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Prayer & Revival

Christians forget too easily the importance of
repentance, holy living and prayer

BY BISHOP HWA YUNG



Moment



“Yes, Sir!” Over 250 of Chinese Methodist youths replied in unison during the youth conference, named “Mission-R” designed as a tactical battle. The camp was held on the Independence Day. It was a biannual youth conference organized by the Chinese Annual Conference Methodist Youth Fellowship (CAC MYF) for summit and election for the MYF’s committee.

According to the camp organizer, the Mission-R represented every camper who was given a mission entitled “Renew to

Transform”. The theme was inspired by the Methodist Church General Conference’s “20 Years Roadmap”. Thus, the camp quoted scripture verses from Roman 12:1-2 and designed games and sermons to encourage the youth in renewing their life, to be involved in missionary works and to be the salt and lights in the nation.

“We are to testify about God in the country, politics, society, culture, mission and evangelism even while under the heavy influence of postmodernism,” as quoted from the organizer’s introduction of the

camp.

The president from Hong Kong Methodist Church, Rev. Dr. Lo Lung Kwong was the main speaker. Bishop Ng Mun Hing from the Anglican Church Malaysia was invited to talk on Cross Cultural Mission Work, YB Nga Kor Ming, Member of Parliament for the seat of Taiping was shared on the topic of Christian Politicians, and Huang Zi, editor of Bridge (a bi-monthly Christian Chinese Publication) was talked about the influences of the post modernism.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP CHIA

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“A Call To Prayer” is taken from the website www.pray4malaysia.org. This website was set up by a group of senior church leaders in Malaysia from across the denominations. The issues raised for prayer are available in four different languages: Bahasa Melayu, Chinese, English and Tamil.

Malaysia National Prayer Network

BELOVED (feed on the Word of the living God)

“Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

(Jer 23:29; Matt 4:4; Heb 4:12)



Pray that

| We be man and woman of God, strong in faith, full of blessing, rich in fruit to the glory of God.

| We make God’s word our daily bread and meditation, feed on it, believe it and obey it, that our likeness may be found in Him, the living Word .

| Our spiritual leaders to be entirely dependant on the Word of God, and wholly submit to it, living out the life of faith.

| We continue to lift up our brothers and sisters who face injustice and suffer for the name of Christ.

Continue to Pray

| For a progressive nation with good governance.

| For national leaders to be righteous, to walk the talk, to make and implement policies that will benefit all *rakyat* irrespective of race, care for the poor, the orphans and widows, and the marginalized; for the cabinet members and *menteri besar* be men and women of character who will carry out their duties and responsibilities in the interest of all *rakyat*.

| For spirit of unity and harmony against the spirit of racism and extremism.

| For clean elections (13th GE).

| That our ministers and heads of enforcement: stop living in denial, make strategic efforts to reduce crime in the country.

| For police force: consistency in law enforcement, carry out their duties without fear or favor.

| The *rakyat*: to desire justice and righteousness that He may dwell in their hearts through faith.

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Christians & Nation-Building (7): Prayer & Revival

By Bishop Hwa Yung

In the Pelita issue of August 2011, I began looking at the role of Christians in the task of nation-building in our country. The first article sought to remind us that Christians must learn to make a principled stand against evil and injustice in the world. Further it explains that nation-building is a complex multi-layered process. Winning the battle at the ballot box may provide for immediate changes but not long-term answers. The next five articles went on to detail what Christians are called to do to help in the task of building a nation that is just and free, and righteous and strong: responsible participation in electoral politics including voting; moral reformation in society as the only effective way to deal with corruption; building compassionate communities and reaching out especially to the poor and the weak; understanding the Christian roots of modern democracy, and defending freedom and human rights; and lastly, the call to be peacemakers in a deeply divided nation and bring reconciliation in the midst of mounting ethnic and religious tensions.

I write in the context of a general awakening amongst many Christians in the country to the Bible's mandate to be 'salt' and 'light' in the a sinful and broken world. At least within Protestant circles, it is probably true to say that never before has there been so much consciousness of our social and political responsibilities! Yet when we look at the nation, we often see evil, corruption, self-interest, inefficiency and mediocrity deeply entrenched, and challenges so seemingly insurmountable. Just think of the World Bank report on brain drain from

Malaysia over the last few decades, with about one million people having left the country, a third of whom are skilled and highly-skilled! (See http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMALAYSIA/Resources/324392-1303882224029/malaysia_ec_monitor_apr2011_full.pdf.) Despite all the hype about 'Malaysia boleh,' Malaysians of all ethnic and religious backgrounds appear to be losing faith and hope in the country on a massive scale!

