

DTC Newsletter April, 2008

A word from the Dean.

How to survive in the field (2)

In the November 2007 Newsletter I shared five points about surviving in ministry. The following three points complete my original talk on this topic.

(6) Important lessons learned through depression

I have been on antidepressant medicine since 1999 and will probably need to be on it for the rest of my life. What does having depression mean for me, a senior Christian worker? It is like having a disability. In my case, depression causes inertia where I have little energy and motivation to get things done or to relate to people. Even relatively small things like phoning or emailing someone are difficult to do. I have difficulty concentrating on more than one or two things at any one time. I am often tired physically and emotionally. Not surprisingly, I am not very productive. I become irritable and moody. Perhaps, the worst symptom is my pathological procrastination. The larger the work pile left undone, the more I procrastinate and the higher the pile, setting in motion a vicious cycle!



Depression

At an Overseas Christian Fellowship Convention in Canberra in 1998, I experienced something I had never experienced before. Despite spending much time in earnest prayer I felt completely 'flat' each time I went up to give the evening message. I was like coca cola that had lost all its fizz! It is difficult to minister with conviction and passion in these circumstances. In my pastoral ministry, I experienced times when I had no motivation to make pastoral visits. Frances had to prompt and push me. Because there was little motivation or emotional drive I often had to 'will' myself to minister. This was what it was like during the periods when I was not on medication. However, if I want to finish well in my ministry, I have to accept that with my genetic predisposition towards depression, something of this may always be there. I need to understand that my working less productively, my tendency to withdraw, my possessing less passion and having to work more at ministry, are not necessarily due to less commitment or to backsliding but may be symptoms of an unbalanced biochemistry! Therefore, for me, ministry should mean faithfulness and perseverance when I feel 'flat' and when I feel 'effervescent', when I feel little compassion and when I feel much, in periods when I struggle to get things done as well as when I am highly motivated and it comes easy.

Various Scripture passages have taken on added meaning for me. *"For when I am weak, then I am strong."* *"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."* *"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* *"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death"* *"And, being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."*

(2 Corinthians 12.10b; Philippians 4.13; Romans 8.37; Hebrews 5.7a; Luke 22.44)

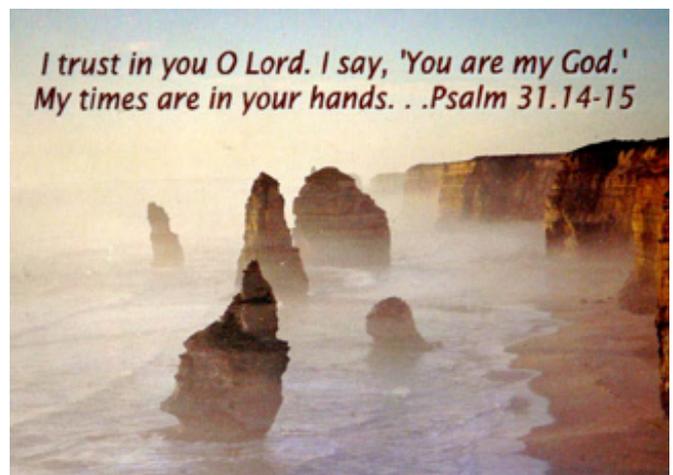
The Lord Jesus may not have experienced clinical depression as we know it, but I believe he has experienced something of what depressed people experience and he understands.

(7) Reflections on being diagnosed with serious, potentially terminal illnesses.

In March 2006, I was diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease! This diagnosis has been subsequently confirmed by other neurologists. I became very reflective and sober when I read some of the literature my daughter sent me. Fifty percent of those with MND die within fourteen months of diagnosis! Those with the most common form, ALS, normally die within two to five years.

I am so thankful to the Lord that the diagnosis of MND did not shake my confidence that he is sovereign and in control and that these developments are in his hands. I am so thankful for the peace and the calm which I have enjoyed. Peace and calm were just there. I wasn't trying to be heroic or stoic. They were a natural response. It helped me to understand others who met news of terminal cancer with peace and calm. (I have since learned I probably have a more benign, less aggressive form of MND. I have experienced minimal disability so far and I may live for ten years or more).

Various passages of Scripture became very meaningful during this period. Not surprisingly the first passage that I meditated on was Romans 8.28. God is working for my good in all things! A related passage is Psalm 31.14-15. "But I trust in you O Lord. I say You are my God. My times are in your hands." My times are indeed in God's hands. My lot, my circumstances are in his hands.



