

GRACE *news*

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illustrations by Tan Sze Ern

Commitment – A Really Scary Concept

Pastor Arnold Wong reminds us that being committed to God should be the chief commitment of our lives.

Many would agree that commitment is a scary concept, but a very important one. Without commitment our quality of life would be very poor. Praise the Lord for the legions of people who keep us healthy, safe and productive because of their dedication and commitment.

Likewise, in the spiritual realm commitment is also a scary yet important concept. When a believer is challenged to be committed to God, he or she has no idea what kind of life God may lead them to live for Him. For most believers that is the crux of the matter: the fear of the unknown and the fear of having to live a very difficult life. In the eyes of the world and ourselves, it is quite acceptable to be dedicated to our professions, vocations, personal dreams and goals, but being committed to God is quite another matter. Living by faith is really scary despite God's personal promises, presence and power (Josh 1:9, 1 Thess 5:24).

However, commitment is absolutely necessary because there are hardships and challenges that naturally come with living a life worthy of our calling. Jesus was very clear in declaring

the challenges of living a life that seeks to follow and obey God. There will be opposition and even persecutions (Jn 15:18, 20). But we can hold on to God's promise that He will not leave us (Heb 13:5), and that He came to give us life and give it abundantly (Jn 10:10).

We have to realise that God calls us to be committed to Him – to love and serve Him (Deut 10:12, Matt 22:37-38). Our commitment to Him should be the chief commitment of our lives, leading us to a life of sacrifice, selflessness and service (Lk 12:51-53, Rom 12:1). It is our ultimate response to the ultimate sacrifice that Christ made for us when He gave Himself for us by dying on the cross for our sins, allowing us to have forgiveness of sin and eternal life (Matt 20:28, Rom 5:6-10).

Scary or not, we must, should, and will commit ourselves to Him.

What are you waiting for? Ω

“...commitment is absolutely necessary because there are hardships and challenges that naturally come with living a life worthy of our calling.”



“ Commitment to God is about belief, but also about reciprocating the love He has showered on us by loving our fellow men. ”

Committing to the Lord

Li Shiwei writes about how he sees his recent baptism as both a commitment to God and a means of fostering deeper relationships with those around him.

In over a decade of attending church, whenever the subject of baptism came up, I'd always wondered about the process I myself would go through. What eventually transpired when I did make my decision earlier this year was admittedly less dramatic than I had imagined; instead it raised questions which were broad-reaching and long-lasting.

Every church, of course, has a standard process for baptism. Yet I believe the journey each of us takes to reach that stage is entirely our own. My tipping point came as a result of thinking through what really, really mattered to me, and the extent to which it was aligned to my walk with God.

Thanks to my being born into a large extended family, as well as my exposure to people of various walks and faiths at work, through church and also National Service, I always considered the people around me to be a blessing from God, and long viewed the way I nurtured relationships to be a manifestation of my Christian faith. But, in the midst of daily responsibilities, this was a stance I found increasingly difficult to keep. Some of my loved ones I simply stopped contacting, and those whom I did, it seemed to be only because they were of use to me in some way. I began thinking, if relationships were something I so deeply cherished, why was I seeing them in such superficial ways? And given that I wasn't young anymore, just what, exactly, was I committed to?

As I set about thinking how to make things right, I soon realised that whatever I did – everything premised around ideas of love and commitment – none of it would mean anything, if I couldn't even take the basic step of obedience to God: Someone I considered the central figure in my life; and after all these years of being a 'believer'.

So what is this commitment to God, exactly? To me it means thinking about His plans for us and how we can live out His character, through understanding the places He puts us in and the people He surrounds us with. These are things we learn – through regular worship, by meditating on His Word, and praying to Him continuously. Commitment to God is about belief, but also about reciprocating the love He has showered on us by loving our fellow men.

