

MANNA

ISSUE 61 | April–June 2010 | Church Life

**God Has Always Been with Me • To Be One in the Lord
A Godly Couple in a Godless Time**

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

Dear Reader,

We receive many blessings from our heavenly Father. As His children, we can trust in His will and His love to guide and protect us through life. Even when we make mistakes, He is there to help and heal us.

We are cherished and blessed, but there are also difficulties that we must face. Living in a secular and materialistic society, facing temptations and the wiles of Satan, and our inherent flaws all affect our relationship with God. These make up a large part of the ups and downs of our faith, often revealing to us our weaknesses and shortcomings.

Yet there is always hope for us in the mercy and love of God. We accept His righteous judgment and are comforted by His boundless grace. The articles in this issue remind us of how much God loves us and how important it is for us to continually seek Him in our lives. Whether we are coming to God for the first time, coming back to Him after a long absence, or learning how to submit to Him in all things, the writers reassure us that He is always there for us.

THE EDITOR

MANNA

April - June 2010

ISSUE 61 Vol 34 No. 2

Church Life

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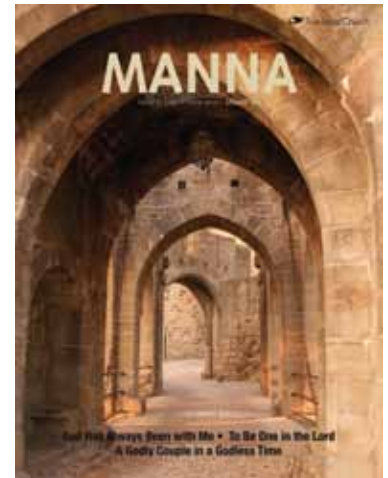
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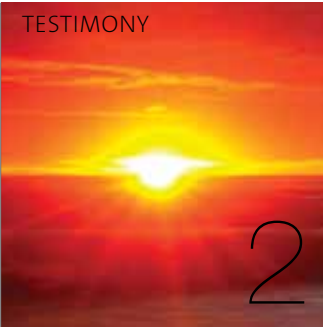







Manna (ISSN1528-8617) is published quarterly by the True Jesus Church, IA Department of Literary Ministry, 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.
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U.S. Postmaster: send change-of-address forms to 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.

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Giving Thanks in All Circumstances

Maria Santi Inggiani—Edmonton, Canada

GROWING IN FAITH

I grew up in a large family in Indonesia. I was the oldest of five children, and even though we didn't have much, we never felt poor because we were always provided for. My father worked very hard at several jobs and my mother was a teacher.

We were baptized in the church as children and were used to attending services and praying, but I didn't truly understand what faith was. I didn't understand why I needed to pray and go to church, and I didn't know Jesus or have a close relationship with Him. However, I did have a good role model in my mother, who prayed for one to two hours every morning.

After I graduated from high school, I attended a university in a city two hours away from home. I felt lonely because I had no friends, and I was away from my family. Even though I lived with my father,

who had established a new business there, I no longer had my siblings or my mother nearby. And because my father worked so hard to provide for us, I didn't get to spend much time with him.

I felt so alone and helpless that I contemplated suicide. But one day I decided that I would ask God to help me overcome my hopelessness. I started to pray every day for thirty minutes to an hour. I started reading the Bible, and sometimes I even fasted. Little by little, God healed me. I received encouragement from reading the Bible, from the sermons at church, and from talking to other brothers and sisters.

My outlook changed and I became happier and friendlier to others. More importantly, I felt at peace and understood how blessed I was to be a child of God and to know Him. I finally understood what faith was and why it was important, and it stayed with me through both good and bad times.

MONEY TROUBLES

Indonesia suffered an economic crisis at the beginning of 2009 as part of a worldwide recession. My father's business was greatly affected by the bad economy, and, with no income, our family was unable to pay the debts that we owed.

Everything changed at home, which became a somber place with no more peace or laughter. My father was under a lot of stress and began to worry about our future. He talked to me about many issues that showed his anxiety, such as if he were to die soon and the family could not pay off the debts, or what would happen if he were put in prison.

He told me about his insurance and asked me to take care of the family because I was the oldest child. He even taught me how to rebuild his business if he had to declare bankruptcy. It made me so sad and scared to see my father like this.

I had never seen my father cry before, but I saw him shed tears in front of the family because of these problems. It broke my heart. Our situation was difficult to accept because I didn't want to end up being poor. I was afraid of what would happen to us and didn't know what I could do to help.

ACCEPTING POVERTY

When the crisis hit my father's business, he didn't tell my younger siblings how difficult things were. They only knew that the business wasn't doing well, and they did what they could to help the family.

Every day I prayed for thirty minutes to one hour. Whenever I prayed to God, I would shed tears over our difficulties. I had so many questions about what would happen if we lost everything. How would I continue my father's business? What could I do to feed my family? And what would I need to do to complete my final year of university?

I told Jesus everything. During my prayers I felt that my heart was telling me, "This is a chance to prove your faith. This is an opportunity to use your faith in any situation. Prove that everything is given by God so that no matter what happens, you will say 'Thank God.'"

After this experience, I faced a dilemma: on one hand I didn't want to be poor, but on the other hand this was a chance for me to put my faith into action. So, I tried to accept the possibility that we would lose everything.

I imagined what it would be like if I didn't have money to buy food—maybe I would have to eat rice and salt every day. I would be dirty and hungry all the time. Maybe I would have to walk everywhere, including to church.

After I imagined all of these negative things happening, I accepted it. I could even thank God because I would still be alive even if I became poor and hungry. As long as I was alive, I would still be able to serve Him, and I realized that living for God was all that I needed.

Encouraged By a Miracle

Even though our problems were still unresolved, I was no longer scared or worried. I knew that God would take care of us, and all we had to do was to have faith and trust in Him.

My father decided to sell his car to help pay off some of the debts, and I helped him put an advertisement online. I found someone who wanted to purchase the car and we were ready to hand it over to him after we received his payment. But when we were making arrangements for him to take the car, he said that he didn't want the car anymore.

He explained that he knew we needed the car and that we could keep the money he had already paid. We were so surprised

and yet thankful to God. It was a miracle that encouraged us when we didn't know what to do.

The money that we received helped us greatly. We still had a lot of debt, but we were able to pay for our daily expenses, and that was enough for us.

JESUS IS ALL WE NEED

After going through this difficult time, I learned that trials help us understand things that we didn't understand before. It is a chance for us to grow. If our life is smooth, we don't need any help. But if we never need help, we cannot understand what it means to trust and rely on God.

God sent me this trial so that I could learn about faith. What was important



was that I accepted the situation and trusted everything to God. Like Job said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

Even though it was very painful to think of what could happen, I overcame all of my worries and fears because of Jesus. If we lose everything—money, friends, children, or parents—we can still survive. We will have Jesus, our wonderful Lord, and that is all that we need.

I overcame all of my worries and fears because of Jesus. If we lose everything—money, friends, children, or parents—we can still survive. We will have Jesus, our wonderful Lord, and that is all that we need.

As it says in Ecclesiastes, everything in this world is vanity. What makes our lives worthwhile is having Jesus, pleasing Him, and serving Him with all our heart until our last breath.

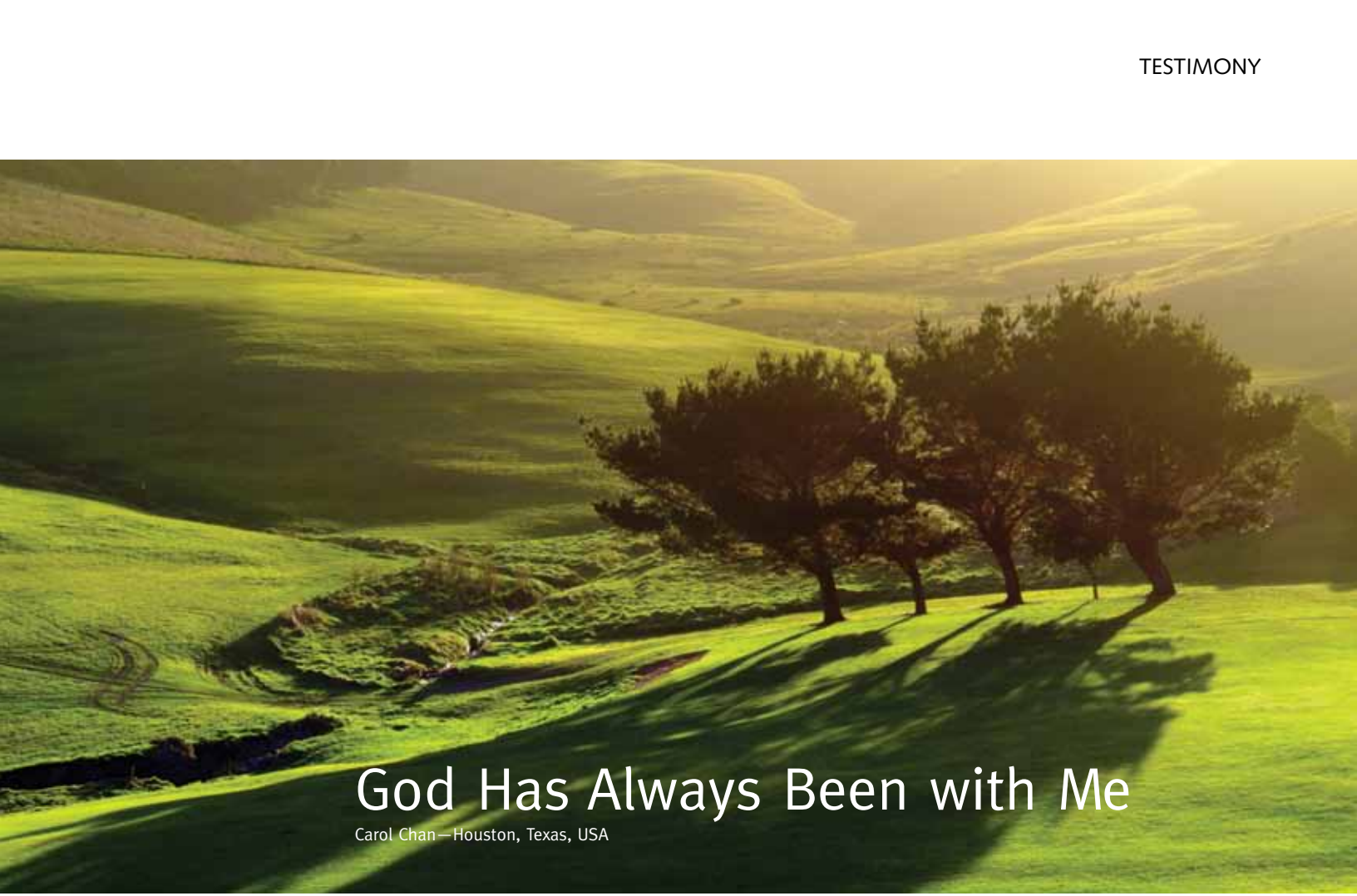
Matthew 6:33 says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” This promise from Jesus is true. I know because I experienced it firsthand.

