

**JUNE 2019**

Annual ESM Retreat  
Muskoka Bible Centre



# STORIES OF FAITH

What are our Stories of Faith?

**Led by: Rev. In Kee Kim**



# UNPACKING THE STORIES

**"I hope I didn't bore you too much with my life story." -  
Elvis Presley**

Tonight, together, we will explore people in the stories, stories of people. Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Peter. Four lives. They're all so different. Same family, but what they bring out from their own lives are very different. Different themes, and different ways to deal with their life situations. It is important for us to unpack what they did, what happened in their lives, and what caused them to be. We are going to unpack that, so it's not going to be a lecture tonight. You're going to unpack those stories, and then we'll come back together in a plenary session, and we will together understand their life stories a little better, and then you'll go back to your own groups, and we are going to unpack our own lives.



I think it's very important that you unpack your life, your life stories. You have to understand your life story so that you can live a better life. I want all of us to live a good life. Religion, good religion always helps us live a good life, so we are going to do that today. What happens to you in life has a significant impact on you. It determines and shapes who you are.

When I was a second year in university, nothing happened on the outside. Everything was going very well, but deep inside, a lot of things were happening.



# UNPACKING THE STORIES (Cont'd)



"Is this really what I want to do for the rest of my life?" "Is this how I want to live?" All kinds of questions started rising when I was in second year, it was deep in my heart. it was like turmoil, it was like strong waves. Outside, nothing. I took courses and I was doing okay, but deep inside, a lot of struggles. And then, I came to a decision to go into ministry in my second year, and that's how now, I'm standing in front of and I'm speaking to you. It determined my life, it determined who I am. What life I live. So especially college students, whatever you decide, whatever happens in your life has a lifetime effect, impact. So it is very important for all of us to understand "what is going on in me", and "what is the story that I can articulate?" It is very important for all of us to write our own stories.

**"Be the reason someone smiles. Be the reason someone feels loved and believes in the goodness of people." - Roy T. Bennett**



# IS LIFE RANDOM OR IS LIFE GRACIOUS?



My basic question is this: is life random, or is life gracious? What I'm saying is, whatever is happening in your life, are they happening as random, disconnected events? What happens to you is just random events, or is there shape? Is there something behind what's happening in your life?

These are the two big questions that we have to ask ourselves. Are these just accidental events that happen? Is there a message that is hidden behind all that? The simple question is, are our lives just random dots? This happened today, tomorrow that'll happen, and next year this'll happen. All these are just random dots? Or if you connect these dots, is there some shape in your life? Can you tell what that shape is?

I believe that that shape is a story. You're making a shape. What's happening in your life is not just dots. Who you marry, what kind of children you'll have, what kind of education you'll have, what job you do and what happens in your church, what happens with your friends.

All these happenings somehow are interconnected with each other and create a shape, and that shape is a story. Sometimes, not only good things are happening, but also bad things are happening. Bad things look like bad things, but when you look back, bad things can also be good things. We don't just give value to the things themselves, but how they're connected with others, they can be good things.



# IS LIFE RANDOM OR IS LIFE GRACIOUS? (Cont'd)



Even though it's a bad thing originally, when you connect it with something else, it can become a good thing. We won't know exactly what shape it'll make. What's happening in your life is important, but how you understand what's happening is more important, because that gives it shape. That gives it meaning. That gives it a story. You are the one who is writing a story. No one is writing your story, you are writing your story. How you connect them together is you. Of course we need the help of God.

**The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion. - Psalm 116:5**



# JOSEPH'S STORY



**"Hope is the thing with feathers,  
that perches in the soul  
and sings the tune  
without words, and  
never stops at all." -  
Emily Dickinson**

There are some major events that shape your life, and there are some events that you easily forget. You need to pick out the important things that are happening in your life, and then learn how to connect them together. For example, when you look at Joseph's life, he had a dream and he had a problem. His brothers didn't like that, so they tried to kill him and then ultimately they sold him into Egypt. He went to Egypt and he worked in some high official's house, but the wife tried to seduce him, and he didn't want to get involved in that, and then the wife got upset and sent him to prison, and so he was in prison, and then ultimately he became the kind of prime minister of Egypt, and this whole story.

