



MANNA

True Jesus Church ISSUE 53 OCT-DEC 2007 **Conquering Addictions**

Finding Satisfaction in Christ
How to Interpret
Christian Values in a Changing World

MANNA

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Conquering Addictions

“The goal of Manna is to inspire believers to live an active faith through mutual encouragement and the study of biblical truths.”



Dear Reader,

In order to bring the best variety of articles to Manna, we decided that it was important to add some new content, as well as include more of what we already have.

All of our columns are now back in every issue. We hope that these articles, which are written to address specific issues and concerns, are helpful and encouraging.

Regarding the new pages, we have three sections: Q&A, How to, and Facts, Stats, and Syntax. These tidbits are presented in a shorter format that will be informative and easy to read.

We hope that you will enjoy the new pages that we have added to Manna.

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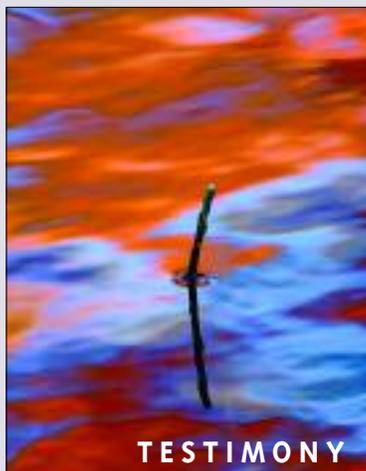
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Conquering Addictions



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Finding Satisfaction in Christ

YS Tsai—Taiwan

Before I came to Christ I befriended drug addicts with whom I ate, drank, and partied. Then I also became a drug addict, and I started to lose direction in my life. I made many determinations to stop using drugs and even checked myself into a drug rehabilitation center. But all my attempts to get better failed.

UNDER THE CONTROL OF DRUGS

I remember one day in 1990, I was hanging out with my friends, drinking and chatting as usual, when someone took out a pack of heroin cigarettes. I had heard of them before—they are made of heroin wrapped in tobacco leaves and cured until dry. They look like regular cigarettes and you smoke them like cigarettes.

Even though I knew it was a drug, I wasn't sure of its effects on humans. Out of curiosity, I tried some. My first try was unpleasant, so I didn't understand how some people like using drugs. Wanting to know the answer, I gave it more tries.

Little did I know, after three to four cigarettes I became addicted to the drug, and my body and mind were deeply attracted to and controlled by it. After that experience, I fell into the depths of pain.

Although I knew that I shouldn't take drugs, and that it is illegal to, once I got addicted there was no turning back. It is like smoking regular cigarettes, drinking alcohol, or chewing betel. Once you develop an addiction, even though you want to quit, it is still very difficult because of the unbearable physical pain and suffering from withdrawal.

Just like that, I was living under the control of drugs. Every day, I lived in ignorance and foolishness. I did not know what I was doing.

NO WAY OUT

I hid my drug addiction from my family for a very long time. One day, I received a phone call from my friend, telling me to pick up something (the "goods") at Tainan. It just so happened that the Tainan police were investigating him. They were tapping his phone and found out where I was going.

On my way home after picking up the drugs, the police arrested me and brought me to a police station. They interrogated me past midnight before I could be bailed out. They also took mug shots of me and put them on file. This

was my first experience of getting arrested.

After my mother found out that I was a drug addict, she tried to persuade me to renounce drugs. When her efforts failed, she would often say that I was hopeless and that she would give upon me.

I knew I couldn't continue living like this; it was illegal, after all. Moreover, drugs damaged my body and drained my wallet—a pack of drugs that cost about \$3,000 NT (\$90 US) could only last me two or three days.

But if I didn't use drugs, I felt lethargic—I would yawn, shed tears, and have muscle pain. I was in deep agony, but I didn't know what to do. I could only live my life one step at a time, thinking that the worst thing that could happen to me is getting arrested and being put in jail.

I followed my friends in beating people up, but I had never killed a person. At this time, I deeply experienced the importance of choosing friends. Good friends will encourage me to change my ways and start anew, but bad friends will lead me by the nose

God's power and love are truly great and powerful. He saved me from the clutches of drugs.

Once I started taking drugs, I had no peace. I couldn't sleep well at night because I kept on thinking about drugs. I tried listening to Buddhist scriptures, hoping to rely on religious power to help me change my path, but my heart was still distressed and turbulent. There was no way to cure it.

SEEKING THE TRUTH

I was introduced to the True Jesus Church through my next door neighbor, brother Huang, and my younger sister. They preached the gospel to me, and every year they gave me flyers inviting me to evangelical spiritual convocation. As a believer of traditional folk religion, I could not accept Jesus at once but I never opposed my sister's faith.

Because of drug use, my head felt heavy and drowsy every day. All that I thought about was earning money to buy drugs. Thank God I didn't get to the point of stealing.

At the time I was working as an exterior painter, and I spent all the money that I earned to buy drugs. If I didn't use drugs, I was not able to control my body or mind and I could not work. In order to get enough money to buy drugs, I had to work. This cycle repeated itself every day.

One day, I accepted brother Huang's invitation and went to church with him. I started seeking the truth in Tainan County's Xishu House of Prayer. I was touched by the sermons that I heard but I didn't know how to pray. I learned how to pray after brother Huang and his wife, sister Liu, taught me. They didn't know that I was a drug addict.

After a period of truth seeking, I went to Tainan city's Nanmon Church for service. On our way to church one Friday night, brother Huang asked me why I was still dressed in long sleeves when the weather was so hot that we needed to turn on the air conditioner.

At that time, because I had the word in my heart, I was moved to roll up my sleeve and show them my arm that was full of needle marks from drug injections. Sister Liu was shocked. That is how they found out that I was a drug addict.

TRANSFORMED BY GOD

Gradually, brothers and sisters in church knew that I was addicted to drugs. But they never looked at me strangely, nor did they alienate me. Instead, they encouraged me, accepted me, supported me, and prayed unceasingly for me. This feeling of being one family in Christ touched me greatly.

People outside of church are different—once a person is addicted to drugs, they think that he is hopeless. I was accepted in Christ, but rejected outside of Christ; the treatment was as different as the day is from the night. I was greatly comforted by the acceptance that I received. Therefore, I made a determination to rely on prayer to quit drugs.

At that time, what moved me the most were my experiences in prayer.

When I was in drug withdrawal, my cravings for drugs came in cycles. Five to six hours after I awoke from sleep, I felt low-spirited, my eyes started watering, and I kept on craving drugs. I prayed to God, "O Lord, I really want to change my old ways but my body is weak, please help me."

Miraculously, every time I prayed, my heart was filled with peace and comfort just like what the Lord said. "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28).

I sought the truth for about half a year and the grace of God gradually transformed me. During that period of time I relied only on prayer and attending worship services to cure my drug, smoking, and alcohol addictions. God's power and love are truly great and powerful. He saved me from the clutches of drugs. I am also thankful for my younger sister who has been praying for me ever since she found out about my drug addiction.

I had invited a friend who did drugs with me to seek the truth. But he rejected my invitation because he believed in a different god. About a month after I started truth seeking, he lost his life to drug addiction.

God's grace is truly abundant—less than a month into seeking the truth, He gave me the Holy Spirit and my heart was filled with joy. Half a year later, in April of 2001, I received baptism and became God's child.

HEALED BY GOD

After my baptism, I went with a deacon one day to visit a brother's electroplating shop. The brother mentioned that he was hiring and asked if I was willing to help with plating pistons and cookware. I happily accepted his offer because I thought I should find a stable job now that I was baptized. I believed that God will provide. The deacon and his wife also encouraged me to go for the job.

I started working the next day. The omnipotent and omniscient God knew my worries and opened a way for me. He arranged this job for me and I am truly thankful for that.

In October 2002, I hurt my spinal cord at work and as a result was limping as if my legs were of uneven lengths. I immediately went to a hospital for a CAT scan. The doctor said that I had a herniated disc and that an operation was needed to correct that problem. My surgery was scheduled for April 6, 2003.

I stayed at the hospital the night before my operation. A doctor who was looking over my X-rays came to my room and introduced himself as my surgeon. When he saw that I could still walk, he did a quick checkup on me.

He asked me with great surprise what medicine I took that allowed me to walk freely. I replied, "Thank God, I am a member of the True Jesus Church. The Lord Jesus has healed me!" That same night, I was discharged from the hospital and didn't need surgery anymore. Thank God. My limping, after continuous prayers and petition, was also healed by God.

Before I came to Christ, my life was black. I lived under shadows and was taken over by sin. Neither my body nor soul had peace, and my dream of having a good and beautiful life disappeared like fog.

After coming to Christ, by relying on God's spirit and power, I have the courage to turn my steps away from the wrong path. Now my soul is satisfied, full of joy, and has the hope of going to heaven to enjoy eternal life.

I deeply experienced that when a person is trapped in sin, there is nothing that he can do besides letting his weakness take over his mind and soul.

But the Lord Jesus came as the Word in flesh to be crucified, so that through His precious blood, our sins can be forgiven. And through His blood we can have salvation and the hope of entering the kingdom of heaven.

This path to the eternal kingdom of heaven is a gift from God given freely to mankind. I hope that everyone can experience His gift. May all the glory be unto the true God in heaven. Amen.★



Stand Still and See the Salvation of the Lord

Jane Yap—Telok Kurau, Singapore



“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for

they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Mt 6:25, 26)

Here I recount the wonderful grace of God upon my daughter, Elena, who was six at the time.

UNEXPLAINED SYMPTOMS

Around June 2005, Elena started to show signs of illness that were but the beginning of a series of nightmares for us. She started to vomit on a regular basis, which was abnormal. She vomited before meals as well as after meals. Thinking that children at times throw up, my husband and I were not too perturbed. We brought her to a family clinic and got her

some medicine to stop the vomiting.

The medication did not work, and the vomiting continued for another three months. However, as there was no fever or stomach pain, we did not see any red alert then.

But, of course, our hearts ached to see her suffer like that. We brought her to a pediatric specialist hospital where she was hospitalized for three days. A series of blood and urine tests showed nothing abnormal and the doctors concluded that the vomiting could be due to constipation.

Feeling helpless, the only thing we could do was to pray every day for Jesus’ help. At work, I would also pray whenever I went to the washroom and especially during lunch time as I knew

that was the time when Elena would be having her lunch. I was in constant fear of getting calls from the childcare center because each time the teacher called, it was bad news.

We also tried a Chinese doctor and Elena got some relief for about ten days. But the symptoms returned soon after and she started getting headaches too. We began to suspect that she was simply not adjusting well to school.

Elena also complained that she was having double vision. We had noticed her eyesight had worsened in the last few months. We thought that poor eyesight was the cause of her headaches, and so we made her a pair of prescription glasses.

In hindsight, I think I have been a negligent mother. I had no idea how to help my own child. I remembered that for months, Elena was not able to carry her own school bag. Whenever she had her bag on her shoulders, she would fall or lose her balance. But we thought that she was acting up and would scold her.

ILLNESS FINALLY DIAGNOSED

By October, the headaches had become more severe and lasted even longer than before. Elena would break out in a sweat and knock her head against the wall because she could not bear the pain. On October 24, at 5:30 am, she woke up disoriented and sick. We decided then that we should send her in for a CT scan.

Results of the scan revealed that Elena had a tumor about 4 cm large in her brain. The tumor was pressing on one major nerve, and fluids accumulated, causing the headaches. The vomiting, double vision, and loss of balance were all symptoms of the presence of the tumor.

Although I had prepared myself for this possibility, the news still came as a

I thank God that He really listened and answered our prayers quickly. It was an assurance that His grace would be sufficient for us.

shock. I could not believe that the worst case scenario had happened. I began to ponder why this was happening to us.

After looking back, I thanked God and praised Him. A week before the CT scan, I had prayed to God to reveal to us what was causing Elena's sufferings. I thank God that He really listened and answered our prayers quickly. It was an assurance that His grace would be sufficient for us.

We later found out that Elena had had this tumor from birth, but God had not allowed it to become full blown until after we had come to know Him and gotten baptized. Parents who have children suffering from cancer undergo tremendous stress. We knew very well that if we had not known the Lord Jesus, we would not know whom and where to turn to. To us, the timing was perfect.

SURGERY AND RELATED COMPLICATIONS

On October 25, Elena had the first surgery to remove the tumor. The surgeon told us that the tumor could not be removed completely because some of the cells were attached to a central nerve and drastic damage might result if he tried to remove them.

Instead, they decided to try thirty-two courses of radiotherapy plus eight courses of chemotherapy to remove them. This would stretch over a year. Elena would

have to defer school for a year or even more.

The next day, Elena suffered terrible pain at back of her head. The doctors had to operate on her a second time, as they suspected it was due to either fluid retention or a blood clot. We later found out that during the first surgery on October 25, a tube called an EVD was inserted into Elena's head to drain excess fluids. That tube had somehow moved out of position so water had accumulated and caused her pain.

The EVD tube would be there for a week to monitor whether the head was regulating its water drainage well. For each twenty-four hour period, from 6 a.m. to 6 a.m. the next day, the water drained out should not be more than 100 ml. If it was more, it meant that the head was not regulating its water drainage properly.

Then a permanent tube (called a shunt) would have to be inserted in the head and connected to the stomach for the water to be drained to the stomach. In addition to being a high-risk surgery, a shunt is a device that can lead to infections.

For the next week, almost 300 ml of water was drained every day. This worried us because that signaled a need for inserting a shunt. But the doctor decided to give it another week before making a decision on the shunt. The old EVD had to be replaced with a new one to prevent infection. So a third operation was done on November 1 to change the EVD.

The week following that was another worrisome period of waiting. For the first four days, the EVD was recording levels of water higher than permissible. The surgeon predicted that Elena would need a shunt.

