisted that there are certain patterns of behaviour that exclude people from the kingdom of God. They did not shrink from preaching the whole Truth. Will you make it your life mission to preach the whole Truth?

- Truth hurts. For the love of God and the good of Singapore, pray that we will not shrink from teaching our young what is true, what is right, what is excellent. Pray that parents will lead their families in the holy fear of God and disciple their young in personal purity. Pray that church leaders will not shrink from dealing with the hot issue of public morality. 92% of those responding to an ETHOS survey said that it was important for the church to teach its members about responding to LGBT issues in the public square (JUNE 2018). Pray that we will educate the church and warn against the shameful fact of our times—that even smart adults have lost their moral compass and shamelessly *call evil good and good evil* (ISAIAH 5:20). That we will expose LGBT activism for what it really is: a dangerous ideology, an affront against God the Creator of Male and Female, the Founder of Marriage and Family. *What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace* (JOHN WESLEY). We have been complacent. In the fear of God, repent. Commit to teach the whole Truth.
- Truth stands. For the sake of public good, pray that we will not shrink from teaching our young that God's Word is the universal standard by which we live. That we cannot and we must not lower it to suit ourselves or to fit the prevailing mood of society. Pray that as we reach out to the gay community, we will not confuse our young with mixed signals of compromise. Pray for strong conviction to stay true to the Truth at all cost. *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away* (LUKE 21:33). *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth* (JOHN 17:17).
- Truth frees. For the healing of the nation, pray that we will not shrink from teaching our young the intrinsic worth of every human being. That the Church is not against the LGBT individual. But that we are against same-sex ideology because it violates creation order, it diminishes human dignity, it offends God, and it puts public health at risk. Pray that we will teach our young that we do not ostracise the LGBT person. Instead, we pray for them. We trust God for opportunities to reach out to them—because Christ died for all, including the LGBT. That Christ's body was broken so that the sexually-dysfunctional may be healed. *And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free* (JOHN 8:32). *Whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death* (JAMES 5:20).

ACTS 20:18-24 [Paul, to the elders of the church at Ephesus:] You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

ACTS 20:28-35
Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. ²⁹ I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears. ³³ I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. ³⁵ In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Attend to yourself first. Sound familiar? It should, if you travel by air. It's that bit of advice concerning the oxygen mask. If it drops from the overhead compartment, and you are travelling with a child, you must attend to yourself first and then to your child. If not, both of you might faint.

In the same way, church leaders should attend to themselves first and then to those under their care. This call to double-watchfulness stands at the centre of Paul's charge to the Ephesian elders: *Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God* (ACTS 20:28 NRSV). Many have neglected this warning to their own peril and shame. Failing to watch over their own lives, some shepherds have turned into wolves and ravaged the flock.

Paul is addressing *elders* or *presbyters* (:17). Verse 28 introduces two new terms for church leaders. The first is *shepherd* or *pastor*. The second is *overseer* or *bishop*. At this point, these are not titles nor ranks nor offices. These are the practical, moral, and spiritual duties of all church leaders. Acts 20 uses all three terms—*bishop*, *presbyter*, and *pastor*—synonymously (:17, 28). It was only later on, as the church institutionalised, that these became three distinct offices and titles.

This is not a gripe against church offices and institutions. They have their place. But serious problems arise when the spiritual, moral, and practical duties of church leaders are forgotten and replaced with egoism, elitism, and entitlements. Then we are left with the long flowing robes, honorific titles, and VIP seats that Jesus loathed—minus the duties (MARK 12:38–39). Paul saw it coming and warned against it. As a man of impeccable character, he was able to appeal to his own track record as a model of true servant leadership in the household of God.

Pastor, do you care for the Church of God which he purchased with his own blood? Then follow Paul's example. Heed his charge. Be alert. Shepherd yourself. Shepherd the flock. Admonish with tears. Covet no one's money or clothes or spouse. Work hard. Help the weak. And remember the words of Jesus: *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

■ It's world news. BBC. The Washington Post. The Straits Times. A prosperity televangelist told his fans that if Jesus were to return to earth today he would not ride on a donkey, but an airplane. He *would not get patted down by security*. Nor would he *settle for 30 inches of leg room*. *Why would (Jesus) choose anything less than the Falcon 7X, a private jet that bears the sound barrier, has noise-limiting acoustic technology, a Bluetooth-enabled entertainment centre and an optional in-flight shower?* The televangelist was asking his fans for S\$72 million to buy the Falcon to spread the Gospel. This would be his fourth jet.

Are you grieved to tears? Jesus *had no place to lay his head*. Paul served with *tears, trials, and humility*. He *coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing*. How far we've drifted from their example! We are a Church in crisis. Failing to watch over our souls, we self-inflate and speak twisted things to exploit and manipulate God's people. Such scandals undermine the witness of the Church. Turn to God in repentance. Identify with the shame and the sin of carnal Christians who have lost their fear of God and take more than they give.

■ Watchfulness is the mother of all virtues. Ambition is the *mother of all heresies* (JOHN CALVIN). Selfish ambitions, dissensions, and heresies hang together like beads on a string (GALATIANS 5:20, NKJV). Whether you're a pastor, missionary, lay leader, or simply a Christian, self-watch is your first duty. Have you been guarding your heart? Invite Jesus the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul to come inside, take inventory, crack the whip, turn the tables, cleanse the temple. Ask him to purge out all ego, all illusions of self-importance, every tinge of self-entitlement and selfish ambition to secure your niche and influence. Ask him to bring us back to the Gospel. Back to humility and tears. Back to cross-bearing discipleship. Back to the ancient path of simplicity and servanthood. *The most important thing in your life is not what you do; it's what you become. That's what you take into eternity* (DALLAS WILLARD).

■ *Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered* (ZECHARIAH 13:7). Shepherds are vulnerable. They top Satan's hit list. Paul said: *watch over yourselves*—plural! It's a collective responsibility on the part of all shepherds. Dear Shepherd, whose back are you watching? Who's watching your back? Do you have a circle of confidants who hold you accountable, expose your blind spots, and lift you up when you fall? Heed this ancient wisdom: *Two are better than one... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up* (ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10). Pray for your fellow shepherds by name.

■ Pastor, what is the state of your flock? Shepherds, what is the state of the Flock in Singapore? Where are the breaches? Close ranks. Close the gaps. Refute false teaching. Expose savage wolves that ravage the flock. Strengthen the weak. Heal the wounded. Search for the lost. Bring back the strays. Pray. Study Ezekiel 34.

through thick and thin

51

ACTS 21
³ ...we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre... ⁴ And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem...
⁸ ...we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.
¹⁰ While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, "This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."
¹² When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.
 Please continue reading to verse 14 in your Bible.

How do we handle personal prophecy? On his way to Jerusalem, Paul spent a week with some disciples in Tyre. *And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem* (ACTS 21:4). How do we reconcile this with Acts 20:22, which says the Holy Spirit was extraditing him to Jerusalem? Did the Spirit make a mistake? No. The simplest solution is that the Tyrian disciples have a true revelation that Paul will suffer in Jerusalem. But of their own accord they urge him not to go.

This is exactly what happens next in Caesarea. Luke and Paul meet with two leading figures of the Early Church, Philip the Evangelist and Agabus the Prophet. With these four men in one room you have a virtual Who's Who of Church History. Add Philip's four prophetic daughters, and the cast is complete for the drama that unfolds.

Agabus takes Paul's belt and performs a prophetic act. He ties himself up hand and foot and predicts Paul's arrest in Jerusalem. Then they all urge Paul not to go. On a personal note, Luke the author discloses his affection for Paul: *We begged him not to go* (21:12 CT). This parallels the moment in the Gospel when Peter tells Jesus not to go to Jerusalem where death awaited him (MATTHEW 16:22). Like Jesus, Paul would not be dissuaded from his destiny.

This is an invaluable lesson in personal prophecy. On this journey, Paul had been receiving words *in every city* concerning his doom in Jerusalem (ACTS 20:23). And he had just recently written in his letter to the Corinthians, *we know in part, and we prophesy in part* (1 CORINTHIANS 13:9). Paul understood that each prophecy is but a partial revelation of God's will. He had to put all the pieces together and discern the will of God for himself. He would not be jostled off his path by a new revelation, however true, not even from a proven prophet like Agabus. He judged the Tyrian and Caesarean prophecies in light of what the Spirit had already shown him:

What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus (:13).

It was a Gethsemane moment for Paul and his friends: And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, *'Let the will of the Lord be done'* (:14).

