

# An wl's Journey

Essays to commemorate the  
70th birthday of David W. F. Wong

Edited by  
Dev Menon, Quek Tze Ming



GRACEWORKS

## An Owl's Journey: Essays to commemorate the 70th birthday of David W F Wong

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Published by Graceworks Private Limited  
22 Sin Ming Lane  
#04-76 Midview City  
Singapore 573969  
Tel: 67523403  
Email: [enquiries@graceworks.com.sg](mailto:enquiries@graceworks.com.sg)  
Website: [www.graceworks.com.sg](http://www.graceworks.com.sg)

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ISBN: 978-981-11-9866-3

Printed in Singapore

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 • 25 24 23 22 21 20 19

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## **EDITORS' FOREWORD**

It has often been noted that, in our present age, there appears to be a “great gulf fixed” between the academy and the church. On the one hand, the academy—represented by the seminary or bible school—is regarded only as a place of theory, lofty thought and fine argument. On the other hand, the local church is considered as the place for the practice of faith, worship, evangelism, prayer, and spiritual formation. This separation is artificial and unhealthy, and does not reflect what has previously unfolded in Christian history. Over the centuries, when the church and the academy have worked together, they have been at the centre of nurturing orthodox belief and incarnational practice of the Christian faith. What we need today is for Christian leaders to be conversant in both arenas, so that the best of what the church and the academy have to offer can be brought together in conversation and mutual edification, to further the discipleship of the saints and the mission to the world, for the glory of God.

Rev Dr David W. F. Wong has been one such leader.

David has been pastor, denominational leader, preacher, speaker, scholar, author, missionary, training director, co-

founder of a theological school, and mentor. He has indeed embodied an exemplary integration of the academy and the church. In truth, confining him to this duality is a bit unfair, as there is one more arena in which David is at home: the arts. David is *also* a published author of fiction, a lyricist for musicals, and a keen film aficionado.

It gives us, the editors, great pleasure to introduce this volume, *An Owl's Journey*, that celebrates the 70th birthday of Pastor David. It is our hope that the essays collected here reflect David's "homes"—the church, the academy, the arts—and that they are brought together for the glory of God.

Those who have contributed to this volume include his family, pastoral colleagues (both clergy and lay); fellow scholars, authors, and teachers; and former students, mentees, and counselees. All have been touched and encouraged by David in his many years of ministry.

In the "Church" section, Ho Peng Kee, who served as an Elder at David's first pastorate, shares about the opportunities and challenges that arise when lay Elders and Pastors work together. Reginald Tan, an Elder at David's most recent pastorate, reflects on God's faithfulness in congregational growth and leadership. Alby Yip writes about the difficult subject of church discipline and peacemaking. Dev Menon expounds on how pastoral care extends beyond physical death (aptly subtitled "Way Beyond Finishing Well"). June Quek shares some personal insight on David's fatherly pastoral heart.

The "Academia" section is represented by several essays. Philip Satterthwaite explores the kind of faith represented in Ecclesiastes. Lai Pak Wah investigates the influence of the Church Fathers on Bible-Presbyterian thought. Leonard Wee writes about God's Heartbeat, taking his cue from the words of a song that David co-wrote. Desmond Soh explores the

place and primacy of preaching today. It is worth noting that three theological schools are represented in this section, and David has taught in all of them (and co-founded one).

The next section, “Leadership/Mentoring”, comprises essays not only on the subject, but from several who regard David as their leadership mentor. Benjamin Tsao examines Paul’s “unequally yoked” admonition in 2 Corinthians. Tang Hai Yang reflects on the call to pastoral ministry. Beh Soo Yeong writes about the biblical basis for leadership development in the local church, and Peter Lin highlights the importance of leadership teams in Christian ministry.

The “Sounding Board” section takes its name from a group of friends that has been meeting to sound each other out and pray for each other for three decades. Wong Kim Tok recounts the genesis and ongoing relevance of this group of four ministry leaders (including David), and fellow member Joseph John writes about the implications of our emotions in Christian discipleship and the formation of leaders.