This situation reminds me of John Sung, China's greatest evangelist and revivalist of the first half of the 20th century. When he arrived home in 1927 from America after his studies there, the Protestant Church numbered only about 300,000 in a sea of some 400 million Chinese. This was despite more than a century of missionary efforts with thousands of missionaries poured into China, and huge sums of money brought in to build some of the best orphanages, hospitals, schools, universities, and the like. He could have cried, 'Apa boleh buat?'

Moreover, it was not just that the church was growing at snail pace in China. The whole country was a socio-political and economic mess. Drastically weakened by colonialism and external aggression in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it continued to be ravaged by an ongoing civil war that had begun with the Chinese revolution of 1911 and would only end with the Communist victory in 1949. And the government of the day under the Kuomintang was corrupt to the core. President Truman of the USA once said this of Chiang Kai Shek's family: 'They're all thieves, every damn one of them ... They stole seven hundred and fifty

Christians forget too easily the importance of repentance, holy living and prayer

million dollars out of the \$3.8 billion that we sent to Chiang.' (Cited in *Sterling Sea-grave, The Soong Dynasty*, 1985; p. 437.) The equivalent today would be anything between fifteen to forty or fifty billion US dollars!

How did John Sung respond to the situation at hand? From the time he came home until he was terminally hospitalised in Dec 1940, he single-mindedly laboured for revival in Chinese churches in China and S. E. Asia. It is estimated that 100,000 were converted under his ministry and thousands (if not tens of thousands) of Christian lives were transformed. In the final years before his death in 1944 he foretold that a great revival was coming to China—one which would be pri-

marily a work of God and not man. But the way to prepare for it was through earnest prayer. Thus he wrote: 'In my prayers, God has shown me clearly that the great revival of the Chinese church will come. This great revival is not through man but through the Holy Spirit Himself moving in the hearts of a class of workers to unite ... for a long period of prayer, to do prayer work in the Spirit.' (*The Diary of John Sung*, 2012; p. 383.)

It took more than thirty years before John Sung's vision found fulfilment in the late 1970s, when the first rumblings were heard of one of the greatest revivals of modern history. It was all happening during the Cultural Revolution when many, including the whole church, were terribly persecuted! Since then, not only has the Chinese church grown exponentially in the last few decades, but China itself is a totally transformed nation, with a GDP that is second only to the US today and fast catching up!

Like many of you, I too have had my share of despair! Apa boleh buat? But as I wrestle through the years with the issues before us, it has increasingly dawn on me that Malaysian Christians are too worried about the state of the nation but not concerned enough about the state of the church! Could it be that God is more concerned about the latter than the former? I believe so. The church is called to be 'salt' and 'light.' But our Lord reminds us that if the salt has lost its taste, 'It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet' (Mat 5:13). That is in the Sermon on the Mount. Similarly in the letter to the seven churches in Revelations, Jesus

adds a further message. The church in Ephesus was told 'You have forsaken your first love' (Rev 2:4). He then adds the warning that, if there is no repentance, as the Lord of the church, 'I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place' (2:5). In other words, when the light fails to shine, the lampstand will be taken away.

Conversely, in the same letter to the seven churches of Revelations, the Risen Lord tells those who were faithful in the church in Thyatira, 'who keep my word till the end,' that to them He will 'give authority over the nations' (2:26). Now this is a pretty awesome promise! What our Lord is saying is that the church has authority over the nations, or as in our case, our nation. In other words, in some manner, not spelt out here, the well-being of our nation is tied up with the faithfulness of the church. Could this mean that if the church in our country truly walks in holiness and seeks God in humble prayer, then not only will revival follow, but the nation will be blessed as well? It would appear that if the story of John Sung is anything to go by, this is what the Lord is saying to us today.

Christians forget too easily the importance of repentance, holy living and prayer. When we live in repentance and holiness, we are telling God that the Holy Spirit is welcomed amongst us. He will therefore come and work powerfully in our midst. When we truly pray and ask God to act, we are really humbling ourselves before God. When human pride and self-sufficiency get out of the way, the Spirit is then free to do His work!

We see this truth repeatedly in the Bible

and in church history. In the 9th century BC, Judah was attack by a powerful military coalition from Moab, Ammon and Mount Seir. King Jehoshaphat, realising that the enemy was simply too powerful for him, 'set his face to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast throughout Judah' (2 Chron 20:3). As the nation prayed, God's word of assurance came: 'Do not be afraid and do not be dismay at this great horde, for the battle is not yours but God's' (20:15). The result was that the enemy forces self-destructed through infighting, and 'the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for His God gave him rest all around' (20:30).

