

These 22 essays are inspirational testimonies because each one demonstrates an undivided allegiance to One MASTER, the Lord Jesus Christ. As a result, every single story has a compelling MANDATE and MESSAGE that will propel the reader to find his own MEANING and MISSION in life. If you have ever asked the question, “How then shall I live for God?”, this is the book you must read to discover the MOTIVATION.

***Rev Tan Kay Kiong***

*Senior Pastor of Covenant Evangelical Free Church*

*Pastoral Advisor for Men's Ministry Network*

Enriching and insightful, this is a highly readable collection of personal stories and reflections. In stories on the inward journey, one connects with the raw emotions of the authors' struggles. Yet there is always hope at the end of the tunnel. The outward journeys in missions open the mind, beckoning one to serve beyond familiar terrain. Ultimately, it is a book which leads one to question how we are living our own personal lives, and to serve in whichever way He has called us.

***Ms Ho Peng***

*Former Director-General of Education, Singapore*

The contributors in this book provide multiple accounts of their perceptions and interpretations of God at work in various spheres of life such as home, workplace and the world. Together they offer the singular message that God is actively at work in our souls and societies and that He invites us to work with Him. Written by men for men, this book inspires men to make their lives count in all the spheres of life and in all the roles that men are called to fulfil, bringing glory to God and showing that faith is meant to be lived out courageously and faithfully. There are several gems in the book just waiting to be discovered.

***Bishop Emeritus Robert Solomon***

*The Methodist Church in Singapore*

Readers of this book will not only be confronted with the call to serious discipleship in the context of life's vicissitudes and vocations, but also encouraged by personal testimonies and perspectives which are expressions of that call. I was instructed by biblical truth, moved by honest dealings, and challenged by models of integrity. Distilled through the lives of twenty-two men, here is practical wisdom for the Christian who desires to live for God in all of life.

***Rev Dr Edwin Tay***

*Vice Principal, Trinity Theological College*

Christian men face challenges in managing the multiple dimensions in life. It is not easy to maintain a close personal walk with Christ, cultivate a Christian household of love and service, excel and have a winsome witness at work, and serve in the Christian ministry and the wider community. It is easy to give up when we face failure. Men often secretly look to other men for examples on how to live life with a divine purpose. God is gracious to provide help. Co-journeying with other men through ministries like "Carmel Men for Christ" (CMfC) and learning from others' experiences in *Men for Christ: Living Out Our Faith* can make facing these challenges easier. This book will encourage many men in many different situations.

***Mr Peter Ong***

*Former Head of Singapore Civil Service*

As a Christian woman and wife, what I appreciate about this book is that it unashamedly reveals the very real struggles faced by Christian men in society today. So often when we Google for answers, the pages that appear are typically from a secular, Western point of view. There is little information on how to understand Asian Christian men from a godly perspective, and how we, as spouses, mothers, or sisters, can better relate with them. While this book is designed for men, by men, I daresay it is also a book for women, especially wives. There are gems within its pages that have enabled me to discover things about my husband that I did not know previously. The stories encapsulated in this book are intentional in shaping and helping men, and as a bonus, they help women as well. I truly believe that this compilation is a sincere gift to all who read it.

***Ms Janelle Yeo***

*Member, Mt Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church*

An excellent collection of articles written by experts and practitioners in their respective fields. Some provide useful and practical information while others challenge and enhance the readers' understanding as to what the Lord is doing in the world and in individual lives today. The personal and intimate sharing by the different writers is what I deeply appreciate. The book is easy to read yet profound in its contents. An indispensable book for those who are seeking something to help them reflect and challenge their thinking on how to live out their Christian calling in the world today.

***Rev Yap Kim Sin***

*Moderator, Bible-Presbyterian Church in Singapore*

There are two desperate lacunas in Christian circles. The passivity of men in spiritual matters and the paucity of Asian church voices and models vis-à-vis the monopoly of Western Christendom's influences which sometimes fail to articulate the experience of following Jesus in our local context. *Men for Christ: Living Out Our Faith (Vol II)* overcomes these gaps amply. Here, we hear the passionate sincerity, raw struggles and real-time stories of Christian men seeking to be the aroma of Christ in every arena of life. Here, we listen to the rare soul-bearing of Asian men as they work through deep experiences of depression, addiction and temptation. Here, we find that we are not alone in our love for Jesus expressed in our obedience to Him. I heartily commend this book for your blessing and growth.

***Rev Christopher Chia***

*Senior Pastor, Adam Road Presbyterian Church*

A sequel to Vol. 1! Here are 22 more presentations by men who have made it their aim to live out their commitment to Christ in their different callings, and who share what they have learned from their journeys of faith. You may not agree with everything in these presentations—I did not—but you will be struck by the determination these men have shown to work as servants of King Jesus, to cross boundaries and to step out trusting in God. Read this book and be challenged!

***Dr Philip Satterthwaite***

*Principal, Biblical Graduate School of Theology*

*Men For Christ: Living Out Our Faith Vol 2* is an amazing compilation of articles that cover a wide range of contemporary topics that are relevant to the modern man. These articles, written by brothers who are practitioners in the areas that they are writing on, are not only comprehensive but also practical. The goal of every author is not just to inform but also to transform. Every article challenges the worldview of the reader in order to bring about a deeper discipleship to Christ. I highly commend this book to every person, including women, who is seeking to go on a deeper journey towards Christlikeness.

