

PARTNERSHIP

Mega
Uncertainty

Mega
Joy

2023 May Issue



Equipping Lay Ministers,
Cultivating Missional Pastors to
Strategically Engage Asia's Harvest

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Dear Friends,

The day was June 4, 1981. The place was Harvard Yard. The occasion was my graduation from Harvard University's School of Public Health. My emotions – feelings of doubt and ambivalence.

After two years of working hard for a master's degree among some of the most competitive students in America, I had finally graduated. But in January 1981, America had a new president – Ronald Reagan. Reagan instituted a major cut in community health funding and with it, my dreams of serving the poor in America's Chinatowns through public healthcare went up in smoke. My two years of studies and a hard-earned degree seemed to be in vain. What would the future hold?

Whenever we face a new season of life, there will be a lot of uncertainties. Some of those graduating know exactly where they will go and what they will do, but even these have no idea whether they will get along with their future colleagues or whether there will be major downsizing coming their way. Others face a total black hole of "no idea"! For our foreign students, governments and policies have changed. They are going back to a country that is different from the one they left. Our local students face hyperinflation, an ageing population, and a polarised world order.

How do we face up to uncertainties in a new season of life? Let us take a look at the Jewish celebration for the New Year – Rosh HaShanah ('the head of the year').

In the books of Leviticus and Numbers, God instituted a mysterious celebration (Lev 23:23-24, Numbers 29:1) – “In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe complete rest, a sacred occasion commemorated with loud blasts (from a ram’s horn).” The Jews took this as a command to celebrate a new year.

Even though the instructions for the celebration are scant in Leviticus and Numbers, God gives us clues into the significance of the day from an elaborate celebration after the return from the Babylonian exile.

On the first day of the seventh month (Neh 8), Nehemiah and Ezra called together the returnees at the Watergate in Jerusalem. After decades in Babylon, many of the second generation could not even speak Hebrew and so the Levites acted as translators. The temple had been rebuilt but it was a far cry from the splendour of Solomon’s temple. For these returnees, uncertainties filled the air. What would the new season be like?

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra began reading from the Bible. The returnees listened. The Holy Spirit moved. They saw. They wept. They realised they had drifted far away from God. The extraordinary reading went on almost non-stop for two days, and the people responded in an amazing way.

In Nehemiah 8, they responded physically by building and living in temporary booths to remember the faithfulness of the Lord through the wilderness journey. In Nehemiah 9, they responded spiritually by confessing their sins together as one man. Finally, in Nehemiah 10, they responded wholeheartedly by rededicating themselves as one people to follow the Lord.

The Jews have a Hebrew word for this – ‘teshuva’, which means ‘return’. For the Jews, it can refer to the homecoming of physically returning to Jerusalem, but it is also a spiritual return through repentance and rededication to follow the Lord.

In that process of returning physically, spiritually and wholeheartedly, the Holy Spirit opened their eyes to see God's faithfulness, so even though the new season was still filled with uncertainties, their hearts were filled with great joy.

How should our graduates face the immediate uncertainty?

Nehemiah's New Year celebration (Rosh HaShanah) offers the answer – return and rededicate. Sometimes, in the midst of our years of studies, we lose track of our original calling. Return. Sometimes, over the last two to three years, God has sharpened our original calling into something radically different. Rededicate. In that process of return and rededication (teshuva), we are able to once again entrust our lot to the Lord and recommit to follow Him to the ends of the earth. And the by-product is joy.

The year is 2023. The date is May 20. It has been forty-plus years since my graduation from Harvard and today I stand in front of you, not as an officer of public health in America's Chinatowns but as a servant of the Lord Jesus in a seminary in Singapore. Were there uncertainties? Plenty. But with each uncertainty, the Holy Spirit has provided the strength for returning and rededicating. Today, I stand in front of you as a testimony that, in a new season of great uncertainty, there is a unique opportunity for great joy for those who wholeheartedly return to the Lord. May the Lord bless you richly as you step into this new season of life.

Rev Peter Lin
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Aung Kham

BTS friends call me “Aung Kham/ Kachin boy”, but I am also known as “Kin” among my Kachin Baptist Church Singapore (KBCS) friends. My name is Awng Hkam Kinyawng and I am from Kachin State in Myanmar. My ethnic group is Kachin (which is one of eight ethnic groups). My study journey in BTS was a three-year Master of Arts in Christian Studies (MACS) programme.

I am very happy to have been able to study in BTS as well as be involved in fieldwork at KBCS. Before I came to Singapore, I thought I would face many difficulties, such as school fees, living costs, and the difficulty of the course. However, things did not turn out as I expected because God provided for me and blessed me by continually making straight my paths. Despite this, I did face some challenges during my three years of study. These challenges were: communicating in English, living in a city (where smiles are rare), and the Covid pandemic.

I would like to thank God for guiding me through my education and providing me with financial support for three years in Singapore. One of my big dreams was always to get a degree from a foreign country, especially a theological degree. During the period I was in Singapore, people in Myanmar were facing a lot of difficulties with food supply due to the unstable political situation, while I was in a good and perfect place at BTS. I did not have to worry about my daily food because God provided for me among strangers in a foreign country. While studying the Word of God at BTS, the lecturers and classmates were very friendly to me in class as well as in outside activities, which made a big difference to me. Sometimes, I felt lonely studying because I was on Zoom for almost two years because of the pandemic, but God was always with me. One of the happiest times in my life was when I finally achieved my MACS degree! I would like to thank God and my lecturers for guiding me in spiritual growth and knowledge of the Bible.

