

## “Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives” (Col. 1:28)

Today I'd like to talk about NLIF. It's about us, who we are, how we live as a community of Jesus followers.

### 1. Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives

Before my wife and I moved to Yangon in 2012, we were in HCMC, Vietnam for almost 11 years. We have experienced lots of joy, but also many difficulties and challenges. For us, NLF-HCMC was like a shelter and support. It is my desire and prayer that NLIF is a church like that for you in Yangon.

If you are looking for the place where you can receive peace, comfort and encouragement as you face challenges in this exotic land, you are in the right place. If you want to take part in a church where people carry each other's burden, rejoice for each other and support one another, using different gifts and talents, you are most welcome and you will be very happy to be involved in NLIF.

We can describe NLIF in this one phrase, "Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives."

In this community, NLIF, we will experience Jesus, who is the true life. In these experiences, our way of life will be changed, we ourselves will be transformed and keep growing, become more like Jesus. And through us, many more people will experience Jesus, the true life, and their way of life and they themselves will be changed.

Col. 1:28 says, "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ."

It starts with the relationship with Jesus who is the center of all. As you are connected with Jesus, you're naturally connected with the body of Christ. You become a part of a particular local church, here it is NLIF. And you connect with other Jesus' followers and experience Jesus. In knowing Jesus through the relationship with him and the relationship with other Christians, you will know yourself more and more, you will come to Jesus more and more, you will experience Jesus more and more, and you will become more like Jesus.

And you are not just connected with Christians, but you are also connected with those who have different belief. You have a relationship with people in your office, in your school, with your family, friends, neighbors and whoever else. Through you, they will experience Jesus, and he will give them a

new life.

“Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives”. This is exactly what NLIF is all about. And each of you are taking an important part in it.

This is not just on Sunday mornings here. It's more about from Monday to Saturday actually. Whatever we do, it can be the moment we experience Jesus, and are transformed more like him. Wherever we go, whoever we are with, someone may experience Jesus through us, and their lives may be changed. “Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives”.

## 2. NLFOC

NLIF is a part of New Life Fellowship of Churches (NLFOC). NLFOC is a relational association of churches with common heritage and vision. That is: “To be a family of churches, united in love and committed to mutual support so that together, we fulfill God’s mission in Asia and beyond for His eternal glory.”

We have churches and church planting ministries in Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Timor Leste, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. And last March we started a ministry in Kirgizstan.

Almost all churches of NLFOC are national congregations, except one international congregation in HCMC, Vietnam and one in Yangon, Myanmar, which is us.

As an international congregation, we are quite unique within NLFOC. But we are still a part of NLFOC and having the same kind of nature, character, culture, flavor, heartbeat. We are like a family. Same same but different. Different but same same.

### 3. Our Practice

How is here. We have three practices. (1) To know Him and to make Him known, (2) To grow in Christ and to live purposefully, and (3) To send out and to be sent out. Let's look at them one by one.

#### **(1) To know Him and to make Him known**

Christopher Wright says "The mission of God's people has to start and finish with commitment to the God whose mission we are called to share. But that in turn depends on knowing our God -- knowing God in depth, from experience of his revelation and his salvation."<sup>1</sup>

In NLIF, how are we knowing God, experiencing God, tasting God together?

#### **- Praise and Worship**

First of all, PW. I love music, I love to sing, and I love PW. I do it at home alone. It is the moment when I can really feel I'm in His presence, in His protection, in His power, and in His glory. PW helps me to know Him more and experience Him more. But when I do PW within congregation, it becomes so dynamic to the extent that I can never experience alone. Our lively expressive style of PW leads us to experience God. When you PW lively and expressively within congregation, you are actually providing the opportunity for others to experience God.

#### **- Preaching and Teaching**

How can Sunday sermons help us to know our God -- in the sense of knowing God in depth, from experience of his revelation and his salvation?

I'd like to share what I'm trying to do, and this would be my suggestion for you.

No.1, Take notes. You don't have to make the summary of the message. Write down what God speaks to you, or something you felt inspired. FYI, all my sermon notes are available at the church website. All for you.

No.2, Keep the Bible verses from the sermon in your mind through the week, and listen to them, meditate them time to time. Your notes give you a light which shows how the Lord wants to minister in your life, which helps you to

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, Zondervan (2010): (31)

deepen your relationship with him.

If that is too much for you, here is what you can try. Write down the main scripture or the sermon title on a piece of paper, and look at it from time to time throughout your day, and each time you look at it just say it aloud or even just remember it. This simple action builds up your spiritual life. How do I know? Because I'm doing it.

No.3, Share with others what the Lord spoke to you, how he ministered to you, and how you responded to him. As you come to know him more, then you can make him known more.

When I preach I give you reflection points. It is for your spiritual growth and care. Don't rush. Sit down, be still, take time for reflection. Making journal is recommended. Sharing some thoughts from your reflection with someone is helpful, not only for your own growth, but also for others. I just let you know, I'm happy to have coffee with you.

### **- LifeNet groups**

Okay, LifeNet groups. What are they? LifeNet groups are the home fellowship groups. These small groups are important for relationship-building in the church, spiritual nurturing and growth, and spiritual and emotional care.