- Here in cosy Singapore, we are spoilt. We bemoan every little discomfort or inconvenience. When it's hotter than usual, we call it suffering. When the train breaks down, we call it tribulation. Turn to God in repentance. Promise to end this bad habit and ungodly behaviour. Pledge to live life from the Gospel perspective.
- *The Early Church was married to poverty, prisons, and persecutions. Today, the church is married to prosperity, personality, and popularity* (LEONARD RAVENHILL). Learn from Paul. By this time in his career, he had already been stoned once, beaten with rods thrice, and given 39 lashes five times (2 CORINTHIANS 11:24-25). Yet he did not flinch from going to Jerusalem, knowing full well that imprisonment and afflictions awaited him (ACTS 20:22-23). Remember our missionaries. Pray for each one by name. Pray that like Paul they will be constrained by the Spirit to stay on track and persevere through thick and thin—even in the face of insane circumstances and risks to life and limb. Ask God to cultivate in each of them a willingness to share in the sufferings of Christ and learn obedience through it all. Speak blessings over each one. May they flourish and finish well for the glory of God!
- Pray for our future missionaries. God's cause will never fail. The only question is, will we fail his cause? Will we fulfil our Antioch call? Will we release our sons and daughters to gateway cities in the 10|40 Window where evangelism is a capital offence? Will we pray, *let the will of the Lord be done*? Will we share in Jesus' victory over Satan and the world? Will we suffer with Christ now so that we may be glorified with him in the age to come (ROMANS 8:17)? That is the question. What is your answer? Pray it forward in your own words.
- *Do not quench the Spirit. Despise not prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good* (1 THESSALONIANS 5:20-21). Personal prophecy was a dominant feature in Paul's journey. The words he received were true. But nowadays, prophetic words fly around like paper planes colliding in mid-air. Beware of prophecy on tap. The Apostle Peter insisted that *no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man* (2 PETER 1:21). That bears repeating: *No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man*—until today, that is. Nowadays you can queue up for a personal prophecy. And if you don't like it, you can exchange it for another. We need to be wary and wise. Pray that we will never let any potluck prophecy dissuade us from what God has already shown us through other means, and especially in his written Word. Ask God for sharp discernment. Pray for an outpouring of the true Spirit of prophecy on the Singapore Church: Lord, come like a refiner's fire. Purify us like gold. Purge out all dross. Expose everything that is false and tainted. Uproot every tree you did not plant. Deliver us from deception. Forgive us for esteeming personal prophecy above Scripture. Silence the Babel of words that contradict your written Word.

It all happened so fast.

After some 20 years abroad, the Apostle to the Gentiles returned to the city of his youth on a home mission of peace and unity. He came to present alms from the Gentile churches to the poor in Judea (ACTS 24:17). This errand of mercy preoccupied Paul during his third missionary journey. It would be a cornerstone of his career and a sacrament of unity between the Jewish and Gentile branches of the Early Church (1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-4; 2 CORINTHIANS 8-9; ROMANS 15:25-33). But in just a few days, this noble dream crashed. Thanks to fake news.

First, the Messianic Jews in Jerusalem heard that Paul was going around teaching the Jews of the Diaspora to abandon the Law and stop circumcising their sons. Fake news, folks. Check it out. Paul still worshipped God in Jewish ways, especially among Jews (1 CORINTHIANS 9:20). He even had Timothy circumcised to avoid scandalising the Jews in Lycaonia (ACTS 16:3).

Next, when Paul entered the temple to worship God in Jewish ways, some Asian Jews accused him of bringing Gentiles in and defiling the holy place. Fake news again. And this time, most vicious. Profaning the temple was the one crime for which the Jews had the right to execute the offender without referring the case to a Roman court.

A riot ensued. The whole city was thrown into confusion. Paul would have been lynched like Stephen if the Romans hadn't intervened. The officer in charge couldn't make heads or tails of the situation because of the shouting match in the crowd.

So much for the collection. We don't even hear a *Thank You* from Jerusalem. So much for the mission of peace and unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. The situation got as complicated as the war in Syria is today. Gentiles had to rescue Paul from his own people. The local Messianic Jews apparently kept a safe distance.

In the long-drawn ordeal that follows, there is no evidence that the church in Jerusalem stood in solidarity with Paul. In seven previous attacks while abroad, Luke has repeatedly shown how believers and pre-believers rallied to Paul's side (ACTS 9:23-25; 9:29-30; 14:19-20; 16:33-34; 17:9; 17:13-15; 19:29-31). So in this case, the silence is deafening. Perhaps too much was at stake. And too much was fake news.

ACTS 21:17-40
 17 When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. 18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ... 20 And they said to [Paul]. 'You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, 21 and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.' ... 27 ...the Jews from Asia, seeing [Paul] in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, 'Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Please continue reading verses 29 to 40 in your Bible.

Fake news is a global crisis. *Around the world, falsehoods are being deliberately spread online, to attack public institutions and individuals. The aim is to sow discord amongst racial and religious communities, exploit fault-lines, undermine public institutions, interfere in elections as well as other democratic processes, and weaken countries* (GREEN PAPER, MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION AND MINISTRY OF LAW).

- Satan is the father of lies. Social media is the mother of fake news. They make a charming couple. They breed chaos and confusion. They are masters of agitation. Satan's aim is to destroy the unity of the Church. His allies are always around. Liars, opportunists, attention addicts. Petty. Divisive. Vindictive. Peddling lies, rumours, accusations, innuendo. Judgment begins in the house of God. Fall down flat on your face in repentance if you have become the devil's mouthpiece. Refuse to spread deliberate falsehood to slander the Church, poison minds, fuel hate, incite rebellion, confuse and demoralise the camp. Pray for purified lips that we may be heard in heaven and serve God shoulder to shoulder (ZEPHANIAH 3:9).
- Singapore is an attractive target of fake news. We are the most wired nation under the sun, the most globally-connected. We are easily caught in the web of fake news and disinformation. Our racial and religious diversity makes us vulnerable to attacks that exploit our fault lines. *Through many dangers, toils and snares we have already come*, thanks to amazing grace. Give thanks to God for our vigilant government. For wise and discerning leaders. For new legislation as a national security measure. Most of all, thank God that in this post-truth era, the vast majority of Singaporeans are clear-minded and consistently in favour of our government's move to curb fake news.
- Carl Jung wondered. Will the world end through evil or stupidity? *Unhappily, at this chaotic moment in history, we see both destructive forces hard at work—the evil of radical extremism and stupid expression unbridled—and not much in the way of counter-forces of equal power pushing back* (CARLA SEAQUIST, HUFFPOST). Wake up, Church. This is end time spiritual warfare. Push back through mighty prayer in Jesus' name—a greater power, the highest authority! *For the weapons of our warfare... have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ* (2 CORINTHIANS 10:4-5). This Year of Prayer, saturate our city with prayer and praise anywhere and everywhere. Let incense arise day and night. Confess divine favour for this Little Red Dot: *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows* (PSALM 23:5). *Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings, from the wicked who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me* (PSALM 17:8-9).

ACTS 22
¹⁷ When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw [Jesus] saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' ¹⁹ And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' ²¹ And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' ²² Up to this word they listened to [Paul]. Then they raised their voices and said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth.'

Persecution is a gateway for the kingdom (ACTS 14:22). This is a major theme in Luke and Acts, and especially Acts 21 to 28. Paul's arrest, trials, and journey to Rome establish and illustrate the principle. Opposition is an opportunity to witness. As the saga begins, Paul bears witness before a blood-thirsty mob in Jerusalem, just as Stephen did some 20 years earlier. He speaks of his credentials as a faithful Jew (:1-5), his encounter with Jesus at Damascus (:6-16), and his commission to the Gentiles (:17-21).

This last point adds new information to Paul's testimony. When he returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, Jesus appeared to him in the temple and told him to get out of town fast, *because they will not accept your testimony about me* (:18). At that moment, Paul reminded Jesus about Stephen's death: *When the blood of your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving* (:20). And then, Jesus commissioned him: *Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles* (:21).

Up to this point in Paul's speech, the crowd had listened in silence. But as soon as he mentioned his commission to the Gentiles, they shouted for his death (:22). Why this uproar? For the next six chapters of Acts, the Roman authorities keep trying to unearth the reason for the rage against Paul (:24, 30). They never find it. But we know the reason. Paul had been Judaism's Goliath against the Church. But he suddenly switched sides. And now, he is not only converting Jews, but Gentiles too and without circumcising them! *Away with him!*

So Paul picks up where Stephen left off. His phrase, *the blood of your witness* in verse 20 marks the first time the word *witness* is linked to martyrdom. The English words *martyr* and *witness* are in fact one word in Greek. Before Stephen and Paul, it simply meant *witness*. But from Acts 22:20, it takes on the idea of witness unto death. By the time you reach Revelation 12:11, the link is fixed: *They overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their witness, and they loved not their lives unto death* (CT).

