



## A WORD FROM THE DEAN

# Discipleship Involves Learning

As most readers will know, the Greek word for “disciple” is *mathētēs*, which translated means learner. At the most basic level of description, a disciple may be defined as one who learns.

In his invitation to those who are weary and weighed down with burdens to come to him for relief, Jesus adds, “Take my yoke upon you and *learn* from me” (Matt 11:28, 29). Note the oft-missed link between following Jesus and learning from him. In the gospels, it is reported that Jesus not only goes about teaching publicly in the temple courts, synagogues, houses, and off the side of mountains, he also occasionally meets with his disciples to give them additional teaching not given to the crowds (see e.g., Mark 9:30–32).

What is clear from scripture is: discipleship involves learning, and the disciple’s part is to learn—from the Lord.

In Christian academic circles, a debate is often joined over how much emphasis should be given to learning rather than to devotion. This is then depicted as a contrast between “a head for God” and “a heart for God”. By such juxtaposition, caution is raised against the learning of divine truth in one’s head without one’s

heart going along with that understanding. As it is, that is wise, spiritual counsel.

What I am, however, not comfortable with is the devaluing of learning—especially of the academic/theological kind—in favour of prayer, contemplation, or other acts of worship. Such binary distinctions are not helpful. I suspect that what it is to learn might be misconceived as simply the acquisition of knowledge, missing the all-important point—that to learn the Lord’s words is to live them. As one writer puts it, “learning means application; learning is transformation; learning is creating a new attitude and behaviour in the inner person”. (Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, 16).

Rather than snub learning or despise “a head for God”, the disciple of Christ will want to heed the scriptural injunction to “continue in what you have learned . . . knowing from whom you learned it” (2 Tim 3:14 RSV) and seek to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2).



**Dr Lim K Tham**  
Dean

## RECENT NEWS

### Quiet Day@DTC

A Quiet Day@DTC retreat was conducted for some members from Pasir Panjang Hill Brethren Church on 25–26 June 2021.

The retreatants spent an extended time “Alone with God”. The dean shared the Word, while Sam Goh introduced the discipline of being quiet before God, and Pastor May Kwan directed the retreatants to do a “Walk with God”.

This is the fourth retreat conducted by DTC for groups or churches.

### SAM GOH, MCM, MTh

We are pleased to announce the appointment of SAM GOH CHIN LIAN as a full-time lecturer following successful completion of his MTh programme with AGST Alliance.

The appointment taking effect from 1 July 2021, marks the culmination of a DTC-sponsored faculty-in-training programme undertaken by Sam, with support from his church Eternal Life Baptist Church (ELBC). DTC is grateful for ELBC’s continued partnership with us for Sam’s appointment.

Congratulations, Sam!

# 52nd Valedictory and Thanksgiving Service

## Testimonies of God's provision and grace

*About 100 alumni, friends and staff attended DTC's 52nd Valedictory and Thanksgiving Service on 12 May this year at Bartley Christian Church. Here are excerpts of the testimonies of the four leaving students.*

### Learning to rely on each other

Melvin Lee (Singapore)

I have been a Sabbatical Studies student at DTC for six months. I had been working in the government sector for the past 22 years and needed a break from work. Looking back, I am glad that God took me down this path.

One thing that I will miss is the community living in DTC. We share and live as a community, doing gardening and sports, eating and cleaning up together and, most importantly, share moments of joy, laughter, sadness and love. We pray for each other and through that learn about one another's struggles and challenges.

Coming from the marketplace, I've learnt to be self-sufficient but I've realised that I had missed out a lot. Being in community allows for sharing and appreciating kindness and compassion from others. Community is about learning to rely on each other just like the fellowship of believers in the book of Acts.

DTC is a hidden treasure. I have learnt many things about God, Christian community and life. We did many reflections that helped me to draw closer to God and feel His presence in my life. I will treasure my experience for the rest of my life. I will remember all the wonderful people that I met here and with whom I shared many precious moments.

### My cross-cultural experiences in Singapore

Nelson Kro (India)

Coming from North-east India to an advanced country like Singapore, I have been exposed to many things that are admirable

and noteworthy. I will share only two.

Firstly, I am impressed with the people adhering strictly to time. A lecturer was late for class by about five to seven minutes. What surprised me was the Singapore student's immediate reaction to call or text the teacher, to ask whether he was coming to take the class.

I learned that day that people here give the utmost importance to time, every second counts and time is precious. In North-East India, students do not bother much if the teacher is late. Some would be concerned but students are mostly reluctant to call or text the teacher to find out the problem or reason. But in Singapore, I see the students' concern for the teacher.

The second thing is the "habit of planning the day ahead". In Singapore, everyone seems to keep a diary. The people are well-organised.