More than 100 years later, an even greater deliverance took place around the year 700 BC. Judah was attacked by one of the world powers of the day, the Assyrian Empire. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was sweeping through the whole region in an orgy of conquest, tearing down fortresses and destroying cities one after and another. Jerusalem was puny in comparison and nothing in his eyes. Hezekiah, king of Judah, had only God to turn to and no other. And as he and his people prayed, the prophet Isaiah came with a clear message from God concerning the enemy: 'He shall not come into this city, declares the LORD. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David' (2 Kings 19:33f). The Bible tells us that 'that night the angel of the Lord went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of Assyrians' (19:35). This miraculous deliverance is actually recorded in secular history by the Greek historian, Herodotus, who attributed the destruction of the Assyrian army to bubonic plague.



When God's people in this country begin to take these things seriously, Christ, the Lord of our church will come as He promised

Such things have been repeated throughout the history of the church. This is certainly true of Methodism in its first hundred years. As I have already pointed in an earlier article in this series, that the Methodist revival and its emphasis on holy living, together with the work of Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect on moral reform, contributed immensely to the decline of corruption in 18th and 19th century England. Again, Roy Hattersley, a former Deputy Leader of the British Labour Party, could speak of Wesley being one of the great architects of modern Britain through building an honest and hard-working working class which became 'the indispensable backbone of industrial and imperial England.' And in the last article we also noted how the South African church, through united prayer, brought about a miraculous breakthrough in the reconciliation and peace process in that country. This enabled the country to avert a bloody civil war which would have resulted in hundreds of thousands, if not millions, being killed! Instead, South Africa marched joyfully days later into her first free election ever and a new democratic era!

How do we as Malaysian Christians respond to these things? Paul, writing to the Galatian church, urged: 'Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up' (Gal 6:9). Every one of us are gifted and called differently. In the preceding articles, I have suggested that there are different things we can do to make a significant contribution to nation-building in our country. May God strengthen each of us so that we will all do what we are called to and what our hands find to do, and not 'grow weary of doing good'! But over and above these things, I would like to bring us back to the point I

made earlier, which is that God's primary concern is with His church, rather than with the nation. Yes, this seems to be what is repeatedly asserted in the Bible, that God is primarily concerned with His people, His church. This is not to say that God does love our country and all the peoples in it. Rather, this is to say that it is God's purpose to call forth the church, so that the church as the people of God will become His instrument of salvation and transformation for the society in which they live. This is what Peter meant when he wrote: 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may declare the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (2 Pet 2:9).

If this is correct, then there is something here that every Christian can and must do—to strive to be what God expects us to be. Space does not allow me to go into elaborate arguments. But at the heart of being God's people are three things: holiness, unity and prayer. The challenge before us to recognise what it is that we must do to live holy lives day by day, to strive for the unity that we have in Christ through our love for one another, and above all to seek God in genuine repentance and humble prayer. (On the issue of prayer, please refer two other related items in this issue of the Pelita: the announcement on 'Prayer United' and 'A Call to Prayer for the Church and our Nation Malaysia.') When God's people in this country begin to take these things seriously, Christ, the Lord of our church will come as He promised. And through His Spirit, He will pour His very presence, power and glory upon His people to revive the church, transform the nation, and bless all the peoples of this land!



Features

Trinity Annual Conference

World Prayer

Assembly



World Prayer Assembly (WPA) 2012, Indonesia

BY DR. DOREEN KHOO

The World Prayer Assembly (WPA) is an international prayer assembly held at Sentul International Convention Centre in Bogor, Indonesia on the 14th-18th May 2012. There were 2500 international participants from 86 countries and more than 6000 Indonesian participants making a total of more than 9000 participants. There were about 200 participants from Malaysia. There were about 20 delegates from the Methodist Church in Malaysia. From TRAC there were about 15 attending including our TRAC President, Dr Ong Hwai Teik, the GC Prayer Co-ordinator, Dr. Chan Geok Oon and 3 other pastors. In addition, there were 2 PMSM pastors and 2 delegates from the Sarawak Iban Annual Conference. Korea had hosted the first International Prayer Assembly in 1984, the only other time such an event took place.

The purpose of the WPA is for Christians around the world to come together and pray and seek God's plan for bringing transformation to the nations. It is meant to be an encounter with the Lord and each other. The theme of the WPA is "A New Wave is Coming" taken from Habakkuk 2:14. Habakkuk declared that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea". The participants were reminded that the Lord was among us, as He has promised to be, when His people gather. We were told to let Him be God among us, guiding, anointing and empowering each session. A common observation is that the Lord is converging the different global missiological, market place and prayer streams in a powerful and synergistic way to fulfil "the whole Gospel by the whole Church to the whole world".

