



A WORD FROM THE DEAN

ARE YOU A DISCIPLE OR A BELIEVER

Often times discipleship is discussed in terms of the radical demands which the Lord Jesus makes upon our lives (cf. Mk 10:29–30). The upshot is we are led to think we can choose to be a disciple or remain a believer. It is of course true that we have a choice. But when we think this way, we imply that discipleship is “a programme of our own to be arranged to suit ourselves.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. NY: Macmillan Publishing, 1963, 66). Discipleship becomes reduced to something we can add—or not add—to our repertoire of spiritual activities, rather than it being a total way of life for those who call themselves Christians.

It does not help that in popular thinking, faith is viewed as prior to obedience; that is to say, one’s first act is to believe (that is, have faith) before taking the next step to obey. This is chronologically the case for many of us, and in most discipleship literature, we are presented with a two-step process. In the gospels, however, Jesus espouses no separation between faith and obedience. A single-act response in which those two virtues belong together is what he expects of those he calls. For, as Bonhoeffer has put it, “faith is only real when there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience.” (*The Cost of Discipleship*, 69).

The distinction between believers and disciples—that is, between those Christians who “just” believe and those who have made a commitment to not only believe but to

follow Jesus and obey his demands—has been sometimes criticised as “unbiblical”. The basis for that criticism comes from Acts 11:26 which seems to negate any separation between the two terms by recording that the disciples of Jesus Christ were all called Christians at Antioch. For my part, I chiefly see the believer/disciple distinction as doing a disservice in fostering a false assumption that being a disciple is an optional second step. Given the wide embrace of consumerism in our culture, we should hardly be surprised to find within our churches many who are quite comfortable to be just believers, especially if they think they will be “saved” as non-disciples.

But the consumerist mindset is only partially to blame for the notion that discipleship is an option to be exercised at a later stage in one’s life or when one is ready to meet Christ’s demands. Another factor may well be the misconception that belief in Christ is an abstract idea to which one need only to give mental assent and then get on with life. On both counts, following Jesus is reduced to being primarily a transaction for securing eternal life for oneself.

In the gospels, Jesus’ invitation comes with the clearest of instructions about the cost of following him. Those who are half-hearted or unwilling to pay the price need not apply. A case in point is that of the believing rich young ruler to whom Jesus lovingly remarks, “One thing you lack”—for being unwilling to commit himself fully to the Lord. (Mark 10:17–22).

It seems in Jesus’ teaching, the line between being a disciple and being a believer should be so fine as to be non-existent. For discipleship and belief must go together.

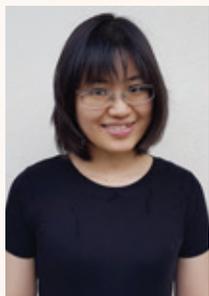


Dr Lim K Tham
Dean

INTRODUCING DTC'S STUDENTS

We introduce six students enrolled in these programmes from July this year: the one-year Graduate Diploma in Intercultural Studies (GDIS), the two-year Master of Christian Ministry (MCM), the Master of Christian Studies (MCS) by dissertation, and Sabbatical Studies.

Yau Gee Lam (Singapore), GDIS



I came to know Christ when my parents started to attend church. I was nine. Growing up, I didn't feel a deep connection to God but God led me to study psychology in university. He helped me to acknowledge and understand my underlying hurt, and feelings and emotions. I prayed to God that if he could heal me, I would like to heal others with the love I received from him. He led me to study Master of Arts in Art Therapy. To me, art therapy is just a tool for healing. Our ultimate healer is Jesus Christ. Thus, I should point people to Christ and this is where I had a calling to study in DTC. Pray for me to grow as a follower in Christ and for my learning, in integrating my profession with my identity as a child of God.

Airi Aoki (Japan), MCM

I was brought up by Christian parents. The church was my playground. God has been faithful and taught me the richness of his love and mercy although I was complaining and judgmental about hypocritical Christians. God showed my sinfulness and Jesus' life. I studied cultural anthropology and worked as a journalist for a newspaper for the construction industry. Two years ago, I visited DTC to see if we can attend, and liked the classes and the environment. We waited for a year due to Covid, and still feel a bit strange and thankful that we are really here. Please pray for our health in the hot weather.

Kohei Aoki (Japan), MCM

I came to Christ when I was 20 years old. My friend invited me to English Class in a church and it was my first contact with the Bible. I didn't believe in the existence of God but he opened my eyes and touched my heart when I read Romans 1:20 and saw beautiful mountains in my hometown Toyama. I worked as a manufacturing engineer for eight years but felt the need to be equipped to share more of the gospel, so my wife and I decided to come to DTC. Please pray that God will equip and guide us to our future ministry.