Blood and witness flow together. Paul succeeds Stephen in both mission and in martyrdom. Faithful under fire. Faithful unto death. Witness is to die for. *Not if. But when.*

Some years ago in Afghanistan, a missionary couple was murdered in their bed by enemies of the Gospel. While bleeding to death, the wife dipped her finger in her blood and wrote three words: *We love Afghanistan*. She loved not her life unto death.

- Persecution is part of the package for the disciple of Jesus. There's nothing surprising or strange about it (1 PETER 4:12). Slander. Scorn. Social ostracism. Betrayal. Physical abuse. Torture. Martyrdom. *Not if, but when.* The difference is only in degree. We forget too easily, and as a result we fail to pray. We happily affirm our Millennials' growing interest in Singapore's role as Antioch of Asia. But are we preparing them well to suffer as witnesses for Jesus in a hostile environment? Return to the Gospel. Hear once again Jesus' forewarnings and assurances. Pause. Ponder and pray Matthew 10:

¹⁶ "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷... they will deliver you over to courts and flog you.... ²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³² So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

- Pray: *Lord Jesus, smash our fantasies of what it means to be a Christian. Make it align with the testimony of Scriptures and the lives of the apostles. More often than not, it means to suffer shame for your glorious name. It is to be cheerful in affliction. It means rejection of the world and by the world. By your Spirit, empower me to walk in victory in all circumstances. I desire to identify with your life fully, from your birth in a filthy manger to your painful death on the scandalous cross. I will not run from drinking the cup you give me. My life is not mine to control, it is yours to use for your glory. Remind me every day that I follow a crucified Lord. Help me to walk in a way that is worthy of your name* (TING SIEW LEE).

- Remember the Persecuted Church, faithful under fire, faithful unto death. Regular bombings in Syria have moved the Church beyond her walls. *Christians are walking with people who are suffering, sharing the hope of Jesus... discovering there is joy and light in Jesus. We are not passing through anything our Lord did not pass through himself and triumph over. Being persecuted is nothing. We have been persecuted for centuries, and it does not hurt the Church but serves it* (OPEN DOORS). *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me* (PSALM 23:4).

Paul doesn't turn the other cheek.

He turns on the high priest: *God will strike you, you whitewashed wall* (ACTS 23:3). Did Paul lose his temper? Or was this a prophetic rebuke? According to historical sources, Ananias was not such a bad high priest. But he was hot-tempered, insolent, and greedy. His servants stole tithes of grain so that some priests actually starved. Jewish terrorists murdered Ananias in AD66. Some of Luke's readers probably saw this as a fulfilment of Paul's rebuke.

Paul's next move is equally surprising. He hacks the operating system of the Supreme Court of Israel. His comment about the resurrection detonates a heated argument between the Pharisees who believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees who denied it (ACTS 23:8). Soon they are at each other's throats while Paul catches his breath.

This same Council had heard the Gospel from Jesus, Peter, John, and Stephen. They had repeatedly rejected the Message and its messengers. Now they are left to their own devices, as Jesus pronounced in Matthew 23:38. *See, your house is left to you desolate*. Also, the very thing Gamaliel warned them against in Acts 5:39 has come to pass. They are *fighting against God*.

This lapse of judgment by Israel's highest ups is essential to the narrative of Luke and Acts: Jesus is the true fulfilment of Judaism. Three times Pilate declares him innocent (LUKE 23:13–22). And in three trials of Paul, the Romans find him not guilty (ACTS 23:26). But the guardians of Israel have lost their spiritual and moral compass. Only God and the Romans now stand between Paul and the fanatics who would tear him to pieces. The Romans rescue Paul a second time (21:35; 23:10). And now he finds refuge and encounters Christ, not in the Jewish temple, ironically, but in the Roman citadel that crowns the temple mount.

For years, Paul had a sense of destiny about Rome. Now his itinerary is confirmed: *That night the Lord stood near him and said: Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome* (23:11 NRSV).

Where is Jesus in times of trouble? Very near. But not necessarily to rescue you. And not just to comfort you. But to commission you as his witness to the ends of the earth. *Keep up your courage*.

- *Keep up your courage!* When all hell breaks loose, it doesn't mean you are out of God's will. It's not the end of the world. Quieten your soul. Lift up your eyes above your woes and foes. Ask yourself: From where do I draw courage? Tell yourself: My courage can only come from one source: the Lord who saves me for his purpose to do his will and to finish his work. Tell yourself: Keep going! My confidence is in Christ. His cause will not fail. He is my ever-present hope. He is my very present help—to the ends of the earth, to the end of the age. Sing aloud:

*In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand*

*No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand*

- We are supposed to give honour where honour is due and rebuke where rebuke is due. But nowadays we zip lip and tolerate injustice, scandal, and lapses of reason in the Church. Are we afraid to correct those who abuse authority? Do we fear bruising and losing the strawberry generation? Reflect deeply on this wise counsel from Gordon MacDonald: *A genuine rebuke is a noble communication. We speak truth in love* (EPHESIANS 4:15). *I worry for the leader who doesn't want to hear hard things, who surrounds himself or herself with people who only say pleasant, positive things. Sooner or later, such leaders neutralise themselves. A good rebuke is issue-specific.... It is framed in prayer and sometimes in tears. If the rebuker finds the task easy, the rebuker may need a rebuke of another kind.*

Does your church culture allow speaking truth in love? Or is there a gag rule? What is the state of leadership? Do leaders *reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching* (2 TIMOTHY 4:2)? Pray for your church. What is the attitude of fellow believers? Examine yourself. Do you cringe at correction? Or do you embrace it as a blessing? Pray that we will heed God's Word and not delay the promised revival: *If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you* (PROVERBS 1:23). Pray that we will wise up and not diminish ourselves: *The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise... he who listens to reproof gains intelligence* (PROVERBS 15:31-32).

- The Church faces a public that's increasingly discerning, critical, and sometimes cynical. Pray that in all aspects of personal conduct and church governance, we will be above reproach. That no one can throw any accusations against us that will stick. May we be blameless, having a good conscience—for the glory of Christ!

ACTS 23:1-11
And looking intently at the council, Paul said, 'Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.'

² And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, 'God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!

Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?'....

⁶ Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees.

It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.' ⁷ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

Please continue reading verses 8-11 in your Bible.

God's help comes in all shapes and sizes.

Jesus had just appeared to Paul, confirming his itinerary to Rome. But as the vision fades, the plot thickens. Forty fanatics swear not to eat or drink until they kill Paul. The outstanding scholar who had been groomed for greatness by the great Rabbi Gamaliel now stands isolated from both the Church and Judaism. A stone that the builders rejected. But the end is not yet.

Paul's nephew hears of the plot and exposes it. The Roman officer in charge sends Paul to Felix the Governor of Judea, escorted by two centurions, 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen. Felix places Paul under guard in Herod's magnificent five-star palace on the beach at Caesarea (ACTS 23:11–35). We are reminded of Martin Luther, safely tucked away at Wartburg Castle, after being condemned as a heretic. *A Mighty Fortress is our God.*

This is the third time the Romans rescue Paul from death at the hands of religious extremists. On the one hand, this is Luke the apologist assuring his civic-conscious readers that the Jesus Movement is peaceful. It poses no threat to State, society, or religious harmony. The troublemakers are always outsiders.

On the other hand, this is Luke the missionary assuring you that, if God sends you on mission to the ends of the earth, you'll get there one way or another. Whether you're smuggled out in a homely basket (ACTS 9:25), or aided by a small boy (23:16–22), or escorted by a force of 470 fighting men (:23–35), God will surely get you there. Let him choose the means.

We often fret too much over the means. We have contingency plans upon contingency plans. But very often, it is precisely when everything goes wrong that God steps in and takes over. Sometimes by massive intervention. At other times by means so tenuous it looks like an accident. God is able to save by many or by few. We prefer the cavalry, but God often chooses the small boy. We prefer the mighty fortress, but God often uses the flimsy basket. That's why he sent his disciples out empty-handed and barefooted (MATTHEW 10:9–10).

All things synergise for good. Through a series of ordinary events, extraordinary events, and narrow escapes, God is taking Paul to Rome. Not as a VIP in first class. But as a prisoner in chains. And forty hungry assassins have to find a way out of their oath.

Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few (1 SAMUEL 14:6). We prefer the many. God prefers the few. Less is more in the economy of the kingdom.

