



WINDOW TO BGST NEWSLETTER

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THE BUSY AND HURRIED SOUL

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Dr Alex Tang is a Consultant Paediatrician in a private hospital in Johor Bahru, Malaysia, an Associate Professor of Paediatrics, Monash University, and teaches in seminars on spiritual formation and bioethics. He is a spiritual director and had facilitated retreats all over the world. Alex is currently involved in developing a spiritual director training program in Indonesia.



I have often been asked why I titled my book *Spiritual Formation on the Run*. It was suggested that it should include ‘...run away from the busy life’ or ‘...run to silence and solitude’. It puzzled me for a long time until it dawned on me that to many people, spiritual formation or spiritual growth is incompatible with being on the run or movement. To many, spiritual formation will only occur when we are still and silent, like on a retreat in the mountains in the middle of nowhere. I do not know where this idea comes from but it seems to me that too many of us are exposed to Chinese *kungfu* movies, where the grandmaster or *sifu* only attains enlightenment (usually implying a higher level of martial skills) by meditation while sealed in a cave on top of some misty mountain. I often wonder how he (usually it is a he) handled his toilet needs. I guess this is reinforced by the familiar Christian reading of the well known incident in Luke where

Martha was busy being hospitable to her guests, while her quiet contemplative sister Mary was sitting and listening to Jesus.

Luke 10:38–42 (NASB95)

38 Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Interestingly, this account is only found in Luke and comes immediately after the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37). This parable highlights doing good to all people irrespective of caste, religious affliction and station in life. Doing good, of course, involves activity. But in the usual reading of vv. 38-42 Martha is associated with the active life while Mary is linked with the contemplative one. Jesus seems to praise Mary's choice as the correct one. If this is the only lesson from the passage, then Martha should have come and sat at Jesus' feet and everyone would go hungry without supper!

The houses in New Testament times were rather small, so even when preparing food, both the ladies would be able to hear Jesus. The passage seems to imply that initially both Mary and Martha were involved in the food preparation. Then suddenly Mary left the preparation to sit at Jesus' feet to focus fully on what Jesus was saying. Martha's ire was that her sister was not helping her in the food preparation. Martha was busy and in a hurry. Maybe she wanted to produce an exceptional meal for her special guest. In her hurriedness, she was distracted and was not listening to Jesus. Jesus was speaking to everyone in the house, not just Mary. Jesus' rebuke to Martha may have been because she was not listening to him. This was because she was so distracted by her busyness. Martha, Jesus implied, could have prepared the food and listened to him at the same time, as women are wonderful at multi-tasking. I am sure Jesus wanted to eat too. Jesus did not say, "Martha, stop what you are doing, sit down and listen to me!"

We all live very busy lives. From the moment we are rudely awakened by our alarm clocks to the time we fall asleep, we have to perform many tasks. Our 'to-do' list often runs to two or three pages. If being busy means that we have not chosen 'the good part', most of us are in trouble. Not many of us have the opportunity to take time away to be at a retreat, to just sit and listen. There are bills to pay, houses to clean and kids to bring up.

There is a difference between being busy and being hurried. We can be busy without being in a hurry. Busyness is an external condition where we have many tasks to complete. Hurriedness is an inner state where we are distracted because of the external busyness. This inner state of distraction means that our soul is confused, fragmented and

disconnected from our mind, heart and spirit. What is more significant is that the hurried or distracted person cannot hear the voice of God. What Jesus was trying to teach Martha (and us) is that it is not wrong for us to be busy (for which one of us is not busy!) but we should not be hurried and distracted. This is because when we are hurried and distracted, we cannot hear him.

This means that Christian spiritual formation and transformation can occur in a busy life. However, the process may be difficult in a busy and hurried life. Dallas Willard notes, "Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life." Is it possible to live a busy but unhurried life? Gregory the Great was the first monk to become a pope. He became Pope Gregory I from 590 to 604 AD. Gregory was a Doctor of the Church and a Latin Father. He contributed a lot to church services and is known as the father of Christian worship. In his busy schedule, Gregory was able to maintain a powerful devotional life. John Calvin mentioned Gregory in his *Institutes* and praised his contribution to the church.