© John Ting December 2000

As people came to know about my condition I began to receive various emails. One that really struck a chord in me was this one from one of Frances' closest friends in HK. "I suppose at this stage you just have to wait it out to see what the second opinion in Sydney says. Aren't we glad our Lord knows what he is doing. We are here only to carry out his plans and purposes. With him we can face any 'tomorrows' come what may." Why was this on just the right wave length for me? *"We are here only to carry out his plans and purposes."* How true. This is precisely it. When I understand this, I am much more able to acknowledge God's sovereignty even in very difficult and painful situations.

It is not that my life belongs to me and that it is my prerogative to choose how I shall live my life, for example, to decide how much of my life I want to give to serving God. No! All my life belongs to God. I am here simply for the Lord to fulfil his purposes in and through me.

(8) I also came to understand and appreciate how blessed and privileged I am.

1. I was born and raised in Sydney and have had the privilege of ministering mainly in Sydney and Singapore.

2. Compared to the average middle-class Christian Sydneysider and Singaporean I have had my share of 'negative' experiences ('negative' from a human point of view):

a) When I was eleven years of age, I and two other children were sexually assaulted by a paedophile in the woods near our house.

b) I have experienced periodic depression from as early as my mid-teen years. I am presently on anti-depressant and will probably remain on it for the rest of my life.

c) My younger brother drowned, at the age of seventeen, during a youth fellowship beach outing and his body was never recovered. As a result, my mother suffered ongoing depression for nearly forty years right up to her death.

d) I had a previous hyperthyroid condition. I experience ongoing depression. I am mildly asthmatic. I have had triple bypass heart surgery as well as prostate cancer which has necessitated surgical removal of my prostate and post-surgery radio- and hormone- therapy following the return of the cancer. I have Motor neurone disease (thankfully, presently of a more benign kind). I am now diabetic.

I am thankful to the Lord and for his grace that I have not complained about this nor ever asked why? There are countless people in this world who are far, far worse off. On the contrary I have enjoyed a good life with so many blessings from the Lord, not least the privilege of ministering to people; a harmonious and mutually supportive family despite my (earlier) failures as a husband and father; generous, caring relatives, friends, travel, photography, music, sports. Yes, it has been a good and blessed life.

Being able to have this kind of perspective and conviction, arising from the experience of God's unflinching faithfulness in my ongoing walk with him, is a great help in terms of being able to continue in life and ministry with a positive and thankful spirit.

Testimony

As part of 'DTC Sunday' at the Adam Road Presbyterian Centre, Jeannie Koh shared a thoughtful and encouraging testimony about why she joined DTC and her experience since. "I came to DTC tired and fatigued. I was mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually drained. I had lost the plot of my life. I felt very much like this adapted free verse:

The Paradox of our Times¹

¹ This has been adapted and modified by me but originates from this website:

<http://www.snopes.com/politics/soapbox/paradox.asp>. The original writer is Dr. Bob Moorehead, Pastor of Seattle's Overlake Christian Church (Washington, USA). I was not able

*We have taller buildings, but shorter tempers;
We have wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints;
We spend more, but have less;
We buy more, but enjoy it less.
We have bigger houses and smaller families;
We have more conveniences, but less time;
We have more degrees, but less sense;
We have more knowledge but less judgment;
We have more experts, but more problems;
We have more medicine, but more illnesses.
We have increased our possessions, but reduced our values.
We talk too much, love too seldom and hate too often.
We strive to make a living but not a life;
We add years to life, but deduct meaning from life.
We have been all the way to the moon and back,
But have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbour.
We have explored outer space, but not inner space;
We have split the atom, but not our prejudice.
We have higher incomes, but lower morals;
We have become long on quantity, but short on quality.
We have more leisure but less rest;
These are the days of two incomes, but more divorces;
Of fancier houses, but lifeless homes.
This is how I thought and felt about this day and age.*



I decided to look for a place where I could engage more deeply in the Word of God in the context of an honest, small community. I have met many wonderful bible teachers and mentors over the years and in different countries. Among these are Eileen Poh and John Ting, faculty from this curious place in Singapore called "DTC". I had heard them preach at various occasions. I was drawn by their teaching. There was something honest about their preaching. I was to later discover at DTC that in them is the combination of great bible scholarship rooted in human life, in jars of clay, and a rare courage to be vulnerable with their students, unafraid to enter the messiness of life.