Alor Star Wesley was represented by 6

of us. However, I was down with Dengue Fever complicated by hepatitis, two weeks before the event and was quite unwell for more than 10 days. I had headaches daily and felt tired. Some of my brothers and sisters cautioned me against going as they felt I should rest and not overstrain. The day before the WPA started, I led worship at the MW Sunday cum Mother's Day service and felt God healing me even as I led and worshiped the Lord. Praise God He gave me the peace to go and the assurance that He would sustain me throughout the convention. God is so very, very good. I went in faith and He did far more than I could ever ask or imagine! Not only did He sustain me but He gave me the most awesome experience of my life. Yes, indeed our God is the Lord and His presence and glory was so tangible throughout the convention. I worshiped, cried and prayed as I had never done before.



WPA Rally in Jakarta Stadium.

We prayed out loud in unison and we prayed in small groups of 2, 3 or 4 with brothers and sisters who sat near us. We had many good plenary and track sessions (workshops) taken by godly men and women but it was the presence of God and the conviction that He had heard and will answer our united prayer that stood out clearly. Dick Eastman, International President of Every Home for Christ (EHC) reminded us that worship (harp) and prayer (bowl) must go together. During the time of King David he sent the choir ahead of the soldiers when they went to battle. Yes, we must learn to establish the tabernacle of David in our lives and in the lives of our church and our nation! God inhabits the praises of His people and when we worship and pray God works and transforms our lives, our homes, our communities, our cities and our nation! In fact, EHC statistics show that there was a 758% increase in churches planted over the past 5 years (2007-2011) i.e. a total of 84,237 churches as compared to 9,820 in the previous 5 years (1997-2001) after intercessory worship or Harp and Bowl emphasis

was implemented.

This was indeed a “hands on” prayer assembly in which praying is a staple in every session. During the conference there were many opportunities to pray for Indonesia and for the rest of the world in intercession. It was also an opportunity to respond in “prophetic prayers” to what had been heard and deemed as revealed by the Lord as we waited on Him. It was particularly touching to hear of what the brethren from Egypt had heard was coming for them in terms of challenging pain but which will manifest the “face of the Lord” clearly.

As we worshiped and cried out to the Lord in one voice, we believe that the wave of revival which has started in Indonesia is spreading to the rest of the world. Internet evangelism through Global Media Outreach (GMO) has 140 websites sharing the gospel and they monitor the number who read the gospel, the number who prayed to receive Christ (usually 12-15%) and the number who have left their contact information for follow up (10-15% of the second category). At the end of the WPA



Group Photo of Malaysians at Hotel Amaris, Bogor.

statistics showed that there was a tremendous increase of those who came to know the Lord during the five days of united prayer during the WPA. All glory to God!

Another thing that was deeply touching was to witness some 500 children between ages 4 to 14 praying for adult participants on a one-to-one basis. In return the adults blessed them, reciprocating with their prayers. The Lord impressed upon our hearts that He loves children and young people, and loves to hear them pray. I was amazed to hear that God has raised up many children and youth to be intercessors all over Indonesia.

A 15 year old Indonesian girl from Surabaya shared about her prayer group which started with 10 children and now has grown to 20 children. As they prayed along with many other prayer groups in Surabaya, God has brought transformation to their city. Statistics showed that the crime rate has dropped and many brothels have been closed down even as God’s people prayed. Indeed all 3 generations (children, youth and adults) must work together and pray to achieve all that God

“Prophetic prayers” to what had been heard and deemed as revealed by the Lord.



Children praying for adults.

wants to do in the coming days.

On the 17th May the Global Prayer Momentum (Prayer Rally) with the theme “It’s time to Pray” was held at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium in Jakarta. It was an awesome rally with about 100,000 present in the huge stadium. It is estimated that of this number 20,000 were youths. Our Indonesian hosts graciously allowed all international participants to sit in the VIP section at the west gate of the stadium. Dr. David Yonggi Cho reminded us that our God is a great God who answers prayer and it truly is the time to pray! Various intercession segments were led by prayer and church leaders from different continents. Christians in 350 cities throughout Indonesia also joined in to pray simultaneously as they watched the event live on television, along with Christians in 78 other countries.

We Malaysians have to rise up and pray for our homes, our communities, our cities and our nation. As we celebrate Malaysia Day on 16th Sept 2012 (50 years after the birth of Malaysia) many Christians believe it is the year of jubilee, the

year of setting the captives free. Malaysia is at the crossroads as our General election draws near and we cannot afford to be complacent and not pray. We have to pray that God will have mercy upon us so that leaders with integrity and righteousness will be elected into office. 2 Chronicles 7:14 says “if my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” Yes, it is only as we repent, humble ourselves, unite, worship and pray will we see transformation in our nation. God loves Malaysia!

Do we care enough to pray, day and night, for God’s favour, healing and transformation of our nation? Our God is a loving and mighty God, the LORD of heaven and earth. Nothing is impossible with our God when we worship and pray. May Malaysia be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea! Amen.