■ Dear Pastor, are you in a fix? Is your church facing a public relations crisis? Bad press? Fake news? Fret not. Fear not. Don't let well-meaning people confuse you with their many contingency plans. Look up. God is in control. Thank him for whatever means he will use to untangle you from the mess and bring you deeper into his purpose. Entrust yourself and your church into his hands. Your past. Your present. Your future. Your family. Your team. Your members. And yes, your reputation. *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord* (PROVERBS 3:5-7). Declare: *A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing!*

■ Dear Citizen, is Singapore in a tight spot? The geopolitical scene is unnerving. As CNBC noted: *Many nations around the world find themselves in a delicate balancing act between U.S. and Chinese interests, but one island nation perhaps typifies that struggle. Singapore is a hub for global finance and trade, and so its relationships with the world's two largest economies are vital to its survival* (19 OCTOBER 2017). In such a time as this, fear not. Look up. Invite God to step in and take over. And even though God delights to save by slender means, he occasionally displays his glory through massive intervention—as in the Exodus. So go ahead, ask big. Declare Truth: *Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and that to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love* (PSALM 62:11-12). Dear God, we rest secure in your steadfast love which never ceases (LAMENTATIONS 3:22). You are our good Father. You are greater than any superpower. You will overthrow every human or demonic conspiracy against your design for this Little Red Dot. We believe, amen!

■ Dear Christians, can Singapore count on us? The early Christian Apologist Justin Martyr assured the Roman Emperor that Christianity was no threat to the State, and that Christians were, in fact, *his best helpers and allies in promoting peace*. Are we our government's best advocates and allies in promoting peace and preserving the good order of Singapore? We should be: *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all* (ROMANS 12:18). *Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God* (1 CORINTHIANS 10:32). Pray: Lord Jesus, use us as your ambassadors of peace and reconciliation. Grant us wisdom to live faithfully as dual citizens—first, of the Kingdom of Heaven, and second, of the Republic of Singapore. We pledge our allegiance to both God and country. We render to you the things that are yours, and to the Singapore Government, the things that belong to it. God bless Singapore.

ACTS 23
¹² When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.
¹³ There were more than forty who made this conspiracy...
¹⁶ Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.
¹⁷ Paul called one of the centurions and said, 'Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him.'...
²³ [The tribune] called two of the centurions and said, 'Get ready 200 soldiers, with 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night.
²⁴ Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor.'...
³⁵ [Felix said to Paul,] 'I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.' And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium.

ACTS 24
And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul.
¹⁰ ...Paul replied: "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation, I cheerfully make my defense...."
²⁴After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.
²⁵And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, 'Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you.'
²⁶At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul. So he sent for him often and conversed with him.
²⁷When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison.

Paul meets Ananias again. The *whitewashed wall* came down from Jerusalem to Caesarea with a public prosecutor named Tertullus. After flattering Felix about his policies of peace and reform, the attorney tore into Paul. He accused him of four crimes, including sedition and intent to desecrate the temple (ACTS 24:1-8). Serious charges. Rome protected all temples in the interest of religious harmony. Sedition and profaning temples were punishable by death.

Paul addresses Felix with customary courtesy minus the flattery. He denies each charge and exposes a glaring omission by Tertullus. Paul's accusers have no evidence, no witnesses, and therefore no case. Felix should have acquitted Paul on the spot. But he postpones his decision and keeps Paul in custody. From now on, Roman justice begins to let Paul down. Why did Felix hesitate? Perhaps Paul's mention of money in verse 17 gave him an idea (SEE VERSE 26).

Felix was a tyrant. His term in office was marred by unrest and hostility between the Jews and Rome. He crushed the opposition without mercy. He suppressed the zealots on the one hand, but engaged them to murder the High Priest on the other hand. The price of his *peace* and *reform*, as Tertullus called it, was the blood of thousands of Jews.

After hearing the case, Felix engaged Paul in a private interview. He brought along his teenage wife, Drusilla. She was the youngest daughter of King Herod who beheaded James (ACTS 12). She was Felix's third wife. He was her second husband. The Historian Josephus says that Drusilla was the most beautiful of all women. Felix noticed it too. It was lust at first sight. He engaged a magician to lure Drusilla from her first husband, the king of a petty Syrian state. Enough soap opera.

What will Paul say to this adulterous couple, seeing he's at their mercy? What would you say? A little flattery plus a bribe could buy your freedom. How do we engage VIPs and *the beautiful people* of this world? Twaddle about politics and sports, fashion and food? Not Paul! He hits the nail on the head: *faith in Christ, justice, self-control, and the final judgment* (:24-25)—exactly what this brutal bully and his pretty princess needed to hear. Felix trembled, but not enough. He was hoping for a bribe. He curried the favour of the Jews. He sacrificed justice on the altar of money and politics (:26-27). In contrast, Paul sacrificed himself for Christ. Where will you lay down your life?

May I stress the need for courageous, intelligent, and dedicated leadership.... Leaders of sound integrity. Leaders not in love with publicity, but in love with justice. Leaders not in love with money, but in love with humanity. Leaders who can subject their particular egos to the greatness of the cause (MARTIN LUTHER KING JR).

- **Fear God.** *Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel* (1 CORINTHIANS 9:16). Paul did not flinch in the face of blatant corruption, brutal injustice, and criminal indifference. Will we maintain our integrity as witnesses to the Truth? Will we tell the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth? Pray for consistency in our confession, conduct, and character before all kinds of people, regardless of the consequences. Take courage. When we're in the hot seat, pray that:
 - We will not beat around the bush with vague generalities.
 - We will not flatter with empty chatter and platitudes.
 - We will not downplay moral and ethical issues in the name of relevance.
 - We will not wait for a more convenient time to deliver Truth.
- **Fear God.** He is not mocked. We reap what we sow. Sooner or later. Felix was later punished by Rome for mismanagement. His own brother, Palas, refused to defend him before Nero. Pray for the *Felix-types* you know. Those who have power over you. They may have heard the Gospel and felt convicted. But they put off the decision. They persist in sin and corrupt practices. They feel no sorrow. They have no remorse. They sear their consciences (ACTS 24:25-27; 1 TIMOTHY 4:2). Pray for them by name. Ask God for courage to continue speaking the Truth in love, come what may. Confess: I overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of my witness. I love not my life even in the face of death (REVELATION 12:11).
- **Fear God.** He is not fooled. We reap what we sow. Some 20 years after hearing the Gospel from Paul, Drusilla apparently perished with her son in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Pray for the *Drusilla-types* in your life. Their hearts darkened by sensuality. Their faces brazened by arrogance. They don't know how to blush. They don't know their peril. Who will pray for them, if not you? You may be their only lifeline. Plead with God for the salvation of their souls before it's too late. Christ came to seek and save the lost, even the worst of sinners.
- **Fear God.** Singapore is famous for its clean system. Corruption cases dropped to an all-time low in 2017. We have maintained our first place in the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy survey on corruption (CORRUPT PRACTICES INVESTIGATION BUREAU, 2017). Thank God for the excellent report card. But don't lower our guard. No one is above temptation. Pray especially for the Church to keep a sharp watch against greed, hoarding, misappropriation, manipulative fund-raising, lack of transparency, conflict of interest, and abuse of spiritual authority.

ACTS 26
[Paul bears witness before Governor Festus and King Agrippa II.] I [Paul] heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' It is hard for you to kick against the goads.¹⁵ And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you,¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Opposition is opportunity. Jesus said: *You will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness* (LUKE 21:12–13). And in Acts 9:15, the Risen Christ said of Paul: *He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel*. These words come true in Acts 26. Paul bears witness before Festus the governor of Judea and before Agrippa II, the last king of the Jews.

This is the third account of Paul's conversion in Acts. It contains new information. For example, when Jesus confronted Paul on the road to Damascus, he said: *It is hard for you to kick against the goads*. This was a common Greek proverb. It means that when heaven calls, resistance is futile. A goad is a stick with a sharp point used to prod animals. Like Singapore's Apostle Rick Seaward, Paul was *goaded* into the mission of Christ. From that point on, he did not kick against the goads. He was *not disobedient to the heavenly vision* (:19).

Paul also shares new details on his commission by Christ: *I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness.... I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God* (:16–18). This is a Messianic prophecy (ISAIAH 42:6–7, 49:6). Why does Jesus take a prophecy about himself and his mission and apply it to Paul? This is a revelation not to be missed. Ever since Pentecost, Jesus continues his mission on earth through Paul and other messengers of the Church. Paul confirms this in Acts 26:23, where he says that the Risen Christ *would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles*. Jesus is a missionary.

World evangelisation, therefore, is not an option for the Church. Missions is not a specialisation of one man, like Pastor Rick Seaward, or one church, like Victory Family Centre. No! Missions is the ministry of Jesus Christ and, therefore, the mission of the whole Church to the whole world. Will the Singapore Church follow the example of Paul and our own Apostle Rick Seaward? Will we obey the heavenly vision? Or will we kick against the goads?

■ *The Great Commission is not an option to be considered. It is a command to be obeyed* (HUDSON TAYLOR). It's not a New Testament idea. It's as old as Abraham, to whom God said, *I will make you a blessing to all the peoples of the earth*. Ponder and pray:

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth (ISAIAH 49:6).

