



Lais' Chronicles 2006 The Year in Retrospect

Dec 2006 / Jan 2007

Dear friends,

It's been more than a year since we wrote our last newsletter. And it was an eventful 2006, with its share of ups and downs. And if we may summarize all in a sentence, we will say that it was a year when we have truly experienced the reality of God's love and guidance in our lives.

To begin, we had the pleasure of seeing how our children grew by leaps and bounds over the four seasons. Isaiah went from a baby who couldn't even turn over his side to an active toddler who can climb up Fide's bed in a matter of seconds. Fide is now a dainty little girl who has started reading on her own. Both kids, as many parents would identify, are so boisterous that there is hardly any moments of quietness at home until they go to bed. Nevertheless, we are grateful for both of them, who have been both a great joy and God's means of moulding our character. The kids' personality, as Rina often remarks, are so similar to ours that we frequently find ourselves confronting our own flaws in our children!

In May 06, Pak Wah (PW) graduated with his first Masters degree at Regent College: *Masters of Christian Studies*. Following this, he continued with a thesis based degree – *Masters of Theology*, for the remaining year. And we are thankful to 'report' that, after many hours of typing, strands of white hair, and neck and back aches, PW has finally completed his thesis and degree! This is truly the grace of God, a feat that would never have happened had not God enabled PW to overcome the

numerous writers' block and difficulties over the last few months.



Writing this thesis was also a blessing in many ways. Besides strengthening PW's research skills, the research has benefited us spiritually. PW's thesis focuses on the teachings of John Chrysostom, a pastor in the fourth century Roman Empire. In his sermons, John frequently reminds Christians that we are called to enjoy God's love and to live a heavenly life, i.e., a life of love and godliness. Consequently, we should not be entangled by the wiles of our culture. This is an apt message for us in two ways. Firstly, it cautions us, Singaporean Christians, not to mistake the Christian life as participating in endless activi-

ties. Rather, the goal of the Christian life is to be conformed to the image of Christ. Secondly, it also reminds us that, if we are not careful, our material riches will easily blunt our spiritual vigour.



John Chrysostom, Renowned Pastor and Preacher from Fourth Century Antioch in Syria

In Spring 06, our family also had the pleasure (courtesy of PW's mom) of returning to Singapore and visiting both relatives and friends. This was a period of both trials and blessings. One day after our arrival, we discovered that Rina's father had to undergo surgery to remove a brain tumour! Worse, Rina's grandmother passed away just one month later. Despite these, God was clearly working in these circumstances. The night before his surgery, Rina's father decided to put his faith and hope in Jesus Christ. Also, the tumour was benign and our father is slowly recovering from his surgery.

Furthermore, the demise of Rina's grandmother was also an expression of God's mercy and timing: it delivered the old lady from an eight year state of semi-conscious paralysis, and Rina was able to attend her funeral. For Rina, her grandmother's death is not the end of the story. She longs for the day when she will meet her grandmother again in heaven, since she has also professed faith in Christ a few years earlier.

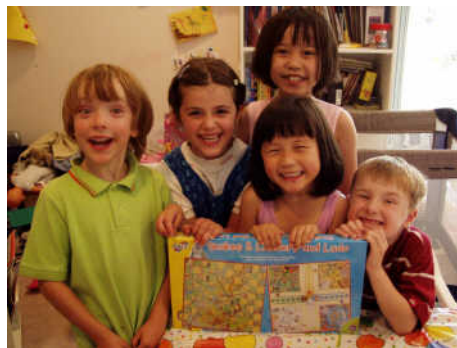


One of the most memorable events in our trip, however, was the 'crisis' we encountered during our journey back to Vancouver. On Jun 19, just before we boarded the aircraft, we were 'escorted' out of the airport because Rina's re-entry permit for Canada had expired! Worse, the next available flight was 2 weeks later, which meant that I (PW) would miss school and the sermon I had to preach on Jun 25! As I struggled with this problem, I was reminded by the Lord that I need to pray specifically for tickets on Jun 22.

It was at this point that I realized that I didn't have much faith at all. It was one thing for us to pray general prayers, which, practically speaking, didn't matter whether they were answered or not. It was another, however, to pray so specifically. To pray in this way required us to acknowledge that God was truly real and loved us like He promised: our heavenly Father. It meant that I could no longer relate to God as I did with my earthly father: saying "Hi" to him, but not really expecting him to help with my problems. Finally, after much struggles, I acknowledged

my faithlessness before God and prayed for the tickets. The next day, the tickets were confirmed!