All these things are happening, some good things, some bad things, and all because of a dream. Just one dream which caused a significant impact on this person. So all these things are

happening, and he could have responded to all these things in a very bad way, but in the end, when he looked back, he connected all the events together, and made a story, and made a statement.

This was his statement. "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you any survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God". He was talking about his brothers. His brothers sold into Egypt. But "It is not you who sent me, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and the Lord of all these houses, and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Of course he's talking based on the reality, but he is creating a story out of his life. He didn't see what was happening in his life as just random events. He saw graciousness in his life. He saw the grace of God in his own story. At the end of everything, he was able to connect the dots. "Ah, now I see the shape."

## JOSEPH'S STORY (Cont'd)



In your life too. When you're younger, maybe you see a lot of dots everywhere, but over the years, little by little, "Oh, I see a little bit of a shape, but dimly." But that shape becomes clearer and clearer, and at the end, "Ah, this is the shape. I didn't know that." Joseph finally connected all the dots and found a story, and that's what I want you to do in your life. Find a shape, what is that shape? What is that story?

For example, Joseph, there were three options. The first option is, it's just random events. They're not connected, just unlucky things happen, and good things happen, and it's just random. He could say that, but the second option is that life events are not random events, events are caused, and the cause was, brothers' weakness. Because of that, I had to be sold into Egypt and I'm going through all these difficulties and hardships. When he connects the dots in that way, then deep inside, anger, desire for revenge, that will be the result of his emotion. The third option is, life events are not random events. Events are caused, but the cause was God. Then the result is the experience of graciousness. So you have three options. You can see whatever is happening as just random events, or whatever is happening is happening because of somebody; your parents or somebody who did harm to you, or you can see that there is God behind it all.

**It has been said that something as small as the flutter of a butterfly's wing can ultimately cause a typhoon halfway across the world. - Chaos Theory**



# A GRACIOUS GOD IN AN UNGRACIOUS WORLD

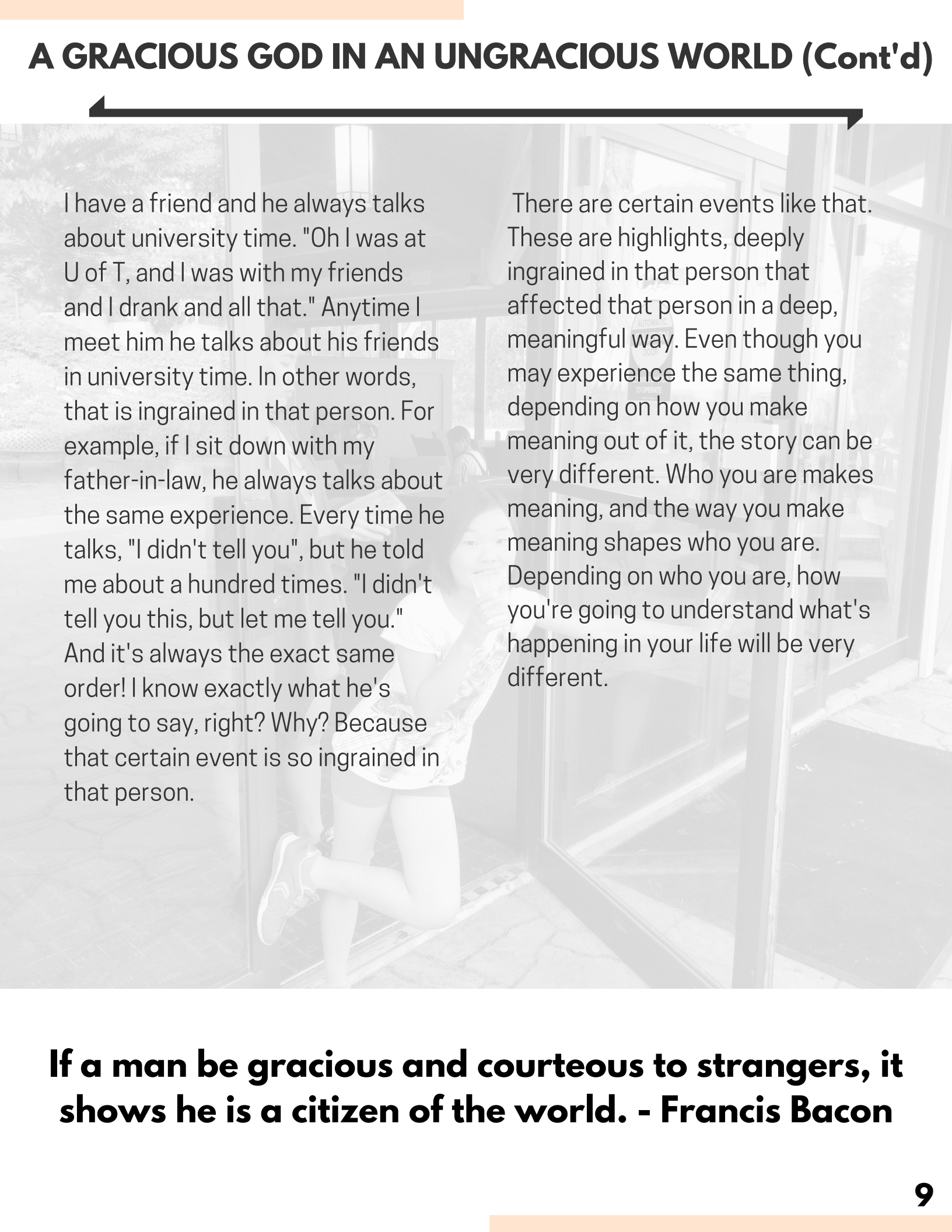
How we connect our dots is very important. Depending on how we do it, we can become a very angry person or a very thankful person. You can write a very dark and gloomy story, or you can write an inspiring story with a depth of understanding. I believe that the stories of faith are stories of living out of a gracious God in an ungracious world. This world can be cruel, ungracious, but we find a gracious God and live out of that. I do believe that our stories are not random events.