[Dr. Doreen Khoo from Wesley Methodist Church, Alor Setar, TRAC.]

Living

And Jesus answered him saying, “It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.” (Luke 4:4)

Mission **Worship** Fellowship | Discipleship | Care & Concern

Christianity is Friendship with God

What is life all about if I am in solitary confinement without anything familiar to me which has been connected to my faith in Jesus or to my loving family relationships?

BY DR. Lee Bee Teik

I. Christianity is Friendship with God

As we approach a period of assessment of what God and we have been doing in 2012, I thought it appropriate to ponder afresh what our faith in Christ, who has given us His ministry of reconciliation, is really about. Reminders are for forgetful humans. Who may say that they have perfect memories in a church and world damaged by sin since Genesis 3? This is evidenced by the fact that nations which have the most Christian material resources (e.g. books, IT, funds, Christian professionals such as pastors, missionaries, theologians and organizational structures) do not seem to have the highest moral characters in private or public life. Yet Malaysians, Christian or not, are well known for being imitators of the most popular trends be they in fashion, music, movies, lifestyle or theology. I am no expert in all these fields but a long term student of the Bible in the school of ordinary believers and disciples of Christ. From this angle, I invite you to ponder with me as we seek to know the root cause(s) of our stubborn inability and slowness in knowing His will and doing it, come what may. I believe the root cause may lie in our being ignorant or having taken for granted God's friendship

with His children. We have added other factors into our relationship with Him that makes Christianity rather difficult to receive or no different from other faiths. The human call to reconciliation and oneness is good for peaceful public life but not helpful in bringing true and deeper forgiveness and reconciliation with God, with oneself and with others.

Where may I start on the basic need of mankind?

A. In my undergraduate days, while trying to figure out the ultimate meaning of human life as well as the Christian life, I once asked myself, “What is life all about if I am in solitary confinement without anything familiar to me which has been connected to my faith in Jesus or to my loving family relationships? No mother or father to engage with me, no friends to visit, no church service, bible study fellowship, bible, hymn book, notebook, prayer book, Christian literature, radio or cassettes related with my faith till then, nothing to remind me of the existence of this loving and holy God of the Bible. What is it that will sustain me through the dark hours and days? What will be my joy and purpose for living...so that I will want to live on and not give up?”

By God's grace, I came to the conclusion that it will be God's friendship with

me. Nothing and nobody can take away His presence from me, even if I am demented and depressed, weak and toothless, useless in this world. His companionship through thick and thin and His uncompromising faithfulness to me, His child will be the only factor that will give me the joy of life, though in prison. Though forgotten by family, friends, the church or world, I will never be forgotten by Him, my Father God. This conclusion was affirmed by a Christian African psychiatrist who spoke at one of our Christian medical fellowship gathering one evening in 1976. His sharing is one of the temporal walls on which I lean on in times of deep loneliness as a result of my faith in Jehovah God. He shared something to this effect:

“I am in charge of a 800-bed hospital for the mentally sick in Africa. If each patient has a friend whom he trusts enough to be himself, to be able to speak the truth about himself at any time and still be accepted, more than 80% of the beds will be empty. If only every person on earth has a friend. We know that this friend is Jesus and He will never leave us or forsake us. That is why we have to point others in the world to Him, not ourselves, though God often uses us as His link to His friendship.”

[Note: Some mental illnesses or disorders are caused by organic changes in the



chemistry of the brain, not by mere thought/emotional/spiritual factors. In such a case, the basic medical treatment is to be received without viewing it as a lack of faith. Researched scientific truth, as distinct from revealed truth, is from the Creator also.]

Since then, imperfect and fumbling though I am, I have become more aware that I must not place a stumbling block to anyone in their endeavor to search for God according to who He is, not what we or the world think of Him. So what is this friendship with God about?

Some may shy away and say,

“We are not Abraham, Moses or Elijah. How then do we dare to talk about such an intimate relationship with Jesus?”

Let us recall what Jesus said to His disciples of old in John's journals. Does He, the Son of Man and Son of God, need or want my friendship? Let us view what He said the day before He died for us. The words of a man near death are to be taken seriously as there is no more time to pretend or hide. Note the intimate and repeated use of the pronouns I and you. John 14:1-4; 8-11; 5-7 reads “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

He would miss them. Hence, He prepared His close circle of 12-1 disciples for His impending departure as their Rabbi and Lord. He comforted them by assuring them of His coming again to take them with Him to His Father's house. He thought that they

would have grasped the central message of His life...to become the atonement for our sins, the barrier to our reconciliation with God. Only He can and will bring us home to the Father. But Thomas innocently asked “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him.’”

Wasn't that clear enough for them to trust Him after He departed? But Philip had to as “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” This time round, Jesus felt hurt by Philip's careless ignorance.