God knows our heart. If we seek after worldly things, our life will be pointless. But when we seek after God, He will not let us go through something that we cannot handle. If we face hard times, all we need to do is trust Him, because He has a purpose in what He has planned for us, and it is for the best.

[W]e also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)

God is our strength and reliance. No matter what happens, we are doing what is right and pleasing to Him when we give thanks in all circumstances.

[I]n everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess 5:18) ★



God Has Always Been with Me

Carol Chan—Houston, Texas, USA

A COMPLACENT LIFE

I have been a member of the True Jesus Church ever since I was baptized at the age of two weeks. At the time, I was very sick with asthma and my mom didn't think I would survive, but I pulled through after the baptism.

When I was four, my family moved to Vancouver, Canada, and thankfully my asthma soon disappeared. However, my family stopped going to church after we immigrated, so growing up I didn't know who God was, and I didn't pursue Him, read the Bible, or pray. During my third year at university, my parents, after some encouragement from a church member, decided to rejoin Sabbath services, and I followed them.

After graduating from university, I got a great job with a major airline that allowed me to travel the world for next to nothing. My mother not only bought me a car, she bought me clothes, packed my

lunches, and allowed me to live at home rent-free. My colleagues thought I was so pampered and lucky! I thought I was invincible.

My spiritual life, however, was in decay. Although I attended services consistently, I was always the last to arrive and the first to leave. When members invited me to stay for lunch I would decline and make excuses.

I had many worldly friends, and every weekend I had something to do and somewhere to go. I couldn't even pray for five minutes without fidgeting. During such a short prayer, I would be thinking about movies and lunch and what I wanted to eat. For me, food was more important than anything.

My life was so smooth and complacent that I felt I really didn't need God at all. But I thank God that it was not His will for me to continue living my life without Him.

FEELING LONELY AND HOPELESS

In 1999, I got married to a non-believer. Two years later, my husband was relocated, and we moved to Copenhagen, a beautiful city with much to do and enjoy. With hardly any notice, we were transferred in the winter of 2002 to a tiny fishing and oil town in Norway.

My world turned upside down. From having friends, a great job, and so many good things provided by my parents to having no friends, no job, and no parents close by, I became extremely bored and lonely. I would walk through town wishing someone would talk to me.

Not only was it lonely, the winters were difficult to live through. Each day was bitterly cold, and some days would be dark for almost twenty-one hours. I also did not have the luxury of owning a car, so I took the bus through the harsh winters, walking to the stops and waiting for the bus in the cold, dark, and sleet.

We lived in an apartment on a hill, and the sidewalk froze whenever it was cold, causing me to slip and fall every time I went shopping. The worst part was that everything cost about three times more than what I was used to. For example, a restaurant pizza cost about fifty dollars and a Coke seven dollars. Because I enjoyed food so much, this was a truly horrible situation. My husband and I grudgingly ate canned food and rice to save money.

I complained to my husband and said I couldn't live like this, and he told me not to worry because we would be there for only a few months. But then one day he received word that we would need to stay a minimum of two years. I started to get really worried. I didn't want my life to consist of feeling bored, sad, and lonely all the time and having to pay an exorbitant amount of money for everything.

For the first time in my life, I suffered panic attacks. Then I developed insomnia and anxiety until everything snowballed into a state of depression. Every day, I felt this darkness surround me, and I didn't want to get out of bed. I didn't feel like doing anything and would constantly cry. The worst part was that my brain could not switch off even when I wanted it to.

In this state of hopelessness, I started to seek God for the first time. He moved my heart so that I would kneel down and pray, and I also started to sing hymns.

One night, I dreamt that I was praying with the Holy Spirit, and I was joyful when I woke up. But the insomnia didn't improve. I was so exhausted and anxious that I didn't even want to live anymore. There was no joy in my heart. I thought that I would end up in a mental asylum and people would forget about me.

I talked to my parents about my struggles, and my dad suggested that I go home for some rest and spiritual healing. It was two weeks since I had last slept, and, needless to say, I was a basket case.

The next morning, I was on a plane back to Vancouver.

JOY AND SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

My dad and a church sister picked me up from the airport and took me home. A couple of hours later, the pastor arrived at my father's request. The first thing he asked me was if I had the Holy Spirit. *Please, I thought, don't talk to me about the Holy Spirit, I just desperately need something that will help me sleep.*

He kept telling me to "ask, seek, and knock," so we got on our knees and prayed. As we prayed, I heard the church sister sing the beginning of "Frère



Jacques," a French nursery song. The English translation of the lyrics is "Are you sleeping, are you sleeping, brother John? Morning bells are ringing, ding dang dong."

I thought this was quite peculiar and questioned her about it afterward. She replied that she was not even aware she was singing it! From that day forth, I was moved to pray for the Holy Spirit because God cared about me and understood my troubles.

That night, I lay in bed for several hours and tried unsuccessfully to fall asleep. When I closed my eyes in another attempt to sleep, it suddenly felt like my body was moving at great speed through dark space. I opened my eyes and saw that I was still in bed.

When I closed my eyes, the vision came back. As my body hurtled through the dark space, a giant wall of fire appeared before me. And as I went through the fire, I cried out, "God help me!"

I opened my eyes, and the vision vanished. I wondered what it meant. The fire didn't feel sinister in any way. On the contrary, my faith was strengthened. It wasn't until much later that the vision made sense after I stumbled across the following Bible verse:

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." (Mt3:11)

The next day was Sabbath, and I had gone fifteen days without sleeping through the night. I attended service and earnestly prayed for the Holy Spirit. I was so exhausted, but I paid careful attention to the sermon. It felt like my soul was thirsting for the truth.

That night, my brain switched off and I slept, albeit fitfully. I was so thankful that I could be refreshed even just a little bit to continue my spiritual pursuit.

Throughout the week, my insomnia would come and go. I continued to pray

All of a sudden, I felt a shot of electricity go through my body, and I couldn't control my tongue, which seemed to be going a hundred miles an hour. My first thought was, So this is what it's like to have the Holy Spirit.

for the Holy Spirit but didn't notice any change in the way I prayed until Friday. What happened during the Friday evening service is something that I will never forget.

The pastor invited the congregation to come up and pray in the front of the chapel to receive the laying of hands, so I went up. During the prayer, I felt the pastor lay hands on me, but nothing happened and he moved on.

All of a sudden, I felt a shot of electricity go through my body, and I couldn't control my tongue, which seemed to be going a hundred miles an hour. My first thought was, *So this is what it's like to have the Holy Spirit.* During the prayer, I was so thankful and joyful that, after all these years, God granted me His precious Spirit. I felt that God took away my sins that night.

I thought that everything would be fine after I received the Holy Spirit, but it wasn't. I went through a period of doubt and spiritual battles because I didn't understand why God gave me, a sinner, this gift.

I discussed my doubts with a sister, and she explained, "It's not our place to ask why. When we receive a gift, we just say, 'Thank you.'" I realized that she was right, that we shouldn't question God but should accept what He gives us.

So in my prayers, I stopped doubting and instead gave thanks to God for the Holy Spirit. After praying in this way, I started to have a healthier attitude and began to recover from my depression. More significantly, my insomnia ebbed away.

When I thought about going back to Norway, however, I worried that I would revert to my depressed and hopeless state. I would be alone in faith, with no spiritual companions. I spent a lot of my time in prayer asking for God's help. I thank God that He granted me the peace that I prayed for.

After eight weeks back at home in Vancouver, I was spiritually renewed and filled with joy at the prospect of reuniting with my husband and getting to know God better.