Aung Kham

Liu Chang Chris



I love the BTS library because it holds so many vivid memories of my time there.

I used to sit near the window to do my assignments. Whenever my thoughts hit a bottleneck, I would look out of the window, contemplate the view for a while, and then I would be inspired and could start writing again.



One of my most memorable experiences in the library was during my first semester at BTS. I rushed to the library that lunchtime to work on the last part of my assignment, which was due at 5 pm. The consequence of not submitting it on time was that marks would be deducted. By 4 pm, I was still struggling with the format of my essay, as it was my first assignment and I was not familiar with formatting. I did not want to disturb him, but in my desperation, I turned to the classmate sitting behind me for help. He was concentrating as hard as I was on the assignment and hoping to submit it on time too, but instead of turning me down, he patiently guided me on the formatting. In the end, with his help, I was able to submit my assignment on time, while his was late because he had lost time in helping me.

I learnt a precious lesson from this classmate of mine – that one powerful way to show love is to put the needs of others before one's own. During my five years at BTS, I have experienced love from different teachers and students in many ways, making this little place called BTS a haven of love!

Thank you
BTS

Liu Chang Chris

Suresh Kumar Sooraj Liam

I joined BTS in 2019, and during my first two semesters as a student, I struggled a lot because of the language barrier and the financial burden I was facing. Some months later, I slowly began to overcome these issues as God helped me to transform my thinking and attitudes. Personally, I felt love and acceptance from the school, and my friends also helped me to overcome my struggles. Seminary education helped me to understand myself and my calling in a better way and equipped me to interpret God's Word accurately. However, I experienced misunderstandings and communication breakdowns because of cultural differences. Thankfully, some brothers and sisters in a field education church continuously helped me to overcome this issue. Moreover, they put in effort to improve my language skills. Ministry internship gave me an opportunity to be involved in different ministries and this process helped me to overcome cross-cultural barriers and understand my responsibility as a member of a healthy church.



Last year, God gave me the opportunity to help an elderly woman in Singapore. She was staying near my apartment and was struggling with depression and loneliness. For almost six months, I regularly communicated with her and finally shared the gospel with her. I shared this incident with BTS's counselling teacher and she encouraged me to focus on the elder-care ministry. I have noticed a large number of elderly citizens suffering because of social isolation, critical illness and financial problems. In my view, elder-care ministry is not only a need for Singapore but also for the whole world. In the future, I hope to reach out to the elderly and serve them in the community. I believe every long journey begins with a single step. Therefore, I am planning to take up a counselling course as it will help me understand people's emotional and physical needs. The counselling course will also help me to understand and overcome my own issues and prepare me for future ministry.

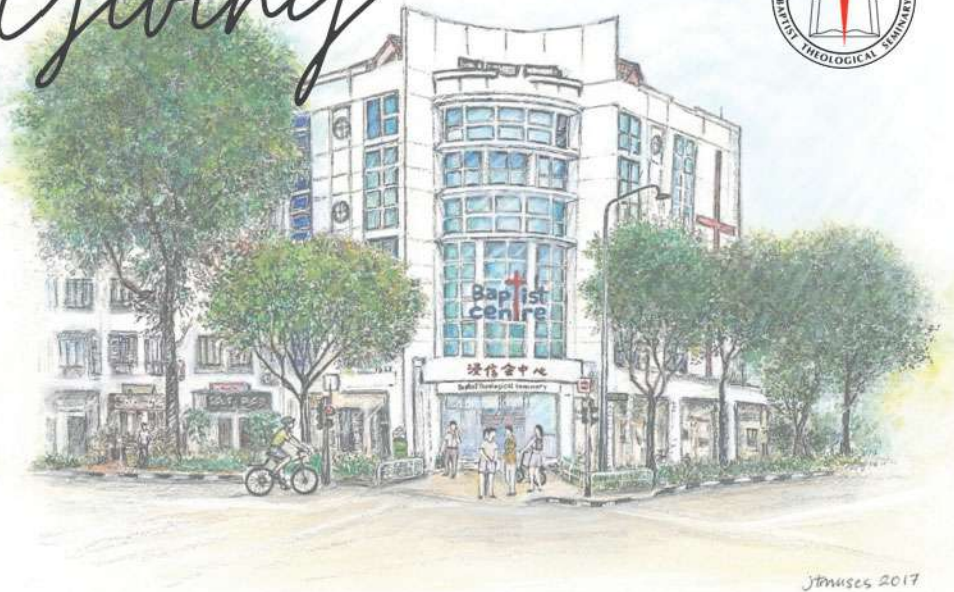
*May the Lord continue to equip me
for where He wants me to serve in future*

Suresh Kumar Sreeraj Liam

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We invite you to partner us in BTS's vision of equipping lay ministers, cultivating missional pastors to strategically engage Asia's Harvest.



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