The “Arts/Musical” section contains two essays. Aaron and Namiko Lee—like David, pilgrims who sojourned in Hawaii for a season and never quite left—offer their thoughts on interculturality and the wandering pilgrim. Chai Chor Tiang and Shirley Yeo reflect on their experiences in three Mount Carmel BP Church musicals, highlighting David’s talent for lyric-writing and his life-long interest in Christian biography.

The collection continues with a trio of pieces on “Marriage”, “Missions”, and “Disability”. Siang Chuan and Moh Peck, one of many couples David has married over the years, share about his counselling and advice on their marriage. Zheng Haoren examines the lives and calling of the great missionary pioneer C.T. Studd and his wife Priscilla, offering implications on how faithful missions can be carried out. Leow Wen Pin offers an

exploration on the connection between Christian spiritual growth and people with disabilities, by way of conversation with I Corinthians 12.

Finally, as befitting a volume in honour of a much-published author, we end with an Afterword by David himself, “The Joys of Being a Pastor”. Many of you already know that David collects owl figurines from different parts of the world. This section includes a note on owls, which explains this hobby and the title of this collection.

We would like to thank all the contributors for their essays.

We particularly wish to thank the following people, without whom this volume would have been less fun, less lucid, and less grammatical:

- 1) Jenny, Jean, and May Wong for being willing co-conspirators in keeping this project a secret from David, and providing write-ups, suggestions and photographs along the way;
- 2) Philip Satterthwaite, for being the eagle-eye extraordinaire on matters theological, typographical, and grammatical;
- 3) Bernice Lee, Priscilla Jamir, and everyone at Graceworks Publishing for guiding the whole process through.

Allow me (Tze-Ming) now to add a personal note. David Wong was my teacher even before I met him personally. I first heard him when I was an undergraduate in the Varsity Christian Fellowship and he spoke at a camp. His Bible expositions made an impression on me. Not long after, I came across his slim and thoughtful volume *Posing Only* by chance. I eagerly devoured his

*Journeys* trilogy of books as they came out. I was very happy when, because of his friendship with my father-in-law, Pastor David said the opening prayer at my wedding. In those early years, I thought, “When I grow up I want to speak and write like David Wong”. More recently I have had the immense privilege of being a friend and colleague with David, in both the Biblical Graduate School of Theology, and in Zion Bishan Bible-Presbyterian Church. You are never quite sure what you’ll get when David wants to speak to you, or drops you an email. We’ve exchanged notes on topics that range from Bible interpretation and good preaching practices, to more esoteric things such as a theology of church furniture, “deep” story arcs, and movies like *The Lord of the Rings*, or *The Three Idiots*.

We, the editors, join all the contributors in wishing Pastor David a very blessed birthday, and many more years of fruitful service for God. May God bless him and his family as he begins his eighth decade. We thank God for this Owl’s journey that, even as it is finishing well, continues to bless many others.

Many Happy Returns!

Quek Tze-Ming

Dev Menon

Lent 2019





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# Family

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*Hi Daddy,*

*It's been a while since we've written long letters to one another. I've always enjoyed writing to you, filling you in on what's going on. WhatsApp and the busyness of motherhood has really interrupted them, haven't they?*



*As your 70th birthday approaches, I've been reflecting on the 40-plus years we've shared together, from early memories to recent ones.*

*All this thinking brought to mind one of your recent emails where you asked if I felt you had been there for me enough. I'd been turning that question over and over again, looking for a well-rounded answer.*

*You have given many memories to bank all through the years. From cassette recordings of silly songs we sang together, to a meticulously well kept collection of notes, photos, doodling, and drawings chronicling my life through the years, you have shown me how important it is to keep a record of both the mountaintop experiences and the ordinary events so they don't fade over time.*

*Thank you for instilling in me a curious mind, teaching me to ask meaningful questions. Thank you being patient and*