In DTC, whenever the lecturer or the Dean asked the students to have a meeting or dinner, or any activities apart from our set programme, they would first take out their phone and check their diary to see whether they would be free on that day or hour. In North-East India, we just do things spontaneously. We "go with the flow".

I learned the benefits of planning.

Maintaining a diary gives one the courage to simply reply "Yes" or "No" when invited for a program, a meal or any other activity without having to pretend. Also, a diary helps one to focus on the work one has planned

for the day and to get it done.

### RETIRING:

DTC showed appreciation to Dr Eileen Poh, who was retiring as a faculty member after more than 20 years of service. She came to DTC as a student in 1987, went for further studies and completed her PhD in Biblical Studies in 1998, then re-joined DTC as a full-time, residential faculty member.

"I shall miss living and learning in this small cross-cultural community," she told the audience. She plans to continue serving at DTC as an adjunct lecturer next year.



### Community living during Circuit Breaker

Dorcas Liu (Singapore)

DTC is a small residential Bible school. Local students like me stay in and share life in a cross-cultural community.

On weekends, I could



From left:  
Melvin,  
Nelson,  
Dorcas and  
Wee Heong.

All photos by:  
Song Cheng Hock

stay at home with my family.

On 3rd April last year, Singapore implemented the Circuit Breaker (CB). Interaction between households was disallowed. So I decided to stay in DTC, which meant that I could not visit my family during the weekends. Together with five other international students and Eileen and Sam, this small community of eight constituted one household for the next two months.

The first significant aspect for me in community living during CB was cooking. Our cook could not come in, so all of us volunteered to cook. This was a new experience for me. This was on top of our five modules and multiple assignments but no one saw cooking as an extra responsibility.

Actually, it brought out our hidden talents. We had different cuisines: Japanese, Thai, Indonesian, North-east Indian, and Chinese. We baked cakes for birthdays and for fun. We ate a lot. I saw people who loved God and were willing to serve one another cheerfully from the heart (even though there was stress sometimes).

The second significant change was having lectures on Zoom. Students and lecturers alike had to adjust to the lack of physical presence and support, experience rough weather days when Wi-Fi was poor, puzzle over foreign functions of Zoom, and try our best to focus and participate in discussions through a screen. Yet we made it through the challenges together and found ourselves still thanking God for technology, for with it we could have many meaningful connections with the wider community.

These stories are simple, yet they are significant to me. God's love and grace can be found in the simple day-to-day living. I hope that I will not forget gratitude; gratitude towards God and towards others in the face of many future challenges. God has used these challenges and hardship during CB to teach significant lessons.

My contributions to the meals were small—sometimes, I could only assist the main cook—but what was offered to serve others, even though small, was not insignificant (and I tell myself that). So let us not discount every effort made, whether small or big. Let us give and receive with gratitude and humility.

## Building my biblical foundation

**Pang Wee Heong (Malaysia)**

Before coming to DTC, I had been working in the marketplace for the last three decades. As I am a relatively young Christian, I decided to use the Sabbatical Studies programme to build my biblical foundations.

It has been an amazing six-month journey! I must say that it has been an amazing race!

Amazing in that my classmate and I were able to do an overview of 30 books of the Bible, beginning from Genesis to Revelation. I felt that I have performed the “mission impossible”, just like what Tom Cruise had done in the movies.

As a slow learner, I almost fell off my chair when Eileen handed me the reading schedule: 50 chapters of the Bible to read each week with a written summary! I struggled to complete them initially. When it came to writing essays, I felt that it would be easier for me to climb Mt. Everest. Unlike the academic papers that I had written during my university days, I was afraid to write because I was very conscious that I was writing about the Word of God!

Thank God for knowing everything for he is Sovereign. Through his grace, he sent coaches and supporters to cheer me on. My lecturers explained the Bible in detail and clarified any doubts I had. They were patient and accommodating.

My classmates and other members of the community gave me all the encouragement that I needed to carry on. Most importantly, I thank God for giving me the strength to persevere and to fix my eyes on him.

I am just at the starting point of the race. God willing, I hope to do the Master of Christian Ministry programme at DTC in the next academic year. Please pray with me that God will continue to give me the necessary wisdom and strength throughout the race.

## Prioritise discipleship and character formation



The direction of theological education was a concern for the late Dr Choong Chee Pang when he spoke at DTC's Valedictory and Thanksgiving Service one month before the Lord called him home on June 12.

Dr Choong cautioned that insufficient attention was being paid to discipleship and character formation.

He observed that the pressures of the academics in theological education made both students and teachers so tired that there was "not much room or time left to think about discipling, the formation of good Christian character, the imparting of this character to the students".