We believe that our lives in Christ could not be healthy without being "knitted" together in small groups that meet on regular basis. This is a time of sharing our lives and affirming our friendships. We share joy and blessing, and give praise and thanks together. We share hardships and burdens and pray for one another. Of course, if you share your prayer request to me, I will pray for you. If you want to talk to me, please contact me. I'm very happy to sit down with you.

David Bosch said this. "Evangelism seeks to bring people into the visible community of believers."<sup>2</sup> "Evangelism is possible only when the community that evangelizes – (which is) the church -- is a radiant manifestation of the Christian faith and has a winsome [or attractive] lifestyle."<sup>3</sup> Our LifeNet groups are how we are practicing it.

We definitely can have more groups. At NLF-HCMC, when I was there, there were more than 20 groups within 250 people. I'm pretty sure we can have more. This is probably the opportunity for you to start a new group.

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<sup>2</sup> David Bosch, "Evangelism: Theological currents and cross-currents today" in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (July 1987), (100)

<sup>3</sup> Bosch, (102)

## **(2) To grow in Christ and to live purposefully**

### **- Serving and Growing**

What is the key for growth as His disciples? Maybe you can make a list of the answers. I found this is very interesting and meaningful. "The privilege of ministry is growth."<sup>4</sup> I believe that NLIF is a good place for those who want to practice it. If you want to grow as Jesus disciple, you are at the right place.

"Learning is empowering: it frees us to serve more effectively." "Learners will always go further, do more and make greater difference; wise women and men are always asking, What can I learn in this situation? What do I need to learn to respond to this new development or opportunity?" "Continue to improve in an area where you are already effective. ... Develop new skills in response to new circumstances or opportunities."<sup>5</sup>

I hope and pray that you will find this church where you will grow spiritually and live purposefully in Christ Jesus through His Body.

There is a list of "the opportunities to serve". Please tick what area you are interested in to serve and put it in the box on the counter at the entrance. Please hand it in today, or next Sunday, or at latest by the last Sunday of August so that we can gather the information in time.

### **- Being and Living**

It is said "Meaning revealed in life".<sup>6</sup> Mission is more than just activities of church or projects of organization, but it is about our "being", or "our existence as God's redeemed people living in the world."<sup>7</sup> Here we can see a simple picture.

#### John 15:4-5

<sup>4</sup> Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. <sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

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<sup>4</sup> David Wiersbe and Warren W. Wiersbe, *Making Sense of the Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), (31-46)

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Smith, *Courage and Calling*, Inter-Varsity Press (2011): (193)

<sup>6</sup> Bernard T. Adeney, *Strange Virtues – Ethics in a Multicultural World* –, Inter Varsity Press (1995): (52)

<sup>7</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, Inter-Varsity Press (1991): (29)

What kind of fruit we bear depends on how we are connected to Christ. If we remain in Christ and deepen our relationship with him, and are being transformed more like him, we will bear fruit that has more fragrance of Christ. But you cannot do it alone. When we are connected with the tree – Jesus, we are also connected with other branches – other Christians.

“To live purposefully”. It simply means to be aware that today is the day of “Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives”. To let every hour be the moment that we experience Jesus, and are transformed more like him. To think this is the opportunity that someone experiences Jesus through us and their lives may be changed by Jesus.

Here I'd like to give you one practical advice. When we deal with issues in church, we must be aware that there are three levels. The level 1 is absolute essential things like Trinity, salvation by grace through faith, authority of the Bible, and so on. The level 2 is conviction things. There are different positions. Each position has its own conviction, based on the Bible. The classic examples are holy communion, water baptism and church governance style. NLIF has its own position which may seem unfamiliar to you. The level 3 is personal preference. I like this kind of songs. I don't like the way the pastor preaches, and so on.

We should not change or even compromise the things of level 1. Otherwise the church will no longer be a church.

When we face the issues in level 2 and 3, we must be careful how to handle it. It's not about which is good or bad. It's not about who will win and who will lose. Our intention should be: how can I make the peace from God in this issue? How can I empower the unity Jesus brought in this church? What can I do in order that he can experience Jesus in this issue? How God is using this to transform me? If each one of us thinks and does it like this, there is no room for our enemy to destroy our relationships. It's easy to understand the principle, but it's not easy to do it. We must practice it so that we can do it better, we will be mature. NLIF is a good class room.

We cannot grow without being joined with God. We cannot bear fruits without being connected with God. We cannot proclaim the gospel without being united with God. When each Christian becomes one with God like each branch connects with the tree, the peace of God will form itself, grow and bear fruit in them. There will be peace in each person, in each family, in this church, and peace in this city, this country, and among nations. “Experiencing the Life,

Changing Lives”.

### **(3) To send out and to be sent out**

#### **- Supporting Church Planting Ministries**

One of the characteristics of NLIF is the support for Church Planting Ministries. We are fully supporting 4 churches in 4 provinces, and 2 churches around Yangon. And we are also supporting 2 churches in Yangon. It is introduced in weekly church bulletins, and you can see their monthly letters and photos on the information board at the back.