“Jesus answered: “Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in Me, who is doing His work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves!”

In our walk with God, we often think of the need for God to understand us, love us, care for us and bless us. But have we ever thought of God longing for our understanding? God has feelings and that is why He has created us in His image with the gift of feelings as well.

A few moments later, Jesus continued, as if to elaborate His desire that He also needed to be understood by the disciples. They

had seen and treated Him as their Rabbi but He was also their Friend. In His farewell conversation with them, He longed for His disciples' friendship as He was about to be crucified for their sins in their place. Hence, He explained further in John 15:12-17...“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in My Name the Father will give you. This is My command: Love each other

Jesus tried to explain to them that He loved them enough to lay down His life for them because they are His friends. Such costly sacrifice would be the sign of true friendship where both sides in the relationship could bare their hearts to one another. Then, as if to further help them understand why He came to live among them, Jesus prayed near and loud enough for John to eavesdrop and record His prayer for us in John 17:1-4: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that Your Son may glorify you. For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those You have given Him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent...”

Therefore, we may safely conclude that Christianity = Friendship with God, nothing



more but nothing less either.

Examples of God's Call to Friendship

A. In the Old Testament, God showed us how He wants us to discuss things with Him like Abraham and Moses did.

Abraham was as weak as we are; Abraham lied two times to protect himself and his possessions, thus putting Sarah and the kings in danger. Further, He gave in to Sarah's complaints over not having a son yet, as promised by God, and hence took her maid as his mistress in order to hurry up God's process for giving him an heir to the covenant of grace. Yet he was called 'the friend of God'. Why? It was because he continued to believe that God would keep His word to him, an unknown man from Ur of the Chaldeans going into the unknown with God because He commanded him to do so. God stood by Abraham through thick and thin like many of us do with our friends, though we often fail each other too but God does not. He talked with Abraham as friend to friend.

Moses was strong and proud while in Egypt, thinking that God was on his side and so he could deliver his people in his own ways. However, after having fled in fear of revenge by Pharaoh, he emerged a

humbled man without confidence to serve God any more. Yet God wanted him to go and set His people free". Why? It is because Moses admitted his weakness and had begun to rely on God alone in his obedience to Him. God accepted Moses as he was but did not leave him where he was. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob promised to provide everything needed to fulfill His mission by even providing a spokesman, Aaron, for him. Knowing Moses' lack of self-confidence to enter the great city of Egypt to meet his fellow persecuted Israelites (having tended sheep for 40 years in the countryside, Moses might experience culture shock) He gave him His authority in His Name I AM WHO I AM and in His power to prevail over Pharaoh.

What about Elijah? God used him mightily on Mount Carmel in spiritual warfare after 2-3 years of silent retreat at a widow's home. One would think he would be brave after such a victory. However, Jezebel's threats frightened him so much that he got exhausted trying to flee from her. God understood his burnout state and soon released him from further ministry. Friends lighten our burdens, not add to them.

B. In the New Testament, Jesus' friendship drew Martha into a deeper understand-

ing of who He was through a family crisis. Martha did not have personal time for Jesus when things went well at home. But when Lazarus died, Martha's perfectionist mask dropped and she became vulnerable, wishing that Jesus had come earlier. Her emotional dependency on a man could not hold any more. That was why Jesus stated to her, "I am the resurrection and the life...will never die..." Anyone would have thought this was spoken to a theologian. But no, it was to His friend Martha who was smelly, sweaty and dirty as she mourned for her one and only brother whom she hoped to take over from her as the head of their household according to Jewish law and tradition. Jesus did not scold her, "Huh, only now you have time for me!" Instead, He looked into her sad eyes with tears streaming down her cheeks and gently led her to realize that He was the pillar to lean on, not Lazarus. In fact, if she believed in Him, He would always be there for her as she would always be with Him. He would never leave her in the lurch. Friends are for eternity indeed.

Jesus also offered His friendship to Zacchaeus though hardly anyone wanted to be His friend. They saw him as a betrayer of the Jews as he worked for the Roman conqueror. His having cheated them in excessive tax only made matters worse. How did Jesus reach out to Him with His friendship? He knew that Zacchaeus was timid because others treated him like a leper. Even children ran away at his footsteps as he was probably grumpy and stingy.

Therefore, He invited Himself to his house as Zacchaeus would have felt so sinful and small before the holy Rabbi. Though we do not have records of their further dialogue, Zacchaeus' changed behavior and attitude showed it all...Jesus' gave him the primary gain of friendship which showed His forgiveness of his sins and healing of his lonely soul. His secondary gain of money and possessions could go as he no longer needed them for security. Thus he was healed of money neurosis, a weakness which led him into the sin of corruption and stinginess. In contrast, the rich ruler in Luke 18 would not release his wealth (his primary gain) in order to have Jesus who was like one of his many antiques (his secondary gain) to him. He had a problem of the love of money more than God, which is a sin. [Note: A primary is something or someone of highest importance and significance to you and on which you depend for emotional fulfillment. A secondary gain is to fill in the gap for emotional dependency when the primary gain could not be attained.] Christianity is truly all about friendship with God, the one and only living God!