They are not disconnected experiences. It has a distinct shape, and make uniquely who you are. Your stories make you uniquely who you are, like DNA makes you who you are. Your stories are very unique, they are your stories.

For example, we have a retreat. There are about 70 people here. 70 people who go out and will write a different story depending on who you are. Stories make you uniquely who you are. Some people talk about one experience over and over again.

**For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men. - Titus 2:11**

# A GRACIOUS GOD IN AN UNGRACIOUS WORLD (Cont'd)

A young girl in a white dress and sneakers is running through a glass door. The background is a blurred indoor setting with large windows and other people.

I have a friend and he always talks about university time. "Oh I was at U of T, and I was with my friends and I drank and all that." Anytime I meet him he talks about his friends in university time. In other words, that is ingrained in that person. For example, if I sit down with my father-in-law, he always talks about the same experience. Every time he talks, "I didn't tell you", but he told me about a hundred times. "I didn't tell you this, but let me tell you." And it's always the exact same order! I know exactly what he's going to say, right? Why? Because that certain event is so ingrained in that person.

There are certain events like that. These are highlights, deeply ingrained in that person that affected that person in a deep, meaningful way. Even though you may experience the same thing, depending on how you make meaning out of it, the story can be very different. Who you are makes meaning, and the way you make meaning shapes who you are. Depending on who you are, how you're going to understand what's happening in your life will be very different.

**If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world. - Francis Bacon**



## A NEGATIVE CYCLE VS. A POSITIVE CYCLE

Depending on how you understand what's happening in your life also shapes who you are, so it goes back and forth and back and forth. If you are the kind of person who is very negative and dark, you're going to interpret what's happening in your life in a very negative way.

Whatever meaning you make out of it will make you a more negative person, and then you will again see reality in a very negative way, and because of it, you become more negative. It becomes a bad cycle, a destructive cycle. But if you are let's say a positive person, and whatever happens in your life, you interpret it in a positive way, that makes you become a more positive person. That gives you the power to interpret your life in a more positive way, so now you are entering into a good cycle. I want all of us to go into a good cycle, rather than a negative cycle.