*gentle with me, especially as I stumbled through much of my academics. Thank you for praying for good friends and influences to come into my life. And, for consistently praying for my walk with Jesus, reminding me that I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. Thank you for letting me go far, far away so that I could stretch my wings and learn to recover from mistakes.*

*Now that I am a parent, I can see more clearly how challenging it is to daily surrender our children to God. Thank you for depositing all these positive memories and traits in my life. So often I feel that my kids are living off interest earned from the deposits you placed in me.*

*Thank you for pressing into my life, leaving the mark of Jesus on my heart. It is the biggest gift you have given me.*

*Here are a few memories I will always cherish (in no particular order):*

- *Arguing with you over the lyrics of "Jesus loves me"*
- *Going to see Annie (first musical)*
- *Missing the school bus to Kong San and you taking me there by taxi in your pajamas*
- *Waiting up for you to come home to read bedtime stories to me at Prince Charles Crescent*
- *Waking up to your singing cos mom gave up waking May and me*

- *Going to the bookstore to read while mom shops with May (developed my love for reading)*
- *Family prayer time (teaching me how to pray)*
- *You quizzing me for words to help rhyme as you wrote lyrics for the different musicals*
- *Doing jigsaw puzzles with you*
- *Spending time with you at breakfast when we took mom to Glory Kindergarten*
- *Your visits to me on the mainland (especially our coffee and musical dates)*

*And most of all... I always loved how you were always curious about what went on in my life... Thank you Daddy for loving me well... you have made it very easy for me to be proud of you because of that.*

*So, this year, as you celebrate your 70th and reflect on all that God has walked you through, be certain that you have done exceedingly well in my eyes.*

*I love you very much Daddy. Happy Birthday! 🥰*

*Jean*

*Ni Dad,*

*As we celebrate your 70th birthday, I thank you for raising me with such love and patience. I have not been the easiest child and perhaps not seen eye to eye with you, especially during my teenage years in Maui. But you were patient with me, you taught me choices and I watched you from afar through the many dinners we had at Haggai and your worldwide network of friends. Because of your acceptance and love of people from all over the world, I embraced diversity and built confidence talking to people who have different backgrounds from our family. I'm comfortable talking to people of all ages because of the exposure you gave to me during our days living in Haggai Insitute.*



*Thank you for praying for me and with me. Reminding me that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. And even in the good and bad times, this too shall pass.*

*I've been blessed to have you as my dad and a role model that I can look up to and confide in. You keep me grounded, humble and rooted in God's word.*

*My fondest memories include our ice cream date at Swensons at World Trade Center and putting the jigsaw puzzle of a dog together, and I remember I named him*

*Swenson. Though the World Trade Center in Singapore has been replaced by Vivo City, it's still a place of great memories for me. As the 2nd memory I had was singing with the Mt Carmel kids choir during Christmas at the Sentosa ferry terminal which has been replaced by Resorts World Singapore, opposite Vivo City. I remember I was picked to sing the verse that you wrote to sing along to "Silent Night" and I was so proud that you wrote it and I got to sing it. You arrived late but we got invited to sing a 2nd set and you got to hear me sing! No wonder I love that area so much! And so does Katelynn!*

*Now that I'm a parent, I remember that quality time is so important. It's not the quantity but the quality of time. To watch Katelynn and you play, though I know it can be exhausting, really reminds me of our dates on Mondays which were your offdays. Watching her bond with you brings me so much joy too. The picnics and cycling at West Coast Park are also fond memories. Thank you for providing us such rich memories and keeping them in yearly albums so we can remember the good old days and friends from all over the world!*

*You have done so well with raising me and I know I can always call on dad when I have any problems and know you will always make time for me. I love you very much and thank you for all you have done and sacrificed for our family.*

*Happy birthday Dad and may God continue to guide you through your next phase of retirement and continue to impact*