***Rev Benny Ho***

*Senior Pastor, Faith Community Church Perth;  
Facilitator, LoveSingapore Marketplace Track*

Their stories are honest, down-to-earth, and absolutely inspiring. From university professor to ex-offender, 22 men testify about a God whom they dare to trust, and how it has transformed them. They share about high points in their careers, and struggles with depression and sexual temptation. There is a God who is always at work, sometimes directing their paths through traffic accidents and other times through chance encounters. A compelling read for those who hunger to grow in their walk with God and who desire to be a more credible marketplace witness.

***Rev Daniel Chua***

*Pastor-at-Large, Mt Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church*

**MEN**  
*for*  
**CHRIST**

Living Out Our Faith  
VOLUME II



**MEN**  
*for*  
**CHRIST**

Living Out Our Faith  
VOLUME II

Edited by  
Ho Peng Kee, Jeffrey Hong, Siew Kim Siang, Yeo Siew Yam

GRACEWORKS

Men for Christ Volume II: Living Out Our Faith  
Copyright © 2019 Carmel Men for Christ

Copyright for individual essays will reside with the respective authors.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Published by  
Graceworks Private Limited  
22 Sin Ming Lane  
#04-76 Midview City  
Singapore 573969  
www.graceworks.com.sg

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked “ESV” are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Copyright © 2000; 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture verses marked “KJV” are taken from the *King James Version* of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked “NASB” are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked “NIV 2011” are taken from *The Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION*®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked “NKJV” are taken from the *New King James Version*. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked “NLT” are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-981-11-8744-5

A CIP record for this book is available from the National Library Board, Singapore.

## ***Dedication***

*To the 40–50 brothers-in-Christ who attended our monthly talks over six years—thank you for your faithfulness and affirming spirit; may these pages continue to speak to you.*

*To the leaders and members of our Singapore churches' men's ministries—may you strive to be godly Men for Christ as you nurture a Christian Worldview that undergirds everything that you do.*

**TO GOD BE THE GLORY!**

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

(ROMANS 12:2a)

# CONTENTS

xiii

Contributors

xvii

Preface: Volume II

*Ho Peng Kee*

xix

Preface : Volume I

*Ho Peng Kee*

## **GOD SHAPING US**

3

A Safe Place for Men

*David W. F. Wong*

11

My Walk with God: Trials that Transform Us

*Stephen Riady*

18

Re-aligning Our Lives to God's Word

*Thong Chan-Kei*

29

Leading for the Long Haul

*Michael Tan*

38

A Personal Reflection on Life's Journey

*Bobby Sng*

53

Silver-naries for Christ

*Toh See Kiat*

## **GOD MEETING OUR NEEDS**

**67**

Handling Our Emotions: Hot Buttons, Anger and Rage

*John Ng*

**80**

Dispelling Myths about Depression

*John Ting*

**92**

Overcoming Addiction

*Munidasa Winslow*

**104**

Mastering Our Sexual Drive

*Benny Bong*

**123**

Cultivating Intimate and Healthy Marriages

*Danny Goh*

**131**

Understanding Dementia and Lasting Power of Attorney

*Kua Ee Heok & Daniel Koh*

## **GOD IN THE WORKPLACE**

**147**

Discovering our Purpose in God's Kingdom: Serving God in the Marketplace

*Neo Boon Siong*

**157**

Serving God, Family and Work: Maintaining a Balance

*Lok Vi Ming*

**167**

My Life, My Purpose: A Gift from God

*Benny Se Tio*

**174**

Ethics in the Marketplace

*T. C. Choong*

**181**

Building Christian Communities in the Workplace

*David Chan*

## **GOD IN THE WORLD**

**195**

God's Dream Church

*Wee Tiong Howe*

**206**

The Church in China: Engaging with Chinese Intellectuals

*Choong Chee Pang*

**219**

Back To Jerusalem: The Last Frontier

*Goh Kng Yan*

**230**

Witnessing to the Jewish People

*Stephen Pacht*

**245**

These Things Must Happen Before Christ's Return

*Freddy Boey*

**255**

Endnotes

## CONTRIBUTORS

### **BENNY BONG**

Director and Principal Consultant, The Family Therapist; Lecturer, National Institute of Education, Social Service Institute and the Executive Counselling and Training Academy.

### **FREDDY BOEY**

Deputy President, National University of Singapore; former Deputy President and Provost, Nanyang Technological University; Founding Elder, Riverlife Church.

### **DAVID CHAN**

Former Chaplain, Far East Organisation; former Director, Alpha in the Workplace, Alpha Singapore.

### **CHOONG CHEE PANG**

Former Principal, Trinity Theological College; former Visiting Professor, China's Beijing, Tsinghua, Fudan and Sichuan Universities; former Member, Presidential Council for Religious Harmony.

### **T. C. CHOONG**

Former Member, Hong Kong Stock Exchange Listing Division; former partner in two top law firms; former Lecturer, National University of Singapore.

### **DANNY GOH**

Pastor, The Bible Church, overseeing Family Life Education.

### **GOH KNG YAN**

Co-founder, SilkStream Asia; Board member, Leadership Development Institute which operates six international schools in China and the Middle East.

### **DANIEL KOH**

Legal Service Officer; former Public Guardian at the Office of the Public Guardian, an agency of the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

**KUA EE HEOK**

Tan Geok Yin Professor in Psychiatry and Neuroscience, National University of Singapore; Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, National University Hospital; Member, the World Health Organisation's Research Team for the Global Study of Dementia.