Stories are not just what happened, it is you who makes meaning out of what happens in your life. Sometimes we feel like our life is kind of messy, in tangles, so you can not see anything. You are totally just trapped in life. Sometimes we feel that way. So think about a tapestry. The bad side of a tapestry, when you look at it it's just threads and they are tangled, and nothing is connecting loose threads, and there are uneven stitches and you see that. But when you turn it upside down, when you reverse it, then you see a beautiful picture.

**When you see a good person, think of becoming like him/her. When you see someone not so good, reflect on your own weak points. - Confucius**



## A NEGATIVE CYCLE VS. A POSITIVE CYCLE (Cont'd)

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Life is like that. Sometimes you feel like you're messy, but there is a beautiful picture hidden in your life,

and your job is to find that beautiful picture. Even though it looks messy right now, with God you will be able to discover that beautiful picture of your life in the end.

Kierkegaard, a philosopher said, "Although life has to be lived forwards, its full meaning is to be understood only retrospectively." Often when you look back, you can see more clearly. When you're going through it, what you see is only messy stuff, but when you look back, "Ah, there's a lot of nice things". You see some path. That was what Joseph did. In the beginning, he didn't interpret the dream. He said, "I had this dream", but he didn't interpret it. But the brothers, they interpreted it. They interpreted it in the wrong way. That's why they hated Joseph, but Joseph did not interpret the dream. He just said, "This is the dream that I had". But after everything was over, then he interpreted what that dream was all about.



# WHAT IS YOUR STORY?

What is your story? That's where you can find yourself. Do you know who you are? Find your story. That's where you'll find yourself. That's what our college interns did for their exercise. They interviewed people, and they also wrote their own stories. They reflected on their own faith journey. What happened yesterday influenced today to make who I am. What I decide today influences what I will be tomorrow. Our present life is shaped by what we did in the past and the decisions we made in the past. Because of those decisions we made, we are here right now. We decided what to study, what career to choose, who to marry, and what to do with our lives. All of these have shaped who we are right now. I'm not saying that we all made good decisions. We made so many mistakes. All I'm saying is that they shaped who we are.

As you look back though, our past was not all pretty and perfect. There are a lot of regrets, pain, guilt, darkness. As we remember our past, sometimes we feel dark. We feel pain, but both positive and negative things of our past have shaped who we are now, but is our life governed only by the past events? I think there's another stronger force, that is your vision for the future. Not only your past shaped who you are now, but your vision for the future also shapes who you are now. When the vision for the future is greater than the regret of the past, then your life can begin. That's where your life begins. Our story is not finished, your life is like a story in the making.





# WHAT IS YOUR STORY? (Cont'd)



How are you going to conclude? Your last chapter is still to be written. And young people, you are just starting the introduction. I'd like to see exciting chapters coming out of your life. Some daring stories, not just, "Oh, I just followed the pattern." That's a boring story. But some exciting stories, that you took some risks to do something.

It is true that our paths had a profound effect on our present life but our hope for the future creates a new story for all of us. Isaiah said, "For I am about to create new habits and new earth. The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind, but the new habits and new earth come. The former things will be gone." Yesterday, today and tomorrow, are all connected. One long stream of river.

A river has a particular shape and water in that river follows the shape of the river but also, this water creates a new shape.

Over the years, it creates a new shape of the river. So it does both. You follow the shape, but also you create a new shape in your life. We have to understand what our pattern looks like. Our own understanding of what is going on in our life has a crucial role in shaping our life. There's some major events in your life that put you in a new direction and new chapter. The meaning of life. It is not something that you make arbitrarily. "Okay, I'll make this as my meaning of life." You can't do that. Also, meaning of life is not out there so that you can go out and find it. The meaning of life is being shaped in your story.



## IS LIFE INDIFFERENT TO US?



But when do we feel that what's happening in your life is indifferent to us? Just random. When do we feel that? When there's suffering. When suffering hits us, our experience of graciousness is gone. We feel that life is just sad. Things happen randomly. Job believed that if I give a sacrifice, then God will not bring disaster to me. So he did that all the time, but in spite of doing that, all the tragedies happened. His children were killed and he lost everything. When he experienced that suffering, he felt that "life is indifferent." Things happen, just randomly. This is what he said; "truly the thing that I fear comes upon me and what I dread befalls me. I'm not at ease, nor am I quiet. I have no rest. But trouble comes." He had a theory; "If I'm good to God, God will be good to me". That was his theory, but that theory was completely destroyed. The fear was, that life might be just indifferent. Regardless of what I do, bad things can happen. So his theory is gone, and when suffering hit him, he felt that life was indifferent.