Announcement

Prayer United: Announcement to All Churches

Dear Church Leaders, Pastors and Friends,
Warmest greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We are happy to respectfully inform you that on 5 July 2012, in a historic moment for the Protestant churches in Malaysia, nineteen (19) church and prayer leaders met at the office of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, Petaling Jaya. They came from all over the country, representing most of the major prayer networks in the country, including those of NECF and CCM, and also denominational and regional Pastors'/Ministers' Fellowships. All came at short notice but with prepared hearts and minds, as each had been burdened with an urgent sense of the Lord's call for united prayer for the church and nation.

During the dialogue, various participants shared their concerns. There was general agreement that the country is facing many critical issues and the Malaysian Church needs to come together in prayer. And it was noted that, if the Church is to play a significant role in national transformation, we must take seriously the call to live as a holy people, to strive for genuine unity, and to pour our hearts out in prayer for our nation!

The meeting was marked by a great sense of unity and hope, as well as much joy in every heart over the common desire for a united prayer initiative to bring the whole church together to seek God's blessing for our country. We believe that through such an expression of unity and love for one another (Ephesians 4:1-6) Christ would be truly glorified. We praise and thank God for giving us this unity of the Spirit in the first place!

We therefore would like humbly to invite all the churches and Christians in this country to join with us in a common prayer platform for the nation. We do this in response to God's promise in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 (NIV):

"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

This united platform will be called

PRAYER UNITED and its terms of reference are:

The Vision

All Christians, churches and prayer networks in Malaysia coming together to pray for the church and our nation.

The Purpose

- The first purpose is to set up a united prayer movement for the whole church to coordinate prayer and to enhance unity among Christians.

- The second purpose is to challenge the whole church to pray together for the transformation of society and nation. In particular, the focus will be on the two up-coming key national events, namely, the National Jubilee Celebration, beginning on 16 Sept, 2012, the upcoming General Elections, GE13.

The Objectives

The following are the objectives of Prayer United:

- To identify key strategic issues for prayer, and to communicate these clearly and quickly to all prayer networks and churches.

- To serve as a link for all those involved in prayer in our churches, including both those in NECF and CCM, and to coordinate our efforts to ensure that our prayers are united in purpose and focus.

- To challenge the church to pray for God's special blessings upon our nation in the Jubilee Year (Lev 25: 10-12), the 50th Year of the formation of our nation, so that it will usher in a new season of peace, prosperity, freedom and justice for our land.

- To call on the church to pray that the up-coming General Election, GE13, will be carried out peacefully and with integrity, and that those elected will be honest and able men and women, who sincerely have the country's true and long-term interest in their hearts.

The Way Forward

1. The work of PRAYER UNITED will be coordinated for the moment by an Interim Committee, with representations from all major prayer networks present at the meeting on 5 July, 2012. This committee will function until after the Jubilee Celebra-

tions and GE13, when the present set up will then be reviewed.

2. All communications from Prayer United will be coordinated by the two Joint-Secretaries, Ms Chrisanne Chin and Rev Andy Chi, who are respectively in charge of the prayer ministries of CCM and NECF.

3. All communication released would be made available in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese and Tamil for dissemination to churches.

We look to you to join us in this spiritual venture of prayer so that all of us will see the Lord's blessings poured out upon our nation, bringing about a powerful transformation for the good and well-being of all citizens in our land. May our prayers and our lives serve to glorify our Lord Jesus Christ, even as we pray: 'Your Kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!' Let us humbly seek God together to ask Him to reveal His glory in Malaysia in our day. Let us also ask Him for grace that we may fulfil His purpose for His church and nation in our generation. May His name be praised and glorified exceedingly in every way!

Blessings in Christ,

- The Interim Committee, Prayer United,
1. Bishop Hwa Yung (Chairman; Methodist)
2. Rev Andy Chi (Joint-Secretary; NECF)
3. Chrisanne Chin (Joint-Secretary; CCM & 24-7 Prayer)
4. Ps Steven Choon (Kota Kinabalu Pastors' Fellowship)
5. Rev Ann Low (MNPN)
6. Rev Teo Kwee Keng (Assemblies of God)
7. Dr Wong Tik Wah (Methodist)
8. Nelson Kee (Sarawak Ministers' Fellowship)
9. Ps Ng Teng Huat (Temporary Representative, Penang Ministers' Fellowship)

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A Call to Prayer For The Church & Our Nation Malaysia

“A Call To Prayer” is taken from the website www.pray4malaysia.org. This website was set up by a group of senior church leaders in Malaysia from across the denominations. The issues raised for prayer are available in four different languages: Bahasa Melayu, Chinese, English and Tamil.