Kohei and Airi, husband and wife

Pang Wee Heong (Malaysia), MCM



I received many "invitations" from God to be his beloved child but being ignorant and perhaps arrogant, I denied him. I prioritised monetary reward and career. I trusted in my strength and capabilities as they had never failed me. However, things took an ugly turn in my China ventures. When the locals tried to force me out from the business, I again relied on my capabilities but to no avail. Helpless, I surrendered myself completely to God. Being merciful and gracious, he had waited patiently for me. He answered my prayers. I am embarrassed to say that I came to believe in him in such circumstances. As a young Christian, I took up a course in DTC to grow in him. God willing, I hope to be called to reach out to others. Please pray that God will give me wisdom and strength throughout my journey.

Jeannie Koh (Singapore), MCS

I am a part of a private initiative working with a psychiatrist and a theological-pastoral consultant helping churches build resilient communities. As part of this endeavour, I am back at DTC doing a private study on the quest for human identity today. I seek prayer for biblical-shaped wisdom as I learn about the pivotal shifts in searching and understanding human identity today. I hope this will help in a small way as to how the gospel is proclaimed today.

Phoebe Zhi (China), Sabbatical Studies

I grew up in a Christian family. I am third-generation Christian. After college, I went to a local seminary to study theology. After graduating, I decided to stay in the seminary and serve full-time. While serving in the seminary, I met my husband who is a student of Singapore Bible College. We got married in 2020. We are so grateful to God for bringing us to DTC. In this half a year, I wish to prepare a course for teaching when I go back to China. I hope to focus on writing and reading.



Phoebe, with her husband, Howard

“HESED” UNION

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

I am neither a theologian nor have I ever studied in a seminary but after more than 15 years of volunteer English coaching at Discipleship Training Centre (DTC), I must share a constant that I have observed there over the years. DTC is close to my heart because Alumni Lucy Tan and Jeanette Hui made a deep impression as mentors in my early walk with God. Both were enrolled in the first batch of DTC seminarians and are now together again in the arms of Jesus. Jeanette showed me God's *hesed* love (the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek *agape* multifaceted love of God) and Lucy taught me how to love God in return. Lucy often gushed excitedly about being “in love” with God and even confided that she was getting herself ready to be martyred for her Beloved. That burdened me for over 40 years!

In DTC, I consistently see an amazing bonding between staff and students of different races and nationalities. And this is not only evident within the DTC family, but as a visitor, I have always felt genuinely welcomed by all the staff and students, both present and past.

This close-knit DTC family is proof to me that one of the final prayers of Jesus is fully answered. Jesus repeatedly prayed specifically for disciple unity as the following verses in John 17 show:

17:11 *Keep them in your Name that they may be ONE even as we are ONE.*

17:21 *I ask that they all be ONE so that the world may believe you have sent me.*

17:22 *The glory you have given me I have given them so that they may all be ONE just as we are ONE.*

17:23 *May they become PERFECTLY ONE so that the world knows that you love them even as you have loved me.*

The Divine Establishment of *Hesed* Union

In answer to this prayer of Jesus, God has already effectively “tied” all believers in a spiritual *hesed* union. In short, when one sincerely repents of one's sins and believes in Jesus, one is immediately spiritually bonded to all other believers as a new *hesed* sibling!

We might compare this *hesed* bond to the bond of real siblings in a family but family siblings have grown up together so it is understandable if they feel more love for one another than *hesed* siblings.

The Struggles of *Hesed* Sibling Rivalry

Sad to say, *hesed* sibling bonding is often not so evident in church, the very place where speech ought to be more gracious and action more compassionate. And the increasing numbers of church in-fights, and even

break-ups, show that pastors and laity are often too wilful and opinionated to give up their viewpoints, not even for the sake of maintaining the divinely-ordained *hesed* union.

It is true that in these days of the pandemic, *hesed* siblings have shown much initiative in working together to bless the poor in society and shower them with love and compassion. But have we become less judgmental towards our own pastors and fellow church members? Since the Lord has given us such compassion to minister to the poor, shouldn't we show such compassion and more for our *hesed* siblings who are also swamped with health problems, anxieties and fears? If we pray earnestly, they will be released and empowered to fulfil the Lord's specific plans for their lives.