On the fifth day, the water level was already at 20 ml by 8 a.m. Only two hours of the day had passed and there were another twenty-two hours more to go! I was worried and sad at the same time, because with this kind of reading, it was quite certain that a shunt had to be done on Monday. It was at this moment that a miracle happened.

GOD'S WONDERFUL ARRANGEMENT

A nurse came to sponge Elena and change her bed sheet. As she tried to lift Elena up, the EVD broke and was dislodged from the head. Everyone in the ward panicked, especially the nurse.

I was surprised at myself for staying completely composed then. I calmly suggested that they page for a doctor immediately. As it was a Sunday, only residents were on duty.

In my heart, I knew that residents, not being specialists in neurosurgery, would not be able to help much. I started to pray to Jesus for help. I looked at Elena and saw that she was all right, with no signs of

fear or pain at all. She could even laugh about the EVD being broken.

Just when I began to pray, Elena's surgeon, Dr. Ng showed up. This was about five minutes after the tube had broken. What a miracle! I was puzzled why he was at the hospital on a Sunday. He explained that he had a suspicion the EVD might break. He removed the remainder of the tube that was still lodged inside Elena's head and stitched up the wound.

Praise the Lord, Elena was all right without the EVD drain that whole night. I strongly believed this was God's will. If the tube had not broken, a reading would have had to be taken. I was sure Elena would have to go for the shunt, since the water level was already at 20 ml at 8 a.m. But our Heavenly Father had already planned everything ahead for Elena.

A CT scan was carried out to check the water content in the brain. Thank God, the scan showed no shunt was needed. Thank God, for we could really see His work and grace towards us!

Not long after, Elena went through an fMRI so the doctors could examine the

remaining two percent of the tumor that could not be removed by surgery. The fMRI images showed there was nothing left of the tumor. What a miracle!

STRENGTH AND FAITH TO FACE TOMORROW

I have learned that in all circumstances, we need to stay calm. When something happens, there must be a reason why God allows it. Only by trusting in Him can we see His will and love for us. He is our heavenly Father, and He watches over us.

Elena will be starting radiotherapy on the entire head and spine. Although the scan showed that the cells did not spread to her spine, it has to be done on the spine as a safety measure. Elena will have to undergo chemotherapy as well.

The oncologist told us research has shown that child cancer patients treated on the head will normally suffer some form of damage to the brain, and their IQ levels tend to be lower than normal. Their height development will also be stunted.

Whatever comes, I have faith in God. He will not neglect even a single one of His children, so I entrust Elena into His hands. ★



Editor's Note: Elena was able to return to school after her treatment was completed in January 2007. However, doctors discovered in August that there was a recurrence of the brain tumor, and Elena's health has since declined. We pray that Elena will not suffer, and that God's love and mercy will be upon her and her family.



From Serving Mammon to Entering the Mercy Gate

CY Lai—Taiwan

A SLAVE OF DESIRE

Before I came to know Christ, I believed that as humans, we could rely on our own strength to overcome all obstacles. I thought that as long as I worked hard, I could achieve any goal I had in life.

My wife and I were classmates from pharmaceutical college and we run a pharmacy store in Chia-Yi, Taiwan. We worked very diligently. For six straight years, we did not take a day off. However, I often saw people living comfortably without having to work hard. They simply had good fortune or a family inheritance.

Four years after I opened my store, I renounced atheism and started going to different kinds of Buddhist temples like everyone else around me, hoping that these idols would help me obtain a better career and make more money. It seemed

that materially my life had improved, so I continued my idol worshipping for several years.

But as my material life got better, my desire for making more money also increased. I found that I could not be satisfied with what I had. I became obsessed with the endless pursuit of wealth.

In order to accumulate greater wealth, my mind constantly dwelled on how to invest money. My mother also told me, “There is nothing wrong about borrowing money from banks. All the wealthy people have gotten loans from banks.” So I acquired loans from banks and became a committee member of the pharmacist association in order to fund my investments.

In this way I became what is recorded in the Bible—a slave to Mammon.

Looking back, I really regret what I did. I ask myself, “For whom did I slave away like that?” But at the time, I did not know the true depth of my enslavement.

TURNING POINT

My younger brother came into contact with some members of True Jesus Church when he was studying in Canada. He was there when my father was diagnosed with leukemia, so he called the Chia-Yi church and asked the members there to help my mother.

My mother had grown up in a Catholic family, but she had not been to church for many years and was practically an atheist. My brother reminded my mother to rely on God.

At first, she prayed earnestly to God, asking for His healing, and my father also showed some interest in the gospel. During his stay at Tai-Chung hospital, many members from Tai-Chung church came to visit and pray for him. But he passed away within three months and did not get a chance to be baptized.

My mother suffered greatly from the loss of my father and became reluctant to believe in God. She could not understand why God did not listen to her prayers when others told her so often that prayers are effective.

One day, as my mother was in her room crying, God comforted her by letting her hear the wonderful voices of angels singing hymns. At first my mother thought that it was the voices of church members who had been coming to visit, but when she asked, she found out that no one was singing. My brother told us later that he had often prayed and asked God to comfort her.

This incident helped my mother rethink her belief. Through the Lord's continual comfort, and her own experience, she decided to accept Jesus Christ as her savior. She began to join church services, and not long afterward, she received water baptism and became a member of TJC. She joined Bible study, fellowship, and heard many miraculous testimonies.

My mother lived with me, my wife, and my daughter, and testified to us at meal times hoping that the three of us would accept the gospel. She wanted to pass on the precious belief of salvation in Jesus Christ to us, but I deemed it as rubbish. That attitude brought real heartache to her.

Every time she brought up church, testimonies, and Jesus Christ, I would get very angry. I debated and talked back to

her until she became speechless. I was convinced that a religious life would be a waste of time because I was only interested in pursuing wealth, power, and social status. My mother would often hide in her room, crying and worrying about how to bring us to God.

We broke the bad news to my mother. She did not know how to comfort me, but said the most important words, "You must pray to the Lord Jesus Christ."

Though I refused to accept Christ at this time because I was interested only in money, I was not satisfied with my life. With the business, my wife and I seemed to be pressed for time every day. Losing even three hours of business cost us substantially and affected our ability to keep a balance at the end of the month.

In order to increase our revenue, my wife and I often held meetings to discuss and review details. We sought improvement but instead always ended up in disagreements and fights. We became a very unhappy couple. In others' eyes we seemed to have everything: a nice house, a car, money, and a daughter.

But I was still not content and always compared myself with others. I realize now that all these material things are superficial and insignificant, but I did not know it then.

REALIZATION IN ILLNESS

Our lives took a turn in early April 2003. My wife asked to get a physical exam after feeling fatigued for several days. She had had the same feeling before but never wanted to get checked by a doctor, so it was miraculous that she asked.

A blood test showed that everything was normal except her alpha-fetoprotein

level. My wife had Hepatitis B so this indicator should not have been over 20 mg/ml, but the reading was 30 mg/ml. There was a 90% chance that my wife had liver cancer.

My wife and I were both just over thirty years old. We were at the peak of

our lives and had plans and goals yet to be accomplished. If it were confirmed that my wife had cancer, there would only be a 50% chance for her to live five more years after a successful operation.

Knowing this, our life was full of anxiety, worry, and tears. We did not know what to do. We felt our life to be dark and without hope. We broke the bad news to my mother. She did not know how to comfort me, but said the most important words, "You must pray to the Lord Jesus Christ."

At the time, I wanted nothing more than for my wife to be cured. Even if the operation went well, the doctor could not guarantee my wife's survival. With this thought in mind, I said to myself, "Why not take my mom's suggestion and pray to Jesus Christ, because worshipping idols seems to have been useless?"

Since I did not know how to pray, I just said "Jesus, if you are God, please listen to my prayer." I poured out everything from inside of me to God. I also remembered a lot of my wrongdoings from the past, but I asked, "If the Lord permits, please save my wife."

A few days later, my wife went to a better hospital for a detailed check-up. From the ultrasound, they found a black

spot around two or three centimeters in size. A CAT scan was scheduled for the next afternoon for a more accurate analysis.

The next morning, I prayed in my own way and knelt down before a Bible my mom gave to me. When I studied in Catholic school, the Bible was just decoration in my room to show that I was a knowledgeable person; I never read it. Now that the Bible was right in front of my feet, I thought, “I will take whatever verses I turn to after the prayer as God’s instruction to me.”

After I prayed, I opened up my Bible and it fell on John 4:46-53, which records how Jesus healed the nobleman’s son. I was so thrilled after reading these verses. I ran downstairs to tell my wife that she would be okay in the exam that afternoon because Jesus Christ showed me that she would survive.

On the way to the hospital, I thought to myself, “Jesus, Jesus, if the CAT scans show that my wife does not have cancer, the two of us will believe in you the rest of our lives.” Before we got to the hospital I told my wife my decision, and she expressed that she would believe as well.

That afternoon the report indicated that the black spot was a benign tumor, but behind the black spot was another tumor 1 cm in size. This tumor was possibly malignant. With that in mind, my wife and I went home and began to pray.

A STUBBORN HEART

I did not know how I should pray or if Jesus was even listening to our prayers. I flipped through the Bible and saw James 5:16, which reads, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” I was very touched by



this verse.

I knew that I was not righteous, and neither was my wife, for we had worshipped many idols and lived a proud and irreverent life. So I went to my mother, hoping that she would pray for my wife, and I also asked my mother for the members in church to pray for us. My mother said, “Sure, but there is a spiritual convocation coming up soon, people might be busy now.”

My mother called Pastor Lin of Chia-Yi church right away and he and a few other brothers and sisters wanted to come to my house and pray for us the next day. My wife and I were not happy about that because we wanted to believe in Jesus, but we were not ready to convert.

I had worshipped many idols in the past, but that turned out to be useless. If these church people were like the people in the Buddhist temples, it would be hard to escape from them. But because I

brought up the request to my mom first, I had to treat them as my guests. I decided that if they tried to force us to join the church, I would just pretend that I did not hear them.

The next day, the pastor and the members came to the house. They chatted with us, prayed for us, and did not force us to come to church. It was different from what I expected. I was touched by their love and felt a little ashamed of myself.

I asked the pastor about Matthew 19:16-21, which records the story of the rich young man who asked Jesus what he had to do to receive eternal life. And Jesus told him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Mt 19:21).

I told the pastor that I would do the same if I could receive peace from God. The pastor replied, “Do not take it literally, the teaching is meant for those who are enslaved to money.” I pondered what the

For the first time in a month I felt that my burden was lifted from my shoulders and that my fear and worry were gone.

pastor said but still did not want to go to church.

GOD'S GUIDANCE

One Thursday night about two weeks after the pastor's visit, I was very heavy-hearted, so I took my daughter for a ride on my motorcycle. We passed by Hou-Ping Street and saw a building with the sign, True Jesus Church, Chia-Yi.

It was about seven in the evening and the church was very well lit with the door and windows wide open. I saw a few people singing hymns inside, but no one was in the back of the chapel. All of a sudden, I thought maybe I should go inside to pray. I thought maybe the Lord would hear my prayer and answer it if I came into His church, because the chapel is the house of Jesus.

I asked my daughter if she wanted to go inside and pray. She said, “Okay.” We went into the chapel and sat down in the very last pew. I bowed my head, closed my eyes, and began to pray. When the prayer ended, the chapel was filled with people, and they were a bit shocked to see me, a total stranger, with tears all over my face.

The service proceeded, but I just worried about my own things and kept looking at the ceiling, thinking that God might live there. I stared at the ceiling and prayed to God to relieve my soul from my burden, as tears fell down my cheeks. At the end of the service, the pastor said, “If anyone wants to pray for the Holy Spirit, they are welcome to come to the front.” I thought that maybe God was not able to hear my prayer since I sat so far in the back, so I moved to the front.

Kneeling down in the front surrounded by people with the Holy Spirit, I thought, these people must be the so-called “righteous people” mentioned in James 5:16. It would be so great if they could all just pray ten seconds for my wife. Then I thought about those fighting in the Iraq war; I was filled with compassion for them and started to pray for them. This thought occurred in my mind three times and I continued to pray earnestly.

When the prayer ended, the pastor announced that a first time truthseeker

had received the Holy Spirit. I was that truthseeker. For the first time in a month I felt that my burden was lifted from my shoulders and that my fear and worry were gone.

Three days later, I returned to church wanting to know more about the Holy Spirit, for it gave me such a great feeling of relief. I also continued to study the Bible and wanted to have a sound basis in my belief. I did not want to worship the wrong god as I had done before.

I told my wife that her illness could not be cured by doctors or advanced medical techniques. I stressed that only through prayers could she be healed. Sometimes we got into arguments because of this. But she had been praying secretly without my knowing.

One night, I reminded my wife again about prayer and asked why she did not pray more. She said, “I have been praying.” We both started to cry. Before we slept, I held her hand in mine and prayed fervently. She lay in bed and tears fell down her face. She could not go to sleep until 2 a.m. so I went to the other room and continued to pray.

The next day, while I was in my study, she ran to me in great excitement and said that she had just received the Holy Spirit. Four days later, my mother, who had been baptized for two years, received the Holy Spirit as well. Thank God, in just one week, three of us in the family received the Holy Spirit.

EVIDENCE

My wife continued to take monthly MRIs. Her situation seemed to have stabilized. At the suggestion of a brother, we decided that a liver biopsy would give a better indication of her condition, so we scheduled one in August.

I knew God would answer our prayers according to our faith. God is almighty, and if we hold steadfast to our beliefs He will save us in the end.

When it came time to do the biopsy, we began to get anxious and scared because of the risks associated with it. But then I thought, now that I believe in Jesus, I should not be afraid. I began to pray to the Lord for His help.