THE BLESSINGS AND PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." I earnestly sought God's kingdom and righteousness, and blessings began to pour into my life.

On my flight back to Norway, I thought that since I had gone through so much, it would be nice to take a trip to Italy with my husband. The following week, my husband called me from work and said the company had just given him a free one-week trip for two to Italy and asked if I wanted to go.

Another time, I was on the bus and decided that I would have Bible study and sing hymns that night. My husband usually watched television after dinner, so I was worried that I wouldn't be able to concentrate. That night, I told my husband that I was going to have Bible study, and he said he was going to watch television. He turned on the television and the cable was out. I had my Bible study for one hour and the cable came back on after that.

Three months in Norway turned into five and a half years. By the end of those years, I had many friends and a good job. God also provided a new place for us to live. I no longer slipped and fell going to and from the market because our new apartment was above a supermarket.

My husband was facing another transfer, and it was possible that we would have to move elsewhere within Europe or to North Africa. I was worried that we would be sent to a country where there was no True Jesus Church. Although I had maintained my faith in Norway, I wanted to be able to worship with other members.

While we were vacationing in Vancouver in the spring of 2008, we received a long-awaited phone call concerning our move. My husband told me that his company wanted to offer him a position in Houston. I was so happy! Not only did God hear my prayers, He knew my thoughts and worries and understood my needs.

In Houston, blessings from God poured in. I fasted and prayed for things to go smoothly when we moved, and God gave me a great apartment and a great job soon after arriving. I thank God that I am able to attend Houston Church and have the opportunity to serve Him. Not only can I worship with other members, I also get to fellowship with them and enjoy this blessing!

I have a greater understanding now for what Paul wrote to the church in Rome:

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)

When I look back at my life, I can see how God has always been with me even though I turned my back on Him. He has blessed me my whole life, but I never appreciated His blessings or made the effort to follow Him until I faced difficulties.

I believe that I wouldn't be here today if I hadn't suffered panic attacks, depression, and insomnia. I would not have actively sought God because my life was so smooth and carefree in Vancouver. But through tribulations, I turned back to God and He renewed me.

When I look back at my life, I can see how God has always been with me even though I turned my back on Him. He has blessed me my whole life, but I never appreciated His blessings or made the effort to follow Him until I faced difficulties.

My encouragement is for members who are blessed with a good life—be careful and maintain your faith because this is the time that you may face trials and fall. But if you fall, don't forget to look for God. He is the only one who can bring you back up. ★



From Idols to Salvation

Brian Lim—Singapore

A DEVOUT IDOL WORSHIPPER

I am by nature very introspective and religious. At the tender age of ten, I was already asking such questions: Is there a God? How many deities are there in heaven? Where will I go after I die?

My family was Taoist and worshipped the Goddess of Mercy. I liked going with my parents and especially my grandmother to Chinese temples for worship rituals.

We would gather with other worshippers and chant for half an hour or more and listen to sermons from a monk. Although I didn't understand most of what the monk said, I never grumbled about the long hours there.

Back home, I chanted three times a day and offered incense to the ancestral shrines and idols in the house. I was a staunch believer in ancestor worship even at that young age.

My first and indirect brush with Christianity came when I was twelve, and it literally ended in flames. I found

out that one of my brothers had joined a very active Christian group at his college. Christian tracts were often sent to him at home, and he had to be cautious as my father was extremely anti-Christian. I also knew where my brother hid those publications.

My father eventually discovered that my brother was part of this Christian group and lectured and nagged him daily. Seeing my father so angry and wanting to please him, I told him where the tracts were hidden. When my brother was out of the house, we dug them out and burned them. I was glad that I had pleased my father by helping him get rid of these Christian tracts.

About two years later, I had two classmates and an English teacher who were Christians. Once in a while, these classmates would talk to me about Christ, but it did not leave any impression on me.

I had been told from a young age that all religions were the same since they all taught man to do good. Moreover, I had also been taught that Christianity was a foreign religion and we Chinese should stick to the traditional religions, namely Taoism or Buddhism, handed down from our ancestors.

One time, a Christian classmate shocked me when he said that Christians are smarter than Taoists because Taoists are silly enough to offer food to blocks of wood. I knew that he was serious because his family had converted to Christianity. I was so offended by his remark that I stopped listening from then on whenever Jesus was mentioned.

TRYING CHRISTIAN PRAYER

That same year, when I was fourteen, my father's health deteriorated very quickly and he was diagnosed with liver cancer. By year's end, the pain was so great that he would toss and turn with each spasm.



The sight of him in such agony broke my heart.

Whenever my father was in pain, I would beg the deities I worshipped to have mercy and to heal him. Oftentimes, I would plead for them to give him a moment of peace and be relieved of the pain so he could sleep well. I even hit my head against the floor as I begged. But none of my requests were granted.

One night, while my father was in the throes of pain, my Christian classmate called me. When I told her that my father was in great pain, she suggested that I pray to Jesus. The moment I heard "Jesus," I hung up on her. She called back and I hung up when she brought up Jesus again. When she called a third time, I gave in.

Since my usual deities had not listened to me, I decided that there was no harm in trying this foreign God. So I asked her to teach me how to pray. She said, "It's very simple. Start with 'In Jesus' name I pray,' and just say whatever you want to say. That's all." Indeed, it seemed simple—no idol was needed, and I could pray anywhere.

After hanging up the phone, I went into my room. I prayed and begged with a sincere heart that Jesus relieve my father of his pain. During the prayer, I felt a great sense of peace that I had never experienced before, certainly not while chanting or praying to idols.

After the prayer, I went to my father's room to check on him. He was no longer in pain and was fast asleep! Exhilarated, I

told myself that there must be something special about Jesus. My request had been granted after only one prayer to Him while my repeated requests to the idols had been ignored.

I decided not to offer incense or chant to any deities anymore. I wanted to learn more about Jesus.

MY SEARCH FOR JESUS

Back in school, I began to discuss Christianity with my two Christian classmates and asked them questions about the religion. When I did that, many of my Muslim classmates, who had never talked to me about Islam before, also came to talk to me about the Quran.

My new faith in Jesus was soon shaken by my interaction with my Muslim friends. There were times when they were so persuasive that I was tempted to join their religious classes and have their teacher explain the teachings of Islam to me. But I never went.

Instead, I turned to my Christian English teacher to clear my doubts. However, her answers could not completely reassure me and restore my faith in Christianity. I was left with many questions and no answers.

About two months later, the classmate who had taught me to pray was also looking for a church to join. She told me that she knew of a small and quiet church at Telok Kurau called True Jesus Church. She added that if one sat quietly in the pews towards the back of the chapel, people would not come up to ask questions or chat.

Since I am quite a shy person who does not like crowds, this church sounded ideal. We decided to attend a service together and joined a Wednesday evening service. I was quite shocked by the prayer in tongues. Still, I returned for a Friday evening service when my classmate asked me to go with her again.

During the closing prayer, I heard singing. It was an angelic sound that hovered near the ceiling, like a physical presence that swayed back and forth.

It was very soothing and gave me a wonderfully peaceful sensation. From then on, all fear of prayer in tongues disappeared.

COMING HOME

I stayed in the True Jesus Church to search for the truth. I often felt that the sermons were directed at me. Sometimes, they answered my questions about life, and other times they strengthened my conviction that this was the true church of God.

I asked many questions, including those that had surfaced after conversations with my Muslim friends. Thank God that the two brothers who studied the Bible with me were able to provide Bible-based answers to all my questions.

However, many obstacles popped up after I started going to church. It was difficult to attend services because my family still opposed Christianity, and I had to lie about where I was going in order to get out of the house.

A year after I came to True Jesus Church, my father passed away. After the funeral, I was told to offer incense to his tablet on the altar every morning. I refused, which angered my family and caused them to see me as an unfilial child.

In addition, I had to buy or cook my own meals during festive seasons as I refused to eat the food that my family had sacrificed to the idols. But through it all, I never saw these obstacles as a burden because I knew that I had to do what was right in the eyes of God.

Over the next few years, with increased understanding of the truth, I was even

more convinced that I had found the true church. My discussions with classmates from other Christian denominations reinforced this belief because I found that they did not fully adhere to the Bible.

I was eager to get baptized but had to wait, since my family opposed my baptism and I was not yet twenty-one years old. As a minor, I wasn't free to make this decision on my own. But when I turned twenty, I signed up for baptism because I didn't want to delay any longer. I did not tell my siblings because I knew they would disagree with my decision. I did tell my mother, who gave me permission to proceed.

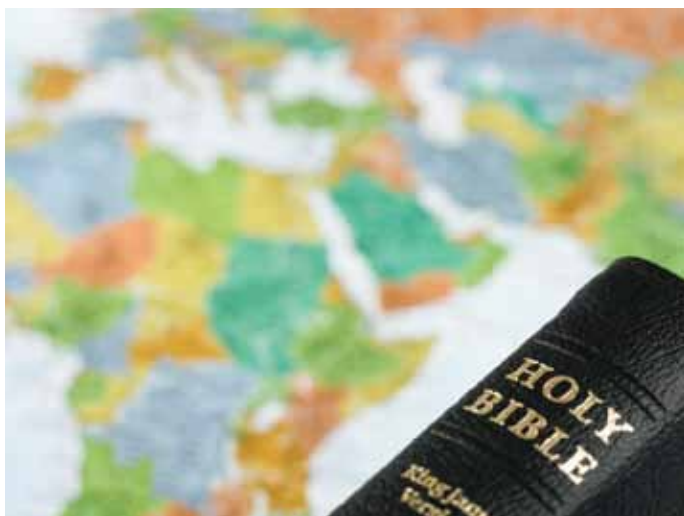
More than two decades have passed, and I still feel so very blessed that God brought me to His true church. I have had many doctrinal discussions with other Christians, even attending their services to see what their worship sessions were like. I could never feel the presence of God in these other places.