**LOK VI MING**

Council of Elders Chair and Overseer of the Men's Ministry, Bethesda Bedok Tampines Church; Founder, LVM Law Chambers; Board member, Singapore Management University Council.

**NEO BOON SIONG**

Canon Chair Professor of Business, Nanyang Business School, Nanyang Technological University.

**JOHN NG**

Chief Passionary Officer, Meta Consulting; Honorary Chair, Eagles Communications' Board of Governance; Founder, Eagles Mediation and Counselling Centre; Director of Programmes, Eagles Leadership Institute.

**STEPHEN PACHT**

Director, Jews for Jesus, and Head of its Swiss office.

**STEPHEN RIADY**

Executive Chairman, OUE Limited; Executive Director, Auric Pacific Group Limited; Chairman and Executive Director, Lippo Limited; Chairman, Lippo China Resources Limited; Chairman, Hong Kong Chinese Limited.

**BENNY SE TIO**

Chef and Founder, Eighteen Chefs; Board member, Prison Fellowship Singapore.

**BOBBY E. K. SNG**

Advisor and Past President, Bible Society of Singapore; former General Secretary, Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

**MICHAEL TAN**

President, Eagles Communications; Publisher, VantagePoint; Chairman, Eagles Proclamation and Persuasion Institute.

**THONG CHAN-KEI (C. K. THONG)**

Former President, Leadership Development Institute, which operates six international schools in China and the Middle East.

**JOHN TING**

Former Pastor, Adam Road Presbyterian Church; former Dean, Discipleship Training Centre; missionary; and drug addiction counsellor for more than 30 years.

**TOH SEE KIAT**

Former law lecturer, National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University; Elder, Mount Carmel BP Church; Missionary, Serving In Missions; Consultant, Goodwins Law Corporation.

**WEE TIONG HOWE**

Founder and Elder, City Missions Church; Chairman, IPP Financial Advisers Pte Ltd.

**MUNIDASA WINSLOW**

Lecturer, National University of Singapore; Founder, Winslow Clinic; former Chief, Addiction Medicine Department, Institute of Mental Health.

**DAVID W. F. WONG**

Former Senior Pastor, Zion Bishan Bible-Presbyterian Church; former Senior Pastor, Mount Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church; former Vice-President of Training, Haggai Institute; Advisor, Men's Ministry Network.



# PREFACE: VOLUME II

**M**en for Christ: Living Out Our Faith (Volume I) was launched in April 2016. Since then, about 1,500 copies have been sold. We thank God that a key purpose of publishing the book, that is, to bless brothers in men's ministries in our Singapore churches, has been met. The book has enabled many brothers to gain valuable insights from the 21 contributors who are distinguished men of God in their respective fields.

We hope that these brothers' worldview has been enhanced by a better understanding of (1) how God is involved in world events, including missions, today; (2) how his Word challenges and guides us on the various roles that Christian men undertake—as fathers, husbands, workers, community volunteers, church members; and (3) a fuller appreciation of our God as a personal God who guides and empowers us daily in our workplaces and the marketplace. Imbued with a solid Christian worldview—enabling them to better appreciate who our God is and how He works today—our prayer is that these men will rise up to be a mighty force for good in their families, our churches, the community, the country and the world.

This second volume sets out another 22 articles. As in Volume I, we are grateful that the contributors have consented to the inclusion of their email addresses in their profiles. This enlarges our pool of contributors who can be a valuable resource and informal faculty to our churches' men's ministries. We encourage our readers to discuss the Reflection Questions set out at the end of each article in small groups. In all, spread over two volumes, there are now 43 contributors from diverse fields to draw from and sisters should find many of the contributions useful too.

Volume II complements Volume I. Compared to Vol. I, it has a stronger focus on how God is working in the world today, especially in missions. In addition, whilst maintaining its marketplace/workplace emphasis as well as how God is shaping us (as in Vol. I), Vol. II delves more deeply into how brothers can deal

with key emotions and afflictions such as depression, dementia, addiction, sexual temptation and rage, that is, it has a direct, practical focus as well. Taken together, we hope that these two volumes will enlarge our readers' faith and energise them to live their lives fully, tapping God's amazing strength and grace.

As in Vol. I, these talks have been reproduced in the spirit in which they were given. They do not necessarily represent Mount Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church's stand on any particular issue.

Happy Reading and Blessings to All!

***Assoc Prof Ho Peng Kee***  
*Elder, Mount Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church*  
*Chief Editor*

# PREFACE: VOLUME I

**C**armel Men for Christ (CMfC) was launched in June 2012, ten months after I had stepped down from political office. During this time, as I prayed and sought God’s guidance on how I could add value wherever He had put me, I felt a conviction that we should restart our men’s ministry in Mount Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church. I then surveyed other churches’ men’s ministries.