One night, in my prayer I pleaded to God, saying that if He wanted me as His disciple, to let me fear no more. I also asked God to show me some evidence so that I could be at peace. I knew that God is an almighty God, so this request was not meant to test Him.

Not long after, God sent me a vision. In my prayer I saw four angels appear in front of me. One of the angels was bigger and had six wings (three pairs), and the body looked shiny and transparent. The angel started to lay hands on me.

Meanwhile, my wife was sleeping on the floor with her body curled up. The other three angels went over to her and laid hands on her head. One of them went near her back and seemed to be working on something. I asked, "What does this mean?" The angel replied, "Did you not ask for evidence? God has heard what you asked, so do not doubt."

I then asked for the angel's name, and the angel replied, "My name is not important; the one you believe, Jesus Christ, is important." I asked once more for the name before I woke up.

The next morning, my wife told me that her back was sore. She wondered if she had been sleeping in an uncomfort-

able position. She still complained about the soreness in her back later that night, so I told her my vision and asked her not to worry. I also said that I would only tell my mom about this, and no one else.

A week later, before we went back to the hospital for the ultrasound, we kept praying to God and hoping that the tumor would not be larger. Thank God, the ultrasound showed that the black spot had totally disappeared. The doctor looked at the ultrasound carefully, but could not find anything. It was gone completely.

Six weeks passed. My wife thought everything was okay, so she went for a blood test without telling me, and did not pray about it beforehand. After going through all these trials, I had learned that I needed to rely on God in everything, so I was unhappy to find out what my wife did.

The report came back that night. It showed that one indicator of liver cancer had doubled. Such a high number indicated a 95% chance that she might have liver cancer. Suddenly, we lost our faith. Doubts and worries filled our hearts. To be prudent, we scheduled another exam in a better hospital the next Monday.

The Sunday before her examination, Chia-Yi Church held a gospel tea fellowship. At the prayer session at the end of the fellowship, my wife and I both knelt down and prayed fervently for God's healing. In the prayer, I heard a clear voice say, "Take heart; I love her more than you do." The voice repeated this three times.

After we went home, my wife told me that in her prayer at church she asked God to comfort me because she knew that I was so worried about her. On Monday, the indicator had dropped from 400 mg/ml to 200 mg/ml. Thank God,

this was another miracle, and we both rejoiced with tears.

TRUE VALUE

I knew God would answer our prayers according to our faith. God is almighty, and if we hold steadfast to our beliefs He will save us in the end. As recorded in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

We came to realize that everything that happened to us was according to God's wonderful will. Thank the Lord our family of three got baptized in March 2004. God had given us the precious Holy Spirit, and we now belong to His holy name.

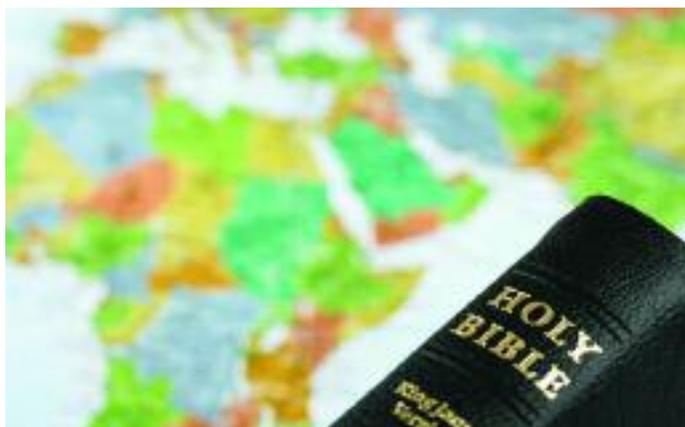
Though human eyes cannot see God, through the abidance of the Holy Spirit, God is manifested within us. It was affirmed to me that the True Jesus Church has the Holy Spirit, complete gospel, and abidance of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know that we can always rely on this Spirit of Truth that has been given to us.

Ever since I came to know the Lord, my life has changed drastically. I know that the purpose of living our lives is to glorify Jesus Christ, to love our family, and to keep the faith. We must also help others find the true meaning of life by preaching to them. Because of the blessings from God, I now live a happy and fulfilling life.

I wish that everyone can come to this church to study the truth and learn that Jesus is the true God; He is the Lord who gives life to us. His merciful gate is always open to everyone, and whoever comes to Him will receive abundant grace and understand the true meaning of life.

May all the glory be unto His name! ★

How to ... Interpret



The holy work of interpretation is essential to spread God's word to different nationalities and countries. It is also vital in delivering sermons to a multi-lingual congregation. Interpreting is more than just processing words from one language to another—interpreters must translate with a spiritual essence in order to edify the congregation. Here are some guidelines to help ensure a well-translated sermon.

PREPARE IN ADVANCE. ON A CONSISTENT BASIS, MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Pray for the guidance and abidance of the Lord.

Bible Knowledge

- Know the books of the Bible
- Be familiar with OT and NT terms
- Be familiar with names and places in the Bible

Church Knowledge

- Understand the essential doctrines (Basic Beliefs) of our church
- Know the history, structure, names, and present condition of our church

General Knowledge

- Expand knowledge in all fields (e.g., literature, history, medicine, etc.)
- Be informed on historical events and keep up with current events

Language Skills

- Learn to pronounce all the Bible books and biblical terminologies correctly
- Read books on effective public speaking and communication

Learning Skills

- Listen to recordings of your own interpretation and make necessary improvements
- Observe and learn from other interpreters

Additional Pointers:

- Be familiar with commonly used expressions and sayings
- Get books on basic terminologies in different languages (e.g. American English All-Purpose Manual, which has Chinese and English terms)

- Keep a notebook on interpretation; take note of words or phrases you don't know
- Talk to the sermon speaker beforehand about the theme and key phrases

DURING INTERPRETATION

- Be reverent, calm, and stay focused
- Use common words (layman's terms) that everyone can understand
 - Keep sentences simple and precise
 - Avoid repeating words
 - Know your audience—be respectful and make appropriate word choices
- Project your voice and enunciate words clearly
 - Be expressive and enthusiastic
 - Maintain the same speed and tone as the speaker
- Stand firm and upright
 - Look towards the audience and avoid looking down at Bible all the time
 - Do not lean on the podium or sway too much
- Be faithful to the words of the speaker
 - Listen carefully: do not make assumptions on what the speaker will say or is saying

AFTER INTERPRETATION

- Look up words and Bible verses that were interpreted incorrectly
- Be able to accept suggestions and constructive criticism
- Continue to practice, learn, correct, and improve

Adapted from the Ministry Guideline Project team

Questions and Answers

Heaven is too “spiritual” and boring. How can you be happy there if you do nothing but worship all day?

“Boredom” is simply another label for the spiritual emptiness in people due to our alienation from God. When we go to heaven, we will not be in our present earthly bodies. The spiritual bodies we will have will be marvelously different. We cannot project our fleshly limitations onto the glorious spiritual state in heaven. The joy of being with the Lord in heaven is “far better” than anything we can experience on earth (Phil 1:23). It’s no wonder Peter, who had only a glimpse of the Christ in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-4), wanted to stay there.



We may think that without earthly pleasures, heaven will be dull. But what our flesh enjoys on earth will seem childish when we are in our spiritual bodies in heaven. As adults, we don’t even think about the toys we “couldn’t live without” when we were children. Likewise, when we are in heaven, we will “put away childish things” (1 Cor 13:9-12). Perfect eternal joy will replace our short-lived earthly joys.

Believers who have “tasted the heavenly gift” and “become partakers of the Holy Spirit” (Heb 6:4) know from personal experience that the joy of spiritual communion with the Lord far surpasses any earthly pleasure. No wonder Paul would rather choose to be with Christ. Even though we have not fully experienced the joy of heaven, our foretaste of God’s immense love through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5; 2 Cor 1:21-22) tells us that heaven is anything but boring.

Is the purpose of prayer to get what we want?

Not exactly. We pray to glorify God (Jn 12:28) and seek after God’s will (Lk 22:42). We can pray to God about everything, but we must never pray against God’s will or His glory. God wants us to ask for His will through prayer—to seek after Him. Like any love in life, we all want to seek after our love and be sought after and loved ourselves. We cannot receive God’s will unless we first ask Him for it. However, if we ask amiss, i.e. against God’s will, we will not receive it even if we continue to ask God for it (Jas 4:2-3). The Bible tells us of many things, relating to God’s will, that we can pray for:

1) Pray for the church:

- Ask the Lord to send out workers (Mt 9:38)
- Pray that God may open a door for the gospel, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ (Col 4:3)
- Pray for words to be given to us, that we may fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel (Eph 6:19-20)
- Pray that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored (2 Thess 3:1)
- Pray for God to renew our days (Lam 5:21)
- Pray for the Lord to stretch out His hand and perform miraculous signs and wonders (Acts 4:30)
- Pray for believers that they may receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-15)

2) Pray for our spiritual life:

- Pray and ask for the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13; Jn 4:10; 7:38-39)
- Ask the Lord to teach us His way (Ps 86:11; Jn 14:26; 1 Cor 2:13)
- Ask God to strengthen us, in our inner being, with power through His Spirit (Eph 3:16)
- Ask God for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so we can know Him better (Eph 1:17; Jas 1:5)
- Ask God to teach us to do His will (Ps 143:10; Heb 13:21)
- Pray that the Lord increases our love and faith (1 Thess 3:10-12)
- Pray in the Holy Spirit that we may be kept in God’s love (Jude 20-21)

Facts, Stats and Syntax



Polls and Statistics

Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents

1. Christianity: **2.1 billion**
2. Islam: **1.3 billion**
3. Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist: **1.1 billion**
4. Hinduism: **900 million**
5. Chinese traditional religion: **394 million**
6. Buddhism: **376 million**
7. primal-indigenous: **300 million**
8. African Traditional & Diasporic: **100 million**
9. Sikhism: **23 million**
10. Juche: **19 million**

(Sizes shown are approximate estimates)

Taken from http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html

Word Study

1) Tanakh (תנ"ך), the word that denotes the Hebrew Bible, is actually an acronym composed by the initial letters of its parts: the Torah (תורה), the Nevi'im (נביאים), and the Ketuvim (כתובים). The Torah includes the Pentateuch, the Nevi'im includes the eight prophetic books, and the Ketuvim includes the rest of the eleven books. Even though the context of the Tanakh is mainly the same as the Old Testament, the Tanakh has 24 books instead of 39 and the books are arranged in a different order.

Did you know...

The shortest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 117.

The middle chapter of the Bible is Psalm 117.

The central chapter of the Bible is also the shortest chapter!

Literary Ministry News

The English Writers Retreat was held this year at Gifford Park church in Edinburgh, UK. Sixteen participants came from around the world: Canada, the US, Singapore, and the UK. (As in recent years, the sisters far outnumbered the brothers.) Thank God for His guidance, the retreat was edifying and fruitful. Through the Bible studies, prayer sessions, and work sessions, we drew closer to God and learned from one another. May God remember the effort of the participants and the local church members.

Bartimaeus and the Rich Young Man

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, UK



A blind beggar sat patiently on the side of the highway waiting for the mercy of those who passed by, not knowing where his next meal would come from. A young man with a golden chain on his waist, clothed in purple and fine linen, strolled down the path from the temple after morning prayer, pausing intermittently as he thought about how to spend the rest of the day.

These two men had completely different life-styles and destinies. One thing they did have in common was an encounter with Jesus. When they encountered God, they had to make a choice. Each chose a different path. And so, their lives remained in stark contrast when the narrative of their stories in the Bible ended.

We often read individual events or verses in the Bible in isolation. No doubt each individual verse or section is rich in meaning and teachings, and close readings may be beneficial and edifying in its own way. Nevertheless, it runs the risk of missing the overarching theme of the gospel and the interrelationship between different stories.

Bartimaeus' encounter with the Lord Jesus, as recorded in the gospel of Mark, teaches us many lessons about true discipleship. Studied in contrast with another story in the same book—the story of the rich young man—we are further reminded of what is expected of one who truly wants to follow Christ.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

In Mark the original Greek word for “to follow” is a term for “to be a disciple.” Jesus called Simon and Andrew and they left their nets to *follow* Him (1:18). When Jesus met Levi, He asked Levi to *follow* Him (2:14). Jesus selected the twelve (3:14f, cf 6:7-13) *to be His disciples* to take part in the mission of preaching and healing.

As one who “follows” as a true disciple, one must deny himself, take up the cross and follow (8:34). A true disciple must learn to serve and be the servant of all (9:35). He seeks to serve rather than be served (10:44-5).

A true disciple is one who sees, hears, understands (4:14-15), and is able to

withstand tribulation and persecution (4:16-17). Hence, he values the teaching of Jesus more than riches (4:18-19), and ultimately strives to successfully bear fruit (4:20).

Our Lord Jesus' life—His suffering and death on the cross—is the ultimate elucidation of the meaning of discipleship.

THE RICH YOUNG MAN— FROM JOY TO SORROW

The young man approached Jesus with eagerness; he ran toward Jesus in haste. It must have been a great and exciting moment in his life to see the rabbi whose fame had spread throughout Galilee. He asked Jesus a poignant question: "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

His privileged upbringing, status in society, and his pious obedience and behavior must have reassured him of a positive commendation by Jesus. Indeed, Jesus' first response reaffirmed what he believed (10:17); he preened himself on observing the commandments. Despite his great wealth, he did not fall prey to licentiousness.

However, his guileless question concealed his ignorance; his confidence deluded him. His question literally meant "What shall I do for myself to inherit eternal life?"

He believed that his good work and observance of the commandments would make him "good"—the very reason he addressed Jesus as the "good Teacher." Jesus rebuffed his appellation in no time

and quickly challenged the man's understanding of goodness. No man can achieve goodness through work alone (10:18), and only God is the source of goodness.