Conversely, attending worship services at the True Jesus Church is like coming home. Though I am still a shy person, I enjoy the fellowship with brothers and sisters. The truth from the sermons continue to enlighten and inspire me, and I derive so much peace and joy listening to the word of God that I try to attend all services.

Great is the Lord! He led me to know Him even though I was a sinner who once felt anger at the mention of His name. I really thank God for such deep love and mercy. All glory to Jesus! ★

I often felt that the sermons were directed at me. Sometimes, they answered my questions about life, and other times they strengthened my conviction that this was the true church of God.

How to Lead Bible Study



The Bible is the word of God. Through the Bible, we can understand the will of God, absorb spiritual food, and grow in spirit. Therefore, it is important to read the Bible and study it. Attending a group Bible study can improve our personal Bible reading through the encouragement, thoughts, and discussion of the participants.

For a group Bible study to be effective, it must be Christ-centered and nurtured through prayer. Furthermore, because the leaders of the Bible study can determine its success or failure, they must rely upon the guidance and encouragement from the Holy Spirit.

Preparation Before the Bible Study

Prayer is the most important tool for a leader. A leader's thorough preparation should come naturally after praying for the Bible study.

During the week preceding your scheduled session, study the passage that you have been assigned:

- Note key words and phrases. Pick out the main points of the passage.
- Do some research into the culture and historical background to understand the context of the passage and book. If certain verses are difficult to understand,

look into the original language to determine the meaning. The Bible was written thousands of years ago, so we must relate it to modern life.

- Think about the passage's application to daily life. What can we do to live out its teachings?
- Keep all of the main points in mind (or written in your notes) so that you will be able to facilitate discussion during the Bible study.

During the Bible Study

Arrive early to set up the room and to pray before the others arrive.

Keep track of the time. Ideally, the format of the Bible study should follow this schedule:

- Hymn singing and prayer (10 minutes)
- Read the passage out loud. The leader should explain the main points. (10 minutes)
- Discussion (30 minutes)
- Conclusion, hymn singing, and prayer (10 minutes)

During the discussion portion, control the time and monitor the direction of the discussion so that it stays on topic. Encourage all the participants to share their thoughts and reflections.

The conclusion should summarize the main points of the discussion and reiterate the teachings of the passage.

Other Reminders

When the opinions of members are not in accordance with the Bible, refer to the Bible for correction.

Interpret the Bible with the words of the Bible. Do not interpret the Bible according to personal opinion.

Speak with humility and kindness. Do not speak to rebuke others.

With prayer and practice, leading a group Bible study will be a fruitful and edifying experience.

Questions and Answers



How can we be sure that the seventh day today is the original seventh day God set aside in the beginning? It might be possible that we lost track of time at certain points in the history of the human race.

The Lord Jesus observed the Sabbath day (Lk 4:16, 13:10; Mk 6:2). So it should be beyond doubt that the day had not been lost up to Jesus' time.

The apostles confirmed the Sabbath kept by the Jews (Acts 15:21). Paul himself also kept the Sabbath (Acts 13:13, 14, 16:13, 17:1, 2, 18:4).

During the same period, sun worshippers observed Sunday and Sunday worship was later brought into the church. Yet the Jews were still keeping the Sabbath (seventh day). Both practices have been observed until today.

Although the Jews have been dispersed to different parts of the world, they all have been keeping the Sabbath on the same day even until today.

The seven-day week is found in many countries around the world since ancient times, and the days are the same from country to country.

God, the Creator of the Sabbath as well as the universe, would not have allowed His sacred day to be lost.

Why do I have to observe the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week? If I think the first day is the best day, I can keep the Sabbath on that day (Rom 14:4-6; Gal 4:10, 11).

The Bible never says, "Choose one day out of seven as a Sabbath day and observe it."

The day (seventh day) itself is a holy day and God especially blessed this day. God has set this day aside to be a day of rest (Gen 2:1-3).

God was very specific about exactly which day the Sabbath was. In Exodus 16:23, God said, "**Tomorrow** is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord" (emphasis added). And in verse 26 Moses explains that the seventh day (not any other day) is the Sabbath day. The same clarity and explicitness are also expressed in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:9-11; Deut 5:12-14).

We must do what God has commanded us, not what we feel is the best choice (1 Sam 15:22).

Romans 14:4-6 and Galatians 4:10, 11 do not refer to the weekly Sabbath day but to the observance of special days. The context of Romans 14 shows that Paul was talking about Mosaic regulations on days and food (see verse 2: refrain from meat). Galatians 4 is even clearer in that it refers to observance of special occasions prescribed in Old Testament regulations.

Facts, Stats and **Syntax**



Polls and Statistics

Government Restrictions on Religion

Out of **198** countries and self-administering territories:

National or local governments of **38%** of the countries limit efforts by religious groups or individuals to persuade others to join their faith.

Religious groups must register with the government for various purposes in **90%** of the countries.

Registration requirements resulted in major problems for, or outright discrimination against, certain faiths in **59%** of the countries.

From the study "Global Restrictions on Religion," <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1443/global-restrictions-on-religion>.

Word Study

One of the names given to the Holy Spirit is "Helper," as in John 14:16: "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever."

In the original Greek text, the word for Helper is *parakletos*, which means one who is summoned or called to aid.

Did You Know?

There were seven major festivals in the Old Testament. The first one according to the Jewish calendar is Passover, celebrated on the 15th of the first month *Nissan*. It is celebrated in the spring and often referred to as *Chag Ha-Aviv* (alternate spelling: *Hag Ha-Aviv*) or Festival of Spring. The Lord's Supper took place during a Passover meal.



A Godly Couple in a Godless Time

Hain-Lee Hsueh—East Bay, California, USA

In the era of the judges, God was repeatedly angry with the Israelites because they did not heed His voice (Judg 2:20). The original Hebrew word translated as “heed” in Judges 2:20 is sometimes translated as “listen” and “obey.”

After Joshua’s death, the Israelites failed to completely drive out the Canaanites, and the Angel of the Lord rebuked them, saying, “But you have not obeyed My voice” (Judg 2:2). When the Israelites complained while under the oppression of Midian, God sent a prophet to them, saying again, “But you have not obeyed My voice” (Judg 6:10).

It is the same in this generation. People everywhere, including Christians, often reject the voice of God in favor of

following their own desires, just like the Israelites.

Nonetheless, among all the Israelites who shut God out of their lives, there was one man whose voice God explicitly listened to. That man was Manoah, the obscure father of the legendary Samson.

Again the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD...Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. (Judg 13:1, 2)

MANOAH AND HIS WIFE

Manoah’s wife was barren, but one day the Angel of the LORD appeared to her and said that she would conceive and bear

a son. After the Angel finished speaking, she went to her husband Manoah:

So the woman came and told her husband, saying, “A Man of God came to me...And He said to me, ‘Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.’” Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, and said, “O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born.” (Judg 13:6-8)

After Manoah’s prayer the Angel of the LORD appeared to his wife a second time. In her excitement, she immediately

fetches her husband:

Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband, and said to him, "Look, the Man who came to me the other day has just now appeared to me!" So Manoah arose and followed his wife. (Judg 13:10, 11)

The Angel of the LORD repeated in front of Manoah the words first spoken to his wife. Grateful for the good news, Manoah and his wife offered a sacrifice, and the Angel of the LORD ascended in the flames. After a period of time, the words of the Angel of the LORD came to pass:

So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. (Judg 13:24)

We might wonder, "What's so special about this passage? Sounds like many other stories in the Old Testament." But this is a story in the chaotic time of the judges.

If we go through all the judges and try to find information about their parents, we don't get much more than the names of the fathers. Othniel, the son of Kenaz. Ehud, the son of Gera. Shamgar, the son of Anath.

Yet, the author of Judges thought it worthy to write an entire account on Samson's parents, before Samson was even born. Furthermore, the word of the LORD was rare in those days (1 Sam 3:1), during which the Angel of the LORD appeared only four times: once to rebuke the Israelites (Judg 2:1), once to Gideon

(Judg 6:12), and twice to Manoah's wife (Judg 13:3, 9).

From these observations, we see that Manoah and his wife were set apart by God. What made God notice them? And more importantly, what can we learn from them so that God will listen to our voices, too?

MANOAH'S PRAYER

Two details worth further study are Manoah's prayer to God and his question to the Angel of the LORD:

Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, and said, "O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born." And God listened to the voice of Manoah... (Judg 13:8, 9)



Manoah said [to the Angel of the LORD], "Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?" (Judg 13:12)

Manoah requested God's teaching. He asked God to give him instruction in regards to raising his son, without considering how *he* thought it ought to be done. All of his contemporaries acted according to their own judgment, but Manoah prayed for God's judgment.