In retrospect, this event was transformative for our lives. Through it, we realised that, previously, we didn't dare to hope for God's answers to prayer, lest we became disappointed. Or worse, we feared that we might be misled to assume that God was some kind of Santa Claus instead! Now, we understand that while it is true that, for our own good, God does not answer all prayers, it is even truer that God is a loving Father who gives us much more than we can imagine!



Fide's Birthday Party with Friends from Marine View Chapel Sunday School

In the last week of 2006, we experienced God's generous providence once again. As we mentioned in our earlier letters, we were sensing that God was calling PW to teach history and theology in Singapore and Asia. Over the last 6 months, this vision gained further clarity when PW was accepted for Ph.d studies in both England and Australia.

The problem, however, was that we had to raise S\$300K for studies in England, or S\$200K for studies in Australia. Both were astronomical amounts and we had no idea how we could raise the funds necessary for either university. When we arrived at Singapore on 29 Dec 2006, a letter from BRASH Trust was waiting for PW. BRASH

is an organisation that regularly awards scholarships to theological students. To our great surprise, BRASH awarded PW such a substantial scholarship that we now have enough money for at least the first 2 years of PW's doctoral studies at the University of Durham, England. God willing, we will move to Durham and commence PhD studies in Sep 2007! This is unbelievable and can only be a great testimony of God's generous and loving provision.

Having said this, numerous challenges lay ahead. Firstly, to prepare himself for Ph.d studies, PW will have to pick up French, German and Classical Greek. Secondly, there remains much to be learnt regarding his area of research, i.e., the history of the 4th century Church. Thirdly, we hope to be able to spend more time with our parents, so that they may see and receive the love of Jesus Christ in the months ahead. Please pray with us regarding these concerns.



Isaiah's first winter storm... Since school was cancelled, we decided to shovel the walkway and make a snowman.

At this juncture, some of you may wonder, "Why is PW taking up doctoral research in early church history, which is the history of the Catholics, rather than the Protestants?" Well, the reasons are manifold.

(1) The history of the early church is the history of the Protestants. Indeed, we have inherited much from these early Christians, e.g. the doctrines of the Trinity and Christ, emphasis on God's love and grace and so on. This is also why the famous Reformer, John Calvin, paid so much attention to these early church fathers (or Patristics) in his writings (incidentally, John Chrysostom, the figure of my research, is one of the most quoted writers by Calvin). Unfortunately our modern focus on technology and the economy (i.e., the future) has weakened our knowledge of these traditions and made us more susceptible to repeat their mistakes! To avoid this problem, it becomes more crucial for Christians to regain a better appreciation of our spiritual heritage.

(2) Every historical period has different spiritual strengths and weaknesses. C. S. Lewis warns that if we read only contemporary books, we will never discover our spiritual blind spots, since every contemporary writer tends to make the same mistakes. On the other hand, if we read books written by Christians in other historical periods, we will be able to see the similarities and differences between Christians of different eras. In this way, we will better appreciate the true 'pillars' of our Christian faith, and discern what may be our spiritual blind spots.

(3) Since the Holy Spirit has also worked powerfully in the lives of our spiritual forefathers, our reading of their writings will enable us to tap on their spiritual wisdom and insights.

It is for these reasons that PW has felt the burden to participate in the theological education, especially in the area of spiritual theology and church history. God willing, he would be able to play a role in enriching the lives of fellow Christians through these spiritual writings.



Visit to PW's schoolmate, Al Brouwer. Al is a pastor in Cranbrook, BC. Over the last 2 years, the Brouwers have become dear friends to our family.

Pak Wah's Reflections

Over the last six months, Rina and I have been reflecting on a simple, but profound message in the Christian faith: *Jesus loves us*. We also pondered how this truth may be related to a cherished value in our Chinese culture: the value of loyalty and fidelity to family and friends (Yi Qi). Yi Qi is a value that is readily observed in our lives, whether in the movies we watch, e.g., the celebrated HK movie, *A Better Tomorrow*, or in the lives of our parents. Our fathers, for example, have all undertaken significant financial and personal sacrifices out of a strong sense of loyalty and duty to their family members and friends. When we reflected on our own lives, we realized that we too have imbibed and practised this value towards our family and friends. This has remained the case after we became Christians. Indeed, we exercised a similar loyalty and sense of duty to our new spiritual family: the Church. We had no qualms giving up our time, even time with our families, for the sake of committee meetings, mission trips, prayer meetings and bible studies.