The man considered himself to be good on the basis of his own observation of the law. The young man's attitude was contrary to Jesus' insistence that man must receive the kingdom of God as a child (10:13-16).

The rich man neglected the simplistic faith of a child and wanted to be judged on the basis of his obedience since his youth (10:20). But no one can enter the kingdom of heaven through his effort alone, either rich or poor, for salvation is from God alone (10:27).

Everyone who followed Jesus left something behind (1:18, 20, 2:14, 8:34), and for this man, following would involve leaving all his possessions. The rich man exemplifies the thorny ground in Jesus' parable of the sower (4:7, 18-19). The thorny ground represents those who hear the word, but the cares of this world, the deceit of riches, and the lust for other things choke out the word.

The man claimed to have obeyed all the commandments, but he had neglected the first commandment. Nothing should stand in the way of one's devotion to God (Ex 20:3). Jesus' command to him became a call to repentance, but it was a call left unheeded.

The rich man was not in need materially. He did not believe, for he lacked understanding. He left Jesus empty-handed; for the first time, a person came to Jesus but was not helped by Him. His exuberant outlook on life had turned into despondence and sorrow.

BARTIMAEUS—FROM BEGGAR TO DISCIPLE

Like the disciples who are named when they were called (1:16, 19; 2:14; 3:16-19), Bartimaeus is introduced by name (10:46-52). Unlike the other disciples, who responded to Jesus' calling, Bartimaeus actually cried out first to the Lord, and then Jesus asked him to follow (10:48, 49).

Faith and Insight

Bartimaeus first addressed Jesus as "Son of David" (10:48; cf 12:35-37), an acknowledgement that Jesus is the Messiah (Mt 22:42). He must have heard about Jesus—His teachings, miraculous signs, and healing.

At that time, there was a lot of conflicting information about Jesus' identity. Was He John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the prophets (8:28; Jn 7:40), a rabbi (Jn 1:38), a king (Jn 6:15), or a healer?

Bartimaeus cried out to Jesus because he needed healing. But after his recovery, he chose to follow the Lord. He was after something more important than the resolution of his present predicament. He saw the Lord as more than a mere miracle worker.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked Bartimaeus (10:51). This is the exact question the Lord posed to James and John, under a set of very different circumstances (10:36). James

A true disciple is one who sees, hears, understands, and is able to withstand tribulation and persecution. Hence, he values the teaching of Jesus more than riches, and ultimately strives to successfully bear fruit.

and John's request revealed their blindness; they did not know what to ask for.

They failed to understand or accept the idea of the suffering servant (10:45). What interested them were power and authority—who was the greatest (9:34) and who would sit on the right or left of Jesus (10:37). They failed to accept the meaning of servitude (9:35; 10:45), even after having witnessed many of the Lord's miracles (7:14; 8:17, 21).

Bartimaeus had heard of Jesus' miracles. He understood and asked for restoration of his sight according to God's will. His faith enabled him to overcome the obstacles standing in the way to get to Jesus. His faith not only healed but also saved him (10:52).

The original Greek word that is translated as "to heal" (5:34; cf Mt 9:22) is the same as "to save" (Mt 19:25; Lk 18:26; Acts 2:40; Jas 5:20). Bartimaeus was healed physically and saved spiritually through faith.

Faith brings courage

The disciples were constantly in fear (5:15, 6:50, 9:6, 32, 10:32, 16:18) because of their lack of faith and understanding. In comparison, we see how the insight and faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman enabled her to overcome obstacles to get to Jesus (7:26-30).

Bartimaeus was persistent; the crowd rebuked him (10:48, cf 10:13), but he refused to be silenced. His exuberant faith was in contrast to that of the disciples. His persistence enabled him to overcome obstacles, and his eagerness was shown by jumping up when he realized that Jesus asked for him.

Giving up everything

It was the custom of the period for a beggar to place a garment on the ground by the road. When people walked past, they threw spare change on the garment.

To Bartimaeus the garment was his livelihood, like a boat or net to a fisherman. Yet when he was called, even

before he gained his sight, he cast aside his mantle.

This is a pattern with the followers of Jesus who left everything behind to follow Him: Simon and Andrew left their nets behind (1:18), James and John left their father (1:20), Levi left his occupation (2:14), Peter and the disciples left



everything to follow Jesus (10:21), the widow left all in the treasury (12:42), and a woman emptied her alabaster jar of perfume on Jesus (14:3).

Following Jesus whole-heartedly

After Jesus healed Bartimaeus, He said “Go your way” (10:52a). Unlike the case of the twelve disciples, Jesus often sent those He had healed back to their own lives (1:43; 2:11; 5:19).

Not everyone is gifted and chosen to be a full-time disciple or minister. It is up to Him to choose. But every human being, the great and the good, the lowly and the dejected, can take up their cross and follow Jesus.

Bartimaeus chose to follow Jesus all the way to Jerusalem (10:52b-11:1). That was a path that led to necessary suffering (8:31, 9:31, 10:32). The disciples did not understand (9:31), and many followers were afraid (10:32), but Bartimaeus chose to follow Jesus without turning back.

THE RICH YOUNG MAN—A CONTRAST TO BARTIMAEUS

The rich man had many possessions (10:22), but Bartimaeus had few (10:46). This difference, however, was not the deciding factor for the way things turned out in their relationship with the Lord Jesus. Other factors were more pertinent.

The rich man asked what he should do for himself to inherit eternal life (10:17). Bartimaeus only asked for mercy (10:51). The rich man had a wrong understanding of Jesus as merely the “good Teacher” (10:17), perhaps just another famous rabbi in town. Bartimaeus called Jesus the Son of David (10:47-48).

The rich man wanted to be judged on the basis of his obedience (10:20), but Bartimaeus followed Jesus with faith. The

With his simple faith and total trust, Bartimaeus was saved. He did not desire position and privilege, but simply wanted to see.

rich man was commanded to sell his possessions and follow Jesus (10:21). The rich man did not sell (10:22), but Bartimaeus left all behind (10:50, 52). The rich man left Jesus in sorrow (10:22), but Bartimaeus followed Jesus with joy.

A TRUE DISCIPLE

So who then is able to be saved (10:26)? Many believers are satisfied with their relationship with God, with their contributions and their observations of the commandments. But one thing is lacking—they are unwilling to bear their cross to follow Jesus.

With his simple faith and total trust, Bartimaeus was saved (10:52). He did not desire position and privilege, but simply wanted to see. He believed, saw, and followed. God’s grace had given him hope and a new life, but he did not waste his life on worldly pursuits.

Rather, he dedicated his life to follow Jesus. He gave up everything before he was healed; he gave up his new-found freedom after he was healed. That exemplifies what it means to fulfill the demands of being a true disciple of Jesus. ★



Conquering Addictions

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches us to be like light and salt, to be a good example for others in our conduct and faith. We strive to follow this teaching because we are pursuing the heavenly kingdom. We want to be able to say, like Paul, that we have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith.

Our faith is reflected through our daily lives, and not only through the moments we spend at church or doing holy work. The smallest mistakes we make and bad habits that we have keep us from being blameless children of God. The theme articles encourage us to be worthy of our status by maintaining our spirituality. When we are close to God, we will have discipline and self-control. The attractions of the world will not hold us when we are filled with God's word and spirit.



Conquering Addictions

Adapted sermon by GH Chen—Irvine, California, USA

IT'S HARDER THAN IT SEEMS

Jason was a thirty-six-year-old carpenter who had accidentally cut off four fingers on his right hand. In the emergency room, he begged the doctor to help save and reattach his fingers. His request was not outrageous, given the advancement of science and technology. In fact, doctors reattach body parts every day.

But when Jason's doctor found out that he smoked one and a half packs of cigarettes a day, he explained how smoking causes blood clots, and that one cigarette is enough to constrict blood vessels and stop blood flow to the reattached fingers, leading to tissue death. If this happened, the reattachment surgery would be useless.

In that instant, Jason threw away the pack of cigarettes in his pocket and resolved that he would never smoke again.

For anyone with an addiction, this true story probably sounds all too familiar. After all, what addict doesn't know that their

addiction—especially an intoxicating addiction like smoking—is harmful?

The problem is, unfortunately, it may sometimes take an extreme motivation to overcome an addiction. And, if the addiction is too severe, even the most extreme motivation is not enough to stop us from doing something we clearly know will carry severe consequences. Conquering an addiction is much harder than it seems.

Fortunately for Jason, the reattachment surgery turned out to be a success, and he was discharged from the hospital five days later and sent home. But unexpectedly, his fingers turned cold and black and Jason was rushed back to the emergency the next day. Despite knowing what would happen if he smoked after the surgery, he could not resist.

Over the next ten days, Jason went in and out of the surgical room three times. In the end, the doctors had no choice but to

remove the dead tissues—leaving only the base of his fingers.

PREVENTION IS KEY

The surest solution to the problem of addiction is to never allow ourselves to be addicted or given over to anything. An addiction is like a weed. If the land is carefully taken care of, weeds cannot take root and grow. But once they take root, they will grow quickly even without any tending.

There are some areas we can pay attention to and good habits we can develop if we are serious about preventing addictions.

Think of the consequences

Frequently remind ourselves of the consequences of an addiction. We need to learn to see beyond the present and be able to foresee where a path will lead us (Prov 23:26-35). And the Bible tells us that the path of addiction leads to destruction.

Because addictions consume energy and focus, they can destroy a person’s future, good name, marriage, and family. Furthermore, addiction can damage other interpersonal relationships and bury a person in guilt. Even a person who has a good life can lose everything if he is enmeshed in an addiction.

Take a look at Tom’s story. Tom was a pharmacist. But after he became addicted to poker, he would often close his pharmacy clinic and hit the casinos. It wasn’t until he didn’t have enough money to make ends meet for several months

and began asking his wife for support that she knew he had a gambling problem.

Tom decided to stop gambling—making promises to his wife and resolving to change his life around. But as good as his intentions were, he couldn’t stop.

In the end, he lost his clinic and was greatly in debt—these were the immediate things he gambled away. But even more devastating than these, he gambled away the good life he had built up, he lost his dignity, and he hurt his family.

It is important to remember that we are the light of the world (Mt 5:14), and that God calls us to a higher purpose while we are in this world. And when we lose sight of that higher purpose and lose ourselves in the temptations of this world, we dishonor the Lord Jesus’ name. One day, He will hold us accountable for our actions.

Never compromise

How do we get into an addiction in the first place? It often starts with a small compromise.

When we compromise, we let our guard down to do something we know is wrong. While our guard is down and Satan’s temptation comes, we are in no position to defend ourselves. Slowly, our addictions build up from small to great, from shallow to deep. Satan will continue to tempt us and control us through our addictions.

From the outside, people may not see the beginnings of our addiction, but Satan knows. Satan is cunning, and he will not waste any opportunity (Eph 6:16). In fact, we ourselves may not notice or acknowledge that we may have a potential problem, but the addiction is already born.

No one purposely seeks addiction, but temptation is all around us. So we need to carefully and painstakingly address

anything that could cause an addiction. If temptations come, we must put up our shield. For if we “resist the devil...he will flee from [us]” (Jas 4:7).

The moment we start to see ourselves forming a bad habit, stop it while it is still in its infancy. Otherwise, it will be hard to change once it has snowballed and become a full-fledged addiction.

It is important that we know our own weaknesses better than our enemy. We need constant spiritual closeness with God for Him to show us those hidden compromises that we make every day. In order to be victorious over Satan’s schemes, we have to be wiser and sharper than our enemy. We need to know ourselves better than he knows us—only then will we call out to the Lord to help us.

Pay attention to our surroundings

Nobody willingly walks into an active battlefield because they know they will get hurt. Every bodily instinct tells us to find the quickest route out of that danger zone. We need to treat our addictions the same way.

The problem with a lot of places that encourage sinful behavior or addictions is that there is no sign on the door that says, “Danger!” In fact, if there are signs, the signs would say “enjoyment,” “entertainment,” or “the best time of your life.” When we read these signs, part of us believe it, too.

If we have certain habits that we have noticed to be problematic, distance ourselves from the place where that habit thrives. If we like a hand of poker more than a “healthy” dose, then don’t agree to go to the Thursday BBQ-chicken-wing poker night after work. If we are drawn to certain unclean images on some magazines, don’t go to a magazine store, and vary our route so we avoid passing it.

We need constant spiritual closeness with God for Him to show us those hidden compromises that we make every day.

Don't let ourselves step into an environment where we are not in control of our own actions and where our weaknesses become extremely sensitive and vulnerable. Fighting addictions require much work on our part; no one said it will be easy. And walking away may just be the hardest thing to do.

So pay attention to your surroundings, and get out of the battlefield as quickly as possible when you see it. The closer we are to God, the more sensitive we are to the danger level of every place and environment we put ourselves in. Recognizing the danger zone has everything to do with our spirituality.

Build and maintain a regulated life

Cultivate a habit of reading the Bible, kneeling in prayer, and attending church services.

This cannot be emphasized enough, so I will say it again: Read the Bible. Pray. And go to church.

Have the same attitude as Jeremiah when he said to God, "Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer 15:16).

God's words nourish our spirit. But we must make the effort to feed our spirit, and enjoy the time we spend doing so.

It is also essential to live a life of prayer and always be filled by the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). When we are filled with wine, we are easily controlled by its intoxication. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we can easily overcome our addiction (Rom 8:13).

The more we pray the more we are filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14, 2:4, 4:31). We must pursue joy in the Holy Spirit through prayer (Rom 14:17).

Attending church services regularly is paramount to growing a mature spirituality. When we go to church, we need to

spend time with others in fellowship and build each other up in love (Eph 4:16).