And that's how my decision to get baptised came to be. I knew I was far from perfect (and will always be), and that there would be plenty more questions about God, and His plans, in the future. But none of it got in the way of the things I believed – in His existence, and in the Gospel. And looking back I'm thankful, relieved even, that when I arrived at my decision, I was able to do so quickly and calmly. For a moment I felt at peace with myself. Ω



Traditional Japanese "Washi" paper being made

“ We cannot rush relationships or take short-cuts to restore others in their walk with God. It takes time and patience to let the Holy Spirit bring about real-life conviction and changes. ”

Discipleship NOT for me

Yap Kim Meng *urges us not to be intimidated by the words 'disciple-making', but simply to commit ourselves to extend Christian love and care to those around us.*

A cry at dawn. My neighbour downstairs discovered his 37-year-old wife had passed away suddenly, with no warning. She was an airline stewardess and a mother of three, with the youngest child only ten months old. James had become a Christian six months before this happened. Now his world was plunged into darkness.

Over the next five years James was in turmoil. He tried everything to get a handle on life. From being a logistics manager he turned to taxi driving so that he could be home more often to be with his young family. He received plenty of advice. Too much. One day I invited him to join my group of taxi drivers who met at McDonald's. He came. I taught him 2 Cor 5:17 - "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." I quoted it to him and then slowly in my own words, explained it to him. I also cited examples of how this verse applied to my life. I then asked him to quote it back to me several times and explain it in his own words.

The next day, while driving, a few young men asked, "Uncle, you Christian ah?" (referring to the Bible on his dashboard), "You speak in tongues or not?" Without turning around he quoted 2 Cor 5:17 and explained what it meant to him. They were stunned into silence. He went home and did the same with his young family. They looked at him with new respect. He started a family habit of reading the Bible every night.

He told me, "Kim Meng, you are the first person who took the trouble to tell me the Bible in a way I can understand. Others gave me advice, but no one did what you did."

As a neighbour I saw the difficulties my friend James faced. I could have chosen to ignore them, but I prayed for him. At the right time I was there to lend a helping hand. I did not give advice; I simply shared what I knew about how a verse from the Bible helped me

in my faith – simply and clearly in a way my neighbour could understand.

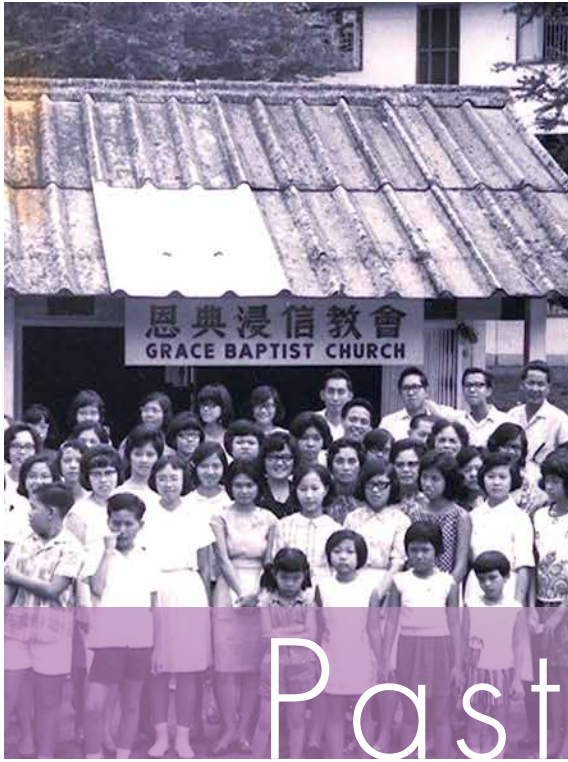
I was simply being a friend. There was no mention of Discipleship, Discipling or Disciple-making. Today James is raising his family well even though his wife is no longer around. It has not been easy. But James thanks the Lord for helping him grow in his faith. He reads his Bible daily. So does his family.

James introduced to me another neighbour whose wife suffers from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). We meet regularly and pray and cry together. Our friendship continues amidst both men's challenging home life. They find comfort in the Bible, prayers, mutual encouragement and a determination to carry on. There is no Cinderella ending, but they see God grant grace and they are raising their children trusting in the Lord and sharing their stories to encourage others.