He didn't just ask, either—he *pleaded*. The Israelites would occasionally inquire of God (Judg 20:18, 23, 27), but only Manoah *entreated* to God. And he entreated not for deliverance from famine, plague, or oppression but for God to lay down the boy's rule of life. In the Book of Judges, the Hebrew words for "entreat" and "teach" appear only once—during Manoah's prayer.

This tells us a lot about Manoah's heart and attitude. While surrounded by ungodly people who sought after idols, he patiently continued to desire God's will.

When his wife told him the Angel of the LORD had just appeared to her, his heart must have skipped a beat in excitement. After so much yearning and searching for God, he finally had a direction. He prayed to God, desiring to fulfill His will in His way. And God listened to the voice of Manoah.

In Jeremiah it is written:

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jer 29:11-13)

God has a plan for all of us, but we often prefer to do things our own way instead. We receive blessing upon blessing only to use them for personal enjoyment and gain. But Manoah, when he learned God was going to give him a son, sought out

God's thoughts and plans on how his son should live.

When was the last time we received a blessing and sought how we should utilize it for God's will? When was the last time we asked—no, pleaded—for God's teaching? Amidst all the people who pursue their own plans and personal ambitions, we need to be like Manoah, maintaining a steadfast thirst for God's teaching and God's will. Only if we have this attitude of entreating with all our heart will God listen to us.

A UNITED COUPLE

It would not be fair, however, to talk only about Manoah; from the passage, we see that God set his wife apart as well.

And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman... Then Manoah prayed to the LORD... and the Angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her." (Judg 3:3, 8, 9, emphasis added)

So the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful." (Judg 13:13, emphasis added)

This is remarkable among other accounts of barren women who conceived at the word of God. The Angel of the LORD appeared to Abraham, not Sarah (Gen 18:1); to Zechariah, not Elizabeth (Lk 1:11). But here, both times, the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman. Thus, Manoah did not stand out alone; God set him and his wife apart.

The unity between Manoah and his wife is apparent from his words. In his prayer, he says,

"Let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born." (Judg 13:8, emphasis added).

Even though the Angel of God appeared only to his wife, he considered it the same as if the Angel had appeared to both

We need to be like Manoah, maintaining a steadfast thirst for God's teaching and God's will. Only if we have this attitude of entreating with all our heart will God listen to us.

of them. Furthermore, when the Angel of the Lord repeated his instructions, Manoah said to him, "Let **us** detain You, and **we** will prepare a young goat for You" (Judg 13:15, emphasis added), even though Manoah himself prepared and made the offering (Judg 13:19).

Compare this to Abraham's words to the three visitors:

"My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant... I will bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh your hearts. After that you may pass by, inasmuch as you have come to your servant." (Gen 18:3-5, emphasis added)

Abraham tells Sarah to prepare food for the visitors but makes no reference to her in front of them.

The interaction between Manoah and his wife further illustrate their unity. The fact that the Angel of the LORD appeared both times to Manoah's wife when she was alone seems to imply that Manoah and his wife typically spent the day apart.

As soon as the Angel of the LORD entered their lives, however, they immediately came together. After the Angel spoke to Manoah's wife the first time, she immediately went to tell her husband. After the second appearance, she "ran in haste" to get her husband before the Angel could even speak. And Manoah immediately arose and followed his wife, no questions asked.

They trusted each other fully and, when it came to addressing the matters of God, were a unit. The image of both husband and wife before the Angel of the LORD

From God's point of view, two become one in marriage. Thus, husband and wife need to trust each other and trust God together, so that they may serve God as one.

ascending in the flames of their offering is a beautiful one.

In contrast, Abraham spoke to the three visitors by himself while his wife Sarah was in the tent. Interestingly, the first thing that the visitors asked Abraham was, "Where is Sarah your wife?" (Gen 18:9). It was as if they expected Sarah to be present so they could tell her directly, as the Angel of the LORD told Manoah's wife firsthand, that she would conceive and bear a son.

The trust between Manoah and his wife also existed between the couple and God. In a time when it seemed as if God had left Israel, Manoah believed the words of his wife, and both believed in the words of God.

When God told Abraham, the father of faith, and his wife Sarah that they would have a son, both of them laughed (Gen 17:17, 18:12). When God told Zacharias that Elizabeth would conceive, he also doubted (Lk 1:18). But when Manoah learned that his wife would conceive, he prayed.

Abraham and Zacharias heard the news from the Angel of the LORD firsthand; Manoah heard it secondhand. Yet, Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, "Now let Your words come to pass!" And because he trusted and honored both his wife and God, God listened to his prayer.

In 1 Peter, Peter writes:

*"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs **together** of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." (1 Pet 3:7, emphasis added)*

In the case of Manoah and his wife, the wife acknowledged the husband as the head by going to get him, and the husband spoke to the Angel of the LORD with his wife. They undertook the mission from God together, and God listened to the husband's prayer.

Husband and wife need to be closely united, especially when serving God, because God views them as being heirs together. Do our interactions and words illustrate that we trust and are closely united with our spouse? If there is always internal conflict or lack of honor and respect between our spouse and ourselves, such unity is not possible and will hinder our prayers.

THIRST FOR GOD'S TEACHING

Just as everyone in Israel in those days did whatever was right in his own eyes (Judg 21:25), people today often do whatever they see fit according to their own views and opinions. Consequently, quarrels are often exacerbated because individuals insist on their own ways of thinking. Many marriages end up in divorce. Even in church, there may be conflicts or barriers between husband and wife that result in individual and disconnected spiritual lives.

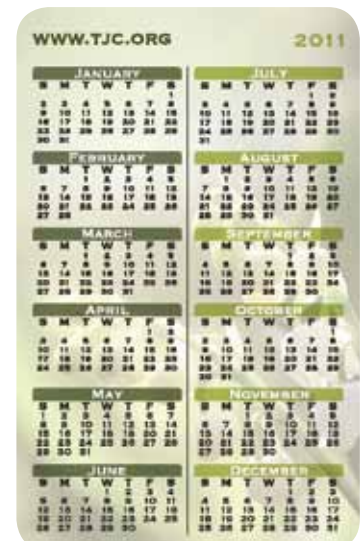
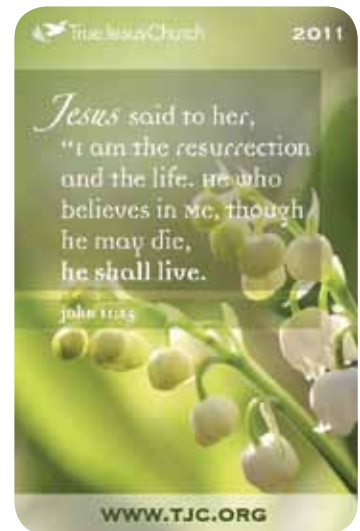
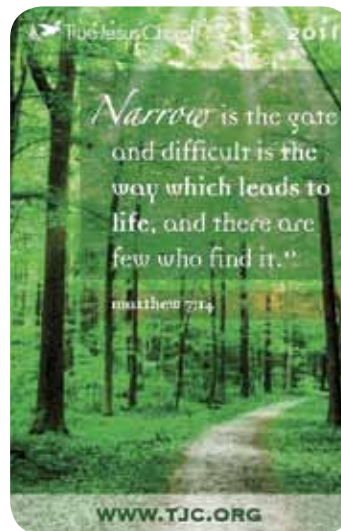
In this godless generation, the marriage of Manoah and his wife serves as a model for married couples to follow. We need to perceive marriage not just as companionship but also as a means to serve God more effectively. From God's point of view, two become one in marriage. Thus, husband and wife need to trust each other and trust God together, so that they may serve God as one.

There are also lessons to be learned for those who are single. In this age, idols

of worldly pleasure and ambition often render us blind to God's existence. But just as Manoah differentiated himself from the rest of the Israelites by maintaining a simple faith and continually praying to God to seek His will, we need to do likewise among our peers, whether they are believers or not.

In this society where individualism thrives and leaves little place for submission to God's word, we must persist in thirsting for God's teaching. In doing so, the Lord God in heaven can distinguish us from among the worldly throng and set us apart for His holy work. And when we pray and make our entreaty before Him, He will listen to our voice. ★