By filling our life with the word and spirit of God, we will be able to resist temptations and prevent bad habits. We need a relationship with God that is so close that there is no room left for our desires to turn elsewhere.

WALK BACK INTO THE LIGHT

What should we do when an addiction has already taken root?

In this case, it is necessary to spend enough time and energy to conquer it. If an addiction is not fully removed, it will overcome us. And it would be easy for an addiction to destroy us because, by this point, we would have also become spiritually weak. There is no such thing as enjoying the things of the world and being very close to God.

We cannot forget that we have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, and we have the abidance of the Holy Spirit. We must remember that we are a special people called out by God Himself to walk out of darkness and come into His light (1 Pet 2:9). Therefore, no matter how our grim our situation may be, we must be determined to conquer the addiction and walk back into the light.

Examine ourselves

The road to healing is to deeply examine ourselves before the Lord. The presence of the devil coupled with our own sinful nature creates the perfect recipe for temptations and sin. We need to ask God to search our minds and identify those things that are wicked within us (Ps 139:23, 24).

Examining ourselves is not for God's sake. God tells us to do this because it is for our own good. The one who is blind is not God, and it's not Satan—both of them



see us clearly for all our weaknesses and our strengths.

We dig deep inside and evaluate ourselves because we want to see what lies beneath, we need to improve our spirituality, and we need to find out what is keeping us from being that beacon of light God wants us to be.

When we see ourselves clearly for who we are, this is no cause for defeat. This is the beginning of healing. We have to acknowledge our sins and repent, and admit our wrongdoings and weaknesses.

With God's strength we need to be determined to return to the right path—relying on His grace and mercy to do so. Ask Him to give us a right and healthy life (Rom 7:22-25).

Walk away from harmful situations

Just as it is important to prevent addictions by being aware of one's surroundings, it is necessary for addicts to remove themselves completely from tempting places and people. Departure must happen after repentance.

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Having made a resolution to turn back to the correct path, we cannot go back to the places that fed our addiction.

Think about and write down a list of places, people, and environments in your life that cause you to let your spiritual guard down. In the column next to it, write down what the consequences of those influences were. Then think about this—was it worth it to stay there, or would it have been better to have walked away?

They say hindsight is 20/20. After we go through this exercise, we need to take it one step further—we need to walk back into the light. God loves us, and He will help us when we cannot help ourselves.

Ask for God's help

Cry to the Lord to pull us out of our addiction. If we have made the determination to stop our addiction, it will be much easier to do so with God's help. Cry out with a contrite and sincere heart just like Peter, who cried out with all his might "Lord save me" when he was about to sink into the water (Mt 14:30).

God is all-powerful. He will help us in our struggles; all we need to do is ask. "[W]ith God all things are possible" (Mt 19:26).

Maybe we feel we don't deserve God's help, maybe we feel too ashamed to come before the presence of the Lord, or maybe we have already made up our mind that God won't help us anyway—we've gone too far off the path to merit help. Sometimes, our sins blind us to who God truly is.

These thoughts we have actually don't prove right our made-up theories. Neither do they accurately portray God and His attributes. What these internal dialogues show is our lack of faith.

Asking for help takes faith. If we find that we do not have enough, we can ask

*Asking for help takes faith.
If we find that we do not
have enough, we can ask
God for more.*

God for more. Therefore, search deeply in ourselves and examine our heart, walk away from the people and places that hurt us, then kneel and repent and ask God for help. But as we ask, we also need to have faith that He can do what we cannot do for ourselves.

After God saves us from our addiction, we will be profitable to ourselves and to others (Phil 1:11).

Find spiritual friends

There is one more place where we can turn to for help to walk back into the light. We need to find spiritual friends or older mentors whom we trust, and acknowledge our struggles and problems to them.

There seem to be a common phenomenon among addicts of any sort—they start to alienate themselves from people they love and people who love them. Similar to the saying, "misery loves company," addicts also tend to gravitate towards other addicts who share the same problem. But this only causes them to walk further away from the light they're supposed to head towards.

After we recognize our problem and start to look for help, one of the first things we can do is to reconnect with people we have distanced ourselves from—especially those who are close to God. Drawing close to them will help us draw closer to God. This is a step in the right direction.

We can ask for their prayers of intercession, as well as encouragement and guidance in our daily life. Let them check

on us and remind us of our weaknesses (1 Sam 13:11; 2 Kgs 5:25).

We may wish to form a small group in our life with whom we can be honest and transparent. Have them ask us personal and intimate questions, especially if they notice anything suspicious. The daily struggles that come with overcoming an addiction will be easier to manage with spiritual friends to help us.

We can think of addiction as an unlikely boomerang: we throw it out in pleasure but it comes back to us in pain.

And it can be any addiction: smoking, drinking, gambling, cheating, pornography, video games, television, lying, cursing—it can be subtle or it can be blatant. As long as it has a hold of us and causes us to lose self-control and our spiritual integrity, it can become an addiction.

We need to wake up from our spiritual slumber and redeem the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:14-21 records so many wonderful things that are godly and spiritual and which we can addict ourselves with; that is, His words, His psalms, His hymns, His melody, His joy, and His spirit.

*Therefore [God] says:
"Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light."
See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time,
because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God. ★*



Why I Got Rid of Cable TV

Vuthy Nol-Mantia—Pacifica, California, USA

THE KNOW-DO GAP

It is reported that the average American watches more than four hours of television each day—equivalent to twenty-eight hours per week—making it the third most consuming activity behind sleep and work.¹

Before coming to Christ eight years ago, I also watched TV for five or six hours a day. I worked as a counselor at the time, and after a stressful day of listening to my clients' depressing problems, my routine was to come home and unwind in front of the television.

It was an outlet for me to temporarily escape my thoughts, be entertained, and

forget about the day's troubles. This seemed like a harmless and autonomous activity, but as I drew closer to God, I became keenly aware that many programs on TV portrayed offensive content that was damaging to my spirituality.

God's standard for us is so much higher than I imagined. He wants us to be holy as He is holy, calling us to be sober and not conform to the lusts we used to give in to in the past (1 Pet 1:13-16).

But there is a huge gap between knowing and doing.

My problem was, even after God had revealed this truth to me, I still found watching TV pleasurable. I heard the

inner voice telling me to stop, but I could not obey it.

For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do...For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. (Rom 7:15-19)

HARMLESS POISON

One time, I was watching *Friends* while running on the treadmill. Later that day when I knelt down to pray, I felt like my

THEME

heart was defiled and I was far away from God. God made me understand that even though watching a half-hour sitcom like *Friends* seemed harmless, it was in fact poisoning my spiritual health.

Although there were no explicit sex scenes, the implicit jokes about sex and relationships were just as abominable to God, and could easily fall under the type of “coarse jesting” that Christians should avoid (Eph 5:4).

I came to the realization that if thirty minutes of watching *Friends* could instantly defile me, then there were many worse things on cable TV that could pull me further away from God. So I determined in my heart to pray to God and ask for strength to get rid of my cable subscription.

Although I had already been baptized for six months, this was still a very hard thing to do. I remember feeling somewhat lost when I first unplugged my cable. My eyes and fingers had become adept at clicking through the many cable channels searching for something “interesting” to watch.

Now, I would come home from work, flip on the TV, and get frustrated trying to watch the four or five local channels available. Because I lived across from a movie rental store, I started renting movies. I found myself renting movies more and more frequently, and at one point, every day.

This went on for about one year before I could admit to myself that I was simply getting my fix from another source.

BE FILLED WITH GOD

There’s a story about a scorpion who wanted to cross the river to the other side. He saw a fox and asked the fox if he

could carry him over. The fox said, “No way, if I let you on my back, you will sting me, and I will drown in the water.”

The scorpion replied, “Don’t be silly. If I sting you, then you will drown, but so will I.” The fox thought to himself, that’s true, he would drown too, so he agreed to take the scorpion on his back.

The first step to overcoming an addiction is to acknowledge its harm. The second step is reconciliation to God through repentance.

But as they were halfway across the river, the scorpion stung him, and they both started to drown. The fox shouted at the scorpion in bewilderment, “Why did you sting me? Now we are both going to drown!” The scorpion shook his head and replied, “I know, but I couldn’t help it. I am a scorpion, and it is in my nature to sting.”

Similarly, conquering a sinful addiction is not easy because it is in our fallen nature to sin.

By definition, an addiction is an irrepressible compulsion to repeat a behavior—no matter the consequences. And Satan had me on a hook. Only by God’s grace was I able to overcome.

For a full month, I did not rent anything. Instead, I just focused on praying and reading God’s words. I remember at one point during that period, I felt like renting a movie. I went to the movie store, walked around for half an hour, couldn’t find anything interesting to watch, and finally walked out empty-handed.

I realized from this incident that when we are filled with the Spirit and word of God, we don’t need anything external to stimulate us but are completely full and satisfied in God Himself.

But the converse is also true. If we are more carnally minded, we will instinctively seek for carnal things to fill our hearts. I remembered that several months prior, when I was not praying and reading the Bible as much, I had no problem leaving the video store with an armful of blockbusters to watch.

We have to make the choice to stop bad habits and start filling ourselves with God—it isn’t going to happen on its own. It takes conscious effort to begin praying and reading the Bible every day.

BE IN THE 1.5% CATEGORY

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. (1 Cor 6:12)

The first step to overcoming an addiction is to acknowledge its harm. The second step is reconciliation to God through repentance.

Oftentimes, we persist in a bad behavior because we do not think it’s a big deal relative to worse sins others are committing. But the point here is that it’s not about us—what we like or what we feel. It’s about God—what He requires of us and how it pleases Him.

Because He is the Creator and we are the created, He has the authority to set the rules and we have the responsibility to abide by them (Rom 9:19-20).

Through continued prayer and studying God’s word, I was finally able to get rid of my TV and VCR altogether. That’s right—for the last seven years,

I've transitioned over to the 1.5% category of American households that do not own a TV.²

The surest way to resist temptation is to simply walk away from it, and it just worked out better for me to not have a TV in the house. That's not to say that the other 98.5% of the population are misguided.

Actually, there is nothing sinful about TV itself. Like any other form of media, there are good and bad content. The underlying problem is that, more often than not, we do not have the self-control to limit how much time we spend in front

of the tube, and we lack the discernment to only watch programs that are appropriate for Christians.

The fruit of the Spirit is self-control (Gal 6:22-23). We do not have self-control when we are not filled with the Holy Spirit. We are not filled with the Holy Spirit because we do not pray and read the Bible enough.

So the simple but profound solution to every human problem, including TV addiction, is drawing ourselves closer to God in prayer and worship, and abiding in His words. ★

Sidebar of Statistics on TV

- By age 18, a U.S. youth will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence.
American Psychiatric Association.
<http://www.parentstv.org/PTC/facts/mediafacts.asp>
- Number of TV commercials seen by the average person by age 65: 2 million
<http://www.csun.edu/science/health/docs/tv&health.html#influence>
- In a sample of programming from the 2001-2002 TV season, sexual content appeared in 64% of all TV programs.
<http://www.parentstv.org/PTC/facts/mediafacts.asp>
- Heavy TV viewers exhibit five dependency symptoms—two more than necessary to arrive at a clinical diagnosis of substance abuse. These include: 1) using TV as a sedative; 2) indiscriminate viewing; 3) feeling loss of control while viewing; 4) feeling angry with oneself for watching too much; 5) inability to stop watching; and 6) feeling miserable when kept from watching.
<http://www.csun.edu/science/health/docs/tv&health.html#influence>

Tips to Control TV Viewing

Even if you are not ready to get rid of the television, you can still control how much time you spend watching it.

Plan out your TV time. Keep a log of the TV shows you watch within one week. Eliminate all programs that you watch only because the TV is still on, or because you don't know what else to do. Make a schedule of your free time, and put in other activities during the times you otherwise would spend watching TV—take a walk, read a book, etc.

Unplug the TV and hide the remote. Because it will take some effort and time to plug in the TV and find the remote, you will probably think of something else to do instead.

Cancel the satellite or cable subscription. Reducing the number of channels available also reduces the temptation to watch. You also save on the monthly cable or satellite bills.

¹Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Dept. of Labor, U.S. Government. American Time Use Survey (ATUS) 2003. Released September 2004

²The Digital Dilemma.

<http://www.knowledgenetworks.com/know/2005/spring/article5.html>



Tofu Custard and Orange Peel: How God Arranged Our “Unlikely” Match

Daniel Leung—Merced, California, USA

Even though my wife, Emily, and I began our relationship in 2002, I feel that God prepared our path long ago. The first time I met her was during the National Youth Theological Seminar held in Philadelphia in 1997. I remembered Emily because she was a member of the church in Philadelphia, and she always seemed to be running around, very busy.

Actually, she didn't remember me. Emily and I had to show each other the

pictures to prove that I was there. Emily's dad, however, remembered me—and that would be important later. Why did he remember me? Because I helped him carry a lot of bottles of water. So I encourage brothers who are single to help out in church. It's really amazing because from a little thing we do, we can receive great blessings.

The second time I met Emily was half a year later. At that time I was studying in

Wisconsin, and I flew back to California for winter break. Unfortunately, I didn't have a place to stay, and the church in Garden Grove was hosting a student spiritual convocation. So I attended the convocation while lodging at church.

After the convocation, they also hosted a literary ministry seminar, and I was forced to stay. During the seminar, I met Emily again. She gave me the same impression—very busy, running around.

I noticed another quality of hers: she can write well. That was the second time I met her, though she again didn't have much of an impression of my being there. Even though I had met her twice, we didn't really talk either time.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Three years later, in the spring of 2001, I suddenly received an e-mail from a preacher. He mentioned that a brother had told him about me, and said that I was a good brother. The preacher said there was a sister in Philadelphia church who was also very good. So he asked me to write her an e-mail if I was interested.