What can we learn from these two stories?

1. We cannot run away from those God has put into our path – especially our neighbours. God is interested in us and in those near to us. He desires them to be saved and we are His extension into their lives.
2. We can only reach out to others when we walk in their shoes and see things from their perspective. Walking alongside a dear one is how God uses us to impact those around us.
3. We cannot rush relationships or take short-cuts to restore others in their walk with God. It takes time and patience to let the Holy Spirit bring about real-life conviction and changes. God wants to see us changed, and in the process of transformation we will be able to help others respond to Him. Ω

why GBC?



Past Present Future

Although the GBC population is made up of members from various generations, it is heartening to hear a common expression of love and attachment to the church from these five representatives, as they express their feelings about the upcoming move.

What brought you to GBC?

Josephine Chan: My family used to live at Kampong Silat in the 1960s and a neighbour brought me to GBC.

Rachel Wong: When I first came to Singapore I looked for a home church and tried several. Then a colleague invited me to witness her baptism at GBC and I have been coming back ever since.

Benjamin Wee: I've been attending GBC since I was born!

Vincent & Sachie Wong: Uncle Shige introduced us to GBC four years ago after finding me in the JCF (Japanese Christian Fellowship) in St George's church having difficulties listening to the Japanese sermon.

Lee-Tsiang Siew Teng: I came to GBC in 1985 with two of my classmates as we were looking around for a church to worship in. That's when GBC became my home church. After we got married my husband and I went to Brunei in 1998 and lived there for seven years. When we came back in January 2006 for our children's education, GBC became our family church.

What keeps you coming back?

Josephine Chan: The strong Bible-based teaching and the close-knit friendships that I have made over the years.

Rachel Wong: I felt comfortable from the start and quickly met some lovely people who remain among my closest friends. Initially it

was this feeling of community that attracted me. Subsequently I felt convicted to stay because of the strong Biblical foundation and the steadfast faith displayed by the pastors and leaders. GBC has become like a second home and extended family to me, and a place where I have matured in my faith and have had the privilege to serve God and His people. It is also important that my children have grown up in GBC and have formed their own Christian friendships in a godly environment. Of course there are flaws in GBC, as in any church, but I strongly believe that as Christians we are called to forgive and submit to each other in obedience to God and as a testimony to non-believers, rather than to disengage and look elsewhere.

Benjamin Wee: GBC provides opportunities for youths to interact with adults through activities. The services are attended by both young and old, which is not the case in all churches. I have been blessed by many aunts and uncles through their words of wisdom. Secondly, GBC is word-centred and inter-generational. Lastly, the tofu!

Vincent & Sachie Wong: GBC's sermons and Bible teachings are God-centred, which makes it impossible to resist. It keeps us wanting to learn more about God's words and His will for us. The people are very warm, welcoming and God-loving, and they cared for us during the trials we went through since we joined GBC in 2012.

Lee-Tsiang Siew Teng: The faithfulness of God and His faithful people in GBC keep me in His family.

What impact will the big move to SAJC in October and the new worship service timings have on you personally? Do you foresee any sacrifices you will have to make?