I was not expecting the depth of blessings that lie hidden in two two-storey humble buildings housing a small group of believers made up of students from struggling nations and faculty members who wash dishes and mop floors along with the students. Here is where there is intermittent internet connection on old computers (until a recent donation pushed us to a more decent RAM capacity). I thought: 'This is a good place to recover from burn out'. I was not expecting more. What other good can come from this low-profile unimpressive 'Nazareth' which has not caught up with sophisticated and progressive Singapore?

to seek permission before using and adapting this, but will endeavour to get in touch with Dr. Moorehead.

In these pluralistic times, it seems like “anything goes” means there are so many views about what the Bible says and I did not know where to begin to discern, and what principles to use to come by truth. It seemed to me that we were basing our interpretations more on what our pastor or spiritual leaders or great bible scholars believe than what we know the Word says. I was resigned to the conclusion that it comes down to just accepting and not questioning. I had in my mind that at DTC I would hear the usual spiel about the Christian faith in nice lectures that would not add to my faith all that much. Perhaps this is what it means to have a simple faith. I could not be more wrong.

The lectures are so compelling that each hour and fifty minutes flies by, and both lecturer and student are reluctant to leave.



One of the more compelling lectures at DTC

If it were not for John Ting’s discipline of time, we would all run overtime and miss breaks and lunch, never complete the course and have make up lessons. It is pure joy for me to sit, listen and discuss with the faculty. For example, when John speaks on Paul, Eileen on hermeneutics, Warren on the exciting shifts as Christianity flourishes in Asia and Africa, Jeannette on spirituality, Alvin on missions, and when fellow students, those scattered from across Asia, share during chapel.

Never have I known such daily, consistent and extensive rigour in approaching the Word with all its ambiguities, and never have I felt more convinced of its truths. My idea of who God is, is also much deeper, richer -- particularly this idea of the God of all ages. What I’ve learnt of the history of Israel and the significance of the laws and the temple, these have added so much to knowing the meaning of the Cross more fully. When first century Christians heard the gospel, they heard it with the Old Testament in the background and understood it with far greater meaning than we do today.

The studies are intellectually honest, tailored to each individual capacity and capability – it is rigorous according to each person’s need. There are the necessary assignments and papers. We are called to be diligent and to write not so much what the lecturer wants to read, but what we truly believe. The faculty is open to and supports disagreements as long as we can back up our arguments. All of these speak to the integrity of the academic process – from the structure and its biblical foundation to the passion of each and every faculty member. By the grace of God, it is the very smallness and unassuming nature of DTC that allows the commitment of each staff to pursue and lead in the light of the bible.

John Ting once pointed out to us that ‘it is also the multi-denominational setting of DTC that allows for a certain freedom to look for the essence of what Scripture is saying.’ We are also taught to research well and suspend the trappings of our assumptions shaped by our various

traditions. Through all these, the bible has been coming alive for me in a way that surprises this sceptic.

This coming alive is not just knowledge acquired but knowledge lived out, in the context of a small community. There is little room to hide and our clay jars are exposed. The excellent staff – student ratio means a close attention to the lives and growth of student and staff alike. In this intimacy comes a vulnerability, and I have been grateful for an acceptance and grace I have tasted at DTC.

I am grateful for each chapel, each lecture, each meal, each day at DTC. I am honoured to be taught by those so humble and encouraging despite their flaws. I am privileged to be among fellow students from Asian countries who know far better than I do the cost of holding to their faith in Christ. Their stories are in themselves humbling. Through them I learn my own cultural blinders, and how much I am influenced by this age, my country, my race, my education and my family. How I live narrowly and how much I do not know.

Founder David Adeney called DTC ‘A terrific gamble’. For me, it is a gamble that has paid off. It is a sign of how lavish God is -- a lavishness that breathes life in this most unexpected and unglamorous place. DTC is actually quite a busy place, but it is busyness brimming with life, not taking from it.

A long time ago in a distant land, God promised Abraham he would have as many descendents as there were stars in that ancient sky. If this happened in Singapore today, Abraham would have concluded his descendents to be few because the big city lights blind us to these precious stones. For me the bright lights of this world’s strength, riches and wisdom – all wonderful things to have and be grateful to God for – are dimmed at DTC in order that the treasures of the kingdom of God shine brighter in ever increasing numbers.

Events and Happenings **Spiritual Warfare and Demonisation class**



Bishop Robert Solomon

Dr Robert Solomon, bishop of the Methodist Church in Singapore, led sessions over a day and a half covering various aspects of spiritual warfare. Drawing from his own research and experience as a medical doctor, pastor and theological teacher Dr Solomon began with a historical survey of the Church’s understanding of spiritual warfare. He then dealt with topics like spiritual warfare in the soul and in society; demon possession including scientific explanations from psychiatry and anthropology and developing a theological framework of demon possession. Dr Solomon concluded with some implications for ministry and mission. Students and faculty alike benefited much from Dr Solomon’s teaching.

