

Catalyst

Stimulating Action, Effecting Change

September 2008

What is a Catalyst?

A catalyst is described in one dictionary as, “a person who causes or promotes change by their presence in a situation or their input into it.” For the past 13 years of our missionary journey, that’s what we have endeavoured to do - bring change in the lives of the people around us in whatever situation God has put us. It may have been in a 4th floor flat in a run-down apartment block in a Chinese community; as the only foreign family pioneering in a remote Chinese city; baptizing Chinese students in our bath; performing the gospel story; helping the plight of Chinese deaf children; reaching out to the poor and needy; teaching Kingdom principles - our aim as disciples of Jesus Christ is to help bring change to people’s lives for the better. God is a good God and it’s our desire that people know just how good He is, and just how much He loves them. Living in Thailand, we have been given the perfect opportunity to be Catalysts among the Thais, and those of other Asian nations, encouraging, inspiring and empowering them to take up the challenge of reaching the nations around them, including China. More locally, we are outworking God’s heart to those in our community, with an English class and other opportunities planned for the poorer children of our village. Be a Catalyst. Join with us in stimulating action and effecting change in Asia. We would love to hear from you. ☐



Stuart Simpson

Gateway Camp, Hong Kong

An excellent opportunity to be catalysts was at the recent Gateway Camp in Hong Kong where approximately 1500 people from 56 different nations, including hundreds of students from Hong Kong and 30—35 students from mainland China, met together to worship God, have fun, and be challenged to follow the call of God for their lives. It was a moving time as representatives of nations invited other nations of the world to come to their country as missionaries. Stuart and I took on a pastoral role and Stuart headed up various teams.

Above: Stuart gets some of the students up out of their seats to help illustrate a point and challenge them into missions during one of the workshops.



Giving in to

Goodness

If there is one thing I have come to understand this year more than anything else, it is the goodness of God. And as I have learned about His goodness, I have been, and am still surprised every time I think about it. God's goodness has a way of surprising us, not because showing his goodness is something He doesn't do much, but because we are just not used to receiving something so wonderful, so big, and so outside our human estimation of what goodness is. Our view of goodness is usually limited by our own small thinking, tainted by our own experience and what we have seen in the world. But God's goodness is not like that. God's goodness has never been limited by the smallness of a human mind. God's idea of goodness has never been negatively affected by experience. His goodness is completely pure. In fact, James 1:16-17 Amplified says:

"Do not be misled, my beloved brethren. Every good and every perfect (free, large, full) gift is from above; it comes down from the Father of all that gives light, in the shining of Whom there can be no variation (rising or setting) or shadow cast by His turning (as in an eclipse)."

God is the Father of everything that gives light. He is light. Only good comes from Him. In Him there is NO darkness at all! And He never changes. But we humans have a hard time accepting that something, Someone, can be that good. After all, we live in a world where there are many good things and many good people, but nothing is perfect, is it? I mean, even nice people aren't perfect. They say things imperfectly. They do things that offend. God's creation is beautiful, but we see evidence of decay and destruction. Birthday presents are wonderful, but maybe someone gives us something we don't really like. Perhaps, like me, you grew up in a broken home where any time you were just beginning to enjoy life, the peace was shattered by another argument. We are surrounded by imperfect situations and it's hard to believe in an imperfect world that there can be perfect goodness. And yet there is, and it is found in our Father, God.

We're not the only ones who struggle to accept the idea of 100% goodness. King David knew God as his deliverer, his shield, his help. He knew God delighted in Him. In many of the Psalms, David talks about God's goodness to him and we are often amazed and challenged by David's faith in the goodness of God. However, then we find psalms where he talks about God having 'cast him away' because of His wrath and indignation, not necessarily at a time when David had sinned, but when he is overwhelmed by affliction and in need of more help than ever.

How can God have changed so much? How can He be a helper and deliverer one moment, and then cast someone away in a time of their deepest need the next? Well, if we look back at James 1:16-17, we know that cannot be true. The scripture tells us that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. All good things come from Him and He does not change. So, if He is our helper one day, He will be our helper the next. He will never let us down. So why does David seem to say that God will help him one day, and leave him to struggle the next?