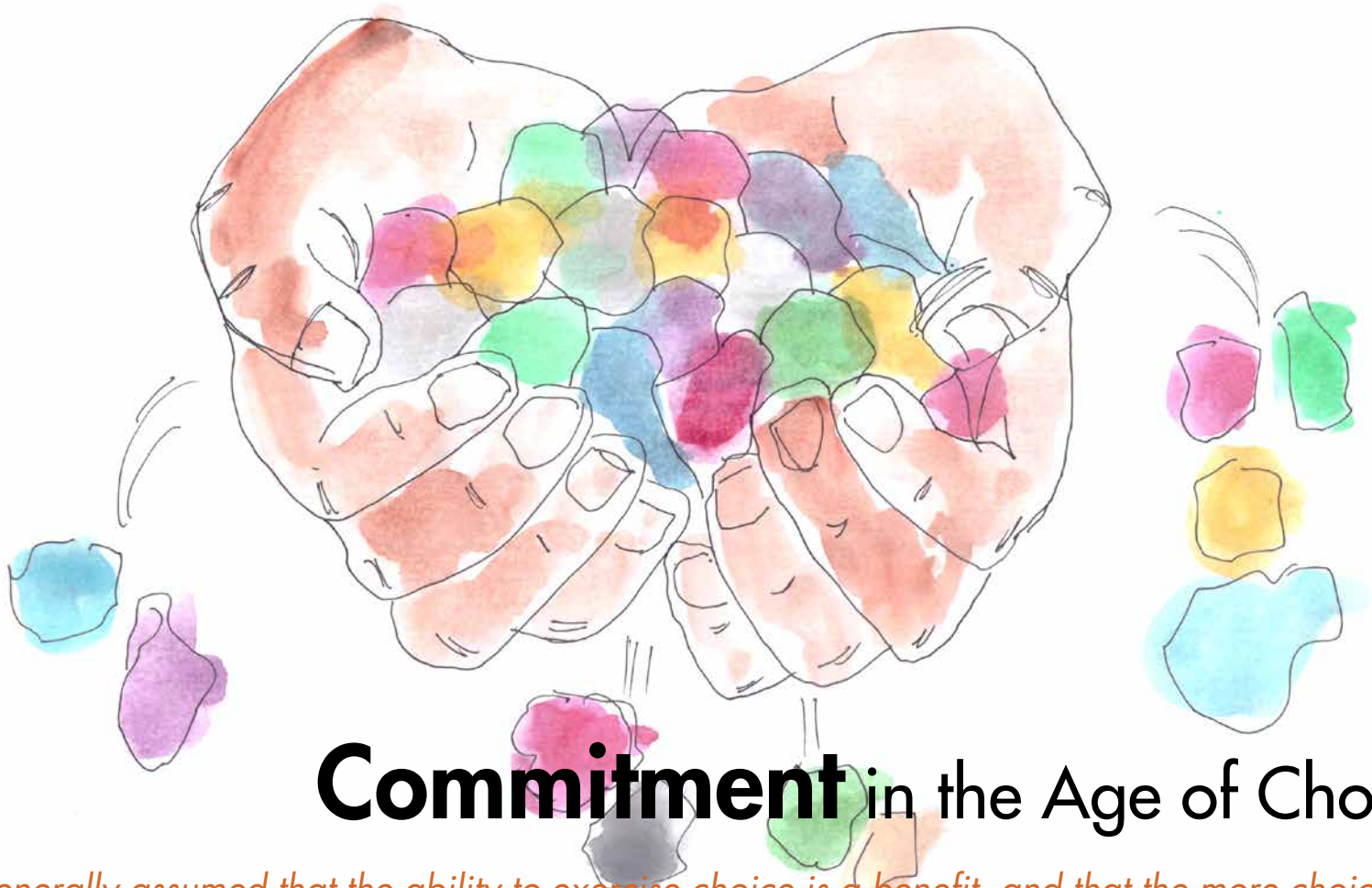
Josephine Chan: This is not the first time GBC has moved. In fact, this time the move is far more comfortable as we only need to move to a different church to worship (instead of a makeshift tent). For me, there is no sacrifice to be made, although I will soon have to take a bus to church instead of walking.

Rachel Wong: The major change will be the shift to an afternoon timing, which will take some adjustment, but I don't foresee any sacrifices. I am actually anticipating some benefits, chief among them the chance to sleep a bit later on Sundays!

Benjamin Wee: The travelling time might be a bit longer, but other than that I don't foresee any big changes I will have to make to my schedule.

Vincent & Sachie Wong: Apart from taking a different route to SAJC and adjusting the timings, we believe there won't be many changes.

Lee-Tsiang Siew Teng: Yes, I can foresee it is a great challenge and there are sacrifices to be made, but the cost is nothing compared to what Christ has done for us. Ω



Commitment in the Age of Choice

*It is generally assumed that the ability to exercise choice is a benefit, and that the more choices we have, the better. But is that really the case? **Tan Yee Kiat** asks what role commitment plays when we are faced with a multiplicity of choices.*

In 2004, Barry Schwartz released a book entitled *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*. Schwartz argues that contrary to what we might expect, having the freedom to choose is not necessarily a good thing and has in fact made us more miserable.