*so many lives in the world through your different ministries  
and gifts!*

*Lots of love & respect,*

*May*

*Dearest Dave,*

*Happy Birthday! As you turn 70 years old, I thank God for all those years.*

*You have chosen a very good Bible motto for your life, "Looking unto Jesus" Hebrews 12:2. God has given you a good 40 plus years in his service, both in churches (at home and overseas) and in your service at Nagai Institute (N.I.). As the Training Director to leaders from all over the world, you have fruitfully served God by ministering to many of the alumni long after they had graduated from N.I.*

*God has given you a family with:*

- 1 wife,*
- 2 daughters,*
- 2 sons-in-law,*
- 2 grandsons, and*
- 2 granddaughters.*

*You have touched many lives over all these years, and almost every one of them remembers your teaching and sermons. You have never turned a deaf ear to those who have called on you. You have valued everyone in need. God has blessed you with many gifts, from writing books and musicals to having a fruitful preaching ministry. You've had the privilege of being a mentor to a number of pastors from different denominations and your leadership skills are evident in the way you help church pastors and churches flourish through your engaging workshops and seminars.*

*I am very proud of you as your dear wife. While you served in churches both at home and overseas, you never forgot the wife at home. I thank God for you. I am thankful for how you had encouraged me to pursue my career and how you encouraged*



*me to be the facilitator for the Women Leaders of the Naggai Institute. You have allowed me to go on many mission trips (well over 33 trips), training Sunday school teachers and preschool centres. You spent time coaching me and helping me in my preschool studies and, later, helping me grow in my role as a principal of a large preschool. I am grateful for your support, allowing me the opportunity both to be a mother and to grow in my career. You have also been a very good and faithful husband, and father to the girls.*

*As I conclude, may we as a couple continue to grow old graciously in the remaining years of our life on earth. May I wish you from Paul's epistle in the Bible: "You have fought the good fight and finished the race that God has given you."*

*Lovingly, your dear wife,*

*Jenny*





# 1

## Elders Working with Pastors

*Ho Peng Kee*

*A key focus in our BP Churches is the Senior Pastor. Whilst this is understandable, my view is that our churches should also pay some attention to another key position, that is, the Chairman of the Board of Elders (if there is one; if not, then, the lead Elder). The working relationship between the Senior Pastor and this Lead Elder is pivotal to the growth and smooth functioning of the Church. It needs to be nurtured. In this article, I share how Ps David Wong and I worked at it in Mt Carmel's early days, learning much along the way. We hope that this sharing will be useful to our younger Pastors and Elders as they, in their own way and as God leads, forge a winning combination that works for them!*

On the inner cover of my 1984 NIV Bible are found these hand-written words,

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Pt 5:2–4, KJV)

Till today, I still use this Bible and carry it around with me. This is because I take this charge seriously! Elder Ang Beng Chong had penned these words, and he and Pastor David signed off under it. They presented the Bible to me on 17 April, 1987 when I was installed as an Elder. These words mean as much to me now as they did then when I first received the charge. By His grace and strength, I try to live out the charge daily (Ps 119:105).

Over these past 30 years of eldership, I have had the privilege of working with three senior pastors and many other pastoral team members. It has been an exhilarating journey of learning, falling and getting up, of understanding and adjusting to different temperaments, of forgiving and seeking forgiveness, and of bouncing back when hurt. But it has sustained me to look to God for strength and guidance always.

### **Growing Through a Dynamic Partnership**

Pastor David was the first pastor I worked with in my first three-year stint as an Elder in Session in Mount Carmel between 1987 and 1990. We complemented one another. Those were the years before the concept of “the pastoral team” emerged in Mount Carmel. Hence, there were only the two of us as Pastor and Elder. But we were very ably supported by an extremely gifted and committed band of brothers and sisters in Christ who had helped to build up Mount Carmel from the early days. Many of them were Pastor David’s contemporaries and had given him and his wife Jenny much emotional and

financial support while he pursued theological studies. Lay involvement and leadership have always been a key and abiding strength of Carmel, and I thank God for that. This can be partly attributed to Pastor David's temperament and stance as Pastor. He welcomed and nurtured all-round involvement of all our members and worshippers at every level. He never felt insecure or threatened!