For Carmel, I felt that we should help our brothers forge a solidly-grounded Christian worldview. Romans 12:2 exhorts us to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”. To do this, I felt that we should adopt a three-pronged approach, that is, (1) study what God has to say in His Word on the various roles of men in society—as fathers, spouses, workers, co-labourers in God’s Kingdom, etc.; (2) be encouraged and inspired by men who have striven to live by His standards wherever He has put them, especially in the workplace and marketplace; and (3) examine, as guided by the Holy Spirit, how God is working in the world—in history, business, missions, world events, etc. This is how I put it when I launched the ministry in June 2012:

*Dear brothers, let us be a band of brothers, an army for God! We are all here because we believe that as men, God has a purpose for us. There is potential in us, whatever stage of life we are in, whether we are at the beginning of our careers or already retired. The fact is, whatever our station or age, God has a purpose for us. And God, in His Word, has determined the various roles that men should play. As a band of brothers in Carmel, we prayerfully seek His will for us, individually and corporately. Please remember that we do this not for ourselves, but because we believe that God can use us. We are all instruments for Him to be used.*

*Indeed, God has put us in different settings. Many of us are fathers and husbands. We either are or have been in the workplace or marketplace. We are also members of the community where He has put us. This can be a neighbourhood, church or para-church organization, voluntary welfare organization or grassroots body. We are also citizens of Singapore and the world. That is the larger context. This Men's Fellowship will meet monthly to hear a brother-in-Christ share his walk with God, including his struggles. No man is perfect, so it is important that we do not put anyone on a pedestal. Our speaker will share from the perspective that God has given him the opportunity to walk his walk and run his race in a certain arena of life.*

*As men, it is good for us to share some of the problems we face in life. Any of us can fall anytime, as we are subject to many temptations—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16, NKJV). As we face these temptations and struggles, we should be mindful of God's Word and have the encouragement of godly men to keep us afloat. And as we are at different stages of our life, the old can share with the young and vice versa. We learn from one another."*

Tapping my contacts from over 20 years in public life, I invited brothers from various sectors to come and share at our monthly men's ministry gathering. We thank God for the 35 brothers who have come over the past four years. Coming from diverse backgrounds, their talks have enriched our men, especially in helping us form a Christian worldview and encouraging us to finish well. This book captures 21 of these talks, up till December 2014. Some have been further refined. (Our thanks go to Soh Swee Peng and Joshua Yeo for patiently transcribing the bulk of the talks, and to Tien Li from Graceworks for painstakingly editing them.) If there is interest, God willing, we hope to publish another book setting out the later talks.

We have categorised these 21 talks under four headings, viz. (1) Living Well; (2) God in the Marketplace; (3) God in the World Around Us; and (4) Finishing Well. God's Word exhorts us to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

As men, how do we love ourselves? I believe that a key to doing this well is to be the best man that we can be, that God has made us. For this to happen, we have to know and understand ourselves. Part 1 seeks to achieve this purpose. Many of our readers will still be working. Some run their own businesses. Part 2 will be especially relevant to these brothers. How can they be his priests and ambassadors during the nine or ten hours every day that they are out there “in the world” (John 17:11)?

Matthew 28:18 states, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to (Jesus)”. Our sovereign God manifests His presence in every field of human endeavour. In a limited way, we try to show this in Part 3, illustrating how God is in history, science, our churches and politics. Finally, our clarion call is for all our brothers in our churches (and readers who are sisters too) to persevere and run the race marked out for them (Hebrews 12:1). We must press on and fight the good fight, finish the race and keep the faith (2 Timothy 4:7). Indeed, by God’s grace, we should try to finish the race of life strongly, with faith, determination and passion, always trusting in Him. This is what Part 4 seeks to move us to do.

Our intention in sharing the insights gleaned with a larger audience of men in Singapore churches island-wide is not to put the contributors on a pedestal. Rather, we hope that these testimonies and the issues raised will get men thinking and praying about their own walk with God, both individually and collectively. How can they be better men for Christ in the various settings God has put them? How can they live life fully and finish well? To stimulate thinking, each contributor has listed four to five questions for reflection. Indeed, the contributors form an informal faculty that our churches’ men’s ministries can tap. To facilitate this, their email addresses are listed at the end of their profiles in each chapter. Alternatively, you can email <enquiries@graceworks.com.sg>.

These talks are reproduced in the spirit in which they were given (as shared originally at CMfC) and not necessarily because they represent Mount Carmel’s stand on particular issues. May God use them to enrich the men’s ministries in our churches and inspire our men to live fully and finish well for Him. Amen.

*Assoc Prof Ho Peng Kee*  
*Elder, Mount Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church*  
*Chief Editor*

“But the pot he was  
shaping from the clay  
was marred in his hands;  
so the potter formed it  
into another pot, shaping  
it as seemed best to him.”

(JEREMIAH 18:4)

# GOD SHAPING US

**3**

**A Safe Place for Men**

*David W. F. Wong*

**11**

**My Walk with God: Trials that Transform Us**

*Stephen Riady*

**18**

**Re-aligning Our Lives to God's Word**

*Thong Chan-Kei*

**29**

**Leading for the Long Haul**

*Michael Tan*

**38**

**A Personal Reflection on Life's Journey**

*Bobby Sng*

**53**

**Silver-naries for Christ**

*Toh See Kiat*



# A SAFE PLACE FOR MEN

*David W. F. Wong*

**H**e requested to have lunch with me. We met near his downtown office. The crowded cafe and noise level did not provide us with the ambience to share anything personal, so we adjourned afterwards to pray in his office instead. As I closed and stood up to leave, he said, “There’s something I meant to share with you but I guess we could do it at another lunch.”

Did I miss something? At that time I was reading Gordon MacDonald’s book, *Rebuilding Your Broken World*.<sup>1</sup> I copied the chapter on “The Pain of Secret Carrying”<sup>2</sup> and mailed it to my lunch partner, with a note, “Let me know whenever you are ready to share.”

