

## My Christian reflection on the death of Lee Kuan Yew



My deep and abiding admiration and respect for Lee Kuan Yew began during my honeymoon of 1992. My wife and I had gone to the Great Barrier Reef. However, instead of admiring the abundant natural beauty around me, I found myself buried in his biography which I casually packed with my luggage. Till today, my wife complains that she shared her honeymoon with Lee Kuan Yew. I am truly thankful to God that she was so patient and long suffering and that I am still married. I have since built up a collection of his books and read through most of his

writings and speeches.

Despite the deep connection I felt with Lee Kuan Yew, I was nevertheless surprised how grieved I was at his passing. Over the last week, I would unexpectedly find tears welling up while watching the coverage of his life on television.

The period of emotional turmoil has passed to a period of reflection. How should I respond as a Christian? What does the Bible tell me about how I should feel about all that is happening?

*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—<sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 1 Timothy 2*

Firstly, I believe that the Bible tells us that it is right and appropriate to give thanks for Lee Kuan Yew. No doubt that there may be some who criticise him. Their criticisms may even have some merit. However, a failure to acknowledge and more importantly, give thanks for the good he has done for Singapore would be unbiblical and ungodly.

A deeper reflection of God's word in 1 Timothy 2 extends the imperative to give thanks. The Christian is charged to pray for his/her leaders not primarily for material prosperity or economic progress, but an environment to live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. I believe that Lee Kuan Yew has on the whole provided such an environment for Christians in Singapore.

Lee Kuan Yew upheld a scrupulous adherence to the highest standards of integrity and honesty in both the civil service and business sector. As a result, Christians in Singapore are able to go about their daily business without being

penalised for their godliness and holiness. I remember the sadness and difficulty shared by a Christian architect friend from a neighbouring country who struggled to make a living and feed his family as he would not resort to bribery or making false promises and cutting corners. Furthermore, Lee Kuan Yew's strict adherence to meritocracy has ensured that Christians are not discriminated or persecuted in education and job opportunities.

*Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!  
Seek justice, encourage the oppressed.  
Defend the cause of the fatherless,  
plead the case of the widow. Isaiah 1:17*

*A wise king winnows out the wicked;  
he drives the threshing wheel over them. Proverbs 20:26*

*By justice a king gives a country stability,  
but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down. Proverbs 29:4*

Secondly, Christians should give thanks because in many ways, Lee Kuan Yew embodied the Bible's qualities and principles of a wise, just and good leader. He built up an effective police and judicial system. He implemented far sighted policies to raise the quality of living for all and in the process helped the poor out of poverty. He was not corrupt and more importantly, did not tolerate corruption even amongst his relatives, friends and cabinet members. He did not use his power and position for his own personal advantage. Even when compared to many advanced western nations, Singapore continues to rank highly in terms of the lack of poverty, corruption, violence, crime and injustice. We are free to walk the streets at night and our children can take the public transport in safety.

*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD;  
he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.  
Proverbs 21:1*

*Who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd  
and will accomplish all that I please;  
he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt,"  
and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid." Isaiah 44:28*

*"This is what the Lord says to his anointed,  
to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of  
to subdue nations before him  
and to strip kings of their armor,  
to open doors before him  
so that gates will not be shut: Isaiah 45:1*

*<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28*

Thirdly, and most importantly, we must be grateful for how under Lee Kuan Yew's leadership, God's people enjoyed freedom to openly pursue their faith, and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to others.

King Cyrus II ruled Persia from 559BC. He was not a worshipper of Yahweh, but yet God used him to bring his people back from exile and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. Indeed, his role is so significant that he is called "my shepherd" in chapter 44 and "his anointed" in chapter 45. Both titles were later used for Jesus in their fullest and fulfilled meanings. I am convinced that these exalted titles were used for Cyrus because of the significant role that God used him.

In the same way, I believe that God has conferred a similar role to Lee Kuan Yew. According to Operation World, since 1960 evangelical Christians have increased 20-fold. More importantly, Singapore is now a strategic hub for mission activity and mission sending. Many regard it as the Antioch of Asia. I believe that Lee Kuan Yew was pivotal in these developments. His courage and determination ensured the continued existence, security and freedom of religion in Singapore. This has enabled Singapore to play a significant role in God's salvation plan to save souls.

The outpouring of thanksgiving and gratitude over the last week was unprecedented. Even the authorities were caught by surprise. Given the amount of negativity directed at Lee Kuan Yew in cyberspace and social media before his death, his passing was an opportunity for the silent majority to show their heartfelt appreciation for him. This was not surprising for me: only a few years ago, I brought our church camp speaker Joshua Ng and his family to the Botanical gardens. Suddenly there was a commotion ahead of us. People were standing up and waving. Some were clapping and cheering. We went ahead to see what was happening. It was an elderly Lee Kuan Yew being driven around in an electric buggy. He smiled and waved to us.

That spontaneous outpouring of warmth and affection is something I believe we are enjoined as Christians to give to Lee Kuan Yew upon his passing. Let us give thanks for his life and the good he has done. Let us pray that successive generations of leaders will continue to uphold his good principles and values.

*<sup>6</sup> This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. <sup>7</sup> Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Romans 13*

The Bible tells us that we are all fallen and flawed humans - *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.* Romans 2:23-24. There are no perfect human beings and for that reason, there are no perfect leaders. Some may have reservations over some of the more controversial and contentious elements in Lee Kuan Yew's leadership. Even so, we would be right to remember the good that God has done through him. Whilst there may be things which he did that were at odds with God's word, I believe it is undeniable that he has done an immeasurable good from an objective Biblical basis. Therefore, let us give him the respect and honour due him.

*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— <sup>2</sup> for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. 1 Tim 2*

Lastly, when I learnt that Lee Kuan Yew was gravely ill, I prayed for him. I prayed for his recovery but more urgently and unceasingly for him to be saved. God tells us that he wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Lee Kuan Yew professed "I neither deny nor accept that there is a God." It saddened me greatly that throughout his life, he did not move from this position. I do not know the hand of God nor the hearts of men. My fervent hope is that in his last dying days, he accepted the grace of God found in Jesus Christ. My prayer is that he truly would have grasped the promise that Jesus made when he promised "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10

Pastor Andrew Ong

Bethany Trinity Presbyterian Church

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