I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness (ISAIAH 42:6–7).

■ *We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God* (JOHN STOTT). World missions is not a peripheral thing. It is the main thing. Not an elective, but a core of discipleship. When we reduce God's mission to a programme alongside a thousand and one others, we are kicking against the goads. Hear the Lord of the Nations saying to the Singapore Church: You are my servant with a mission—the mission of Jesus. My Kingdom is bigger than your local church. Growing the church, feeding the sheep, tending the lambs is too small a job for you. Even winning Singapore is just practice for the greater works ahead. *I am setting you up as a light for all the peoples of the earth, so that my salvation goes global—to the ends of the earth* (THE MESSAGE, ADAPTED).

Pray with all your heart for this generation and all future generations. Ask God to download this vision deep in our spirits, and inscribe this biblical theology deep in our hearts and minds. This is our Father's world. This is our Father's dream.

■ When heaven calls, resistance is futile. Have you been tuning out? Dragging feet? Making excuses? Kicking against the goads? Make this your prayer for yourself and a new generation of missionary pioneers from Singapore: *I have but one passion: It is he, it is he alone. The world is the field and the field is the world. And henceforth that country shall be my home where I can be most used in winning souls for Christ* (NICOLAUS ZINZENDORF). In faith, declare that Celebration of Hope 2019 will yield a new crop of disciples who will eagerly drop everything to become fishers of men to the ends of the earth!

¹⁹ Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,
²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.
²² To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass:²³ that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.

to the ends of the earth

6

ACTS 27:1-2
And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius.
² And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

Please read the entire chapter in your Bible.

To Rome at last!

By this time, Paul had already written Romans 8:28: *We know that all things synergise for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose* (CT). Paul had already learned this truth through many hard trials. He would know it better after his adventure at sea. *All things synergise for good* is not only a powerful theological principle. For Paul, it's a lived experience, a deep conviction that determines his posture and behaviour in every situation.

Paul doesn't know how to act like a prisoner. He doesn't allow his status and circumstances to set his mood or govern his actions. Throughout this journey, he takes the initiative again and again. He doesn't just let things happen. He makes things happen. He doesn't wait for opportunities. He creates opportunities and he makes the most of them. For example:

- He gives a word of wisdom and warning against sailing from Fair Havens (27:9-12).
- When all hell breaks loose and hope is abandoned, he shares a word of encouragement with his despairing shipmates: *I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you...* (:22).
- He blows the whistle when the sailors try to abandon the ship (:31).
- After two weeks of corporate fasting, Paul takes matters into his own hands and hosts a dinner for all on board (:33-37).
- After the shipwreck, he heals all the sick on the island of Malta (28:7-10).

And so on to the end of Acts. Paul stands tall through it all, a lighthouse above the tempest. Between the lines of this true story, Luke offers us a dramatic theology of suffering for the sake of the Gospel. The worst of the storm brings out the best of Paul. As a prisoner in chains, he could have made every excuse to mind his own business and lick his wounds. But no! He seizes every opportunity and makes a difference in every situation. He warns. He encourages. He feeds his shipmates. He shepherds them all to safety.

This is the place of a disciple and the Church of Jesus in a world beset by storm. Divine Providence does not pre-empt human responsibility. On the contrary, Providence stimulates us to take responsible and redemptive action in a world lost at sea.

All hands on deck!

A fitting tribute. The authors of *Men in White, The Untold Story of Singapore's Ruling Party*, dedicated their work to *Singapore's greatest generation who grew up in untold hardship and privations, suffered under British colonialism and Japanese occupation, experienced social and political upheaval, and yet picked up the pieces to rebuild their lives, get married and raise families while laying the foundation for the peace and prosperity of a new nation.*

■ All hands on deck. Mr Lee Kuan Yew *was a great man who loved his country and who answered the nation's call at a time of crisis and upheaval* (OTHMAN WOK). We salute our Founding Father and his pioneer team who steered Singapore to safety and success when beset by storm. Lest we forget, let us give thanks to God. Allow the Holy Spirit to overwhelm you with a deep sense of gratitude as you think back on the Singapore story:

Over sixty years ago, we were emerging from the shadows of colonialism and war. We were a daunting mess. We had no natural resources. We were ethnically divided. Morale was low. Unemployment was high. Labour strikes were rife. Politics were shaky. Neighbours were hostile. We had very little chance of success. Lee Kuan Yew and his team could have given up and walked away. But they stuck it out. They laid aside personal ambitions. They rolled up their sleeves. They worked hard. They suffered setbacks. But they never gave up. They laid strong foundations for the common good, creating equal opportunity for all—regardless of race, language or religion. They transformed Singapore from Third World to First in 40 years or less.

■ All hands on deck. Anyone can steer a ship well when the sea is calm and when skies are blue. But it's your conduct in the midst of storm that will set you apart as an outstanding leader. Pray for Millennials. On their watch, may they remember our Founding Fathers. May they emulate their excellent example and learn from their lives. Their clarity of purpose. The thinking behind their policies. Their values. Their integrity. Their non-communal stance. Their convictions. Their high standards. Their foresight. *Their sense of togetherness, toughness and ability to turn weaknesses into strengths* (PM LEE HSIEN LOONG). Ask God for a greater measure of grace to stay true to the spirit of our pioneers and overcome the odds in the gathering storm.

■ All hands on deck. The world is at war. Beyond the military aspect, it is also a spiritual, emotional, mental, and ideological conflict. God calls us to shepherd our nation with empathy and compassion. When family members or friends go through battles, who do they turn to? Are we their first line of care and support? Their trusted go-to leaders? Retired US General Colin Powell said: *Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.* Examine yourself. Pray.

ACTS 27:21-26
Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss.

²² Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴ and he said, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you." ²⁵ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told.

²⁶ But we must run aground on some island.'

Where did Paul get his courage? Remember that dark and scary night when they arrested him in Jerusalem? The Lord stood near him and said: *Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome* (ACTS 23:11 NRSV). And now, in a doomed ship on a deadly sea, an angel stands beside him and says: *Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with YOU* (27:24).

That last line sounds like an answer to prayer. In the midst of all his woes, Paul was not thinking of himself. He knows he will reach Rome, come hell or high water. But what about his shipmates? God gives them all into Paul's hands for safe keeping! That's why he's there, *like a bridge over troubled water*. And that's why we are here. Not to save our skin. But to stand in solidarity with all who are suffering, sinking into despair, without God and without hope in this storm-tossed, seasick world. That's why the Church exists. *To be there for others* (DIETRICH BONHOEFFER).

This is the last of six visions that Paul has in Acts (SEE BELOW). What do they have in common? Three things. One, they call for witness and perseverance in God's mission against all odds. Two, they occur on the frontline of missions. And three, most of them occur in the face of severe persecution and peril. Get it? Faith is not a ticket to the Oscars. Visions are not up for grabs. It is presumptuous to think that we are entitled to such close encounters with Christ if we are not laying our lives down for God's mission as Paul did.

Visions are not chat-lines to heaven. They are marching orders from God. They call and guide witnesses of Jesus to the ends of the earth. *Faith is not what rescues you. It's what guides you.* Faith will lead you to still waters in the end. But don't expect blue skies and smooth sailing all the way. Be prepared for fire and fury, storm and shipwreck, as God works out his purpose for you and your generation. Be there for others.

PAUL'S SIX VISIONS IN ACTS:

• Of Jesus on the road to Damascus (9:4-6, 26:13-18) • Of Ananias coming to him in Damascus (9:12, 22:14-15) • Of Jesus granting him immunity from harm in Corinth (18:9-11) • Of Jesus in the temple commissioning him (22:17-21, 9:29-30) • Of Jesus in the barracks in Jerusalem (23:11) • Of an angel on the storm-tossed ship (27:23-24).

■ Are we there for others? Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer repeatedly insisted that *being there for others* is at the centre of what it means to be the Church and to be a Christian. Being there for others cost Bonhoeffer his life. He was executed on 9 April 1945 on Hitler's order. Is your church there for others? Are you there for others? Reflect on the following *there-for-others* sayings from Bonhoeffer's writings. Turn them into prayers of repentance. Resolve to be there for others:

- *Evil is not wanting to be there for others.*
- *Our relationship to God is no religious relationship. Instead, our relationship to God is a new life in being there for others.*
- *The Church is Church only when it is there for others. It must tell people in every calling what a life with Christ is, what it means to be there for others.*
- *The Church's word gains weight and power not through concepts but by example.*

■ Are we there for the Elderly? By 2030, 27% of our resident population will be 65 and above, and a projected 83,000 will be living alone. Many fear social isolation more than material lack. According to research, lonely people with less social connection are at a higher risk of stress, sleep disorder, altered immune system, inflammation, heart disease, stroke, depression, and suicide. In 2015, more than 50% of Singaporeans aged 60 and above reported being lonely. 126 committed suicide, a 60% increase from the year 2000. In spite of government efforts, there is still a lack of public awareness and cultural openness towards ageing. Pray for change! Whatever happened to the Asian value of family and filial piety? What happened to the Fifth Commandment to honour your father and mother? Will the Church be there for the lonely, vulnerable elderly abandoned by kith and kin? Are they even on our radar? Search deep within. Will we lead by example? Ask God to give us no rest until we make ourselves nothing, until we take on the nature of a servant, bridge the gaps, and serve the suffering elderly among us.