I rather suspect that in those early days, we were both learning how to work together as a team to shepherd the church. There was always mutual respect, a lot of teamwork and a strong desire to build the church together. When I became an Elder in 1987, we had two "founding Elders" who had helped to shepherd the flock in Mount Carmel (and its outreaches such as Hermon, Hebron, etc.) in the early years while Pastor David was receiving his theological training. They were quite a few years older than him and had already held key leadership positions as Elders for a few years before he was ordained and elected as Mount Carmel's founding Pastor in the late 1970's. Hence, with me, Pastor David was embarking on a new journey of learning, that is, to share leadership at the highest level on a day-to-day basis. My first three years of Eldership (1987–1990) was one of the most fulfilling periods of my spiritual journey. I appreciated Pastor David's style of leadership and grew a lot spiritually myself even as I served. Except for a few "blips" now and then (to be expected when we work in community), a healthy relationship between the Elders and Pastors in Mount Carmel has continued to flourish over the years. Praise the Lord!

While Pastor David immersed himself in the pulpit and teaching ministry, setting the overall direction of the church, counselling members and preparing couples for marriage, I chipped in with hospital visitations to pray for the sick, leading

worship services, chairing prayer meetings, extending social outreach programs to the community around us and speaking at youth fellowship meetings. It was truly team ministry. Neither Pastor David nor I were strong in administration and devising overall strategy. It was good that he recognised that, and was open to God's provision of the many other leaders in Carmel who were strong in these areas. As we tapped their input judiciously, the church grew (1 Cor 12:12–20). We never talked about having a primary leader, as both Pastor David and I felt a calling to assume primary responsibility over our designated areas, and meshed our giftings as led by the Holy Spirit.

One memorable aspect of Pastor David's ministry is his interaction with couples preparing for marriage. Until today, many couples are still grateful to Pastor David for journeying with them. He was gifted in documenting their journey with him, in some instances, taking note of delightful small details. At strategic moments, he would dig into his files and thoughtfully put together memorabilia that would be meaningful to the recipient. When I went with my wife, Choy Ping, to the United States in 1980 to pursue a Masters in Law, he presented us with an album comprising some wonderful photographs and several touching verses. Indeed, over the past 15 years or so, with the help of a small team, Pastor David has made the effort to organise gatherings

**Until today, many couples are still grateful to Pastor David for journeying with them. He was gifted in documenting their journey with him, in some instances taking note of delightful small details.**

for couples who were counselled and/or had their marriages officiated by him over these past 40 years. We never failed to enjoy wonderful moments together, with lots of laughter and nostalgic recollections over old photographs, many of which were produced by Pastor David. I would say that this was one hallmark of his ministry in Mount Carmel. Another key aspect of his ministry in Carmel are the six original musicals that he has helped to produce, especially with his song-writing skills. We were truly blessed to have a senior pastor who could do this for us!

What I appreciated about Pastor David's leadership was that he was not concerned about "turking"—that is, he was not territorial and did not limit my involvement as an elder to only specific areas. I was able to make suggestions on a host of matters, both policy and operational. We discussed many issues and always did what we thought was best for the church. When we disagreed, we never pushed our viewpoints aggressively but prayed over the matter. Informally, we recognised each other's strengths and expertise and somehow, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sorted things out. There was mutual respect and trust between us. We knew that neither of us had a monopoly over wisdom.

### **Building a Strong Leadership Team**

Pastor David and I had a good working relationship in the time when it was just the two of us helming the leadership of the church. However, the situation got a bit more complex when Carmel took more pastors on board. The dynamics of a team ministry took us by surprise, especially with the arrival of younger pastors who were fresh out of theological college, all eager to make their mark. We discovered that we had very different approaches towards handling this new situation. I felt

that, as Senior Pastor, he should have provided more guidance and exercised greater authority over them. When I did so, as Chairman of the Session, it “ruffled feathers” with these younger pastors who were likely to have been taught in their theological colleges that the pastor(s) should be the dominant figure(s) in the church. Admittedly, I could be somewhat pushy when getting my views across or in trying to get things done. This did not help the situation.