**THERE'S A MESS INSIDE YOU; YOU CLEAN THE OUTSIDE. - THE DHAMMAPADA**



# THE LORD IS MY STENGTH

I believe that that's where faith comes in. When suffering hits us, that's where faith comes in. Faith is finding graciousness in the ungracious world. Stories of life and faith; those should be connected together, so that you can find graciousness in the ungracious world. Our stories are revelations. Revelations of what? Revelation of the divine presence. Job held on to that graciousness of God in the ungracious world before he held on to the theory; "If I'm good to God, God will be good to me". That's a theory, that's a formula, but he threw away the formula from his experience of suffering and then he held onto the graciousness of God in the ungracious world. Jesus Held onto the graciousness of God in the ungracious world. He didn't know exactly how God would present himself to him, but he held them to the graciousness of God. When suffering hits you, I hope that you can hold onto that graciousness of God in the ungracious experience you have.

Faith does not guarantee necessarily that everything will be good. Faith finds only the graciousness of God Faith holds on to the fact that our stories, will ultimately move towards God's presence. Faith always has this aspect of in spite of, not because of. In spite of difficulties and hardships, your stories will ultimately end at God. The poet Habakkuk wrote this; "Though the fig tree does not blossom and no fruit is on the vines, though the produce of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food, though the flock is cut off from the fold and there's no herd in the stalls, yet, in spite of all that, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will exult in the God of my salvation. God the Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights." That's Habakkuk, the poet. Faith is the path for life through which we can see beyond the surface of all we are going through.



# OUR FAITH IN GOD BECOMES GOD FAITH IN US



My final point is, our faith in God becomes God's faith in us. When that happens, our story becomes God's story. Your story is not just your story, your story becomes God's story. When our own faith in God becomes God's faith in us, we have tremendous confidence. When we see only our faith, we still become anxious and uncertain, but when we start seeing God's faith in us, we get solid confidence. Our faith in God may be weak, but God's faith in you is so strong.

That's what Job held onto. This is what Job said, "If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him;

I turn to the right, but I cannot see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I shall come out like gold."

**"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." - Joshua 1:9**

He couldn't see God. His vision of faith became very blurry. He couldn't see anything good. He was so disillusioned, but he held onto God's faith in him. Your faith in God is not as important as God's faith in you. When you find God's faith in you, your life will be alright. You'll be confident.

# GOD WILL OPEN UP A NEW CHAPTER



Your future is open. We don't know exactly how our story will end. I'm 61. I'm at the end of my career that began when I was in second year university. All my life, I've done this, and then that moment in second year university determined what kind of life I will live. Now I'm back after many years, I see some shape of what God wanted to do, and how God shaped me, and I'm very thankful for that. I still have about nine years left, and I'll see how God is going to shape me in the course of my life. I still have a lot of dreams. My career is over, but career is career. Life will go on. What kind of person I'm going to be, what kind of life I'm going to live. It's very exciting. God will open up a new chapter in our lives. I hope that you can all explore your stories and live well.

To live well, you have to understand your story. If you don't have a story, then you don't have life.

You're just doing things. Doing things never gives you satisfaction. Understanding it gives you satisfaction. So I hope that you all have this great opportunity at this retreat to write your own story, to share your own story with each other. Sharpen your story, don't just complain about bad situations. A bad situation may be necessary for the greater good to come. So think about that, and make your life strong, hopeful, positive, and powerful, and enjoy it. Every moment of it. Enjoy it. Life is short. Enjoy it. The best way to enjoy it is to always walk that journey with God, then you can appreciate every moment, even simple food, simple entertainment, you will enjoy everything in your life. Beautiful weather, beautiful facility, beautiful people. Wow. I mean, it's just wonderful to be here, and I want you to enjoy the whole day with God.