■ So you want to see an angel? Or meet Jesus in person? Remember, Jesus visits Paul between the hammer and the anvil—in the pangs of persecution, prison, and peril. Pray: God, have mercy. Pardon our presumption. Dispel our illusions. Destroy our audacity. We seek exotic epiphanies in heavenly places while having little or no interest in seeking the lost. Forgive us for thinking we deserve visions and visitations from you, when we lack the character and commitment of Paul, when we are not anywhere near the battleground of missions. Bring us back to basics. Bring us down to earth to hear and obey your marching orders in your written Word. When we are in the centre of the storm, in the throes of shipwreck, your abiding presence is more than enough. We will not fear for you are with us—to the ends of the earth, to the end of the age.

ACTS 27:32-38
When the
fourteenth night
had come, as we
were being driven
across the Adriatic
Sea....

³³ As day was
about to dawn,
Paul urged them
all to take some
food, saying,
'Today is the
fourteenth day
that you have
continued in
suspense and
without food,
having taken
nothing.

³⁴ Therefore I urge
you to take some
food. For it will
give you strength,
for not a hair is to
perish from the
head of any of
you.' ³⁵ And when
he had said these
things, he took
bread, and giving
thanks to God in
the presence of
all he broke it and
began to eat.

³⁶ Then they all
were encouraged
and ate some
food themselves.

³⁷ (We were in all
276 persons in
the ship.) ³⁸ And
when they had
eaten enough,
they lightened the
ship, throwing out
the wheat into the
sea.

Everyone fasted for two weeks. In that dark night and desperate hour, Paul *took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat* (:35). Paul wasn't super-spiritual. Even though the angel had promised safety for all, something as down to earth as dinner was still necessary to survive the shipwreck. Eating in the face of death expresses a hope and a will to live. Just watching Paul eat chased away the gloom: *Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves* (:36).

If this is not a celebration of the Eucharist, it comes as close as you can get. For a devout Jew, there's something sacred about sharing a meal with others. It implies acceptance and solidarity before the Lord. God had entrusted everyone on board to Paul (:24). He doesn't gather his fellow Christians, Luke and Aristarchus, into a cosy corner for a holy huddle. He takes all his 275 shipmates under his wings. He shepherds them through the storm. He turns that sinking ship into a floating cathedral. He shares his courage with everyone—centurion, soldiers, sailors, passengers, prisoners on death row, and fellow Christians too. He draws a circle that takes them all in. Imagine what he would have done on the Titanic.

Paul reminds us of the radical inclusiveness of Christ, who eats with saints and sinners alike. Jesus is a centre without a boundary. He feeds the five thousand. He pardons a prostitute caught in the act. He builds his Church without walls. He draws a circle that takes us in. The Incarnation places Christ and all who serve him in absolute solidarity with all humanity.

No one understood this better than the German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He was sentenced to death by the Nazis during World War II. On the way to the gallows, his fellow prisoners asked him to hold a worship service. At first he refused because one of them was an atheist and a communist. Bonhoeffer didn't want to draw a circle that would exclude any of his fellow prisoners. It was only when the atheist asked him to hold the service and wanted to be included that Bonhoeffer agreed. He drew a circle that took him in.

The Church is the only institution that exists primarily for the benefit of those who are not its members (WILLIAM TEMPLE).

- Jesus ate with sinners. He drew a circle that took them in. Do we? In June 2018, Ethos Institute released its findings on a study *to assess the attitudes of Christians in Singapore towards LGBT individuals and LGBT activism. On the question of how open their church was in welcoming an individual with same sex attraction into its community life, 50% said 'not open at all', 29% said 'somewhat open', and 22% said 'open' or 'very open'. 75% said that they did not feel safe sharing their experience or struggles with same-sex attraction to their church leaders. 86% said that their church did not have any ministry or help channels for people with same sex attraction.* Ask God to forgive us. Pray that more pastors will eagerly address these issues and make their churches a safe haven for strugglers who want help. *All this, while affirming the orthodox view of marriage, family and sexuality.*
- A recent survey on social capital came to this stark conclusion: *The sharpest social divisions in Singapore may now be based on class, instead of race or religion* (INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES, THE STRAITS TIMES, 28 DECEMBER 2017). Are Christians any different? Pray for Church leadership to actively study this national concern. Pray for insight and wisdom to unpack the issues. Ask God for fresh ideas and promising solutions for the best way forward. Pray for Christians from all walks of life. May we stand out as people who welcome all kinds and love all types. May we seize every opportunity *to interact and make friends with others outside of our usual circles centred on a common race, language, religion, educational and housing background* (IPS REPORT 2017). May we be recognised as a community that always acts for the common good. *Majulah Singapura!*
- *A leader is a dealer in hope* (NAPOLEON). If we have the character, that is. This was Paul's fourth shipwreck. He had already survived three. Plus a long litany of other ordeals that would make Harrison Ford squirm (2 CORINTHIANS 11:23-33). God had tempered Paul through it all. Now he had the character and courage to face the storm and inspire hope in others. Can God do the same with you? Are you are a bridge over troubled waters? What would you have done on the Titanic? Ask God to help you respond rightly through every test so that he can strengthen your character and use you to bring calm and courage into situations of panic and fear—whenever and wherever.
- Memorise and pray the Word: *We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (ROMANS 5:3-5).

Witness ends when the world ends.

When it comes to missions, Acts is the greatest story ever told. It begins with Jesus preaching the kingdom in Jerusalem (1:3). It ends with Paul preaching the kingdom in Rome (28:30-31). Witness has spread from place to place, from people to people, from province to province, and finally to Rome, the beginning of the ends of the earth. Luke's whole plan of Acts leads to this triumph of Truth.

The last word in the Greek text of Acts is *unhindered*. This is a technical term used in legal documents of the day. Paul is under house arrest. But no one stops him from preaching the kingdom and teaching about Jesus in the capital city of the Roman Empire. In this way, Luke brings closure to some of the central themes of his Gospel and Acts:

- Persecution is a gateway for the kingdom.
- Providence prevails over all.
- Preaching the kingdom is Jesus and Paul's priority.
- Both Jesus and Paul are innocent.
- The Jesus Movement is compatible with the interests of society and State.
- And nothing can stop the forward march of the Gospel. Truth triumphs over all.

Paul's hands are bound. But the Word of God can never be bound (2 TIMOTHY 2:9). Nothing in heaven, earth, or hell can stop the advance of the Good News of the kingdom. God is sending salvation to all nations and all peoples.

The abrupt ending of Acts suggests that the story is incomplete and to be continued. The road goes ever on, to the ends of the earth and the end of the age. God is at work in our world today just as he was in the time of Acts. He works through ordinary people, both then and now. Ordinary men and women can play an extraordinary part in God's work today. Acts is the beginning of a journey that we are all invited to take. It continues here and now, right where you are. Who knows where it may take you? *All aboard!* To the ends of the earth.

ACTS 28
14 ...And so we came to Rome...

16 Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

17 After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews....

23 When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers.

From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets...

30 He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, 31 proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Please read all of Acts 28 in your Bible.

- Seventy-six years ago, when Singapore fell to the Japanese, we were re-named *Syonan* which means *Light of the South*. In recent times, God has been burdening some pastors of our city to unite in loving Japan, turning her Godwards. Could Love Japan be Singapore's unique part in the continuing story of Acts? Will you come aboard?

Rejoice! God has been preparing the way: *The Japan-Singapore relationship is one of the best we have with any foreign country. And over the last 50 years, we've built an excellent relationship in every direction—economically, politically, culturally and most importantly, between our people* (PROFESSOR TOMMY KOH, CNA 17 MARCH 2017). Spiritually, the link could be better. It's time to build stronger bridges and make deeper inroads. God sees the harsh realities of Japan's spiritual landscape. He invites us to dream with him and soften the ground with our prayers and tears. All things are possible with God. Turn information into intercession:

Only 0.3 percent of Japan's 126 million people are evangelical Christians. This makes the Japanese the second largest unreached people group in the world. Most Japanese identify with Shintoism or Buddhism. But many practise more than one religion for pragmatic reasons. They see each religion as beneficial in different ways at different times. Christianity, therefore, is just another option. To preach Christ as the only Way is a daunting task. The majority of Japanese do not know a Christian. They have little or no idea what the Gospel is about. Some 50% of Japanese pastors are in their 70s. Only about 10% are below 50. 30% of churches have no pastor. And since 1997, the number of missionaries has dropped 40%.