It was a learning point for both of us. I realised that it was paramount for the key leadership roles to be in sync with each other for the church to function well, grow, and remain united. In Carmel, this responsibility falls on the Chairman of the Board of Elders and the Moderator of the Session. First, the Chairman of the Board of Elders (BOE) is a lay Elder. The BOE oversees matters involving church membership and the disciplining of members. The BOE also has general oversight over spiritual matters, such as theological positions adopted by the church, spiritual growth of members, and the administration of sacraments. Second, the Moderator of the Session is the Senior Pastor. The Session comprises the Elders in their personal capacity, Deacons, Deaconesses, and the pastors, and is an equivalent of a Board of Directors that oversees the governance and administration of the church. These matters include, but are not limited to, the contracts entered into by the Church, employment contracts of the Pastors, land matters, compliance with the laws of the

**I realised that it was paramount for the key leadership roles to be in sync with each other for the church to function well, grow, and remain united.**

land, such as MOM directives, and PDPA requirements. The roles of the BOE and the Session—in particular, how they interface—are spelled out in a carefully compiled manual on our “Leadership Operating Procedures”.

The foundation of a strong, vibrant and effective church (in terms of governance) is built upon the mutual trust and respect of the two co-leaders (a lay Elder/Deacon and the Senior Pastor), who work closely together for the welfare of members and the growth of the church. Always with Jesus Christ as their Lord and Leader, this pairing should be infused with a Spirit-filled sense of humility and honour in doing God’s work. Recognise each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Try

**The foundation of a strong, vibrant and effective church is built upon the mutual trust and respect of the two co-leaders who work closely together for the welfare of members and the growth of the church.**

to complement each other. Be open. Share your thoughts and feelings, even if negative towards each other. But do so gently. Acknowledge that you may not be right all the time. These are the essential qualities to nurture in our top church leaders, both pastoral and lay (Col 3:23).

In order to foster this relationship, the Pastors and Elders need not be too officious. Unless one is clearly senior in age or years of service, it helps to be “friends first and co-workers second”. Other than interactions at meetings, discussions, or church events, everyone should make time for informal social interaction over meals, exercise and even the occasional trip overseas if possible. It would also be good for the spouses to spend time with each

other to nurture a space of collective spousal support. In many commercial offices' settings, this is increasingly the case. What more in the church office, where we minister together as brothers and sisters in Christ, empowered by God's Love and answerable ultimately to our "big Boss", God Himself!

In the same vein, the pastors need not appear overly-officious in presenting themselves to and in interacting with church members. For example, the ubiquitous "pastor XXX" is much preferred to titles such as "Dr XXX", or even "Rev XXX" in the church setting. Being addressed simply as "pastor XXX" (just like "Prof Ho" for me) is a term of endearment, underscoring some (but not over) familiarity which is conducive to producing a close-knit spirit in our church family. Church bulletins, annual reports, pulpit introduction etc should adopt this approach. Titles and reminders of worldly achievements tend to segment the congregation and should be avoided, as far as possible. In the same spirit, it may be good to consider re-designating the Senior Pastors in our BP Churches as Lead Pastors. This nomenclature renders the governance structure less formal and hierarchical and underscores the teamwork focus of the pastoral team.