My first thought upon reading that e-mail was that he had written the wrong Daniel, because there are many Daniels in Southern California. But I read it again, and he also mentioned the Northridge Prayer House (which is now Canoga Park church) and I was the only Daniel there.

So my second reaction was "No way! It's impossible—is this preacher for real?" Because to me, Emily is like tofu custard, because she is very gentle, soft and sweet, but I am just like orange peel—rough and bitter. I just felt there was no way we could be a match for each other.

Of course, that was not my main reason. I wasn't ready at the time because I had just started working and my life was not that stable. I needed to support my family, and my sister was going to college in two years. In addition, since the prayer house in Northridge was growing, a lot of holy work needed to be done, and I thought that I didn't have the time and effort for a relationship.

So I prayed about it, but I did not feel good about it. Since I received the e-mail from the preacher, I assumed that it was just between him and me. I assumed Emily didn't know about it. I thought if I

were to write her an e-mail she might not have any idea what was going on.

So I deleted the e-mail from the preacher, and I didn't write to anyone—neither to the preacher nor to Emily. I just kept it in prayer and believed that God would prepare my future.

A SECOND TRY

My busy life helped me forget about the incident. I also assumed that Emily might be with a better brother already.

A year and a half later, in November 2002, a seminary student and his wife asked me to dinner, and I thought they wanted to discuss some things for the upcoming National Church Conference. That was true, but it was only part of the dinner. After we finished discussing church business, they asked me if I was still interested in getting to know Emily.

I was shocked, because I wasn't prepared for this conversation. So I told them what I did one and a half years ago and that I thought Emily probably was not free to begin a courtship with me anymore.

But this seminary student and the marriage counselor in Philadelphia church apparently had been occupied with this holy work. He told me that he had just come back from Philadelphia, and that he had talked to her parents. He also quoted Emily as saying, "He still hasn't written me."

When I heard this my heart sank, because I didn't know she knew about it, and I was very embarrassed. I didn't know how I could write to her, even though I wanted to. At the beginning, I was pretty insistent that I did not want to start the courtship for the same old reasons. But through prayers and encouragement from the student and his wife, I decided to give it a try, without expecting too much.

I thought she would be mad at me, so I sent her an e-card and apologized to her, and explained why I had not written. Within twenty-four hours, she replied and said she wasn't mad. Afterward, I felt better, so I spoke to my mom over the phone and asked for permission to start a relationship. She agreed, and Emily and I started to e-mail each other.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND SHARED GOALS

In January 2003, Emily came to Southern California for a church meeting. I arranged to drive her from Irvine church to Canoga Park church for Sabbath service. Since I didn't usually drive to the Irvine area, we got lost along the way.

I drove onto a toll highway towards Riverside, which is east of Los Angeles. Canoga Park is to the north and west of Los Angeles. I was very frustrated at the time because we were in the middle of the mountains, and I had to keep myself calm.

I kept saying "Hallelujah" in my mind, until we stopped at the toll station, and I asked the toll officer for directions back. By that time, I thought she must have known that we were lost.

I've talked about this testimony with her after we were married, and Emily has told me that one of the lessons she learned through our relationship is, "First impressions are not always right." What does that mean? I'll let her share her side of the testimony.

After the service, we managed to meet at the house of the seminary student. As we chatted with his wife, I discovered that God had planted another seed even earlier.

During the conversation, I asked Emily if an elderly brother from Philadelphia Church was doing all right. In the summer

of 1996, when I went back to Hong Kong for summer vacation, there was an elderly brother traveling from Philadelphia to China, who stopped in Hong Kong. At the time, I didn't even know who Emily was. Since I was free on summer break, the preacher asked me to take him around.

After I told her the story, Emily told me that the elderly brother was her grandfather. She said that her grandfather had talked about a nice brother who had taken him around Hong Kong. She finally knew that it had been me. Indeed, God's plan is truly amazing.

After chatting, I took Emily to dinner, and after dinner we took a walk. As we walked, we immediately began to talk about our spiritual goals. She told me that serving God was very important to her, and that she would still serve God even after she got married. When I heard this, I checked off the first item on my mental checklist.

In the past, I had seen a lot of youths in church who lost their fervency for the Lord after starting a relationship. I didn't want to be like that—I would rather stay single. I used to call myself “Daniel Paul” to keep my distance from sisters in church. But that was the past.

As we talked that evening, God seemed to check off all the items on my checklist. I was pretty sure that she was the one, that we would be compatible. At the time, I didn't think about our differences.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR COURTSHIP

We began to talk over the phone after that. We couldn't talk much because she was on the East Coast and I was on the West Coast, and it was hard to find a time that would work for the both of us. Most

of our conversations were about our background, family, and church.

In April 2003, I was laid off, so I had time to fly to Philadelphia and visit Emily and her family. During that week, I attended the spiritual convocation in Philadelphia; people thought I had come

I've learned that our true match is when we have differences, because from the differences we can learn from each other and help each other improve.

just for that event since nobody knew about our courtship.

After the convocation, Emily took me around her hometown. She said one thing during that trip that confirmed my feelings that she was the one. She said, “Bring me with you when you serve the Lord.” I thank God that He gave me a very good helper.

Two days before I left for California, the thought of engagement crossed my mind. I called my mom again for permission, and she was surprised because it had only been four months. My father was especially surprised because I had told my mom not to tell him about the courtship, since he tends to worry a lot. I wanted to make sure that everything was right before I told him about it—but it all happened so fast. Thank God, they were very happy.

The next day, the day before I left, Emily and I had lunch with her mom. At the end of the meal, I asked her mom if I could marry Emily, and if we could arrange for an engagement. I think my question surprised Emily, her mom, and

even myself. Her mom replied with a laugh—I guess it was a happy laugh.

After lunch, Emily and I went to shop for the engagement ring. I proposed to her in front of a convenience store as we were standing at the intersection, waiting to cross the street at a red light.

That's how God arranged our marriage. After we were engaged, everyone heard the news, and most of my religious education students couldn't believe it until I showed them the pictures.

I really thank God for His arrangement. Throughout this experience, I truly understand what it means when the Bible says to seek His kingdom first, and everything else will be given to us.

An Important Principle

At the beginning of our relationship, I mentioned to Emily that I had a principle. I told her that I wouldn't hold her hand before our wedding. A kiss was definitely out of the question. Since East Coast people seem to like to hug each other, any hugging would be limited to friendly hugs, and only on special occasions, and only for a few seconds.

She was surprised. She felt it was unbelievable, so I explained to her why. When I was a Junior 2 student in my religious education class, my classmates and I made the determination that the next person who held our hand would

be our spouse. So we kept this determination.

Also, I truly wanted God to attend our wedding and give us His blessing. Yes, we can have a wedding in church, but it doesn't mean that God will be attending. I looked forward to the blessings of God because, as our preacher and teacher in Hong Kong counseled, a life without God's blessing is very pitiful.

Once I explained this to her, she seemed to accept it. That's how we managed our relationship before the wedding. During our wedding day, we really thanked God that we did this, because it can be considered the most memorable day of our life. For, whatever we did, it was for the first time. We felt so close to each other.

THE BLESSINGS OF MARRIAGE

Gradually, after the wedding, we both felt that the blessings of God were upon us. His blessings are the differences that we have. If I ask anyone who knows us, they can give us a list of differences without a problem.

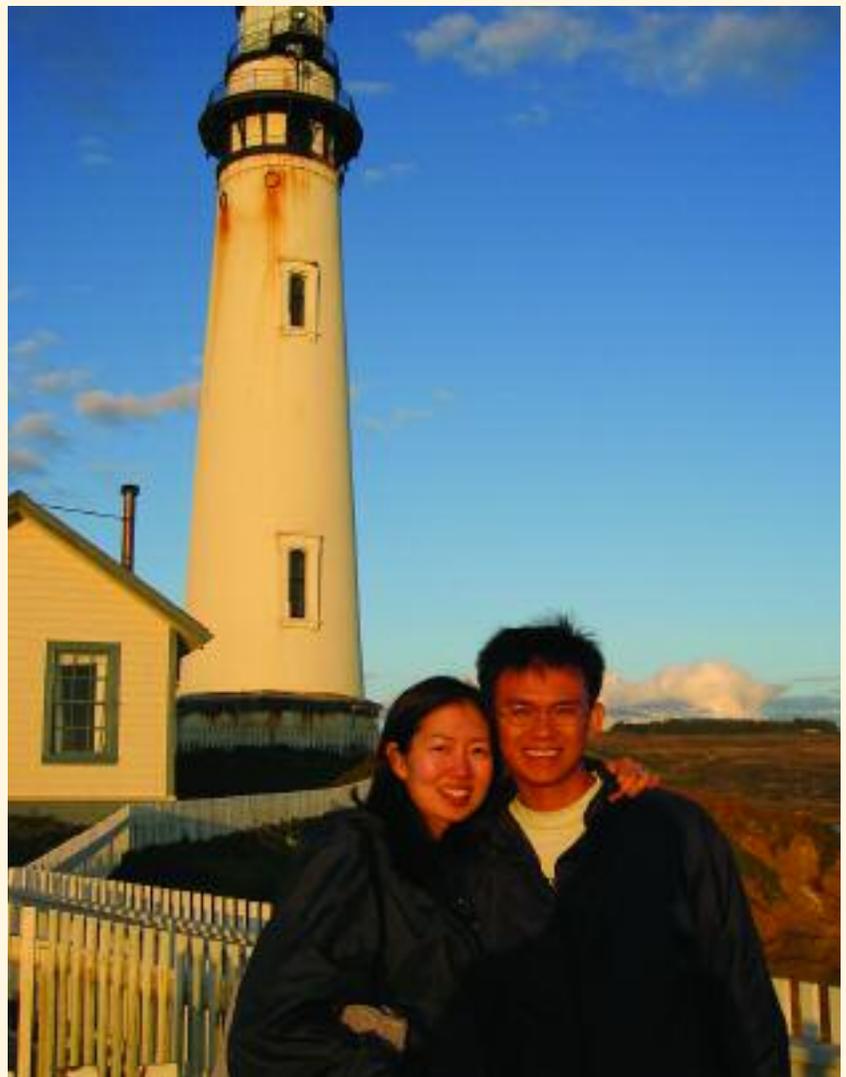
On the other hand, I feel these differences are truly God's blessings. For example, Emily likes to read. She majored in literature. She reads and thinks a lot, but because she thinks too much she gets herself in trouble.

But for me, the only thing I finish reading is the Bible and church publications. I hardly think at all. So sometimes I can help release her troubles.

Emily is a librarian; but when I'm around a lot of books, I get a headache. I study better at home than at the library. I've improved, though—I'm almost finished with the second book she gave me to read.

I've learned that our true match is when we have differences, because from the differences we can learn from each other and help each other improve. The more differences we have, the more blessings we have. If everything about us were the same, then one of us would be unnecessary. So I thank God.

I praise and thank God He has given me the most wonderful gift in the world: that is, a wonderful wife and her family. May all the glory be unto His holy name.★



Work Addiction

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, UK



WHAT IS WORK ADDICTION?

Addiction is the condition of being habitually or compulsively occupied with or involved in something. It is an inability to extricate oneself from a state of mind or behavior which is, knowingly or unknowingly, beyond one's control.

Work addiction is an unrestrained demand for constant engagement in work. In Japan, it is called *karoshi*—death by overwork. In the Netherlands, it is described as “leisure illness,” affecting 3% of the population. Workers are physically sick on weekends and vacations as they stop working.

Work addiction is one kind of addiction that is more subtle and very often misunderstood. Some corporate cultures unknowingly support, encourage, and reward work addiction. Those who are addicted to work are driven to perform even harder and accomplish even more. They cannot stop working until they suffer serious consequences.

THE CAUSES OF WORK ADDICTION

We have been brought up in a competitive society. We want to be the best, or at least reach the limit of our potential. In this high-pressured society, our desires to provide a decent living for our family or to make a contribution to society become the main driver of our life.

How much effort have we put into our annual appraisal or professional development? We want to be seen in the best light, don't we?

The work addicts feel that they have to achieve certain standards. Such a mindset is driven by their self-projected and self-imposed image. They have an overdeveloped sense of self-importance. They are likely in occupations that are considered as in a different class. They are unable to make sense of today's success; there is always a guilty feeling in their mind that they have to do more.

Work addicts use work to manage, control and avoid their insecurity. Success would lead to the desire or ambition to

achieve even more. Failure would lead to frustration and irrational behavior, which itself reinforces their misconception that they are not working hard enough.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF WORK ADDICTION

Like any other addiction, the work addicts lose their ability to choose what is right for themselves (Rom 7:23). Their physical health deteriorates under the strain of their punishing work regimen. Weight problems and lack of healthy eating and exercise are also common. They suffer from “burn-out” or being ill from worry over work.

Not only do the work addicts jeopardize their own physical and spiritual well being, their behavior causes their family to suffer as well. Their withdrawal from family life leads to a deteriorating family relationship. The work addicts would like to substitute their presence by showering gifts on their children or spouse.

Material things are not an alternative to personal devotion and commitment. The caring, loving father or mother, husband or wife, has become remote, unapproachable, and bad tempered. In times of need one cannot find solace or support from Prada shoes, Louis Vuitton bags or a Playstation 3.

Husband and wife begin to grow out of their relationship—the absenting spouse is out of reach, out of sight, and out of mind.

Last but not least, work addicts sever their relationship with God. Many people have destroyed their faith in different ways, but they all started from distancing themselves from God.

By spending less and less time with God they are gradually depriving themselves of spiritual sustenance. Such a sterile faith is depicted as a severed branch, withering, barren, and only fit for the fire (Jn 15:1-6).

How much time do you spend on work, family, friends, and ultimately God? Are you breaking promises to yourself, family, friends, and God?