Beyond the 40.Day season, revisit this page often. Keep asking, seeking, and knocking. Pray the Word: *They shall fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun; for he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the Lord drives* (ISAIAH 59:19).

- *Peace is always worth the effort* (US PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP). On 12 June 2018, Singapore hosted the historic Summit between the US and North Korea. We were *chosen because they know that we are neutral, reliable, trustworthy and secure* (DR VIVIAN BALAKRISHNAN). Acknowledge God for his divine favour. But is he saying something more? Is he setting the stage for Singapore to play a bigger role in shaping the spiritual future of North Korea, the site of a great revival more than a century ago? Could this unfolding story become a new chapter of Acts featuring Singapore as the Antioch of Asia? Does this resonate with your spirit? If so, fall on your knees, cry to God that we will honour him and rise to the occasion. When North Korea opens her doors, pray that our sons and daughters will be among the first to enter as ambassadors of the Prince of Peace.

- Speak Life over our leaders: *The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace* (NUMBERS 6:24-26). *For the Lord gives wisdom... he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity* (PROVERBS 2:6-7).

Mdm Halimah Yacob
President

Mr Lee Hsien Loong
Prime Minister

Mr Teo Chee Hean
*Deputy Prime Minister,
Coordinating Minister for
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Mr Tharman
Shanmugaratnam
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Mr K. Shanmugam
*Minister for Home Affairs,
Minister for Law*

Mr Gan Kim Yong
Minister for Health

Mr S. Iswaran
*Minister for Communications
& Information, Minister-in-
charge of Trade Relations*

Mr Heng Swee Kiat
Minister for Finance

Ms Grace Fu Hai Yien
*Minister for Culture, Community,
& Youth, Leader of the House*

Mr Chan Chun Sing
Minister for Trade & Industry

Mr Lawrence Wong
*Minister for National Development,
2nd Minister for Finance*

Mr Masagos Zulkifli
*Minister for the Environment
& Water Resources, Minister-in-
charge of Muslim Affairs*

Mr Ng Chee Meng
Minister, Prime Minister's Office

Mr Ong Ye Kung
Minister for Education

Mrs Josephine Teo
*Minister for Manpower,
2nd Minister for Home Affairs*

Mr Desmond Lee
*Minister for Social & Family
Development, 2nd Minister for
National Development, Deputy
Leader of the House*

Ms Indranee Rajah
*Minister, Prime Minister's Office,
2nd Minister for Finance,
Education and Law*

- *The Big Read:* Singapore's political succession goes beyond finding the next Prime Minister. Reflect on this excerpt from CNA. Turn insights into intercession:

Given the larger-than-life presence and aura of Singapore's founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew—which were to a large extent carried over by Mr Goh and PM Lee themselves—there is high public interest and expectation surrounding the identity of the next Prime Minister.

For now, the big question on who the next Prime Minister is has been put on the backburner, but observers believe that, on the surface, Mr Chan [Chun Sing] has the inside track. Still, Mr Heng [Swee Keat] and Mr Ong [Ye Kung] remain very much in the running, they pointed out—especially if the succession

pathway this time is different. Any one of the three could become Prime Minister, supported by the other two and the rest of the 4G leadership.

While the current timeline could be too short when viewed through conventional lenses, there is ample time to prepare a team to steer the country forward, led by a Prime Minister who is able to get the best out of it, observers said.

National University of Singapore political scientist Bilveer Singh noted that it is *important but not sufficient* for the next Prime Minister to have led key ministries well:

Even more important is his ability to work with and gain the respect of his peers, and for them to gel together as team," he said. "This is the PAP's DNA and political culture ... Hence, it does not really matter who is the number one as long as all work for the same team.

PAP cadre Eric Low added: *A strong leader is always necessary to steer the team... in the right direction and implement well-suited policies ... A leader who is able to win the respect of his team mates would naturally be treated as a 'first among equals' by his teammates.*

The 4G collective leadership will *play an important role in the era to come*, said Mr Low, who had previously contested under the PAP banner in the 2001 and 2006 General Elections.

PM Lee said as much himself in January: *Maybe it's the way that the media and public politics is played in many countries nowadays, it's personalised as one person. And the face becomes familiar. And you think that everything is done by that person. Actually it's not ... there's a team.*

Speaking to Singapore reporters at the end of his trip to New Delhi for the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit, he added: *The team works together and they have one, as Mr Lee Kuan Yew said, striker. Now you have to strike from time to time, but you're really also sometimes spokesman on behalf of the team, bringing together a collective wisdom and giving voice to that. And I think in the next team, that aspect of it will have to be even more important.*

Two weeks ago, PM Lee again stressed that the issue of political succession goes beyond finding the person most suited for the top post.

Speaking at a conference in Shanghai, he pointed out that many qualities are needed for national leadership and it would be unrealistic and impossible to find a single candidate with the qualities and able to *do it all*. He said:

We need to find a capable team who can work closely together, who can inspire the people's confidence and bring the nation forward, carve out a new path and make Singaporeans proud.

HOW TO FAST

You are free to fast however the Spirit leads you. Here are some options:

Total Fast

■ Abstain from solid foods and beverages for 24 hours. Take only water.

Partial Fast

■ Abstain from solid foods for an extended part of the day. Take only water. You may fast from sunrise to sundown or from breakfast to afternoon tea.

1-Meal Fast

■ Sacrifice one full meal a day.

Beverage Fast

■ Abstain from solid foods for 24 hours. Take only water and liquid foods such as milk, milo or other health beverages.

Daniel Fast

■ Abstain from meats and other favourite delicacies. Take only small portions of fresh vegetables, fruit and juices. You may practise this as a 40.Day routine. Or as Daniel 1:12 suggests, make this a 10-day fast.

Esther Fast

■ Abstain from solid foods for 24 hours for 3 days. [ESTHER 4:16]

HOW TO ENJOY FASTING

■ Set aside time each day to seek God in prayer and fasting. It may be half an hour or one hour or more.

■ Adopt an attitude of prayer as you go about your daily duties at home, at work or at school. Apply what you've learned in tangible actions.

■ Scale down your normal activities. Avoid rigorous exercise such as rock-climbing, cycling or jogging.

■ Be alert. Besides fasting from food, fast from things that distract, such as TV, social media, cybergames, or things that destroy such as coarse jesting or careless words.

■ Break your fast gradually and wisely. For health reasons, you should consume small portions as you break fast, avoiding chilli or acidic foods as much as possible.

HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER GUIDE

Daily pray through the 40.Day prayer guide. For each entry, first read aloud the Scripture passage and then the devotional. Reflect on it.

■ Study the prayer prompts. Pray as suggested. Pray as the Spirit leads. Stop, listen and wait for impressions from the Spirit. Record them in your personal journal. *Whatever He says to you, just do it.*

HOW TO INVOLVE OTHERS

Fasting together as a group is easier than doing it alone.

■ Family

Agree to fast and pray as a family. Decide on the type of fast your family members are comfortable with. Use this 40.Day prayer guide for your family devotion.

■ Neighbours

Find out who are the Christians in your block. Get together as often as possible to pray.

■ Cell Group

Get more copies of this 40.Day prayer guide for your cell members. As a group, commit to a specific type of fast. Throughout this 40.Day period, yearn for personal transformation and national transformation. Ask God to use your group to be His mouthpiece and His outstretched hands at home, at work, on campus, and in the community.

■ Friends

In this super-wired city, prayer is easier than ever before. Keep a daily prayer appointment with a friend via social media. Send reminders via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SMS, whatsapp. At the agreed time, connect to pray!

■ Office

Inspire colleagues to fast with you. Utilise tea breaks or lunch breaks at the office to pray together. Follow the 40.Day prayer guide. Rally others in your same office block to pray together.

■ Morning Prayer

Daily. 6.30am to 8.30am. Kum Yan Methodist Church. Level 6. Nearest MRT Station: Bras Basah | Exit A.

■ City@Prayer

July 1 to August 8: Mondays to Fridays. 12.30pm to 1.30pm. St Andrew's Cathedral.

■ CREDITS

Scripture quotations are from The English Standard Version (ESV), unless marked otherwise. Other translations quoted include: The New American Standard Bible (NASB), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), The New International Version (NIV), The King James Version (KJV), and The Message. Quotations marked 'CT' (Composite Translation) are paraphrased from different translations in consultation with the Greek text.