Mental Health First Aid



Prior to coming to DTC, Jeannie Koh was the senior counsellor and manager of the National University of Singapore's Counselling Services. Altogether, she has been a counsellor for sixteen years. Having undergone the appropriate training and certification, Jeannie is qualified to train people for the Mental Health First Aid Certificate programme first developed at the University of Melbourne in 2000. Mental health first aid is the initial help given to someone experiencing a mental health problem before professional help is available.

Jeannie taught the twelve-hour course over four mornings during the March break. The course covered such areas as psychosis, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, addiction problems and other mental health related issues with the aim of helping people to deal with crisis situations such as persons with suicidal thoughts, panic attacks, traumatic experiences, threatening violence or who have overdosed. The appreciative course participants included DTC teachers and students, OMF personnel and others.

Students appreciation of Faculty, Staff and Board members



February, 2008



Students presenting a song item in various languages

For some time the students had wanted to express their thanks and appreciation to those who have contributed to their training at DTC. So they organised a dinner meeting. Much time and effort had clearly gone into the evening. After an enjoyable 'ethnic' buffet dinner prepared by the students, we gathered in the lounge area where the students presented a song item in various languages and gave speeches expressing their appreciation and thanks for the different aspects of DTC training and the faculty, staff and board members for their respective inputs into DTC.

"We are grateful to all the teaching staffs for investing their lives in us through their academic teaching, ministry, personal spiritual guidance and last but not least their prayer. Their help has been truly sacrificial as it has gone beyond formal and official boundaries. We are also very thankful to God for His blessing that we have received through all other DTC staffs: the administration staff, the Librarian, the kitchen staff and the cleaning staff. Words cannot describe the incredible value of what they have done that has supported us in many practical ways. On this special occasion, we also want to express our big thanks to Frances who has been the one behind many things in the running of our community life at DTC."
(Extract from Pudji Sulaksono's speech).

Eunice Lim Memorial Fund

Responding to a phone call from the Trustees of the Eunice Lim Estate, I went to their law firm in Chinatown and learned that the estate's remaining assets had been sold and DTC was to receive a further SGD 130,000 as our share. You can understand how thankful to the Lord I was. This now leaves our student support fund in a very healthy state – a far cry from this time last year. Praise the Lord. I was able to draw on the fund to purchase two new computers for the student computer room and a new Epson 1700 lightweight LCD projector (2,200 ansi lumens) to supplement our dated (600 ansi lumens) projector and to enhance our teaching and presentations.

Kid's small group fellowship



DTC Kids from three different countries

Faculty and students have their weekly pastoral group programmes and the children have their own small group activities! These include ceremonial washing (as in the photo), blowing and chasing bubbles, raising the decibel level at DTC, swings and slides, exasperating parents and enjoying different modes of parent-assisted or personal foot-powered transportation.

The Thirty-ninth DTC Thanksgiving and Valedictory Service

will be held at the Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church on Thursday 15 May at 8.00PM. Leaving students will share their testimonies and Jonathan Fuller, OMF's International Director for Mobilisation, will give the message. The Service is open to all even if you do not have any personal connection with any of the leaving students or with DTC.

Fortieth Anniversary of the Founding of DTC



First batch, October 1968

The very first scheduled DTC activity took place on Monday 16 September, 1968. It was DTC's very first Monday night Family Fellowship Evening. I can still recall the excitement and deep sense of gratitude to God that we experienced as we listened to each other share about the Lord's working and leading in our lives in bringing us to DTC.

I had the privilege of being one of the 'first batch' DTC students described once by Ada Lum as the most strong-willed, individualistic group of people she had ever come across! It is true we had more than the one confrontation (many more) as one strong-willed student clashed with an equally strong-willed classmate! Thankfully, we were often able to work through our confrontations to a deeper level of relationship and understanding. I am so thankful to the Lord for the deep bond that continues to exist between us to this very day. Other batches have also kept in touch with each other over the years.



Teachers, students and families at King's Road, 1969



Students at Chancery Lane, 2008

DTC alumni are now scattered throughout Asia and the West. Nevertheless, we hope a number will be present at our fortieth anniversary thanksgiving dinner meeting scheduled for Thursday September 18, 2008. Of course we also look forward to meeting up with past and present faculty, board members, supporters and friends of DTC. Hope to see you there!

We also hope to have ready for distribution that night, a DTC commemoration publication consisting largely of testimonies and reflections from DTC alumni.