

## **The Desire of Matthew's Heart**

Orathai Chureson-Saw

The first time I met Matthew and some of his family members was four years ago in Jakarta, Indonesia. He is a cheerful chatterbox who loves to laugh and sings hymns with full excitement and actions. Most often playful in his pure childlike character, he mingles with people and gets to know them so easily. Being tactile in nature for a down-syndrome boy, he likes to grab people's hands, feels connected, and demands hugs. Matthew has, certainly, been living out his life to the fullest by continually witness through his limited but powerful ways. His smile and cheerful spirit always bring sunshine in the heart of anyone.

Having down-syndrome, Matthew is indeed a special needs child who is confronting with several physical and mental challenges. He has limited ability to learn certain subjects as much as he is facing with difficulty in pronouncing words properly due to weak jaw muscles and physical mobility. These issues pose challenges to his learning ability and even in his carrying out of daily routine, but his spirit is never barricaded or obstructed by them to live out his cheerful and hopeful life. Despite these challenging conditions, he is an extra ordinary child as he continually inspires many people he associates with. Truly, learning of this boy's life challenges and how God is revealing Himself through him has greatly impacted my views of special-need-children and the ministry for them. My experience with him also serves as a great inspiration to minister to children with unique needs.

One privilege that Matthew enjoys over the normal, yet discontented and unfulfilled people, is the blessing of a loving and caring family that he has been blessed with. He has been adopted by his aunt, Ms. Arlaine, so that he could get access to special needs education near her place. Since the adoption, his aunt has been devotedly teaching Matthew about God through singing hymnal songs and reading the Bible to him and making him memorize both the Bible and hymnal songs. As a result of her great effort, Matthew can now memorize more than 300 hymnal songs and hundred Bible verses. He also finished his elementary with good grades and almost earned perfect score in Religion. All his achievement and progress in learning are due to God's blessings and Matthew's family's unconditional love to him. They have been united their effort in every possible way to make him realize that he is loved and greatly treasured as a member of the family. He is being brought up as a child of God and nurtured in a loving family where patience and encouragement are the languages at home. Church family has also played a vital role in Matthew's vibrant life. It provides a great support and enriching experiences for Matthew to grow in. He is never seen alone or isolated at church circle and faith community gathering. There are always people who recognize, reach out to, and want to socialize with him anywhere.

"I want to be baptized by Pastor Saw," Matthew expressed his desire one day. When asked why he must be very specific with the name of the baptizing pastor, Matthew smiled broadly and said, "Pastor Saw is my good friend!" I was also privileged to witness Matthew's

baptism on one Sabbath afternoon in 2018. On that Sabbath afternoon, Matthew was dressed on pure white robe. He was joined by other three children in baptism. He was the first candidate to go down the pool. Pastor Saw prayed for him and immersed him in the water. As he was lifted from the water and ushered out of the pool, he became stiff and refused to move. He was facing upward as if he was waiting for something to happen. Pastor Samuel tried to assist and walk him out of the water. He resisted for a while but finally gave in with his usual cheerful smile. When we inquired about his resistance to be ushered to the poolside after his baptism, Ms. Arlaine smiled and fondly shared the reason behind.

“Matthew was thinking of Jesus’ baptism in the Bible at that moment,” Ms. Arlaine explained, “he remembered how God had affirmed Jesus’s obedience with great pleasure from heaven by directly speaking to Him. Matthew was anticipating for the same gesture from God. He was waiting for God to speak directly to him saying, “This is my beloved son whom I am well-pleased!” Matthew's deepest desire was confirmed on that day. He desires that his life is always pleasing to Jesus.

I have been personally touched by Matthew's enormous and commendable faith. He has greatly impressed me with his utmost desire at a very young to place his trust on God and have a close relationship with Him. Similarly, Matthew's faith has greatly inspired everyone who witnessed his baptism on that Sabbath afternoon, and many more people who would learn of his love for God later. The consistent and loving effort of his family in leading him to Christ evidently has paid off with a considerable amount of love he has for God and people. All those who were witnessing his baptism and learned of his desire have been moved by Matthew’s level of spiritual maturity. As Mrs. White said, “There is nothing more calculated to energize the mind and strengthen the intellect than the study of the word of God.” (CT 460.1).

Through family’s united effort in nurturing and discipling Matthew with extra support and care, he has been lovingly encouraged to bring out his best from his limited situation. He wants to be the best child of God that he could possibly be. Matthew is now 14 years old and he prides to be an active member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He is always thankful to his family who truly loves and cares for him. When asked about his greatest desire in life, he responded without any hesitation, “I want to see Jesus and go to heaven with Him. I know that He will make me whole and well. I can finally say good-bye to down-syndrome!”



Matthew and his family.





Both Matthew and Pastor Sam rejoice in the Lord after Matthew accepts Jesus as his personal Savior and Friend.