Dr Choong was a member of DTC's Board of Reference and a former principal of Trinity Theological College. Educated at Nanyang, London, Aberdeen, Oxford and Harvard universities in literature, theology, biblical studies and philosophy, the esteemed scholar was also a visiting professor at Peking (Beijing) University as well as other universities in China.

Dr Choong began his speech by recalling the circumstances in which DTC was founded in 1968 by Mr David Adeney, with whom he had spoken on several occasions at that time. Not being a formal theological college then gave DTC the "cutting edge" to innovate and offer courses that were different from other colleges but which met the needs of the students, he said.

Dr Choong then proposed an impromptu dialogue with the audience on the direction of theological education for the church. In his responses to several questions, he circled back to one theme: striking a balance between theological training and discipleship, between imparting knowledge and making mature disciples.

He said: "I try to remind my students, theological education is a serious business, there is no doubt about that, but the end of all this is the (character) formation of a Christian person, pastor, evangelist, counsellor."

Reflecting on his many years of teaching, Dr Choong, who was 78, said: "I thought I spent far too much energy and time on things academic which in the end did not quite contribute to the formation of a good disciple... a good pastor-teacher."

DTC's dean, Dr Lim K Tham, told DTC Link that he believes that if one understands that the purpose of theological education is not about acquiring more knowledge—biblical or otherwise—but to grow in spirit and in Christlikeness, then one would seek to apply the mind one seeks to develop to all aspects of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

# A Story to Tell to the Nations

By Dr Lionel Lee

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope (faith) that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience... (1 Peter 3:15–16a).*

Multi-religious societies by their very nature provide for freedom of religion. Theologian and lawyer, Dr William Wan, at a recent workshop on evangelism, informed the participants that Article 15 of the Singapore Constitution guarantees freedom of religion for all. Every person has the right to profess, practise his religion and propagate it.

But propagating one's faith insensitively and rudely can become a powder keg to the harmony established in a multi-racial, multi-religious society. It is to be avoided and for this reason, Singapore has the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, to ensure that while the various religions can keep their freedoms, each must practise mutual respect for other faiths and stay within the bounds of the societal space given for each religion.

Insensitive proselytising is offensive to any recipient. I remember being embarrassed by Christian friends from a certain parachurch organisation who would corner varsity freshies during the University orientation period. While "ragging" freshmen, these Christians would present the gospel without regard to the inappropriateness of timing nor opportunity. Uninvited, they accosted their listeners, intruded on privacy and offended their intelligence. It was a definite put-off for my non-Christian classmates, many of whom complained, rejected Christianity outright and remained non-Christian to this day, five decades later!

So how does one witness and share the faith while maintaining the desired multi-religious harmony? The take-home advice is to be careful how one propagates one's faith and to do so respecting the

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# Keys to Effective Ministry

By Revd Dr C. David Harley

For the past fifty years, Rosemary and I have been involved both in mission and in the training of others for mission and ministry. We have grappled with questions as to what are the keys to effective ministry.

Dedication, faith and perseverance could be listed among many essential attributes of those who seek to minister in Christ's name. I would also suggest three additional qualities that should characterise the lives and ministry of those who seek to be effective in their master's service.

The first is authenticity. If we seek to share the gospel with others, we can authenticate what we say by the way we behave. We can reflect our message in our personal lives.

A friend of mine who worked for many years in Bangladesh said: "If people do not see Jesus in me, I may as well go home." A Malaysian Christian, who came from a Buddhist background, argued that unless adherents of other faiths see evidence of the love of Christ in the lives of Christians there is no incentive for them to listen to the Christian message.

We read in the book of Acts that the religious leaders were astonished by the courage of Peter and John and took note that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

I once conducted a survey among a hundred Jewish people who had accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. When I asked what caused them to make that difficult step and face rejection from members of their own family, they all gave similar answers. They were not persuaded by long discussions or theological arguments. They were drawn to Jesus because they observed peace, purpose and the love of God in the lives of Christian friends.

A second quality that will enhance the ministry of the gospel is humility. Sadly, humility has not always been the hallmark of missionaries, especially those who came from the West.

At the World Missionary Conference, held in Edinburgh in 1910, it was stated that: "The white man so instinctively feels that he is lord of creation, that it is hard for him, however Christian he may be, to get over the idea that men of a different colour are his inferiors."



Revd Dr David Harley with his wife Rosemary.

Photo by Revd Dr David Harley

When an African Christian leader addressed missionary candidates in the UK, he said: "When you come to Africa," he said, "do not come as if you were the fourth member of the Trinity!"

It is not only people from the West who can feel culturally or racially superior. People from any successful nation or church can assume their country and culture are best and look down on others.