Over the last few months, however, we started to realize that while we were quite good at sacri-

fices and obedience to God, we had little sense of what it meant to enjoy the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, if one was to ask us "*How is Jesus attractive to you,*" we find ourselves unable to offer a heartfelt and convincing answer. Yes, Jesus is Lord and we serve Him. But how deeply were we attracted to Him? Did we desire and long for Him? This was an unfamiliar notion. Yet, if our hearts were not convinced and gripped by Christ's love, would not our proclamation, that "Jesus is love," sound like empty words?

Recognizing this, we began to re-read the Gospels, praying that God would reveal the attractiveness of Jesus Christ to us. During this period, our exploration was complemented by two new routines in our family's life. Firstly, I (PW) started to take regular walks with a retired Regent faculty, Prof. James Houston. Prof. Houston is a man of great wisdom and discernment. Every walk with him was such an enriching experience that I began to look forward, or indeed, *desire* to go for walks with Prof. Houston, even though I often had nothing in mind (i.e., an agenda) to discuss. The last time I experienced a similar desire was my courtship with Rina. But now, the new desire was for spending time with an 85 year old man!



The Brouwers and Lais Juniors with their Moms!

When Rina and I discussed this new desire, we began to catch a fresh glimpse of how Jesus' first followers must have felt when they were first attracted to Him. Zacchaeus the tax collector, for example, was rejected by his fellow Jews because of his job (Luke 19). When Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was coming to town, he was so eager to see Jesus that he decided to climb a tree to take a good look at Him. Zacchaeus was not alone. Many widows, children, blind men and etc. also longed to see or touch Jesus because they believed that He could help them. These people, however, did not have high hopes that Jesus would stop and take notice to them, since they also knew that they were inferior or marginalised people among the Jews. But Jesus did! More than that, Jesus stretched out His loving hands and befriended them! Is it any wonder then that these people were so attracted to Jesus that they longed to spend more time with Him? Wouldn't this be wonderful news for a society like ours, where we are often accepted only when we perform well, whether at work, home, studies or in church! Isn't this the very reason why Jesus would be attractive to us?



Isaiah and his first attempt at cherries

The second routine that has shaped our understanding of Jesus' attractiveness is my (PW) bedtime reading of the *Chronicles of Narnia* for Fide. Written by C. S. Lewis, the Narnian stories are splendid on their own. But what is better is that these are an excellent means of deepening our understanding of God's love and the

Christian life. Among these 7 books, my favourite is the last: *The Last Battle*. *Last Battle* is a heart wrenching story of how Narnia was conquered by its enemies. Despite losing his friends and kingdom, Tirian, the last king of Narnia, surprisingly, never lost faith in Aslan (the Christ figure in Narnia).



*...nce
become Fide's favourite stories.*

Instead, he courageously fought his enemies till his death. Yet, just when he thought he had died, Tirian discovered, to his surprise, that he had entered a new Narnia! Here, he encountered many of the characters in the previous 6 books: Peter, Edmund, Lucy, Reepicheep, and even his deceased father! Most importantly, however, Tirian met his heart's desire, the one whom he had faithfully trusted but never met: Aslan, the lion! And what a sheer joy it was to read Aslan's opening words to Tirian, "Well done, last of the Kings of Narnia, who stood firm at the darkest hour."

As I read Tirian's encounter with Aslan and these beloved Narnian characters, a strange and wonderful joy was stirred in my heart. Suddenly, I began to desire after heaven, to long for that day

when I, like Tirian, will meet Christ face to face and hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," when I will also meet my loved ones again, including my departed father. This brief glimpse into the joy of heaven, if I may call it this way, also helped me to better appreciate the Christian life.

One of the most important aspects of the Christian life is the deepening of our desires for God and to become increasingly attracted to Him, His love, His holiness, His ways, His heaven, and His people. As Singaporean Christians, however, we often find this concept difficult to grasp. Influenced by our culture, we often measure our spirituality in terms of how much we are doing for God or serving Him, and *not* by how deeply we desire God and seek to be conformed to His image. Yet, if our eyes are merely focused upon what we should be 'doing' for God, or worse, if we were to delight primarily on the material pleasures of our lives, we would have missed the entire intent of the Christian life. When this happens, the only Christianity that we can offer to our friends and neighbours is something that is dismally similar to their experiences. Hence, it is my prayer that we may never lose sight of this glorious vision that God has for us, and that we may always long for that true and worthy Desire: Jesus Christ, our Lord and friend.