We do the same thing all the time because, just like David, we are human. When difficult circumstances come along, we get our eyes off the goodness of God. All we can see is our problem, our sickness, our disappointment, our failure. And like David, instead of seeing God as our answer, we point the finger at Him and accuse Him of not being there, of having deserted us. What's worse is that sometimes we forget that there is a devil at work trying to kill, steal and destroy, and believe the bad things happening to us are from God Himself. But James says that every GOOD gift comes from our Father. It doesn't say that we will receive some nice gifts from Him, and some horrible ones like cancer, accidents, broken bones, poverty and family breakdown. Those are not good gifts.

I should know. Some years ago, I was involved in a horse-riding accident where the horse I was riding was attacked by a couple of dogs. I fell off the horse and the horse fell on me. My femur (thigh) bone snapped like a twig and I spent the next three years having three major surgeries, metal rods implanted, doing daily physiotherapy, being rolled about in wheel chairs and walking on crutches or with a stick. There are times in the midst of that kind of pain and frustration where people question what happened, and are tempted to believe that God did it to them or at least that He 'allowed it to happen to them' for a reason. But thankfully God had already taught me something about His goodness and I knew that kind of thinking was contrary to the Word of God. I also learnt two other important things as I lay in that hospital bed and sought God for answers. **Number 1:** I could have been dead if that horse had landed higher up on my body, but it didn't and I wasn't and that was something to be thankful for. **Number 2:** I learnt that it is vital to recognize and obey even the smallest promptings of the Holy Spirit. On the morning of the accident, I had felt that I didn't really need to ride that day, but went ahead and did it anyway.

Goodness

God never stopped being good to me. In fact, He prompted me not to ride that day. It was me who allowed what happened, not Him. God kept me from death. He sustained me through a very difficult period. I learned a lot, but God wanted me to learn those things another way, not through a dangerous accident. God is good. He never plans evil for his children. His plans for us are good. They are plans for peace, to give us a future and a hope.

Not so long ago, after having moved home 26 times and lived in numerous other places in connection with our work as missionaries, we moved back to Asia to continue work there. We needed to find a house to rent and I knew it was right to find a place that we would be able to stay in for a long time, so that's what I had been praying for. When our family arrived in Asia, we had one week to find a home. After that, the family whose house we were staying in would return, and we knew from experience that 10 of us in one house would not be easy. I encouraged each of us to make a list of all the things we wanted to see in our new rented home and ask God for those things. We wanted extra rooms so people could stay, and so we could have office space as we work from home and home-school as well. We needed some kind of carport so the car (which we didn't have yet) would have some protection. We needed a place away from the city centre pollution for health reasons. We needed a place with a long-term let. I wanted to have water of some kind, a small stream or pond as I find water in a garden relaxing. One of our children wanted a mango tree.

We prayed over these things and set out on our house hunt. We visited some weird and wonderful places, some of them more on the weird side. Many were nice, but they were in the wrong area, didn't have the rooms we wanted, or just didn't have one of the things we had prayed for. We decided to stick with what we had prayed and watch for God's goodness. After a few days, we went to visit a house that looked lovely in the photo and it seemed to be a good price. However, when we got there, the house was beyond anything good that we had imagined. It had everything we had prayed for. It was also beyond our price range. We had misunderstood the price given. "Don't worry", the agent told us. "We can negotiate." Yes, we thought. That would have to be a very big negotiation!

However, no other houses turned up. We prayed. We went back to visit the house again, and this

time, as we peered through the gates, felt God say that we should get this house. We spoke to the agent, who arranged a meeting with the landlady. We ended up with a long-term let, an excellent landlady, the rent slashed to almost half the original amount, and we moved in exactly one week from our arrival in Asia. The house has all we asked for and more. My home is beyond what I had imagined!