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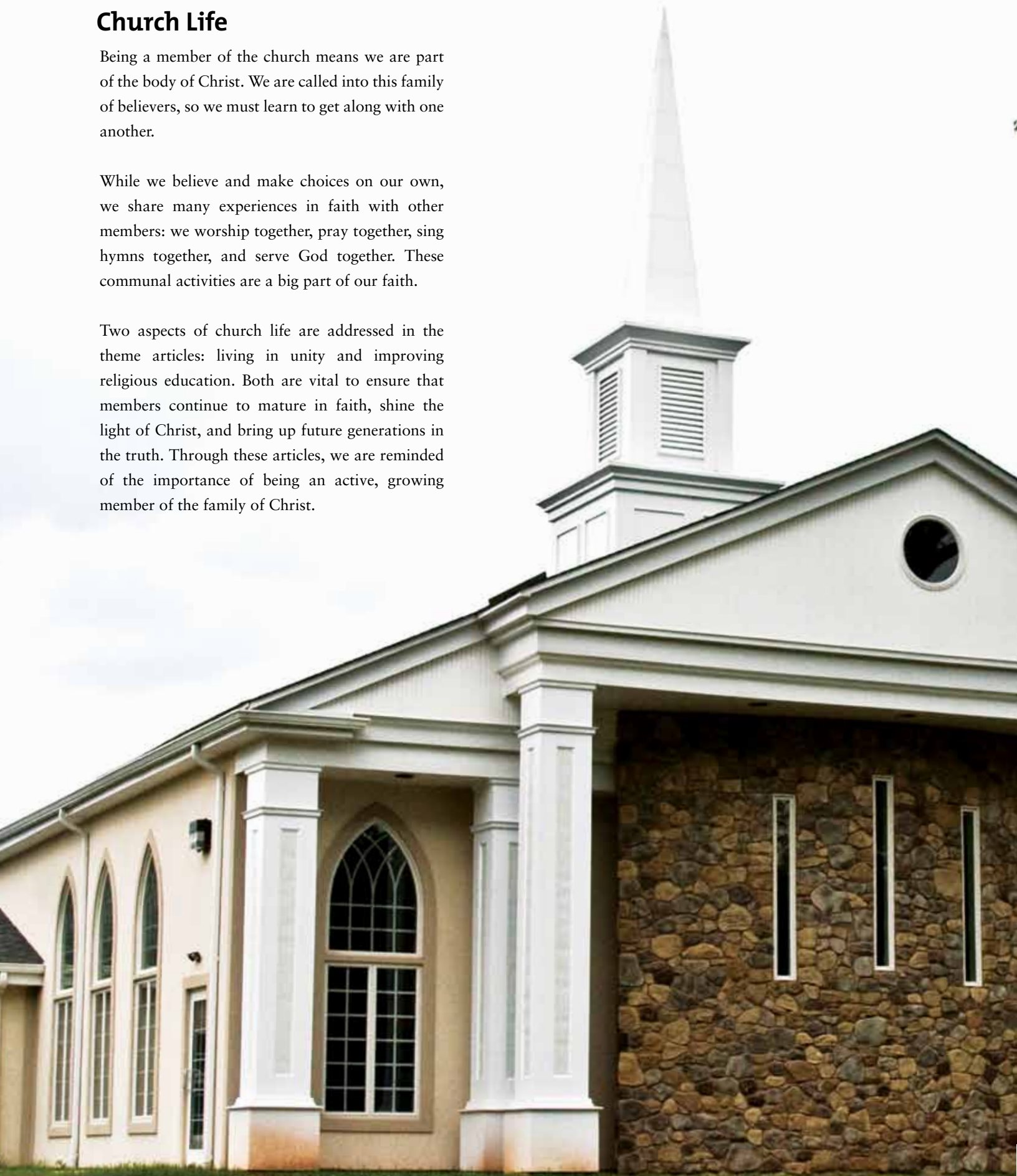
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Church Life

Being a member of the church means we are part of the body of Christ. We are called into this family of believers, so we must learn to get along with one another.

While we believe and make choices on our own, we share many experiences in faith with other members: we worship together, pray together, sing hymns together, and serve God together. These communal activities are a big part of our faith.

Two aspects of church life are addressed in the theme articles: living in unity and improving religious education. Both are vital to ensure that members continue to mature in faith, shine the light of Christ, and bring up future generations in the truth. Through these articles, we are reminded of the importance of being an active, growing member of the family of Christ.





To Be One in the Lord

FF Chong—London, UK

With the world under Satan's sway, he uses its elements to ensnare us in his schemes (1 Jn 5:19). Knowing this, the church must identify and seal every crack the evil one will fully take advantage of to split the church.

Jesus knew that the disciples would constantly battle against the evil one while in the world. Keeping them in the Lord forms a major part of Jesus' prayer in John chapter 17 and is heartily emphasized: "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one" (Jn 17:15).

The church's ability to overcome challenges stems from the unity from Christ that she strives to foster and continues to build on, particularly among the servants of God. For this reason, Paul urges individual believers to endeavor to

keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3).

The weight of this teaching is centered on Christ's work of reconciliation. Jesus sacrificed His own life in order to achieve peace. As a result, He abolished enmity in relationships, be they between man and man or between man and God (Eph 2:14-16).

This reconciliation is not intended only for all to admire His greatness. In fact, it brings to light Jesus Christ's nature, which believers need to adopt in order to defeat Satan and to fend off relentless fiery attacks, especially in holy work.

Since most problems in the church occur in the process of serving God with others, constant spiritual cultivation is necessary. We must understand that a life of servitude does not mean that we are

confined to doing work alone. It is a life that must be worthy of God's calling, just as Christ demonstrated on the cross. His example of understanding and forgiveness is one we should follow if we want to be one in Him.

SANCTIFY CHRIST

Within the church, unrefined words have proved to be a major cause of division. When differing views surface during heated dispute, words should be kept to a minimum to prevent us from taking out our displeasure on others.

We must learn to entrust matters into the Lord's hand, focusing on God above all else in order to sanctify Him in our hearts (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). Thus, His meek and reverent nature will be present in any difficult situation, ensuring peace in a diverse group of servants.

Serving the church ultimately ends with accountability before God. The point here is not merely how much church work *should* be done but *how* it is done. The crucial concern is whether it reflects the nature of God.

When we have the right heart, it generates and draws power from God. It impels us to stay silent, even as we are maligned, so that we may remain blameless before God (1 Pet 3:16). This is precisely what Christ did when He was fiercely reviled and brutalized (1 Pet 3:21-23). Instead of retaliating against those who harmed Him, which He was more than capable of doing, He chose to commit Himself to the Lord who judges righteously.

The retaliatory instinct is sinful and must be put to death if we are to continue living in righteousness. Honoring God in our hearts while being oppressed allows us to forgive the wrongdoer. In this way, we will experience that it is "by [Christ's] stripes [we are] healed" (1 Pet 2:24b; Isa 53:3). This is God's mysterious way of removing misunderstandings, differences, and ills.

An inseparable bond can always be maintained with Him when peace rules

True harmony comes from understanding that Christ is the Head of the church, and only with Him can problems be truly resolved.

within us. To have a good conscience before God is what matters. The strength from holding on to the truth will lessen any harm done to us and help us win over the wrongdoer. By honoring God, the church can be in continual pursuit of unity.

MAGNIFY CHRIST

The church at Corinth caused much grief to Paul. The members were divided in whom they perceived as the church leader, and some believed that Paul was one of those at fault (1 Cor 1:12).

The schism became so serious that the believers could no longer be considered spiritual but were rather viewed as babes in Christ (1 Cor 3:1-4). Their coming together caused more harm than good (1 Cor 11:17). The church could no longer function as the body of Christ and became a congregation of repelling groups that were in grave danger of destroying one another.

To deal with such a thorny issue required a completely spiritual mindset that magnified Christ. Paul made it clear that the church belonged to Jesus (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1). It was Christ who had set the believers apart from the world and done everything He could to call them to Himself (1 Cor 1:13).

The attitude we show as workers speaks volumes about how much we know about Christ and His work. We, whom God has called to serve, must recognize that we are merely vessels. No one should ever lay claim to the ownership of the church or think that he controls the believers.

Sometimes, a conflict within the church can flare out of control, especially when we are self-seeking and unrepentant. Instead of resolving differences, we go about soliciting support for a course of

action, which only further exacerbates an already negative situation.

At such times, serving God with a pure heart quickly vanishes, straining every working relationship to the breaking point. What preoccupies the church is not how to come together to work out a solution in fear and trembling; rather, whatever is conceived is intended to hurt each other.

In rebuilding unity amongst the different groups in Corinth, Paul lowered himself in order to promote Christ. He shook off those who supported him by saying that he neither died for them nor baptized them in his own name but in the name of Christ (1 Cor 1:13).

The work of rebuilding has to start with ourselves, not others. This generates peace and paves a way for patching up differences. True harmony comes from understanding that Christ is the Head of the church, and only with Him can problems be truly resolved.

BE HUMBLE

Nowadays, humility is hard to come by. Disguised pride has been another major cause of divisiveness in the church. Many go to great lengths to justify their pride more than the rightness of a case.

Some, though clearly at fault, refuse to back down. Still others believe that whatever they do is the best, despising the works of others and feeding their own pride. Frequently, what results is nothing less than a disservice to the community of faith.

The Bible teaches that the entire church must be clothed with humility and submit under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet 5:5, 6). A humble person does not boast of personal achievement.

Though Paul received a double confirmation of the work he did at Corinth,

where many came to believe and where he saw a vision (Acts 18:8-10), he did not boast of himself to those who supported other workers. Instead, he spoke to the church of his fear and ineloquence while he was with them (1 Cor 2:2-4).

To create an atmosphere that was conducive for working together, Paul did not hesitate to set an example of unity with Apollos (1 Cor 4:6). Though certain factions of the church considered them to be rivals, he quelled the idea not by superimposing his seniority and dominance over Apollos but by introducing peace (1 Cor 3:5-10).

Paul first spoke about the work they shared in building up the church—Paul planted and Apollos watered (1 Cor 3:6).

He did not state that he had done more than Apollos even though he had been stationed in Corinth for eighteen months under the instruction of the Lord (Acts 18:9-11).

Not only that, Paul was given the understanding and wisdom to deal with this potentially explosive situation: when Paul was at Corinth, Apollos had yet to understand baptism in the name of Jesus. Yet, Paul made Apollos of equal importance in the eyes of the believers with regard to establishing the church.