Paul Hiebert briefly summarises how Schwartz sees the ubiquity of choice in the modern era:

While Schwartz doesn't claim he discovered the setbacks of excessive choice, The Paradox of Choice is perhaps our best articulation of the overall problem. In the book, for example, he explores the stress people feel when confronted with ample opportunity, and the regret that follows from choosing poorly (whose fault is it other than mine?). He also discusses our loss of presence (why am I doing this when I could be doing that?), our raised expectations (with so many options, why settle for less?), and our tarnished sense of self that comes from comparing our choices with the choices of others (why do I continue to pick the wrong things when Alex always picks the right ones?). In sum, Schwartz's work poses a serious challenge to the notion that more choice brings about more freedom, and more freedom brings about more happiness. As the book's subtitle implies, sometimes a lot is simply too much.¹

It is indeed nothing new. An economist might perhaps point out that this is simply the age-old problem of calculating our opportunity cost, the computation of which has nevertheless

become more difficult due to the abundance of information available.

The 'paradox of choice' can be overcome if we look past the illusion that we have many options and instead choose the one thing we know to be true, the one thing that we know will lead us to where we ought to be, and the one thing that we are called to be – Christians grateful for the grace of God in transferring us out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col 1:12-13).

Paul's words to a young Timothy contain timeless truths for us all. After detailing the snare of riches, he writes: "But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." (1 Tim 6:11-12)

Are you suffering from the 'paradox of choice'? Does the wide range of choices you have make it difficult for you to commit and cause you unhappiness – which job to choose, the location of your house, which school for your children, even who to marry? Let's look beyond these and take hold of the eternal life to which we have been called. Jim Elliot's famous words are worth our while remembering: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Ω

¹Paul Hiebert, *The Paradox of Choice, 10 Years Later*, <http://www.psmag.com/health-and-behavior/paradox-choice-barry-schwartz-psychology-10-years-later-96706>, (December 19, 2014)

16 -18 Jul Young Adults (YAs) Retreat – Clash of the Two Kingdoms

During their annual retreat in Malaysia this year, the young adults looked at how Christian disciples can follow Christ in a world with very different or even conflicting values. *"I really enjoyed the sermons, group discussions and prayers! My one strong memory was when Wen Pin, Andrew and I prayed for each other about the one thing we thought God was saying to us, and we just prayed our hearts out!"* **Samuel Ngo**



26 Jul Baptism & Transfer

We rejoice with Li Shiwei – a long-time worshipper at GBC – as he entered the waters of baptism and made public his commitment to the Lord and the community here at GBC. We also warmly welcome Jessica Fong to the GBC family through the transfer of membership.



22 Aug Ladies Ministry Chinoiserie Craft Session

The ladies had a wonderful time of fellowship as they learnt the art of Chinese knot tying to make necklaces. One lady brought two friends who are non-believers to the session too!



29 Aug Evangelistic Movie

We thank God for the Outreach Ministry's overture to the community through the screening of Rev Neville Tan's touching testimony, and for Ps Bobby's message on God's unconditional, life-transforming love found in Christ. Even though the turnout could have been better, we are thankful for the visitor who came and the fellowship time after the movie screening.



30 Aug CG Emphasis Sunday

To encourage more of our church members to join a care group, the CG Ministry set up a booth in the canteen to share with us the different care groups available. Should you have missed it, you can contact cg.at.gbc@gmail.com for more information.



6 Sep GBC's 56th Anniversary Celebration

GBC marked the last church anniversary to be held in the current sanctuary with a joyful worship service. The congregation was urged to look back with thanksgiving and look forward with hope, in preparation for the changes ahead, both challenges and blessings.