### **Passing On the Leadership Mantle**

Singapore has Lee Kuan Yew. Our Bible-Presbyterian (BP) Churches have David Wong. Just as Mr Lee was ready to relinquish power over Singapore in 1990, even though he could have continued being Prime Minister for several more years, in the early 1990s, Pastor David decided that it was time for him to leave Carmel. He felt that God was calling him to another field of service overseas at the Haggai Institute. It was not a decision taken lightly as there was still much to do at Carmel. He was a well-liked Pastor who had the support of the leaders

and congregation at Carmel. We were well-settled at our new premises at the West Coast. The church was growing. But, prayerfully, Pastor David increasingly felt God's call becoming stronger for him to "let go and leave" and be used by Him in a wider capacity. Rightly so, he obeyed. But he did not leave the church in a lurch. Instead, he paved the way for Pastor Daniel to take over (just like how God, through Moses, had prepared Joshua over so many years through many events to undertake the monumental task of leading the Israelites into the Promised Land shortly after Moses' death—Ex 17:8; 24:13; 32:17; 33:11, Dt 1:38). More of our BP churches should also prayerfully groom younger men and women to assume the mantle of leadership of their local congregations.

Pastor Daniel joined us from a non-BP background, as he came from a from a Christian Nationals' Evangelism Commission (CNEC) church in Malaysia. He and his wife, Phoebe, nevertheless settled down well in Carmel and won the support and affirmation of the congregation. He complemented Pastor David well in the pulpit ministry. He was a worthy successor after he had cut his teeth in Carmel over a three-year period. By 1994 when he took over from Pastor David as Senior Pastor, Elder Choo Soo, who had taken over from me as Chairman of the Session in 1990, had also become an established member of the church leadership team. This way, Pastor David embarked on the next phase of his journey serving God's Kingdom in far-away Maui, Hawaii, with a clear conscience and the church's blessings. But those of us who knew him and Jenny well, sensed that, as our founding Pastor, his heart was always with Mount Carmel. He had grown up amongst us; he had matured as a Pastor in our pews and prayer rooms; he had many contemporaries in church who supported him in various ways. Together with many key lay leaders, he

had helped set the initial direction of the church. True to our expectations, Pastor David and Jenny have remained members of Mount Carmel all these years. Other than the occasional preaching/speaking engagements, whenever they can, they have shared time and fellowship with us at our Annual Congregational Meetings, Christmas or Good Friday services or at wedding and other church celebration events.

On the matter of succession planning, while focus is normally on how this is done for the Senior Pastor, I feel that the succession of the BOE chairman is just as important. It bodes well for our church leadership to plan well for this too, prayerfully and purposefully. Thus, in Carmel, when Pastor Daniel handed the Senior Pastorship over to Pastor Boon Leong, I decided to hand over the BOE chairmanship to Elder Bruce Lockhart at the same time. I felt that as someone considerably older than Pastor Boon Leong, and with a longer period of church leadership, I may hinder his transition if I continued as BOE chairman. It was better for him to strike up this essential partnership with a new and younger chairman. What I share may not fully apply in all our BP Churches; each BP Church's historical development is unique. But I hope that this will inspire church leaders to reflect prayerfully on how we may, by God's grace, develop a church governance structure that brings out the best in our leaders and members.

**On the matter of succession planning, while focus is normally on how this is done for the Senior Pastor, I feel that the succession of the BOE chairman is just as important.**

We can never fully leave the past behind us. The past can either come back to haunt us or inspire us. For Pastor David and me, the latter is true. Just as we worked tirelessly in Carmel's early years to put her on a strong footing, it appears that even in our mid and late 60's now, God has enabled both of us to minister to each other and to a wider flock in and beyond Carmel. Indeed, we try, by God's grace, to motivate each other to finish well (Prv 27:17)!

Pastor David Wong has certainly left his mark on Mount Carmel. We thank our gracious and Almighty God for that (1 Thes 5:18). As an "old friend", I wish him well.

Ho Peng Kee is a three-term Elder in Mount Carmel BP Church, stepping down as a ruling elder at end 2017. He retired from politics as Sr Min of State for Law and Home Affairs in May 2011, but remained active in the community advancing causes such as mediation, keeping Singapore safe and secure, voluntarism, youth development, sports and fighting children's cancer. Returning to NUS, he is now an Associate Professorial Fellow at its Law Faculty and LKYSPP. At Mount Carmel, he led the men's ministry for six years (2012–2018) and oversees its Prayer Ministry. An advisor to the Biblical Graduate School of Theology (BGST), he is married to a retired lawyer and has three grown-up daughters.