In that chapter, MacDonald compares a person’s life to the integrated system of a computer. It is called “integrated” because all aspects of the software must fit and work together. He explains the comparison:

*Each of us is created to be an integrated system of personal and corporate life. The truth by which we live in our public worlds must be the truth we live in our private worlds. The gap or the difference between the two will largely determine the state of our personal health.*<sup>3</sup>

Apparently, my friend’s life had fallen into such a gap: who he appeared to be in public was not who he was in private. He never got back to me. A few months

passed. Then a call came, not from him, but from his wife. I went down to their home. There, in the stillness of the night, I heard the confession of an anguished husband whose affair had been laid bare before his distraught wife. It was the secret he had wanted to share with me but decided in the end to carry it alone.

That got me thinking about how we keep secrets to ourselves for fear of being found out. King David kept the secret about Bathsheba until both it, and he, were exposed by the prophet Nathan. By then he had inflicted irreparable harm. Why is it so difficult, especially for men, to divulge their secrets? Why do they keep their private world so private?

### **When Private Worlds Shatter**

Some years later, MacDonald would write another book, *When Men Think Private Thoughts*.<sup>4</sup> His wife Gail wrote the Foreword, revealing that:

*This has been a difficult book for Gordon to write. I have loved cheering him on as he has dealt with the material himself before writing it for others. After 35 years of observing this man, I realize that this is part and parcel of who he is—insisting his words wash over his own soul first.*<sup>5</sup>

Why should what he writes “wash over his own soul first”? Rewind ten years, the headlines in *The Washington Post* of June 13, 1987 read: “Clergyman Confesses Adultery, Resigns” followed by the brief announcement, “The Rev. Gordon MacDonald, 47, an evangelical author and lecturer, resigned the presidency of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship after confessing that he was ‘involved in an adulterous relationship in late 1984 and early 1985.’”

He and his wife had been married 25 years when the news broke. MacDonald had himself gone through “all the biblically defined steps that call for confession, repentance and restoration” and had hoped that “the tragedy in my past would have been over and buried.”<sup>6</sup> However, when rumours about it surfaced, he decided to come clean before the public and step down.

A year later, he wrote *Rebuilding Your Broken World*, the third of a trilogy, after *Ordering Your Private World* (1985)<sup>7</sup> and *Restoring Your Spiritual Passion* (1986).<sup>8</sup> Evidently, as his own private world broke down, rebuilding and restoring

became themes in his writing. I read all four books at a time when I was meeting with men whose private world told a different story from their public life. Most of them were successful in their careers, married with young families, and faithful church-goers. As a pastor I tried to earn their confidence so that they would share with me who they really were and what they were really going through. Unlike my aforementioned lunch partner, some did open up. They let me into their private, secret thoughts.

Listening to these men, I did a good amount of soul-searching and soul-washing myself. Stephen Neill, in a series of addresses to aspiring leaders, noted that “the years between forty and fifty are the most dangerous in a man’s life.” The reason is:

*... that is the time when our inner weaknesses are most likely to show themselves .... It is far better to find out now while we are young whatever our inner weaknesses they may be, and to let them be dealt with ... rather than to let the years wear us down, and bring out the weaknesses, just at the time when we ought to be growing into leaders and pillars in the Church.<sup>9</sup>*

Neill was probably addressing those in their twenties and thirties. At that age, too much is at stake for us to make any serious mistakes. We are launching our career and ministry, and starting our marriage and family. We value them too much to risk losing it all. But when we pass the taking-off stage and reach cruising speed, we cut ourselves some slack and sit back to enjoy some perks. King David fought his battles, overcame his enemies, won his throne, built his palace, walked on its rooftop—and fell. He was probably in his forties.

I read Neill’s warning in my forties and wondered if it had come too late. Yet for those who have fallen to their weaknesses, Gordon MacDonald’s books offer a measure of solace and encouragement. Our broken world can be rebuilt, our spiritual passion can be restored, but only when our private thoughts come out into the open. We are back to our question of why men find it so hard to share their secrets. Why do they keep their private world so private? It seems that the higher men rise in success and status, the harder it is for them to be open and come clean.

One such man was US President Bill Clinton. In 1998, he came clean about his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, an intern working at the White House, young enough to be his daughter. He confessed to the inappropriate relationship only after Independent Counsel Ken Starr, tasked to investigate the matter, pursued him like Inspector Javert in *Les Miserables*. Finally, on August 17, 1998, Clinton spoke on national TV, and admitted wrong-doing. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist David Maraniss took the speech apart and put it together in a book, *The Clinton Enigma*:

“There is this deep need in all of us for intimacy with God.”

*The speech took four and a half minutes to deliver and was composed of 543 words... No apology to his supporters, nor to his staff, nor to Monica, nor to the country. Words of rationalization to explain himself. Another attempt at lawyerly evasion. And most of all, an attack on Ken Starr.<sup>10</sup>*

Maraniss ended his verbal indictment against Clinton with these words:

*When the public persona is immaterial, when the rationalizations do not work, when there is nothing to compartmentalize, when there are no hands to shake or votes to be won, when the only thing interpreting your words is your own conscience, what then? A self-inflicted wound. A hardened heart. A deadened spirit.<sup>11</sup>*

Harsh words indeed. Clinton was impeached, his legacy of a second-term presidency forever shackled to an unsavoury liaison.<sup>12</sup> But that was not the end of the story. A few months later, on 4 October, *The Washington Post* linked Clinton's name to Gordon MacDonald's, with the headlines, “Broken Spirit: Clinton's Pastor Overcame Past. Gordon Macdonald, A Best-selling Evangelist, Had An Adulterous Affair”.