Fide and her french fry

Rina's Reflections

June 2004. We arrived at Regent College, Vancouver, and I asked Pak Wah "Why did he choose Regent College, and not other bible colleges?" He gave me his 'academic' reasons. But we prayed that we would be sensitive to what God has prepared for us at Vancouver, so that our mind and our lives might be transformed to be more like Jesus.



Home at Vancouver... With two kids, we struggle to maintain a fragile 'order' in our basement apartment.

During my first year at Vancouver, I began to struggle intensely with the fact that I was losing control over many parts of my 'life'. This increasingly placed a strain on my relationship with Pak Wah, and, indirectly, with Fide. When I struggled with God in prayer, all I heard was the answer, "Wait." This was unsatisfying. And as the days passed, I began to doubt whether I truly understood who I really was. Nevertheless, I hung on to the belief that God has called me here to walk faithfully with Him.

May 2006. We returned to Singapore and Malaysia. The day after we arrived, my dad informed me that he had to go for a brain tumour operation. It was a great shock to me. He went for the operation. I was not there at the hospital. I praised God that he survived and is recovering well from the side effects of the surgery. One thing I felt

bad about is that I never did get to see my 'old' daddy since.

Before he entered the operation theatre, my dad willingly prayed with his friend (he and my mum got to know her during the last 2 years at the same hospital, where my mum had received her cancer treatment), so that he may become a Christian. This was because he wanted to be with us in heaven, eventually. Dad's faith in taking this unbelievable step was, and remains, the greatest comfort God has given to me. It was God's answer to my 15 years of prayers for my family's salvation. Four weeks later, while my father was still recovering in the hospital, his mother (and my grandma) passed away.

I grieved for the fact that I could no longer sit by her bedside, hold her hands, and sing for her. Yet, I rejoiced that God, in answer to my prayers, have also helped her to profess faith in Christ 8 years ago. This loss, in a way, was a provision of God. Her passing actually relieved my family, so that they can take full care of my dad, who was returning home to recuperate one week after her funeral.



The love of a grandfather... when Fide drew the above picture and mailed it to Rina's father, he painted it as an oil painting and gave it to her!

During the 15 years of waiting, I doubted my love for Jesus and vice versa. I gave all sorts of explanations to this silence. Now, God answered me, regardless of my little faith in Him. This thrilling experience reminds me that He is truly good, and all those questions that I have about how to leave my old self, or this life transforming walk with Jesus will be answered in time.

In Jul 2006, I attended a Regent College retreat, where a teacher encouraged us to re-read the Gospels, so that we may better understand who Jesus really was. So, I did. As I read, I gradually realized that Jesus was someone who was always interested in whoever he was speaking to, whether he was a beggar, rich man, or even you and me. Jesus' lovingly attention for us, in turn, helped me to better appreciate God's love for us. God loves and cherishes us apart from what we may do for Him, ourselves, other people, or even the Church. Recognizing this truth has meant so much to me. It has renewed in me a fresh willingness to wait upon the Lord and surrender to Him all my fears, anger, pride, and inability to love. And I trust that, in *that* day, when I see Him face to face, He will transform me wholly unto His glory.



Fide and Friends at a Church Retreat next to the US border.

In retrospect, I think that this realization is probably God's greatest gift and lesson for my time in Vancouver.

The words and tune of the following song has touched my heart and spurred me on to remember Jesus. I would like to share it with you. May your heart be encouraged too.

Will you come and follow Me ?

Will you come and follow me
If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown
Will you let my name be known
Will you let my life be grown in you
and you in me ?

Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you
and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
If I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoner free
And never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you
And you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around,
Through my sight and touch and sound
in you
And you in me?

Christ, your summons echoes true
When, you but call my name
Let me turn and follow you and never
be the same.
In your company I'll go

Where your love and footsteps
show,
Thus I'll move and live and grow in
you
And you in me.

Text : Iona Community.
Music : Trad. Scottish folk tune,
KelvineGrove



Concluding Remarks...

We will be living in Singapore until early Sep 2007. During this period, we will be staying at:

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We look forward to catch up with you again.

With much love,

Pak Wah, Rina, Fide and Isaiah

Jan 2007