How do we become unhurried in our busy life? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Do not be a perfectionist

Martha might not have been so distracted if she had not been in such a hurry to prepare a gourmet meal for her visitors. Perhaps a simpler meal would have allowed her to slow down and listen to Jesus as she worked. Our home need not be so clean and tidy that it could be featured in *Ideal Home* magazine. We do not need to have the complete set of Minions from McDonald Kiddy Meals. Being less of a perfectionist may remove the strain of being in a hurry.

2. Prioritize your to-do list

Not all of the things on our to-do lists need to be completed. The world will not come to an end if we do not complete it. If Christ comes again then we do not need to complete it. Prioritize and do the most essential things first. Be realistic in assigning the amount of time to complete each task. Group similar tasks together. A bit of forward planning can help to eliminate hurry from our schedule.

3. Take 'minute' retreats

A 'minute' retreat is to take a minute of your time during a busy period, close your eyes and calm your mind, slow your breathing and take deep breaths. Visualize a quiet room within your heart where you can meet with Jesus and say hello. This will break the vicious cycle of stress caused by your business. Stress tends to induce hurry in our inner life. You can close your eyes and do a minute retreat at any time and in any place. Except maybe when you are driving or skydiving.

4. Keep things in perspective

In a particularly busy period, ask yourself: will what you are doing matter in five years' time? Will it matter in a year's time? Next month? Often answering these questions bring things into perspective. Having things in perspective helps to eliminate hurry. One of my favorite quotes from Facebook is a paraphrase of the Serenity Prayer: "Lord, give me coffee to change the things I can change and wine to accept the things I cannot, and chocolate while I figure out the difference!" Not taking ourselves too seriously and having a sense of humor helps us to slow down and not hurry.

5. Let go and let God

The need to be in control and a busy life is a guaranteed recipe for a hurried life. Most of us are control freaks. We need to learn to let go and let God take control of our life and of our schedule. Learning to let go means learning to say no. Letting go means focusing on things that have eternal value rather than chasing after things that offer temporary satisfaction. This also helps us to be more patient with events and people.

A hurried life is a distracted life. We can be hurried even when we are not busy. Even during our vacations we are hurried and busy. A distracted life is an unhealthy life. It harms our bodies leading to hypertension, diabetes, obesity and heart problems. Our souls are also being harmed. We are restless. We feel disconnected and lost. There is a lacking sense of being anchored or grounded. We become swayed by every event that comes our way. We are irritable and short-fused. And we cannot hear the voice of God. Listening and hearing to the voice of God is what Jesus said as 'only one thing [is] necessary'. So, take a deep breath and stop being in a hurry to finish reading this article!

Dr Alex Tang will be directing Be Still, a BGST Spiritual Retreat, on Sat 27 April, 2019 (9:00am - 12:30pm).

Information and registration at <http://bit.ly/bgstretreat>.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2019

SLEC-BGST CHAPEL / 13 & 27 MAR (WED)

13 Mar - Mr Ronald JJ Wong

27 Mar - Dr Dirk Jongkind

12:00pm - 1:00pm @ BGST

Open to All. No registration required

GRACEWORKS-BGST BOOK LAUNCH / 14 MAR (THU)

"CHINESE ENTREPRENEURS IN SINGAPORE:
HISTORY, FAITH AND CULTURE"

Dr Clive Lim

7:00 pm @ Eaglewings Loft

bit.ly/march14booklaunch

SPIRITUAL RETREAT / 27 APR (SAT)

"BE STILL"

Dr Alex Tang

9:00 am - 12:30 pm @ BGST

bit.ly/bgstretreat

OPEN HOUSE AND ALUMNI HOMECOMING: CELEBRATING 30 YEARS / 1 JUN (SAT)