THE SYMPTOMS OF WORK ADDICTION

People who are affected by work addiction do not notice that they have a problem. Normal people think about skiing while working, and work addicts think about work while skiing.

There are a number of telltale signs of work addiction.

Not enough time

The direct outcome of work addiction is

the siphoning of family and church time to work. The work addicts divert their energy to work, gradually neglecting their family, and ultimately distancing themselves from God.

There is no time to read Bible stories to their children at night, no time to talk to their spouse, and no time for prayer let alone time for church services. They are haunted by a sense of urgency and constantly struggle against time. They rarely take holidays and often work on weekends.

How much time do you spend on work, family, friends, and ultimately God? Are you breaking promises to yourself, family, friends, and God? Are you skipping church services and meetings in order to spend more time at work?

Impatient and irritable

The sense of urgency makes workaholics annoyed with people who interrupt their work asking them to spend time with them. They cannot tolerate delays in grocery stores or restaurants, for they don't have time to wait.

Unable to relinquish responsibility

The inability to turn away from work makes it difficult for them to relinquish responsibility or delegate part of their work to their colleagues. They obsessively need to control themselves and everything in their lives.

Isolation

Work addicts begin to develop reclusive behavior. They choose to spend long periods of time at work. They have difficulty finding hobbies outside their work. They let down family and friends by neglecting responsibilities and missing events.

Inability to relax

Work addicts often wake up at night,

unable to get back to sleep because their brains are actively tackling the unfinished business at work. Even on vacation, it is difficult for them to relax or disengage from work. The advances in technology do not help either, as WiFi is ubiquitous and the BlackBerry is always at hand.

Inability to enjoy life and success

Workaholics are unable to enjoy the fruit of their labor because they have a distorted picture of perfectionism. They can never reach the state at which they would be totally satisfied with the results.

HOW TO OVERCOME WORK ADDICTION

Identify work addiction

The first step to moving away from work addiction is to identify the signs of work addiction. The prodigal son suddenly came to his senses, realizing the appalling state he put himself in (Lk 15:17). The trigger of such an awakening is the introspective question “what am I doing here?”

Seek help from man and God

When Lot departed from Abraham he traveled to the land of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 13:10). The temptation was so great that he gradually moved into the city (Gen 19:1). He was tormented by the lawless deeds of the city dwellers (2 Pet 2:7), but he failed to remove himself and his family.

Lot epitomizes those who are entrapped in work addiction. They are tormented by their habit but are either unaware of their peril or unable to help themselves. Only through the intercession of Abraham (the loved ones) and the willingness of Lot (the victim) to follow the angel was he able to escape from the total annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Prevention is better than cure. We need to prevent work addiction before it causes irreversible damage to our spiritual life and family relationships.

Set boundaries

Daniel was one of three governors under the Persian king Darius (Dan 6:2), yet he habitually prayed three times a day to God (Dan 6:10). Daniel did not compromise his belief in the time of adversity. He did not give up a bit of his time or obligation towards God just to gain political expediency (Dan 1:8-9, 20). He knew that there was a greater power than himself who could restore him. Therefore, God rewarded him with kindness, and the wisdom and ability to conduct his work.

We need to maintain a work-life balance by setting boundaries that we will never cross. We should draw a line on the time we spend on work, family, and God.

Mark your daily calendar at the beginning of the year with major events such as birthdays, anniversaries, special events at school, family holidays, Sabbaths (yes Sabbaths, I mean it), and spiritual convocation. These are sacrosanct, and you should not excuse yourself from them without valid reasons. You may even find it useful to set aside a brief time at the end of the day to allow closure of work activity.

Manage work effectively

Manage your workload effectively by setting smart objectives. Make sure your objectives are specific and achievable. By setting up specific and attainable goals you will prevent the risk of over-stretching yourself, or allowing work to eat into your quality time.

Confront your boss to make the objectives realistic—work should not be an open-ended commitment. Ask for

additional resources when needed, and do not be afraid to say no.

Maintain dialogue

Try to spend as much time as possible with your family. Keep them informed about your work and your time away from home. Let them know why you have to be away, and stay in touch.

your family.

Are you a victim of the Peter Principle? Are you one of those who have been promoted to his level of incompetence? A change of direction is not failure; it is a matter of choice. You should take up a job that you are comfortable with.

It is vital to set boundaries at work to preserve a work-life balance. If the workload is intolerable, pray to God, and He will open a way for you.

Change mindsets

To avoid the trap of work addiction, you need to change your perspective on life.

Entrust yourself to Jesus, knowing that He controls every aspects of your life (Mt 10:30-31), and He will see to all your needs (Mt 6:33).

Paul learned how to rejoice in the Lord greatly because he knew how to be content in whatever state he was in (Phil 4:10-11). His re-evaluation of life allowed him to see his priorities clearly (Phil 3:8). Any aura of self-importance evanesces in the light of Jesus.

The fire that feeds the self-destructive behavior of work addiction is quenched by the love of Jesus. Knowing that we do not need to pursue richness, power, and glory in this life, our burdens are immediately lifted from us.

Change jobs

If the fire is too hot, get out of the kitchen. We should not feel ashamed or dejected for changing jobs or careers. If your boss is not realistic or the work itself is not suitable, rather than hanging on in a state of suboptimal existence, you should take the courage to evaluate the situation and make the right choice for you and

Under constant pressure to perform and outperform, we are all potential victims of work addiction. To avoid falling into the trap, we should constantly evaluate our life and our relationship with our family, our friends, and our God.

It is vital to set boundaries at work to preserve a work-life balance. If the workload is intolerable, pray to God, and He will open a way for you. Remember the sea of testimonies in the Bible; Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah gained favor before man because of their unmovable trust in God.

You should not be afraid to ask “Is this job suitable for me?” or “Does this job compromise my faith?” Do not be shy to walk away from your job; God is the one who will prepare.

If you are in the dire state of work addiction, you should seek help from God, your family, and the church. Old habit dies hard, but remember Abraham’s effective and persistent prayer, and how Lot’s willingness to respond led to Lot’s deliverance. All is not lost as long as we come to our senses and return to the Lord. ★



Losing the Path and Finding it Again

LURES AND DECEPTIONS

A young girl began walking along a path. She was a child who walked closely in Jesus' footsteps while spreading His love to those around her, friend and stranger alike.

The path she walked was long, but filled with life. Flowers lined the neat stones, and bright sunlight filtered through the silver-lined trees that spread out on the sides of the walkway, beyond which were dark woods filled with gloom, the dense treetops allowing no sunlight to shine through.

As the girl walked along the path, she paused for a moment to observe this dense gloom, wondering what lay behind the darkness. To her surprise, she could hear a faint, pathetic mewling from the direction she looked.

Hesitantly, she took a step towards the edge of the path. Stepping off, she entered the trees and into the dark

woods. Very quickly, almost surprisingly quickly, she lost sight of the path behind her, but she walked determinedly on towards the sound that was slowly becoming louder as she walked.

Soon she came upon a small clearing. In the middle of that clearing was a small round ball of fur curled up tightly against the gloom and darkness as it mewled to itself.

The girl was hesitant to touch the small creature, unease filling her as she stared, wondering what was wrong with it. However, the mewling was so downcast that she determinedly but gently touched it. Immediately, the creature uncurled and leapt into her arms with a cry, revealing a small kitten, thin from starvation and exhausted from lack of proper rest.

The girl gently took up the thing, her heart completely taken by the pathetic

creature. She patiently searched for food in the gloom and fed the kitten.

For days, she walked in this way, carrying the kitten as she fed it bits and pieces she found in the forest and nursing it back to gradual health. She ate some food herself, but found it most strangely bitter in her mouth. Still, she walked on, seeking the path she had left behind so many days ago.

She was beginning to despair of ever finding it again when she saw a faint light not too far away. She broke into a run, for fear of losing sight of it, hurrying towards it in sudden hope and desperation. Around her, the gloom got lighter and lighter. Eagerly, she hurried on and found that she had walked parallel to the path, for there was the path ending in a small house.

She slowed down and began to walk forward, but was stopped by a tall man who appeared before her, his face stern

and commanding, a sharp contrast to the gentle white robe he wore.

“Father!!” She cried, recognizing his face immediately.

“Who are you, child, and why have you come here?” He asked her.

“I...I got lost after finding this kitten in the woods.” The words tumbled out of the child’s mouth, slightly shocked by the stern welcome.

“Kitten?” The man searched her arms, and His eyes softened. “My dear, that is no kitten you hold in your arms.”

“What do you mean?” Her arms curled possessively around the creature, who now looked up in obvious dislike at the man.

He looked at her with compassion in his eyes. “Come and see.” He led her to a clear pool that sat just beside the path.

The girl peered into the pool and was shocked to see that she did not recognize the reflection. In the pool was a hollow-cheeked girl, her dress in tatters. Her arms were bloody with scratches from the thorns and brambles she had forced her way through, her face equally scratched and unclean.

As the girl’s eyes roved downwards, what she saw in her arms made her gasp in horror. The cat was still the creature she had found in the forest. Exposed in the daylight, it was still seemingly a skeleton, thin patches of fur giving it a diseased look in the bright light. The eyes, as it turned to look at the pool, glared dolefully at her.

In shock, she dropped the creature and backed away. With strength belying its seemingly weakened condition, it dashed back towards the woods, flicking its tail in disdain at the child as it disappeared. The girl flinched in shame when the Lord knelt down and gently held her in comfort.

“My daughter, your love becomes you, but you allowed yourself to be blinded by it, leaving My side in pursuit of such deception. In leaving Me, you became lost and alone. Be sure to stay alert and never stray so far from the path again, for that is what the devil wishes for you to do.”

WHAT IS YOUR WEAKNESS?

We are all susceptible to the wiles of Satan, whether we realize it or not. It would be easy to resist the devil if he appeared to us in the form of a big red monster with a trident and a long forked tail. But Satan is always quietly seeking ways to distract us from the Lord and draw us away from Him through subtle distractions or outright temptations that lure us through our physical desires.

It may not be easy, but it is important we examine ourselves and spot our own weaknesses, making us more alert and aware, so it is harder for the devil to draw us away. While examining ourselves in such a way, we must remember that what we view as a strength may be what will lead us to our downfall. A strength in compassion could lead us into the hands of Satan, who uses the same compassion to draw us away from God.

However, we don’t always realize that we have fallen into the trap of the devil. Often, we are lured into the dark forest without realizing that we have long left the path of the Lord behind us. “... he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going” (Jn 12:35). It is in these times that we must fully trust God to reveal the truth of our ways.

STRAYING FROM THE PATH

Even in knowing my own weaknesses, I have been unable to win against Satan

without the hand of the Lord to guide me. Often, my weakness is the addictive qualities of being able to be like those around me. In one such instance, my inability to resist the lure and addiction of physical wants and needs may have led to my downfall, had the Lord God not shown me His mercy and grace.

I once began talking to someone online, talking about our most common interests and about school on a forum made up of my fellow high school students. Eventually, we shifted our conversations to MSN (an online instant messaging program), and he began opening up, revealing his tumultuous emotions; he had recently gone through a breakup with a girlfriend he thought truly cared for him.

When I read this, I remember thanking the Lord that I was separate from this kind of community that I moved through every day in school, and was free from experiencing this kind of emotional cliffhanger.

How ironic that I dragged myself into it anyway.

Shortly after we had started to chat online daily, the relationship I had with him developed into something a non-believer would view as a boyfriend–girlfriend relationship. We had become emotional buffers for each other, breaking down the barriers we usually held. I had already told him our values and beliefs regarding dating, and he understood completely.

However, I soon realized that I wanted the kind of relationship everyone around regarded us as having. As a result, both in and out of school, we began acting more and more like a couple, maybe a brief hug in passing down the hallway or sticking together all the time during lunch and after school.

Reflecting on that time, I truly thank God that it never went a millimeter beyond that. The after-effects of this kind of living, though, resulted in a very distant relationship with God .

LEAVING THE DARK WOODS

An opportunity to really think about my situation came up when my local church organized a Student Spiritual Convocation (SSC). I looked forward to it with my usual anticipation, but I also felt anxious—about being unable to find the answers to the questions tumbling through my mind, about being unable to experience His greatness, and especially about being unable to find Him at all.

During that SSC I spent more time in the prayer room than ever before, and a lot of my free time was spent alone in the

The realization of my straying only came when I was reminded of how we must walk closely in the Lord’s footsteps. The closer I drew to my friend, the further I drew from God; He was no longer first in my heart.

This new relationship had become much more important to me, so much that I pushed aside any thoughts about spending more time in prayer and meditating on God’s love and mercy. By slowly returning to these thoughts, I finally broke away from the dark path I had been treading.

Having determined these things, I knew what steps I had to take, and all I could do then was pray for strength. Soon after the SSC, I took steps to sever the relationship we had formed. I still talk to

devil used him as a tool to draw me away from the Lord, and could have used him to cut me off from the Lord completely. I am truly thankful the Holy Spirit remained as a light within my heart to remind me of the Lord’s values, and of the bright path I had so quickly left behind.

I have long since let go of the incident, and have come to terms with myself, but I am still often worried that I will fall into another trap just as easily. “And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid” (Ps 18:4). Upon reflection, I realized that I had failed to be alert, and I realized the importance of being awake and vigilant to the workings of the devil.

I now use this experience to remind myself to remember my weaknesses and stay close to the path of God.

We are very exposed to the jaws of Satan by living on his world, but being “sheep in the midst of wolves,” we must be “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Mt 10:16). Though the ways Satan lures us away from God are often subtle and difficult to see, the Lord would never allow him to place anything in our path that is beyond our abilities to overcome. The Lord knows our limitations better than even we do, and in His love and care will always show an exit sign that will lead us out of any temptations we have stumbled and tripped into.