That is what God's goodness is like. It is more than we imagine it to be. He takes a lot of joy and pleasure in doing more than we ask or pray for, or even dream of. God is not mixed up in his idea of goodness. It's us that get mixed up about what is good. Actually, God is far nicer, and far more good than we think He is! But that kind of goodness is hard for us to accept because it seems too good to be true. We are surprised by it. In Psalm 18 verse in the Message Bible. David is talking about his enemies and the awful things they are doing to him, and how God rescues him.

"But me he caught—reached all the way from sky to sea; he pulled me out of that ocean of hate, that enemy chaos, the void in which I was drowning. They hit me when I was down, but God stuck by me. He stood me up on a wide-open field; I stood there saved—surprised to be loved!"

We are like that. We are surprised when God is more good than we think. His goodness and love and the good things He wants to do surprise us. Sometimes we are even offended when people talk about a goodness which goes beyond what we have allowed ourselves to believe. And yet to receive the immensity of the love God has for us, the wonder of His forgiveness, the blessings He has stored up for us, the grace, favour and miracles He wants to pour on our lives, we need to learn to understand just how good He is. We need to believe in that absolute goodness. But with our tainted ideas of goodness, how can we begin to believe in a goodness which is so good it goes beyond our imagination?

The only way to receive it is to GIVE IN TO IT. We need to let go of our small and even twisted ideas about God's goodness and simply give in to the fact that God is always, beautifully, purely, wholesomely, completely, abundantly, and wonderfully good and will never be anything else to us, or give us anything but goodness. We need to stop fighting how good he is, and trying to squeeze Him into our acceptable ideas of goodness, and give in to the

Goodness

fact that He is much kinder, nicer, generous, loving, and sweet than we thought. Of course, He is also almighty, all powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, the one who wants our obedience and respect. But more than all that, He wants to be our Father, to have a relationship with us where He can show us just how good He is. That's why He sent Jesus—to show us how amazingly good our Father is.

Psalm 23 says in the Amplified Bible:

“Surely or only goodness, mercy and unfailing love shall follow me all the days of my life...”

That means that even when it seems like you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death, you won't fear or dread any evil, for just like David, you will know that “You (God) are with me”. And if God and His goodness are with you, there is nothing to fear, nothing to worry about. If His goodness is following you, you can be sure it is not just wandering along hoping it will catch you up someday. No! His goodness is in hot pursuit, chasing after you, and ready to overtake! If you can believe this kind of goodness, something good is bound to happen!

Do you know what? If you can believe in and receive God's goodness for you, you are in a far better position to then pour out goodness on others? Just as in a family the parents are an example to their children, God is our example of fatherhood. As we allow Him to be all that a good Father can be, as we allow Him to lavish His goodness on us, we are going to follow that example and lavish goodness on others. We are going to freely give His goodness because we have been able to freely receive His goodness. If we limit his goodness toward us, we will find it hard to express the fullness of God's goodness to others.

Let God do good things for you today. Enable Him to do good things for others through you by receiving his goodness for yourself first. Believe that His goodness is following you this very day, tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, and the day after that. Stop fighting it. Let God surprise you with just how amazingly good He is—more than you have allowed yourself to imagine. Give in to the goodness of God and see Him do wonderful things in, and through, your life! ☐

Goodness and Missions

Most Christians know that the word 'gospel' means 'good news', but is the gospel that we are sharing truly 'good news'? Does it really represent the true character, nature and overwhelming goodness of God? When those who don't know Him receive a revelation of how good He really is and what He has done through Jesus, they will want a relationship with such a God, for “...the goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Romans 2:4).

Being a missionary is about taking the goodness of God to those of other nations who do not yet know that goodness. It is about sharing the good news with them and revealing the goodness of the Father to them. Revealing the goodness of the Father may come in many different forms—preaching the gospel, education, empowering the poor, healing the sick, helping the disadvantaged—the wonderful list of God's good desires for all people goes on and on...He is so good!

If you would like to receive more detailed information about our work in Asia, specifically among Chinese and Thais, receive this publication regularly, or contact us, please email Stuart and Michelle at:

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