In Conversation With Rev Dr Quek Swee Hwa

2:00 pm - 4:30 pm @ BGST

bit.ly/bgsthomecoming

UK CHURCH HISTORY TOUR / 7-18 AUG

"BGST CHURCH HISTORY TOUR 3: THE SPIRITUAL
LEGACY OF BRITISH CHRISTIANITY"

@ United Kingdom

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CHANGE IN AUDIT FEES

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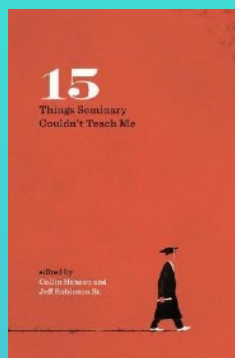
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1. General Public \$25/year
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*Mandatory for Credit Students. Includes administration, registration and technology fees.

Due to the generosity of our donors, we are able to absorb the above costs for 12-months. Thus, the BGST Access Membership Fee will only be in effect from **July 1, 2020** onwards. Fees will remain unchanged up to this point.

BOOK CORNER



15 Things Seminary Couldn't Teach Me **Edited By Collin Hansen** **And Jeff Robinson**

NOW: S\$17.95
USUAL PRICE: S\$25.60

Some lessons can't be learned in a classroom.

A seminary education is immensely valuable, offering theological preparation, spiritual formation, and wise mentoring. But many new pastors are discouraged when the realities of their first call don't line up with what they came to expect from assigned readings and classroom discussions.

Bridging the gap between seminary training and real life in a local church, fifteen veteran pastors and ministry leaders offer advice and encouragement related to a host of real-world issues, such as leading congregations through seasons of suffering, handling conflict, accepting a call, leaving a church, and more.



More Than Just Pretty **By Jessie Faerber**

NOW: S\$10.30
USUAL PRICE: S\$14.65

For girls who want to know where we can find our true value, beauty and purpose. Are you looking for a book that challenges us to question where we've got our ideas about beauty and identity from? Are you looking to find the identity God created you for?

We learn that our value doesn't come from our grades, our body shape, our past, or the number of likes on our latest social media post. We girls know what it's like to feel inadequate. Despite our best efforts, we constantly compare ourselves to the models in magazines, the selfies we see on Instagram, and even our closest friends. But we're worth so much more than what we tell ourselves.

'More Than Just Pretty' teaches us about our value that doesn't come from our grades, our body shape, our past, or the number of likes on our latest social media post. We're so much more than just pretty. We're pretty funny, pretty kind, pretty ambitious, and all round pretty great. And it's time we knew it as written in 'More Than Just Pretty'.

SPECIALS
 MAR 2019

WHILE STOCKS LAST

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NEW
BOOKS

BOOK	TITLE	AUTHORS	CATEGORY
	Hedges & Edges: A Compendium For Social Workers, Counsellors & Family Therapists	Edited By Lim K. Tham & Lynette Balotta	Human Services - Singapore
	Well Connected: Releasing Power And Restoring Hope Through Kingdom Partnerships	Phillip Butler	Interdenominational Cooperation
	Effective Generational Ministry: Biblical And Practical Insights For Transforming Church Communities.	Nesbit Sbanotto, Elisabeth A	Intergenerational Relations-Religious Aspects- Christianity
	Loving People: How To Love And Be Loved	Townsend, Dr John	Love – Religious Aspects – Christianity
	Living Biblically In Marriage And At Home	Ting, John	Marriage – Religious Aspects – Christianity
	God's Faithfulness: Stories From The China Inland Mission And Omf International	Berry, Chad	Missionaries – China

MORE NEW BOOKS AT

<https://bgst.vlibonline.com/images/201902-bull.html>

The background of the entire image is a close-up, high-angle shot of a large pile of coins, likely Euro cents, in various shades of gold, silver, and copper. The coins are scattered and piled together, creating a textured, shimmering surface. Overlaid on this background is a large, semi-transparent teal rectangle that covers most of the frame. Centered within this teal area is the main text in white, uppercase letters. At the bottom of the teal rectangle is a dark blue rectangular button with the word 'DONATE' in yellow, uppercase letters.

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