Committed to Obey

Esther Yap *explains her commitment to become a full-time missionary.*

On 30 Jan 2015, I left my corporate job to become a full-time missionary. It took me many years to come to this point. I have been interested in mission work since I was a teenager. However, my parents advised me to defer that decision until I'm older and more mature. In the intervening years of study and work, I wrestled with my conviction to be a missionary.

Have I reconsidered becoming a missionary? Certainly! The typical, modern lifestyle of building a career and financial security is undeniably attractive. Yet, I recognise that the modern lifestyle could become a way to justify a life that focuses only on self-fulfillment, an excuse to withhold the best of my strength and talent from God.

Commissioned by Grace Baptist Church as a missionary candidate, I'm currently in training to be a Bible translator. At present, I am studying at Redcliffe College, UK. Here, I learn and develop skills in language and culture acquisition, language survey and language study. Next year, I will start a two-year internship with Wycliffe Bible Translators Singapore.

I'm excited about what's in store for me, but I could not do this by myself. That is why I am thankful to have the support of my church, family and friends behind me, who have encouraged and prayed for me, and continue to do so. Ω



One of our class sessions was on culture learning techniques. One of the techniques we learnt was how to conduct ethnographic interviews to glean insights into someone's culture. To demonstrate the ethnographic interview, my teacher interviewed me. Here, I'm sharing with my classmates about Chinese culture in Malaysia and the different festivals we celebrate.



Culture learning is a major part of my course. During one of our culture and language learning sessions, we learnt to make dolma (an Armenian dish made with vine leaves stuffed with minced meat).

“the modern lifestyle could become a way to justify a life that focuses only on self-fulfillment, an excuse to withhold the best of my strength and talent from God.”

O Church, Arise

O church, arise and put your armour on,
hear the call of Christ our Captain.
For now the weak can say that they are strong
in the strength that God has given.
With shield of faith and belt of truth,
we'll stand against the devil's lies,
an army bold whose battle cry is love,
reaching out to those in darkness.

Our call to war to love the captive soul
but to rage against the captor.
And with the sword that makes the wounded whole,
we will fight with faith and valour.
When faced with trials on every side,
we know the outcome is secure,
and Christ will have the prize for which he died,
an inheritance of nations.

Come see the cross where love and mercy meet
as the Son of God is stricken.
Then see his foes lie crushed beneath his feet
for the Conqueror has risen.
And as the stone is rolled away,
and Christ emerges from the grave,
this victory march continues till the day
every eye and heart shall see him.

So Spirit, come, put strength in every stride,
give grace for every hurdle,
that we may run with faith to win the prize
of a servant good and faithful.
As saints of old still line the way,
retelling triumphs of his grace,
we hear their calls and hunger for the day
when with Christ we stand in glory.

Aaron Lum *explores the theme of commitment in the words of a favourite modern-day hymn.*

O Church, Arise is a modern hymn written by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend. In this hymn we sing of the centrality of Christ, which forms the basis of the various kinds of commitments we've made to Him.

The first verse draws from Ephesians 6:10-18 and emphasises the importance of the unity of the church to fight against Satan's lies with Christ as our captain. As a church, we can and must be committed to loving and caring for one another in all circumstances before we can stand firm against evil, especially in the light of our church rebuilding. The second verse reminds us that we are His people and Christ will come to claim us as His. Hence, we can live with full confidence through trials in this life as we look forward to this end goal. Perhaps you are thinking of committing to missions and are hesitant of the uncertainty that comes along with it, but this verse puts all doubts to rest because

we are assured by Christ of the future that awaits. The third verse forms the crux of this hymn by underlining the importance of Christ in the things that we commit to and do. His death and resurrection prompt us to respond by first committing to Him and subsequently to His people. The fourth verse points to a commitment to a glorious future that awaits us when Christ comes again by living out faithful testimonies in the world.

As we begin a new chapter in GBC's history, may this hymn help us to align our hearts to Jesus and heed His calling before we consider the areas in our Christian life that we want to commit to Him. Ω

Go to <http://youtu.be/x63cVewXAeg> to listen to a recording of this beautiful hymn.