He was willing to humble himself, downplaying his work, so that the church could recognize that it was God who gave the increase. There can be no greater power to drive away the black cloud of disunity.

THE SAME FOUNDATION

Distorting the truth has been the most deadly tactic Satan has employed to confuse believers. This has been one of the most harmful causes of division in the church.

Being a God of order, He does not change His word. Therefore, no other foundation can be laid than that which has already been laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11). The pattern of sound words has to be kept in the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:13, 14). It is imperative that we know that no prophecy in Scripture is of private interpretation (2 Pet 1:20).

To prevent any heresy from splitting the church, the two sources of false teachers, within the church and outside the



Nanmen Church in Taipei, Taiwan

church, must be identified (Acts 20:29). In addition, believers must be trained to discern right teachings from wrong teachings.

There have been countless incidences of false teachers coming as savage wolves to harm the church. When they found a foothold in the sanctuary, they cast the truth down to the ground (cf. Dan 8:12).

The Jerusalem Conference is a notable example in which an onslaught of members advocating circumcision had troubled and unsettled the church (Acts 15:24; Gal 1:7-9). The infiltration of heresies into the churches at Galatia and Colosse is another example. As a result, the church became badly divided.

We must pray that we will not become false teachers. There are many reasons, apart from pride, for a worker to stray

from the foundation of truth. It is a risky exercise to probe into an issue about which the Bible does not even speak. The initial intention may be good, but, over the course of time, the mind can become obsessed with the subject and be unable to disentangle from it.

Though searching the Bible with great diligence is essential, keeping simple in what we have received is a powerful means to move forward. Through a simple faith coupled with trust in God, we can break down every stronghold through our obedience (2 Cor 10:4, 5).

We must learn to be truthful to the truth. First and foremost, imparting God's word is not about a rigorous intellect, nor is it about a mastery of the Bible or a demonstration of the ability to hone in on key biblical points and provide

clear answers to life's questions. Rather, it is about relying on God to cultivate ourselves and other members.

Second, we must be able to recognize the limits to our understanding. God has given to the church what He wants her to know. There must be no attempt to enter into uncharted biblical waters, extrapolating into the unknown.

The role of an imparter is to let the Bible speak for itself by disclosing, not inventing, biblical truths; to explain biblical concepts without any preconceived notions (particularly in ideology or ambition) and with an utter commitment to the truth that we have received; a respect for traditions (2 Thess 2:15); and a determination to practice faithfully what has been taught.

In this way, the church is molded into a mindset of honoring God and being equipped with the whole armor of God (Eph 6:6-18) to stand against the wiles of Satan.

TURN TO JESUS

It is hardly surprising to note that every one of us is having some sort of problem in our service to God. Sometimes, we are not the cause of the problem. At other times, the difficulty stems from us being unspiritual. When things are not prayerfully handled, they can quickly spiral out of control, causing nearly irreversible damage to the church and blurring the will of God.

When the church is in disarray, a problem that is compounded by division, the will to resolve conflicts must not be greater than the will to rely on God. Whenever there is a desire to be led, there is always an urge to foster a better relationship with God.

The will to submit to God in prayer is a humbling experience that makes us realize how insignificant we are. In this way, God's abiding presence will surely be felt and fill the church. Though disunity can be a fatal weakness, the sting can be alleviated when the parties concerned are bent on offering prayers of trust.



In doing all that we can to the best of our ability, our work must always revolve around God and prayer. We must set our mind on Christ to usher the church into a mode of trust and obedience to the truth.

The rivalry amongst the disciples was practically incurable—it even continued after the institution of the Holy Communion (Lk 22:23). Had it not been settled, it would have been a huge obstacle to the work of establishing the church after the ascension of Christ.

After Jesus' resurrection, He instructed the disciples to go to Galilee (Mt 26:32, 28:7, 10, 16), where He rebuked them for their unbelief and rivalry (Mk 16:14). Turning to Jesus in sincerity changed them completely, and they were able to continue with one accord in prayer and supplication (Acts 1:14, 2:1, 46).

There is always a limit to how much we can do. In doing all that we can to the best of our ability, our work must always revolve around God and prayer. We must set our mind on Christ to usher the church into a mode of trust and obedience to the truth.

The power to keep the church united emanates from God. He knows what is best for the church and how she is to be guided. Our trust is that He will do what is beneficial to the church, though it may not be easily understood. Only the Lord alone can save His church from being divided.

PRAY FOR PEACE

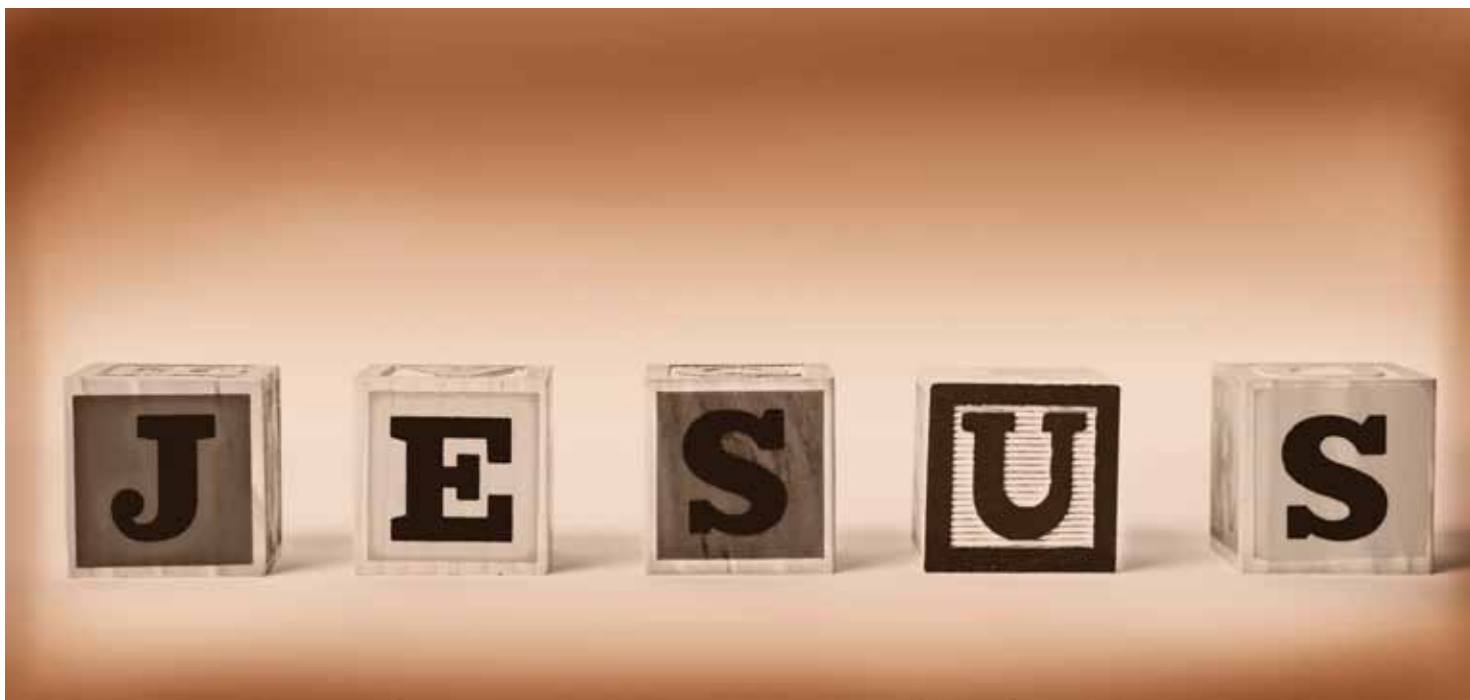
"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: 'May they prosper who love you.'" (Ps 122:6)

For peace to rule in us, we are required to pray unceasingly for the church and

lead the brethren to intercede for one another.

When concerted prayers are offered, believers are more inclined to care for the church. God's work becomes more noticeable. Differences and misunderstandings melt away in the power of His presence. Characters are shaped in the Spirit.

Love and faith can thus be stirred up with words from changed attitudes. Surely and prayerfully, the church shall be united, just as the Father is one with Jesus (Jn 17:22).★



Raising the Bar in Religious Education

Tan Guat Kim—Cheras, Malaysia

“The youths of today will be the leaders of tomorrow.”

I have often pondered on this axiom. It is a natural process of life. However, the demands and expectations on today's young people coupled with their own curiosity and society's influences well surpass that of my own youth!

Today's progressive and globalized society reflects phenomenal development. Knowledge is expanding at an exponential rate. Simultaneously, we see the emergence of children who are the product of this new age.

In this environment, it is important for religious education (RE) classes to meet the diverse and changing needs of the students. Are we sufficiently equipped to help our youths face the challenges

that lie ahead of them? How do we help our students stay grounded in pure faith, church doctrines, and Christian ethics? What does it take for us to help them live a life of reverence and to serve God?

These objectives should be the core of every RE department, but this feat entails redesigning an RE landscape that may have already become outdated. It is a timely move for the RE department to diversify its programs to accommodate a new generation of children effectively.

What should be the specific goals and strategies of the RE department in the 21st century? More importantly, how are we to address the changing world while retaining the objectives of religious education? These are pertinent questions and sobering challenges that ought to be raised.

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

At Home

RE classes can influence the values of the students, but Christian values are first and foremost developed at home. Because children will absorb values and beliefs that are modeled at home, Christian parents must not neglect their parenting responsibilities.