On the first Sunday of the month, we are collecting offering for mission. Every month, we are sending about \$2500 on average for these ministries. By the way, this church is supported by your tithe and offering. Thank you very much for your generous giving and faithful support.

Through the mission offering, we can be involved in the work of bringing the gospel to the area where we may not be able to go by ourselves, and to the people we may not meet face to face.

It is not just giving offering and praying for them. We can visit them, and minister to the people and help the church planting ministry. If you are interested in, please talk to Gabriel.

#### **- Sunday School and Youth Group**

Another characteristic of NLIF is Sunday School and Youth Group. We have many children in our church.

The greatest strategy of God’s world mission is to bring up our children’s faith in God.

#### **Genesis 18:17-19**

Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? <sup>18</sup> Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup> For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

God promised that he would bless all nations through Abraham. How did

this promise come true? What was the instruction God has given him? To teach his children to live out the way of the Lord.

Parents are the keys to children's faith. Children learn more from parents' daily life than any other Sunday school materials or church activities. But there is a limit to what just one family can do. Sunday School is a community of parents and children. They gather together, mourn together, and rejoice together. They encourage one another, teach one another, and learn from one another. And in addition, people who share the burden of teaching children will be added there, and strengthen the community.

Our Sunday School and Youth Group are the place where we lead children to Christ, bring them up as His disciples and build foundations for them to be sent out all over the world. Thank you so much for parents, Sunday school teachers and youth leaders. You are doing such a precious work beautifully. Why don't we give them big hands?

#### **- Witnesses to global communities**

NLIF is a global community. We, most of us, from baby to grandparent, are from many different places, and we are leaving for many different places in all over the world. And in Yangon each and every one of us are sent to the different parts of society, carrying out God's mission. Your working-place, office, school and home are your mission field. We are sent to those places as witness of Jesus, testifying the power of the cross, bringing God's presence, the fragrance of Jesus - peace, hope, joy and love.

In NLIF, this community of believers, (I hope) you will be a mature disciple, you will be more effective and fruitful for God's kingdom. While you are here in NLIF, (I hope) you will be transformed, become more like Christ from glory to glory. You may be healed and strengthened, then you can be a comforter or peace maker for this broken world. "Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives".

For closing, I'd like to share my testimony.

In 1994, I became a full-time pastor in Japan. In the summer, I had an opportunity to go to Indonesia for mission trip. It was the first time for me to visit Indonesia and join an overseas mission trip. First night, we stayed in Jakarta. Second day, we went to look around the city. Jakarta was a big and modern city. However, there were slums as well. I saw people washing clothes and dishes and bathing in the river. The water was brown and smelly.

Then, one question came up in my mind. If I could speak their language very fluently, how would I share the gospel with them? I realized that what I could share was just bible knowledge. What is the gospel? What is the power of the gospel? What is the good news for me and for them actually? That was the starting point of my mission trip.

We flew to Kalimantan and took a mini bus to one small town and stayed there. Following day, we moved further to inland of Kalimantan. It took one whole day. When we reached our destination village, I was totally exhausted. I came down with a fever. My whole body was shaking. I vomited many times and could not eat at all, couldn't even take water to drink. What I could do was just lay down on the bed, which was a straw mat on wooden board. Honestly I thought I was going to die there.

Next morning, other members went to villages and I was alone. My condition was still the same as the night before.

On the third day, I felt slightly better. But I was still on the bed. About noon, one Indonesian young man came to my room. He brought me lunch, Indonesian food, but I was not able to eat anything. I could not speak Indonesian and he could not speak English or Japanese. So it was not easy to communicate with him. But he seemed to have understood me somehow and left.

Then, he came back with his friend who spoke little English. I told him that I was very sick and not able to eat anything. They talked to each other and left. Then, they came back and gave me a bowl of instant noodle. I think they tried their best to think of what I, Japanese could eat. But I had to tell them it's not because of the kind of food they brought that I was not able to eat. They talked to each other and the one who can speak English left.

I lay down on the bed. The young man sat down at the corner of the room quietly. I thought it would be better if I was alone. Time had passed slowly. He was still there. Then I began to feel something new. He said nothing and did nothing, just be with me, just watching me there. His silent eyes on me made me realize that I am loved, I am cared for. His presence gave me hope to live.

This experience taught me what the gospel is. It's Jesus. His presence is the good news, hope and life for everybody in any circumstances.

We can experience Jesus, the true life. The more we experience Jesus, the more we are transformed to be like him. And through us, someone will experience Jesus, and their lives will be changed. "Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives".

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection:

1) What was your experience(s) of Jesus (last 12 months)? How did it affect you? Share it with someone in this week.

2) Three practices are shared: (1) To know Him and to make Him known, (2) To grow in Christ and to live purposefully, and (3) To send out and to be sent out. Which one are you interested in? What will you do to practice it (Make it specific)? What help do you need? Whom will you have the help from?

3) Read John 15:4-5, and imagine the picture. What does the Spirit speak to you? What is your response?

4) Pray about which area(s) you would serve in and through NLIF, this believers community and submit "Opportunities to serve".