BY PRAY 4 MALAYSIA

1. Humbling Ourselves to Seek God in Prayer

Pray that the Malaysian church will seek the face of God together earnestly and with perseverance, so that He will open the heavens, reveal His glory and pour His power upon our nation. Let us claim His promise that “if my people ... humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

2. Emphasising Holiness and Righteousness in the Church

- a. Pray that pastors, church leaders and members will strive to live godly lives at home, in church, and in the market place and the public square.
- b. Pray that every church will provide systematic teaching on holy living from the pulpit, in our small groups, and at every level of church ministry.

3. Fostering Church Unity and the Ministry Of Reconciliation

- a. Pray that Christians will make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit, embracing reconciliation within the Christian community.

b. Pray that as Christian leaders, local churches and whole denominations learn to live in unity, through forgiveness and reconciliation, we will model ethnic reconciliation powerfully in our nation.

4. Teaching Christians the Cost of Discipleship

- a. Pray that Christians will understand what true discipleship means, and be willing to take up their cross daily and suffer for Christ.
- b. Pray that many Christian professionals and countless university students studying abroad will return with a clear vision to build both the church and nation.
- c. Pray that Christian parents will encourage their children to come home or to remain in Malaysia to serve God here.

5. Developing Godly Leadership for Our Churches

- a. Pray that church leaders, both pastoral and lay, will grow in depth and maturity as true shepherds of Christ. Pray that they will have a real hunger for God’s Word, a firm commitment to God’s truth and to live by it, and the courage to teach the same to their flocks.
- b. Pray that the present generation of leaders will strive to lay strong foundations for churches and Christian organi-

zations in our country, to model godly and humble servanthood, and to manage succession plans well, as they gradually hand over the baton of leadership to younger people.

6. Empowering Bumiputra Churches, Especially Those in East Malaysia

- a. Pray for the increasing availability of both the Bible and discipleship materials in Bahasa Malaysia.
- b. Pray for a growing and effective partnership in ministry and mission between the churches in West Malaysia and in East Malaysia.
- c. Pray for the increasing emergence of strong churches among Bumiputra communities in our land, and the rising up of bold and God-fearing leaders among them.

7. Being “Salt and Light” in Our Nation

- a. Pray that God will continue to bless our nation with strong and steady growth of the national economy so that all citizens will be blessed. Pray for the equitable sharing of the wealth of this nation among all races.
- b. Pray against the twin problems of badly formulated policies and prevalent



corruption, both of which combine to adversely affect national economic growth.

- c. Pray that the smaller and economically weaker communities will not be marginalised. In particular, pray that the rights and means of livelihood of the native people of Sabah and Sarawak, and the Orang Asli in West Malaysia will be legally recognised and safe-guarded, especially their land rights.
- d. Pray that the church will take the lead in reaching out with concrete acts of love and compassion to the poor, including refugees and migrant workers, regardless of race or religion.

8. Defending the Supremacy of the Federal Constitution and Fundamental Human Liberties

- a. Pray that the church, civil society and the rakyat in general will defend the Federal Constitution so that fundamental liberties of all citizens, especially religious

freedom, will be upheld.

- b. Pray that the government will genuinely seek to uphold the principle of equal citizenship rights for all Malaysians, which had been forged originally against a diverse background of race, religion and culture. Pray against all efforts made at asserting ethnic and religious supremacy which, if unchecked, will destroy the foundations of our nation.
- c. Pray that the democratic processes and institutions will mature and, if necessary, be revitalised in our country, especially the Parliament, State Assemblies, the Judiciary and the Civil Service.

9. Electing Politicians Who Are Competent and Genuine, and Committed to Integrity and Justice

- a. Pray that our citizens will have the discernment and wisdom to elect sincere and politically competent leaders who will govern the nation with compassion,

integrity, righteousness and justice.

- b. Pray that Christians will take their responsibility as voters seriously and do what is right.
- c. Pray that in the up-coming 13th General Elections that God will so overrule that governments which will be faithful to the mandate to rule for the good of the nation will come into power. Pray specially against the work of unseen spiritual powers that seek to keep the nation under their control through evil of all kinds.

10. Making Malaysia a Model Nation

Pray that Malaysia, by God’s grace, will develop into an advanced economy and a stable and harmonious democracy, in which all citizens are equal, with fundamental liberties protected by the Constitution and a legal framework which protect the weakest and the least. This will make Malaysia a model nation for others.

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