We need only look around, locate the path He has shown, and step onto it. It is entirely up to us to surrender our will to His, and walk closely in His Way so that we may be safely and securely brought back to Him after seeing the error of our ways. Often, the only way of realization and escape is through the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit that dwells in our hearts.

Ask yourself always: Has my deceptive kitten lured me from the side of God? ★

The Lord knows our limitations better than even we do, and in His love and care will always show an exit sign that will lead us out of any temptations we have stumbled and tripped into.

chapel. Closed off from the world, I soon realized how far I had really strayed from God. As I thought about His word, I slowly began to realize why the path I was on felt so wrong. I had seen that God had been fading from my life more and more, but never before had He been so far from my heart.

Even though we did not view each other as a boyfriend and girlfriend, the people around us did. In pushing God away, the image I had presented to those around me was not one of a child of Jesus Christ, much less the heart I presented to God Himself. I was shocked at the way I had shown myself to my friends, hidden myself from my parents, and moreover, parted myself from God.

him occasionally, but I am always careful to never let things go beyond that.

Of course, it was difficult to let go of a close relationship like that. I left behind many tears and brought with me too many painful memories. To be able to let go, I had to force myself to completely rely on God to be my strength. “I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies” (Ps 18:3). Only by drawing upon His love was I able to leave behind the dark wood I had walked into.

FINDING GOD AGAIN

During that time, the person I had thought I could help ended up being my deceptive kitten. I certainly do not view him as the devil, but I do know that the



Christian Values in a Changing World

Audrey Chan—Leicester, UK

CHANGING TIMES BRING NEW CHALLENGES

Times have changed. Or maybe I am just getting old. I look at my children and compare them with myself at their age. They seem so much more savvy, confident, and better off materially than I was.

The fact is, we live in more sophisticated times. Our children's standard of living and expectations are higher than our generation's. This can be seen in the fact that most children living in the West are in households that have access to a wide range of consumer goods, private transportation, and the chance to travel.

What were once luxuries are now considered essentials. These changes should not surprise us. It is inevitable that

society and lifestyles change—we cannot expect things to stand still.

However, as Christian parents, we need to keep a watchful eye on the spiritual condition of our children. We have children who are better off materially, but we need to ask whether the state of their faith matches their physical well-being. In truth, I think that we live in challenging times. The world has increasingly more to offer and to distract our children by way of all that glitters.

To help our children grow up into well-grounded Christians, we need to start young and give them the Bible's teachings about wealth and material possessions so that they have a set of values they can use for the rest of their lives. The Bible reminds us,

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. (Prov 22:6)

CHILDREN AND MATERIALISM

It seems we do not need to teach our children about the value of money. They appear to catch on from an early age that money equals spending power.

From a certain age, my two boys have had a decided interest in all things monetary, especially the health of their piggy-banks and when to cash in to buy some pre-determined goody. Like young businessmen in the making, they have been known to eagerly negotiate the pooling of assets to buy a sought-after game.

If we look in the media, school playground, or home, we soon realize that we live in a time that prizes material

possessions. Children know about brand commodities—what cars and clothes are cool and what gadgets their friends have that they do not. Whether they let on or not, those little gray cells learn to appraise what’s “in” and what’s “out”; and even “haves” or “have-nots.”

As parents we enjoy buying nice things for our children. Who does not? But things need to be done in proportion. We do not need to respond to the pressure to buy everything they ask for, or to buy things that their friends have. Otherwise, we will be on a slippery slope. Our children will learn that they can have everything and will be in for a rude awakening if one day we do not have the means to oblige.

Also, where would it all end? The latest Gadget XP Version 6 usually lands on shop shelves before Version 5 has even been taken out of its packaging. It is the business of companies to relieve us of our hard-earned cash. No, it’s time to redress some of the expectations of our children, as well as the influence exerted by the media and our children’s peers.

REDRESSING THE BALANCE

It is important that we give our children God’s teachings about the priorities of life, and point out how Christian values are fundamentally different from those of the world:

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ Or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek....” (Mt 6:31-32)

As I look at these verses, I reflect with interest that a message which was once undoubtedly targeted at an adult audience now has to be shared with an

It is important that we give our children God’s teachings about the priorities of life, and point out how Christian values are fundamentally different from those of the world.

increasingly younger one. Times certainly have changed.

We also need to instill in our children a sense of self-worth that does not need affirmation from material possessions, or comparison with others:

“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” (Lk 12:15)

This all undoubtedly goes against the grain, as society looks highly on material wealth and judges success according to how much of it you have. We need to educate our children so that they understand that God does not value them in the same way as the world. They need to know that the Bible positively encourages contentment and a simple, godly lifestyle (Prov 30:7-9; 1 Tim 6:6-10; Heb 13:5).

These principles will stand them in good stead when they reach adulthood. They will have a better chance of leading less stressful lives—lives without a compulsion to keep up with others.

How do we do this?

We can teach our children best if we have a family altar where we set aside some time each day to worship God together. The format is flexible, but could entail reading a chapter of the Bible together, discussing what was read and

its application for our daily lives, and to pray.

Some of us may think it is a lot easier just to leave this work to the Religious Education teachers at church, but we need to remember that our children’s time in church is limited, and religious education should continue in the home. In fact, the Bible reminds us that it is part of the job description of parents:

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (Deut 6:6-7)

Personally, I find it hard to apply the family altar consistently, as will probably many other busy families. There always seems to be a hundred and one other things competing for our time. But we need to persevere because the results will be worth it. Slowly but surely, we are making opportunities for the words of God to take root in our children.

Secondly, we need to communicate with our children. We need to talk to them:

- about what they see in the media and what advertisements are for
- to acknowledge their desire for products they see advertised
- about trends and their tendency to change over time
- to let them know they can choose not to follow their friends—they may not feel it, but it’s really okay to be different
- about what is worth buying—to teach them about quality and value versus brand names
- to help them to understand the family budget

- to help them to think through what they already have, and if they really must have something new
- about prioritizing purchases when there is more than one choice
- to help them make wise choices—is there something more worthwhile for them to use their money on (like helping a good cause)
- about saving up for things they really want.

Thirdly, I think that our actions, as parents, speak louder than words. It is no use telling our children what to do if we ourselves do something different. Children are very astute. From my experience, they are quick to pick up on inconsistencies when we fail to practice what we preach.

Therefore, alongside teaching our children, we need to take a good, honest look at our own core values and how we are living our lives. Do we try to keep things simple, or have we unwittingly been caught up in a lifestyle where money or material things have shifted our focus? We are our children's role models—for a short time at least, and so we should not lose the window of opportunity to set a good example.

PRAYING PARENTS

I know of successful parents who consistently apply the best parenting technique of all—prayer. It sounds simple enough, but we may often neglect to pray for our children's spiritual growth, focusing instead on things like physical health or good grades.

Whether we realize it or not, we are actually engaged in a spiritual battle on our children's behalf. There is so much in the world to tempt them and lead them astray. We should be mindful that the devil is prowling round constantly (1 Pet

5:8), and his prey includes our children. Therefore, we need to pray for God's help and protection so that we can raise children who will grow up in His grace and away from evil and temptation.

We also need prayers because bringing up children can be hard work. It is not so much the feeding and clothing of our offspring, because if it were merely this, it would be easy. The difficult part is raising them to become decent, principled Christians. Fortunately, Elder James advises us that we can all ask for a good dose of spiritual wisdom:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.
(Jas 1:5)

Christian parenting is a real challenge because the Bible's teachings are often at odds with those of society, and we may even find ourselves wondering at times whether our children will be at a disadvantage for going against the grain.

But the Bible reminds us that though our children live in the world, they must not love the things of the world or conform to it (1 Jn 2:15; Rom 12:2; Jas 1:27).

We need to make it our mission to raise a new generation of spiritually wise and content children who know what the more important things in life are. ★

Approaching Repentance

I.

I used to yearn for them,
but now, my tears bring no relief.
They revive; they reproach; they mock
that old repentant self that is never fully sorry.

I dare not present my tears to You,
O Lord.

For does this tear here, and that one there,
Or this one that trickles down the same path
ever approach a different end?
Do they not all fall into the same sewer
of aborted renewals?

These tears bear witness to many prior ones –
fallen in their attempt to generate
a spring of faith,
a stream of love
and other such poetic effusions.

They are now merely dry tracks
that point to a once-intended direction.

II.

But still
the tears will fall.

Well then, flow down, my tears.

Yes,
for sins committed,
for deeds left undone, and
for the lost resolution of earlier outpourings.

Flow down, flow down,
But do not think your work completed.
Tears ought to tear the old, forsworn life asunder:
a river of Jordan that carves out the old land from the new.

Here, my tears delude,
drops that blur my vision:
tears that tell me my repentance is done
and that life can move on,
as it always has, as it always has –
before.

III.

But once,
there were tears unlike mine.
Tears of toil,
tears wrought with the determination of God,
with the determination of love,
with the determination of the word,
of the word which was with God
Of the word which was God.
They were tears of the word, of the word, of the word.

Shed in a night,
in a garden of rocks,
in a garden of dead life.

They were tears to weld a will
to do the will of God.

Tears were shed –
then –
there –
that should have changed the path

of all tears thereafter.

They were tears of death,
and of life
and were filled with the hope
that all the rocks which cut his knees
– that all the flinty hearts which pierced his own –
would one day melt,
and water and nourish the garden of God.

Yes, once there were tears,
not of water and salt, but of blood.

IV.

But those are not mine.

My tears are weak,
and they are infirm.

I dare not, O Lord, present them to you
as an offering of repentance,
of change,
for what have they ever changed?

I present them to You,
as an offering of myself,
A broken and contrite spirit, O Lord,
That knows it is not broken or contrite enough.

Tears that are nothing but what they are,
from a person who is nothing but what she is:
simply,
the merest expression of sorrow,
from a wavering faith,
that requires the blood of Your tears
to be what they,
to be what You
meant us to be.



Manna is looking for certain types of articles, or article genres. Each genre constitutes a different subject matter and writing approach. If you are planning to write an article (regardless of topic), please try to adhere to one of the genres below.

Christian Living

A *Christian Living* article gives practical biblical guidance on real-life issues and how to use Jesus' teachings in our daily lives. Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Bible Study

A *Bible Study* explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives. Article length: 2000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A *Doctrinal Study* examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs. Article length: 2000 words.

Exhortation

An *Exhortation* encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith. Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Testimony

A *Testimony* recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader. Article length: 1000-1500 words.

Creative Writing

Creative Writing pieces include poems, parables, or short stories that illustrate a biblical teaching or idea. Keep in mind as you're writing: how will this edify the reader?

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email electronic files of articles (Word, Wordperfect, ASCII text) to manna@tjc.org, or send hardcopy and disk to:

**Manna
General Assembly of True Jesus Church
314 S. Brookhurst St, #104
Anaheim, CA 92804 USA**

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or
Phone: +1-714-533-8808
Fax: +1-714-533-8878

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number even if you wish to remain anonymous.

Call For Articles

Author Guidelines & Editorial Calendar

Issue #56

Theme: In the World, Not of the World

Articles due: January 1, 2008

This theme addresses how believers can live as separate from the world, yet still be able to go into the world. How do we obey these seemingly contradictory commands from Jesus? Articles should cover how to reach out to others without conforming to them, and how to befriend others without trying to convert them all the time. Use examples from the Bible of people who were able to live in the world and yet not be of the world (Joseph, Daniel). How should members view politics and trends?

Issue #57

Theme: Holidays

Articles due: April 1, 2008

This theme will address principles and guidelines for members to determine whether we should or should not celebrate certain holidays. Articles should separate the truth from tradition, and give facts on the origins of different holidays (Halloween, Christmas, Chinese New Year, etc). What can we learn from the religious feasts God established in the OT? To what extent are our actions on a holiday considered celebrating it? What are the biblical truths regarding holidays and religious holidays?

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number.

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- Article should be organized and have a logical flow of thought.
- The main point or teaching of the article should be clear to the reader.
- Readers should be able to apply what they have read to their daily lives.

GRAMMAR/STYLE

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain old English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible.
- Adhere to the IA Style Guide, except for He/Him when referring to God/Jesus.

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

The One True God was manifested in the flesh. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, was resurrected on the third day, and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and the only True God.

Holy Bible

The Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible are inspired by God and are therefore the only authentic scriptures which testify to the Truth.

Church

The True Jesus Church was established by our Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (the Latter Rain) and is the revival of the True Church of the Apostolic Days.

Salvation

Salvation is given by grace through faith. However, it is necessary to rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness and to keep the biblical teachings of honoring God and loving humanity.

Baptism

The Baptism of Water is the sacrament for the remission of sins and for regeneration. The baptist must already have received baptisms of water and the Holy Spirit. The baptism must be immersion in natural, living water and must be administered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the candidate's head facing downward.

Foot Washing

The Washing of Feet is a sacrament which enables one to have a part in the Lord and teaches mutual love, holiness, humility, service, and forgiveness. The sacrament of the washing of feet must be performed in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ to all newly baptized members. Mutual washing of feet may be practiced when necessary.

Holy Spirit

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite for entering heaven; speaking in tongues is the evidence of having received the Holy Spirit.

Holy Communion

The Holy Communion is the sacrament to commemorate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It enables us to partake of the flesh and blood of our Lord and to be in communion with Him so that we may have eternal life and be raised on the last day. This sacrament should be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice should be used.

Sabbath Day

The Sabbath Day, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is a holy day, blessed and sanctified by God. It is to be observed under the Lord's grace for the commemoration of God's creation and redemption and with the hope of eternal rest.

Judgment Day

The Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven on the Last Day to judge all people; the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information on the True Jesus Church, contact us or visit us on our website. We look forward to hearing from you!

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