Both men had each soared to heights of glory and plummeted. They had each fallen hard, their worlds shattered, their spirits broken. The pastor who himself underwent a two-year restoration process with his church elders would now walk

with the president through a similar journey. *Rebuilding Your Broken World*—which Clinton claimed to have read twice—prescribes a discipline of reflection, confession and change, a mandatory time away from the limelight and public duties. The last part would not be possible for the president, but the first steps could be taken.

Did Clinton find a safe place and a path to walk back towards restoration? Perhaps, the best person to judge is Ken Starr himself. Eight years down the road, in 2016, Starr expressed regret that so much of Bill Clinton’s legacy is viewed through the lens of what he euphemistically called “the unpleasantness”, adding, “There are certain tragic dimensions which we all lament. That having been said, the idea of this redemptive process afterwards, we have certainly seen that powerfully.”

He went on to commend Clinton’s post presidency and the high standard he upheld, following the example of President Jimmy Carter before him. Starr called Clinton “the most gifted politician of the baby boomer generation” with “genuine empathy for human beings” and powerful, palpable “I feel your pain” sincerity.<sup>13</sup> What a turnaround! We may never know how much credit goes to Gordon MacDonald, but that is not important. The important thing is that restoration is possible, as both men have shown us.

### **In the Safety of Spiritual Friendships**

One of the things that MacDonald recommends for restoration is “Safe Places”.<sup>14</sup> He refers to places in Scriptures such as the altars that Abraham built to acknowledge the presence of God, the ground where Moses stood barefoot before the burning bush, the tabernacle and the temple where sacrifices are offered to keep the worshippers safe from judgement. But in time I would learn about safe places of a slightly different sort: a place where men could gather and feel safe to share their most private thoughts and hidden secret worlds.

In 1996, I attended a conference in San Diego organised by the Promise Keepers. Tens of thousands of men gathered at a football stadium, under the theme, “Break Down the Walls” based on Ephesians 2:14: “For he [Christ] himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” I went there with a retired military general from Ethiopia and his two sons-in-law, and witnessed the breaking of walls and the

bonding of men despite the huge, diverse crowd. We sang, we prayed, we listened, we wept, we hugged, and we left knowing that we were not alone in our struggles. That year, similar conferences took place in 22 stadiums and cities across the United States, impacting over a million men.<sup>15</sup>

Started in 1990 as a movement for men, Promise Keepers challenges every man to take a stand for God in his marriage and family, church and community. Much like the revival of John Wesley in 18th century England, the idea was birthed outside the church, and action took place beyond its hallowed confines. Led by Bill McCartney, football coach for the University of Colorado, all gatherings took place in sport stadiums. Something indescribable happens when men pack an arena usually associated with macho camaraderie. Yet the leaders behind the movement knew that a spark lit in a momentous event would not continue burning unless it was sustained by small group fellowship when participants returned home.

At the end of the conference I attended, we were given materials to take home and start small groups for men. Such gatherings became safe places for men. I was then based in Hawaii directing a training centre for leaders from more than a hundred developing nations. I spent much time with men who came in for a month at a time to be equipped. Yet what they needed was not so much expert knowledge or skills, but an opportunity to re-order their lives. Our curriculum offered training in evangelising and discipling, leadership and management, communication and motivation, fund-raising and goal-setting. While they appreciated them all, the sessions they valued most were the ones on personal integrity and the family. We provided a safe place, away from their home, workplace and church, to share their private world and, where it is broken, to find restoration.

Gordon MacDonald makes one more recommendation for restoration: special friends. He lists six of them: the sponsor, the affirmer, the rebuker, the intercessor, the partner and the pastor.<sup>16</sup> Some of us reading this may despair of ever finding six such friends. Even Jesus found only three, and they weren't always real friends! Perhaps, a modest start comes from another author: Tan Soo Inn and his slim volume, *3-2-1: Following Jesus in Threes*.<sup>17</sup> He offers a simple formula: three persons, meeting for two hours, once a month.

When I first came across the book, I bought copies for all my staff and asked them to go start their 3-2-1. I should know the value of such small band of friends. Some 30 years ago, six of us started meeting monthly to share and pray. For a time we dispersed to serve the Lord in different parts of the world. But our bonds endured, and today, four of us are back together, meeting regularly and watching out for each other. A safe place with a circle of special friends—could that be for men the hedge against falling and the net when they do fall?

...

## Questions for Reflection

### 1

From your personal experience and interactions, why are you or those you know afraid to share secrets of weaknesses, temptations and sins?

### 2

What can we do to protect ourselves from falling into serious sin? How can we hold ourselves accountable to someone—or a band of brothers—to help us?

### 3

How do we recover when we fall? Why is recovery sometimes difficult and long drawn? How do the examples of Gordon MacDonald and Bill Clinton give us hope?

*Rev Dr David W. F. Wong served as the homegrown pastor of Mount Carmel Bible-Presbyterian Church for 17 years before answering a call from Haggai Institute to pioneer a leadership training center in Hawaii in 1994. After a fruitful stint there, he returned to Singapore in 2006. He was Senior Pastor of Zion Bishan Bible-Presbyterian Church for 10 years before stepping down in 2017 to assume the position of mentoring pastor. Lyricist to six musicals, David also writes a column for Impact magazine and has authored more than a dozen books, the latest two being *The Narrow Road: Turning Neither Left Nor Right* (2015) and *Waiting: A Necessary Pause in Time* (2018). This article is taken from his upcoming book. He is married to Jenny, and they are blessed with two married daughters and four grandchildren. His email address is <owlnook@yahoo.com.sg>.*

# MY WALK WITH GOD: TRIALS THAT TRANSFORM US

*Stephen Riady*

**M**any people told me that when I became a Christian, I would be blessed. There certainly are blessings: all of us who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour can have a personal relationship with Him; we can walk and talk with Him; we can listen to His voice. Yet everyone who has been a Christian for a while will also know that the journey with God is often not smooth. God uses many things—trials, sufferings and so on—to transform us from being people who expect Him to walk with us into people who walk with Him.