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A HISTORIC FIRST • SOLEMN ASSEMBLY 2018 • 8PM-10PM

CENTRAL	NORTH	EAST	WEST
<p>JUL 1 - 7</p> <p>● Cornerstone Community Church 11 East Coast Road Level 03, S428722 From Aljunied Interchange: Bus 40</p>	<p>JUL 1 - 7</p> <p>● Victory Family Centre 55 Sembawang Drive, S757614 Nearest MRT Station: Sembawang</p>	<p>JUL 1 - 7</p> <p>● Bethesda Bedok-Tampines Church 300 Bedok North Avenue 3, S469717 From Bedok Interchange: Bus 14, 222</p>	<p>JUL 1 - 7</p> <p>● Covenant Evangelical Free Church 10 Jelapang Road, S677740 Nearest LRT Station: Jelapang</p>
<p>JUL 8 - 14</p> <p>● Faith Community Baptist Church 3 Marine Parade Central, S449409 From Paya Lebar Interchange: Bus 134, 135</p>	<p>JUL 8 - 14</p> <p>● Smyrna Assembly 3 Yishun Street 11, S768645 Nearest MRT Station: Yishun</p>	<p>JUL 8 - 14</p> <p>● Christ Methodist Church 597 East Coast Road, S429082 From Bedok Interchange: Bus 32, 40</p>	<p>JUL 8 - 14</p> <p>● Aldersgate Methodist Church 98 Dover Road, S139647 Nearest MRT Station: One North</p>
<p>JUL 15 - 21</p> <p>● Church of Our Saviour 130 Margaret Drive, S149300 Nearest MRT Station: Commonwealth</p>	<p>JUL 15 - 21</p> <p>● Living Sanctuary Brethren Church 2 Hougang Street 22, S538728 From Kovan Interchange: Bus 113</p>	<p>JUL 15 - 21</p> <p>● Paya Lebar Methodist Church 5 Boundary Road, S549954 Nearest MRT Station: Serangoon</p>	<p>JUL 15 - 21</p> <p>● St James' Church 1 Leedon Road, S267828 Nearest MRT Station: Holland Village</p>
<p>JUL 22 - 28</p> <p>● City Missions Church 2 Kallang Ave CT Hub 11-16, S339407 Nearest MRT Station: Lavendar</p>	<p>JUL 22 - 28</p> <p>● Lighthouse Evangelism 81 Woodlands Circle, S738909 From Woodlands Interchange: Bus 931</p>	<p>JUL 22 - 28</p> <p>● Bethesda Cathedral 30 Chai Chee Street, S468979 From Bedok Interchange: Bus 26, 222</p>	<p>JUL 22 - 28</p> <p>● Renewal Christian Church MANDARIN 2 Tah Ching Road 04-01, S618744 From Lakeside MRT Station: Bus 49, 98</p>
<p>JUL 29 - AUG 4</p> <p>● Kum Yan Methodist Church 1 Queen Street, S188534 Nearest MRT Station: Bras Basah Exit A</p>	<p>JUL 29 - AUG 4</p> <p>● Yishun Christian Church (Anglican) 10 Yishun Avenue 5, S768991 Nearest MRT Station: Yishun</p>	<p>JUL 29 - AUG 4</p> <p>● Pentecost Methodist Church 4 Pasir Ris Drive 6, S519420 From Pasir Ris Interchange: Bus 12, 21</p>	<p>JUL 29 - AUG 4</p> <p>● Jurong Christian Church 2 Tah Ching Road, S618744 From Lakeside MRT Station: Bus 49, 98</p>
<p>AUG 5 - 7</p> <p>● St Andrew's Cathedral 11 St Andrew's Road, S178959 Nearest MRT Station: City Hall</p>	<p>AUG 5 - 7</p> <p>● Church of Singapore Bukit Timah 2B Hindhede Road, S589240 Nearest MRT Station: Beauty World</p>	<p>AUG 5 - 7</p> <p>● Chapel of Christ the Redeemer 2 Tampines Avenue 3, S529706 From Tampines Interchange: Bus 298</p>	<p>AUG 5 - 7</p> <p>● Grace Assembly of God 1 Bukit Batok West Avenue 4, S659125 Nearest MRT Station: Bukit Gombak</p>

AUGUST 8 • DAY OF HIS POWER • 7.30PM • SINGAPORE INDOOR STADIUM

PRAY SINGAPORE

SUNDAY • 7 OCTOBER 2018 • THE NATIONAL STADIUM • 4PM - 7PM

VISION

DAY OF PRAYER & FASTING

- A significant moment in this Year of Prayer.
- A spiritual act in humble obedience to God.
- A sacred trust to shape the future of our nation, uniting all who are hungry enough to fast and desperate enough to pray.
- A strategic step towards God's promised revival-harvest in this *kairos* window.

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THEME

SEEK THE WELFARE OF THE CITY

Seek the welfare of the city... and PRAY TO THE LORD ON ITS BEHALF, for in its welfare you will find your welfare... For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will CALL UPON ME and COME AND PRAY to me, and I will hear you. You will SEEK ME and find me, when you SEEK ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART. I will be found by you, declares the Lord... JEREMIAH 29: 7, 11-14

Nations rise and nations fall. Studies reveal that nations decline primarily because of a *weakening sense of duty and an increase in selfishness and the desire for wealth and ease* (LIM SIONG GUAN and JOANNE H. LIM). Singapore is not exempt.

True, Singapore is a miracle nation admired around the world. Yet, beneath that gleaming facade, there are signs of decline that threaten to undo her.

We see a weakening sense of duty to stay faithful in marriage, to procreate, and to parent our children. We see the rise of secularism and youth shunning religion. We see a society fragmented along class divides.

We are not in the pink of health. We are a nation at war with diabetes and depression. As one of the fastest ageing societies in Asia, eldercare will escalate. Dementia could become a national crisis sooner than expected.

We see a lack of rootedness and emotional bonding to Singapore. ESM Goh Chok Tong has warned that Singapore will decline when her people cease to value her, and begin to treat her as a stepping stone, a temporary station in life to get an excellent education, grow wings, and fly off to sink roots somewhere else to seek their own fame, fortune, and future.

We love Singapore.

We cannot be complacent. We cannot brush these issues aside and conveniently leave them for future generations to tackle. That would be totally irresponsible. God expects us to do the right thing on our watch: Humble ourselves. Repent. Seek his face. Seek the shalom of the city.

God loves Singapore.

When we seek him wholeheartedly, he promises to show up. He will show the way, turning Singapore Godwards!

ONE NAME ONE HOPE

ONE HEART ONE VOICE

ONE FOUNDATION ONE FUTURE

ONE PEOPLE ONE DESTINY

Over the last year or so, God has placed on my heart and on the hearts of several pastors in the city, that He is visiting our land with grace and mercy. A vital expression of this is that God will bring an amazing number of people to saving faith in Christ Jesus. We are preparing for an amazing harvest in Singapore, and this will take the shape of the Celebration of Hope rallies at the National Stadium from 17-19 May 2019.

It is time for us to be singularly focused on 'A Great Homecoming'. For that is what salvation in Christ Jesus means. Through Jesus, sinners come home to God and are set free to live new lives as His children. What tremendous hope and joy this is for a dry and darkened and restless world! God has purposed that multitudes, from all sectors of society, will come home to Him and experience the new life that begins here and now, and continues past the gates of death into all eternity!

There is good news to be shared with everyone. Are you ready to be messengers with 'beautiful feet and burning hearts of love' to go and tell others that God's wonderful salvation has come in Christ Jesus? The time has come for us to do so with courage, joy and winsomeness.

Is this wishful thinking or a vision to be embraced with faith? Is it possible that in the midst of increasing strife and flux on the one hand, and moral darkness, ethnocentrism and hardened secularism on the other, that God is preparing a mighty harvest? I believe it is, because with God nothing is impossible (LUKE 1: 37; JEREMIAH 32:17). In the midst of the engulfing darkness, God in His great love for the world and in order to show forth His glory, has prepared a day of salvation—a time of radiant, magnetic light—in many nations. This glorious light will surely shine upon those nations where God's people are turned towards Him in repentance, faith and love. A nation will be drawn to the light of God's glory shining through His revived people in that land (CF. ISAIAH 60:1-3).

Therefore, let us be focused in our churches and ministry points all across our nation on a great homecoming of many lives to God through Jesus Christ.

Bishop Rennis Ponniah
Chairman, Celebration of Hope

CELEBRATION OF *Hope*

17-19 MAY 2019

NATIONAL STADIUM

Official Organisers:

National Council of Churches of Singapore
Evangelical Fellowship of Singapore

Supported by: LoveSingapore

info@celebrationofhope.sg

Morning Prayer

Daily including Public Holidays

6.30am to 8.30am

Kum Yan Methodist Church

City@Prayer

Monday to Friday

July 1 to August 8

12.30pm to 1.30pm

St Andrew's Cathedral

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