We can feel proud because of our background, education or abilities. It is salutary to remember that Jesus chose ordinary and reluctant disciples to preach in Galilee (Luke 10). Paul reminds us that God often uses people who are weak, foolish or even despised (1 Corinthians 1:26ff.). A missionary is

only a beggar who has found bread to share.

A third quality that is essential if our ministry is to be effective is relevance. The message we proclaim must be intelligible and relevant. How we present the good news must depend on the people to whom we are speaking.

When Jesus discusses with Nicodemus, he talks in terms of the kingdom. He uses the theological language because Nicodemus is a scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures (John 3). But when Jesus talks with the Samaritan woman, he speaks about finding fresh water. He uses an idiom from her daily life, an illustration she understands (John 4).

The challenge we face today is how to present the wonderful message of forgiveness and eternal life in terms that people understand. "How shall they hear?" is the cry of Paul's heart (Romans 10:14). His burden is not just that the message will be audible but that it will be understood.

An enthusiastic Christian quotes John 3:16 to a Buddhist friend. The problem is that his friend misunderstands almost every phrase in a verse, which to Christians is so rich in meaning.

The Christian speaks of God, but the Buddhist does not believe in a creator, sovereign God. The Christian speaks of God's love but for the Buddhist, emotions like love or desire do not provide the solution to the human condition. He believes that all our problems come from our desires. The Christian speaks of eternal life, but the Buddhist does not see this as good news, since he wants to escape from the never-ending cycle of reincarnation.

We have a marvelous message to proclaim. May God give us grace to authenticate that message by our lives, to pass on that message in an attitude of humility as forgiven sinners, and to share that message in such a way that all can hear and understand and believe.

*Revd Dr C. David Harley is a former Dean of Discipleship Training Centre. He has served as Principal at All Nations Christian College in the UK, and also as the General Director for OMF International.*

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dignity of the listeners. Jesus Christ himself set this example in his discourse with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, which is recorded in John 4. William shared how sensitively Jesus engaged the woman in conversation:

- **Advance towards the person.** It is evident from the narrative that Jesus had purposed to engage this woman. He initiated the conversation by asking her for a drink. He had her in mind and was aware of her circumstances. He did not retreat from her nor kept his distance.

- **Approach with humility.** When Jesus asked her for water, the woman was shocked that he, a Jew would "lower" himself to speak with her. She was a Samaritan and a woman, two reasons any other Jew would have considered her repugnant. Instead, Jesus interacted with her and took on a humble posture.

- **Address practical relevance.** Jesus turned a simple encounter, beginning with an innocuous request, into something of practical relevance; finally addressing her condition and circumstance. The woman was ostracised and needed to be accepted. Jesus spoke with her and together they shared their views.

What transpired at Jacob's well was lifestyle evangelism. Jesus discussed with the woman issues concerning her lifestyle. This was relevant and it spoke to her heart. In return, the woman had an insight into Jesus' humanity and deity—his lifestyle. She was willing to listen and receive his message. Furthermore she went back to her village to share the good news.

Many non-Christians are repelled when we present the gospel, going around knocking on doors uninvited and unapproached. In contrast, the conversation at Jacob's well was mutual, friendly, engaging and non-threatening.

The art of evangelism is to be able to turn around a conversation and weave in religious matters and issues that are real and relevant to the listener. Views are heard and shared sensitively and sensibly. This also means that we are listening to the story of the listener

and open to his/her views.

We should be thankful that Singapore's religious harmony laws do not restrict us from propagating our faith. There is, however, one proviso: We cannot convert the person against his will. We must wait on the Holy Spirit to create a need within the listener until he/she asks, "How can I be a Christian?"

It will require faith, belief and action on the part of listener who willingly requests to become a Christian. It also requires humility when we present the gospel and give the reasons for our belief.

Let us be authentic and do our best to witness. Then let the Holy Spirit work on the heart of the recipient. Allow the Christian in us to shine through and let God do the rest.

*The writer, a medical doctor, was one of the participants at a workshop on witnessing organised by Discipleship Training Centre on 26 April 2021. This article is an edited version of the writer's blog post at [contemplation-lionel.blogspot.com](http://contemplation-lionel.blogspot.com) published on 2 May 2021.*

## Serve with DTC

We are seeking to fill the post of lecturer in Biblical Studies. The appointee is expected to be involved in the teaching of various courses offered by the school.

He or she should be a committed Christian with a relevant postgraduate degree(s). The successful candidate will be expected to play a full part in the collegiate life of the school. He or she is required to live-in on campus.

To apply, write in confidence to the Dean, Discipleship Training Centre at [disciple@singnet.com.sg](mailto:disciple@singnet.com.sg) enclosing a brief resumé, stating age, church, work experience, highest educational level attained.

## 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.

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