## **Letting God Lead Us: The Power of Abraham’s Surrender**

Although it sounds like a subtle difference, these two ways of walking produce vastly different fruit. We can see the difference play out in the lives of Lot and Abraham. When Lot, Abraham’s nephew, started his journey, he appeared to desire to walk closely with God. He left his own home and followed his uncle Abraham for many years, presumably to emulate his godly example. Throughout their journey together, Abraham blessed Lot and treated him like his own son. Lot became very rich.

The accumulation of these blessings revealed the true state of Lot’s heart. Rather than feeling gratitude towards his uncle, he took advantage of him. When it came time for them to part ways (due to a conflict between their servants),

Lot chose the part of the country that looked more appealing for himself and left the less desirable part to his uncle (Gen. 13:10). When the place he chose to live in turned out to be a city of evil, he was unwilling to leave and condemn it even though he knew God would soon destroy it. Moreover, he failed to be an honourable father when he offered his two daughters for the men of Sodom to sleep with. Even though Lot knew of God, his heart remained self-centred and self-seeking. He wanted God to walk *with him*, to support *his* plans, so that he could enjoy the blessings that came with God's presence, but was not interested in surrendering to God. His selfish decisions led him to a life that ended in misery.

In contrast, even though he was not without his own imperfections and struggles, Abraham's life ended up very differently. Initially, he followed God's instructions to go to "the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). But when severe famine struck, he allowed fear to affect his obedience and went to Egypt instead. Abraham also lied. He said that his wife, Sarah, was his sister, not his wife, to save his own skin! As a husband, he shirked his responsibility of being the protector of his wife and made her vulnerable to assault. Yet, despite these flaws, the Bible calls Him the "father of all who believe" (Rom. 4:16, NLT). Abraham eventually learnt to walk *with* God, abandoning his plans and submitting to the Lord's leading, to the extent that he was even willing to sacrifice his long-awaited son at the Lord's command (Gen. 22). For this, God rewarded him greatly.

The Christian life is not without its struggles. But these struggles need not dictate our lives and overwhelm our desire to follow God. As we study God's Word, seek His will and direction for our lives and trust in God's faithfulness, we will discover that He will provide for all our needs.

I have been a Christian for more than 20 years, and have faced my fair share of struggles that have tested my integrity and character. Six years ago, the South Korean government wanted an overseas Chinese company to undertake the development of a piece of prime land (about 200 hectares in all) in their country. My father stepped forward to take on the project. When the South Korean government saw that we had extensive experience building Indonesian townships that were much larger in scale and size than their intended project, they hired him.

My father then tasked me to handle this enormous project. As I had no prior experience working in South Korea, I was apprehensive. The area was

underdeveloped, with very few existing townships in the area. It was not a place where I could expect to sell the completed residences easily, simply because few people had any need to visit the place! However, an area—about five hectares in size—was set aside for an integrated resort (like the ones in Singapore), with a casino, attractions, and so on. So, I thought that if we invested in building the basic infrastructure and amenities for a new township, the properties would sell because the integrated resort and its attractions would pull people into the area. My managers and directors agreed with me. We put forward our plans to the relevant governmental authorities, which granted us their approval. It sounded like a good plan!

But when the news broke that we were planning to do this, many friends, especially godly Christians, challenged me by saying, “Hey, you are a Christian, why are you building a casino?” This outcry put me in a dilemma. We had estimated that we would make over a billion US dollars with this project; that was a lot of money to give up if we chose not to go ahead with it. I could not imagine how my South Korean partners would respond if I told them I wanted to pull out of this lucrative deal. Worse still, I was afraid of what the government would think of or do to our company! By then, we had put in three hard years of work and planning on the project. All that would have gone to waste!

Around that time, I went into retreat for ten days. I reflected, thought through the issues and prayed. Ultimately I had to decide whether to cling onto my own plans or put aside my own self-interests and follow His commands. Finally, I decided that we should give up the project. I made this decision rationally, but also with Christ’s wisdom. While the project was lucrative, I knew that going ahead with it would run contrary to my own values and would not please God.

Even though walking with God means having to give up what we think is best, the peace that comes with choosing to obey Him is incomparable. We are in safe hands when we choose His way because God always knows what is best for us, even more than we do.

“Even though walking with God means having to give up what we think is best, the peace that comes with choosing to obey Him is incomparable.”

## **Letting God Speak to Us: The Power of Moses' Prayer**

Moses lived for 120 years, a life that was divided into three parts, each 40 years in length. For the first 40 years, not unlike many of us during this first part of our lives, Moses was very self-confident. He believed in his own ability. Over the next forty years, however, Moses' confidence dissipated! His mantra then was: "I cannot". Finally, over the last 40 years, his refrain was "I cannot, but God can". During this period, he prayed and talked to God ceaselessly. Through prayer, Moses was able to speak to God and seek His guidance in terms of how to shepherd the Israelites effectively. The extended time that he spent with God strengthened his relationship with God, and attuned him to God's heart for the people. The more Moses listened to God and obeyed Him, the more he was transformed into an effective and dynamic leader.