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# Blessed Are the Peacemakers

*Alby Yip*

*I came to know and appreciate Pastor David Wong more during an extraordinary church meeting. He was presiding as a moderator over an attempt to resolve the internal conflicts of the church. I admit I was both amused and bemused when Pastor David took out a yellow card and a red card, and said he will employ them as in a soccer game, as he laid the ground rules for that meeting. I wondered if it was a little too harsh and insensitive, after all, a mediator ought to be nice, or so I thought. As it turned out, those cards actually helped restore civility and Christian propriety when the exchanges between the parties became too heated. Now, after being trained in mediation, and having acted as a mediator in both the secular and church setting, I realise the necessity of Pastor David's tough love approach when navigating conflicts as a peacemaker even more.*

As the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God"(Mt 5:9). Why are peacemakers

called children of God? Because God Himself is the greatest Peacemaker who presided over the cosmic mediation between Himself and man. In calling peacemakers children of God, the Lord is also calling the Church into the ministry of reconciliation and restoration. But peace-making also presupposes discipline and tough love. God would have to judge man if not for Him placing the judgement upon Christ on the Cross. As such, the church—the under-peacemaker—too has to grow in meting out tough love and in developing a rigorous discipline process to reconcile man to man and man to God.

Unfortunately, the church sometimes inadvertently neglects the role of discipline in exchange for tolerating offenders in the name of Christian niceness and peace.<sup>1</sup> The failure to discipline is not only a sin of omission. It is also a sin of commission, for to “see our brother caught in sin, sinking beneath the waves of the world, and to do nothing to restore him gently is to submit to the devil’s deception.”<sup>2</sup> In his conflict with Satan, even God paid the utmost “price” (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; see also Jn 3:16; Rom 5:8, 18; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:7; 5:2; Ti 2:14) not for himself but to restore man to himself! There is both a biblical and theological, indeed a divine need, for churches to have a renewed understanding and coherent response to conflicts.

### **The Root of Conflict**

For James, the root of conflict is unrestrained raging desires, not for something one needs but for something one wants:

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1 Clarence A. Kopp, Jr., ““Not Wanted”: A Study of some Forced Terminations in Situations other than Moral Failures in Churches where the Pastor is Assigned” (DMin diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1990), 22.

2 Tara K. Barthel and David V. Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 31.

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?” (Jas 4:1–2). In this way, we can see conflict as God’s way of “breaking down appearances”, particularly the unsightly ones that are often hidden behind the spiritual masks<sup>3</sup> to test a Christian’s “true theology.”<sup>4</sup> Such intra-personal conflicts provide the perfect spawning ground for inter-personal conflicts<sup>5</sup> and gives birth to the “impulsive response to the experience of being deprived.”<sup>6</sup> Desires are integral to the human makeup. But they will become a raging force when God, the restraining equilibrium, is left out of the picture,<sup>7</sup> as was evident in the dawn of creation. Underlying Adam and Eve’s sin of disobedience is man’s rejection of God’s offer of “dialogue-partnership”<sup>8</sup> where “grace (the determination of the relation from God) is met with thanksgiving (the responding acceptance of this determination from man).”<sup>9</sup> It is in this “being-in-gratitude” that man’s true identity can be found.<sup>10</sup>

But when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they distorted this created role and ended up both losing the *being*, and causing *in-gratitude* to become ingratitude. Since the primacy

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3 Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 37.

4 Alfred Poirier, *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 76.

5 Joyce Huggett, *Conflict: Understanding, Managing and Growing Through Conflict* (Surrey: Eagle, 1998), 46.

6 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 23.

7 Douglas J. Moo, *James*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1985, repr., 1996), 139–142.

8 Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 44.

9 McFadyen, 21.

10 Ibid.