Furthermore, *hesed* siblings are the priority ones the Lord has bonded us to for all eternity and Paul specially pleads with us in Ephesians 4:3 to make every effort to keep ourselves united in the spirit even if not in opinion. They are the ones we should favour and love the most, without apology to unbelievers, according to Paul's teaching in Galatians 6:10. Here Paul exhorts us to do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Paul is aware that it is highly unlikely that *hesed* siblings can always be united in opinion as we are all wired differently and more so in these pandemic days of confinement within the same four walls with the same people. We certainly have more issues to potentially argue about! To remain united in spirit as Paul pleaded, we have to deliberately choose to allow our *hesed* siblings to have different viewpoints and forgive them when they fiercely impose them on us. Furthermore, we have to realise that we may easily fall into the trap of being too materialistic, individualistic or self-absorbed. For instance, when a fellow church member gets a job promotion or when her children do exceptionally well in school, are we guilty of not sincerely rejoicing with her or of even being positively green with envy? In such an instance, we must resolutely declare that she is our precious *hesed* sibling and not let such worldly values result in the breakdown of our sweet spiritual communion, enshrined in the lyrics of the following ancient hymn.

*Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.
From sorrow, toil and pain, and sin we shall be free.
And perfect love and oneness reigns through all eternity.*



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All Glory to the Wonder Working Holy Spirit

I believe that the Holy Spirit specialises in helping *hesed* siblings truly love one another. I recently contacted Christians whom I met more than 40 years ago and when we reconnected it was as if time had stood still and I felt just as close to them as I did before! This has happened too many times for me to deny the truth that time and miles can never separate true *hesed* siblings.

This same precious *hesed* bond I had experienced when I was diagnosed with breast cancer 24 years ago. The Holy Spirit comforted me with such an indescribable peace after I filled my days reading the whole of the Psalms, Isaiah and Jeremiah. I was all ready to face death, especially since one of my colleagues had died of cancer just the week before. My prayer was not for healing but for courage to march forth victoriously to God in heaven. My line of thinking was that many have died of cancer, so why not me? Because I was not frantically pleading for healing, I felt complete peace in my wholehearted submission to the Lord's will. Then I noticed how my *hesed* siblings, as well as my family, pleaded with God for my healing and it was their loving prayers that the Lord mercifully answered.

Another memorable encounter is my chance reconnection online with DTC Alumni Lucy and Johnson Chua on a national cum global daily noon Zoom prayer. Their prayer teamwork with other visionary pastors has visibly united Christians in Malaysia, Singapore and beyond. To me, it is specially heartwarming to hear Lucy claim that "our exposure in consistent prayer for the nations, the persecuted and focus on Asian mission trips at DTC was the preparation for what we are doing today at national prayer".

Let me end with Lucy's most recent urgent prayer:
O LORD, let the church rise up in UNITY and sing to YOU with One voice, not just in GLORY but NOW here!

To all my *hesed* siblings, sweet *shalom* from June.

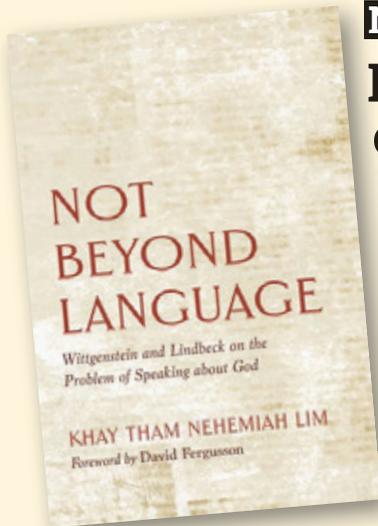
Dr June Ngoh, PhD
(Applied Linguistics), is a retired
NUS lecturer but, prayerfully,
eternally far from retirement
in the Lord's service!



NEW RELEASE

Dean's New Book on Religious Language

We congratulate DTC's Dean, Dr Lim K Tham, on the publication of his book, *Not Beyond Language: Wittgenstein and Lindbeck on the Problem of Speaking about God* by Wipf and Stock Publishers. This 235-page book is a lightly-edited version of Dr Lim's PhD dissertation submitted to the University of Edinburgh.



For more information, go to:

<https://wipfandstock.com/9781725272682/not-beyond-language/>

Applications Welcome

DTC's residential programmes include the Graduate Diploma in Intercultural Studies (one year), Master of Christian Ministry (two years) and Master of Christian Studies (by dissertation only). All three programmes are accredited by the Asia Theological Association. We also offer a Sabbatical Studies Programme (one or two semesters, or six to nine months) for those who wish to review, reflect and refresh by attending courses, writing, or guided personal reflection or self-study. Go to www.dtc.org.sg for more details.

Giving to DTC

Donors may issue a cheque made out to Discipleship Training Centre Ltd. and mail it to **33A Chancery Lane, Singapore 309554**; or transfer the funds to DTC's account number **024-901049-4** with DBS Singapore by ATM, Internet banking or telegraphic transfer. Donors may also scan the PayNow QR code. **UEN Number:** 197100578E

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