These last few years, I had been wondering, "What is lacking or missing in my walk with God?" Up to then, my prayer life comprised saying grace before meals and sending intermittent and sporadic prayers to God when there was a need. But something seemed missing. One day, a church leader challenged me to learn how to pray for an hour. His point was that even though God does listen to our short, few-minute prayers, there was a depth that I could experience in God when I intentionally set aside time to pray. Just like Moses had to go through different stages in his walk with God, I found I had to go through a similar growth. I discovered that my confidence in prayer grew the more I practised. When I had more experience in the way He answered prayer, I had a greater sense of His reliability and trustworthiness and became more certain that God listened to me. With this deeper trust and faith in Him, God started to become the One I always wanted to turn to for all things and eventually the One to whom I wanted to surrender all things.

## **Letting God Transform Us: The Power of the Holy Spirit**

In the New Testament, Paul said that our walk with God should be in accordance with the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:16 and 25 exhort us to "live by the Spirit" and to "keep in step with the Spirit". The moment we are born again, our spirit man is made alive. This allows God's Spirit to engage with our spirit. From that starting point, we can keep in contact with God constantly. The more open we are to Him working in our lives, the more His Spirit saturates and permeates us with His

Presence. In being filled like this, we sense that we completely belong to Him, and God's love will then flow out from us.

The more we live by the Spirit, and allow God to take control of our lives, the more we will be able to be like Him in our daily lives. We are being built up in Christ. Imagine how powerful the body of Christ would be, if each member were individually growing in Christ in his or her personal life in this way. When the body comes together—regardless of our background, age, spiritual maturity, educational level and social status—we would all be able to love, accept, and forgive each other. The world would truly be able to see that we are Christians by how we love one another.

My whole family became Christians early on in their lives. I was the only one who resisted. I was afraid that becoming a Christian would increase the pressure in my life. I was already so stressed at work; I did not need the pressure of attending cell group meetings, prayer meetings, and Sunday service. In those days, I cherished my leisurely weekends. I got up late on Sundays, often sleeping until 10 a.m. I would then play a round of golf or watch a movie. Moreover, I was also wary that becoming a Christian meant making painful adjustments to my lifestyle. I would not be able to continue old habits or go shopping at length. Due to these apprehensions, I did not want to commit.

Little did I know that my sisters were faithfully fasting and praying for me. But I thank God that they persevered. They learnt of my concerns and assured me that becoming a Christian did not mean that I had to stop my old habits. I could continue doing the things that I liked, but should also cultivate new habits and practices, such as going to church, doing Bible study or attending fellowship groups. They never pressured me to conform to a certain mould of behaviour. They knew that when Christ lived in me, I would grow to have a natural desire to follow Christ and His teachings, and change would soon follow!

Indeed, this is what happened. As I grew in the knowledge of and love for Christ, my faith became stronger and change came naturally. This came about not because I was afraid of being hauled up before the church pastors and elders for not doing the right thing. Rather, it was because I discovered that the Christian faith is about eating from the tree of life and desiring to walk in the way that is life-giving (Gen. 2:9). I did not abandon my old habits immediately. But as I matured, that desire diminished and after a few years, I eventually dropped those

habits altogether! In its place, the Christian habits of going for church meetings, or prayer sessions, or reading God's Word, or Christian literature became more ingrained. With the cultivation of inner spiritual disciplines, outward Christian behaviour became more and more effortless.

### **An Ongoing Journey**

I share this to encourage us, especially Christians who are younger in their faith. Our walk with God is not about doing what appears spiritual or not doing unholy things. If we go about nurturing our budding Christian faith this way, we are building up pressure points that will eventually explode. What a new believer should really do is focus on God. Read and study God's Word more. Pray fervently. Discover and experience how good and faithful our God is. Let the Holy Spirit infuse his spirit as he does so. It is only by God's wonderful grace that our spiritual growth is sustainable, as we have seen from the lives of Abraham, Moses and Paul.

And do not be surprised when suffering and hardship break us along the way. This is part of how our faith deepens and grows. Our trials cause us to lose confidence in ourselves and rely entirely on God's grace and strength. This will give us a lived experience of who God is. In fact, the testing times and trials have helped me read God's Word more earnestly, love it even more and trust in Him more deeply. Take hardship and struggles in your stride. When we are broken, we can then become strong. By His strength and grace, we can then minister to others in need.

■ ■ ■

## Questions for Reflection

### 1

What are some things we fear about letting God take control of our lives? Can you think of some verses in Scripture that can speak to these fears?

### 2

What do you tend to talk to God about during your prayer time? What are some things that you would like to start talking to God about?

### 3

What are some hardships that you experienced that allowed you to know God in a deeper way?

*Dr Stephen Riady is the Executive Chairman of OUE Limited, a diversified real estate company listed in Singapore. He was educated in Singapore and the US, and is proficient in English, Mandarin and Indonesian. He also serves as Non-Independent, Non-Executive Director of OUE Lippo Healthcare and Healthway Medical Corporation Limited, and is the Chairman and Executive Director of Lippo Limited, Lippo China Resources Limited and Hong Kong Chinese Limited. A second-generation Chinese-Indonesian family business leader, loving father, dedicated son and philanthropist, Stephen believes that faith is the foundation of character and a determining factor of success. He can be contacted through his personal assistant at <jordanisac@oue.com.sg>.*