To be a Christian parent is a gift from God as well as a duty, and the greatest challenge is to bring up children who are able to fulfill their religious, social, and moral responsibilities.

God explicitly gave instructions for parents to teach their children His thoughts and laws (Deut 11:19-21). Through Moses, God told the Israelites:

"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)

Children must be rooted in their faith at home and have their faith reinforced in the church.

Therefore, parents must take religious education seriously. They should lead by example and incorporate God's word into their daily thinking, speaking, and living. Priorities should include praying together, setting aside consistent times to read the Bible, and building a close and loving rapport with their children.

At Church

The church needs to support the RE department and understand its role. Sufficient funds should be allocated to improve educational resources such as visual aids, reference books, and other classroom materials.

The church should liaise closely with the RE department. The concerns and needs of the RE department should be brought up and discussed with the church council.

In turn, they must take proactive steps to provide for those needs and address problems.

When the church and the RE department work together, the church doctrines and teachings will have significant effects on students and their families and make an impact on our students' upbringing. We cannot afford to look lightly on RE because the children who pass through church doors today will comprise the future congregation and leaders—the hope—of the church.

Ultimately, the church should remain a child's spiritual anchor, and those of us who are given the responsibility of RE are tasked with guiding our students to God and ensuring that they will remain in the church and live a life of reverence and discipline (Col 1:28).

BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION

An Impenetrable Faith

While weekly RE classes can help guide students and give them Bible knowledge and life application examples, what happens during the rest of the week is out of the teacher's hands.

An area of immense concern, particularly for our impressionable teenage youths, is their social circle. They are experiencing a plethora of disconcerting changes and challenges. For many, their Christian values and integrity will be challenged as they come into more contact with the world through their friends and the media. Can they still defend and maintain their faith?

In reality, our students cannot live an insular life, restricting their movements and debarring themselves from interacting with friends outside the church and their homes. This is not practical—we must

find another way to ensure that their faith remains grounded.

I recall Daniel and his three friends, who were captured and thrown into the sinful society of Babylon. They were taken from their families as adolescents into the service of the king. They were surrounded by a pagan and idolatrous culture, yet none of them were influenced by it! How did they stand firm in such an environment?

The answer is they took their values and faith with them. They did not isolate themselves in order to keep their faith. Their faith remained deeply ingrained in their hearts, despite being exposed to all sorts of social ills.

Therefore, to nurture and prepare our students, we must challenge them to acquire an impenetrable faith. This will ensure that they are able to overcome all temptations and uphold their Christian principles in this ruthless world—just like Daniel and his friends.

Well-versed in the Bible

An essential component of maintaining a strong faith is being well-versed in the Bible. It is not possible to live out God's words if we are not acquainted with them.

Therefore, it is disheartening to note that, for many students, their only contact with the Bible is when they attend RE classes. I have reminded my Junior Youth students (ages thirteen to seventeen) time and again that reading the Bible is not an option but absolutely critical and mandatory in their walk as a Christian, and they must never underestimate the importance of Bible reading.

Many are reluctant to read; not only do they find it boring and dogmatic, they

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In an ever-changing society, RE classes pave the way for students to achieve their emotional, social, and spiritual potentials—helping each student develop and reach spiritual maturity and integrity.

encounter difficulties in understanding the many connotations of what they read. Nevertheless, these obstacles must be overcome.

Students must be conscientious in following a Bible reading plan. They should be encouraged to read the Bible systematically, with determination and commitment. For example, they can read in chronological order to see the significance of Bible events and accounts clearly.

Guidelines should be given on how to approach reading the Bible. They should begin with a prayer for God's guidance and understanding (Jn 16:13). The students' attitude is also important; they should read with a humble heart and depend on the wisdom of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Study aids (Bible concordance, church commentaries and outlines, the dictionary, etc.) can further enhance their understanding and perception of the Bible. More importantly, RE students must be made to realize that reading the Bible to gain knowledge is insufficient. They must take it a step further by applying the word of God (2 Tim 2:15).

They must be firmly grounded in the doctrines and disciplined in their pursuit to study the Bible. Then they will be able to judge the world from God's perspective and grow in their faith. All RE teachers should continually encourage their students in this direction of spiritual cultivation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having had the privilege of being a teacher for three decades, I have concluded that the students of today greatly differ in character, poise, and personality from those I first taught. Therefore, to keep up with the times, I must also change and explore new methods and avenues while retaining what has proven to be good and sound.

There is an imminent need to evaluate our teaching methods and modify them in response to the changing society. There is limited room for complacency, but what I would like to strongly reiterate is that, amidst changes, the fundamental beliefs and church doctrines must never be sacrificed. God intended that His truth be applicable at all times, regardless of changing and new environments.

For RE Teachers

Being an RE teacher is a privilege and an honor and should not become a burden or a chore.

Teaching God's word is not merely a duty or a cerebral task—it requires our emotional and spiritual involvement. Being an RE teacher means that we should not only teach but constantly be supportive and concerned for our students and be sincerely committed to taking a personal interest in their faith and spiritual growth.

We are not teachers for an hour per week; instead, we need to make the effort to understand and bond with them as unique individuals. This is by far the most rewarding approach to being an RE teacher.

If all RE teachers constantly examine themselves, evaluate and improve their teaching methods, inject new ideas and enthusiasm in their teaching, and take time to be thoroughly prepared for their lessons, it will alleviate boredom and classroom routine. In addition, it will open doors and avenues for the students to be more motivated to learn.

We should also support seminars and workshops organized by the church

on local, national, and international levels. These programs provide in-depth exposure and practical advice on teaching. These skills and knowledge are necessary and relevant, and they may prevent more experienced teachers from getting stuck in a rut!

Counseling

The RE department can consider offering student counseling sessions that are made available to all RE students as a group or on a one-on-one basis. There are students who may need individual counseling beyond the classroom to resolve personal issues. They need the privacy to share with someone they can trust to alleviate their personal burdens—a counselor, teacher, or godly adult who can lend an objective ear and offer wisdom from the Bible and the Holy Spirit.

Counseling must integrate prayers, appropriate advice from a Christian perspective, and biblical principles. Only then will the counseling sessions be truly beneficial.

Bible-based advice on topics like friendship, peer pressure, and career guidance should be discussed openly in class. Students should be encouraged to look in the Bible for answers and be prepared to deal with such issues. This will then pave the way for resilient personal development.

Evangelism

It is never too early to learn the art of evangelizing! RE students can be ambassadors for God. What better way than for the students to invite their friends to attend RE classes together with them?

RE teachers should encourage their students to be involved in evangelism. First, RE teachers should instill a sense of responsibility and the need to evangelize to their friends outside of church.

Second, they should be taught how to evangelize. The RE department should set aside time to teach the importance and significance of preaching God's word.

Third, much preparatory work is needed. Students should be familiar with the church doctrines and key Bible verses before preaching to their friends. It is important to equip the students with appropriate procedures of preaching and to constantly remind and show them the power of prayer in spreading the gospel.

Outreach Programs

The RE department can implement programs that appeal to students to reach out and show their concern for other members. These activities, which are less didactic and more interactive, can include leading fellowship services and helping members in need.

The objective of outreach is to teach Christian living principles. Visiting retirement homes, orphanages, and hospitals provide opportunities for the students to evangelize and work with non-Christians.

The students should also be encouraged to serve other members in the church. For example, they can allocate a certain portion of their time to run errands or do some housework for senior members who are in need of help. They can also serve fellow students facing difficulties by offering their time, prayer, and support.

Participating in these outreach efforts will allow students to bond with their community as well as other church members. These efforts will help students appreciate their social environment and acquire healthy attitudes like humility, respect, commitment, concern for others, as well as responsibility. Such exposures can add great value towards their personal Christian growth.

and apply God's words in life and to utilize their talents to serve Him and make good decisions in their personal lives.

May God open for us a window of opportunity to serve with an unclouded mind, undaunted spirit, and steadfast faith. When an RE department is committed to working with the church and to adapt and make changes in line with the needs of a new generation of students, a dedicated and committed teacher can and will make the difference. ★

In an ever-changing society, RE classes pave the way for students to achieve their emotional, social, and spiritual potentials—helping each student develop and reach spiritual maturity and integrity.

There is wisdom in serving God as an RE teacher, and it is the desire of RE teachers everywhere to see their students articulate



Managing Career, Family, and Faith: A Christian's Challenge

Philip Shee—Singapore

"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world... They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world... As you sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." (Jn 17:15-18)

Christians are often told to be in the world but not of the world. What does that translate into in practice? Apart from making sure our conduct and lifestyle do not conform to secular practices contrary to biblical teachings, there is one area that the majority of us have to deal with constantly—setting priorities among our career, family, and God.

It is a challenge to maintain balance between living in the secular world and thriving in our spiritual lives. Can we be a good Christian and be successful in our career at the same time? Is it possible

to realize our full potential in our career and still be found favorable in the eyes of God?

THE MEANING OF PRIORITIZATION

The world is supposedly more advanced and efficient than the past. Yet, it is ironic that we are often much busier and suffer more stress than before. Greater efficiency but less time—how we strike a balance among our career, family, and church becomes a matter requiring real strategy.

Many tackle this challenge by notionally breaking their lives into phases and focusing on one area at each phase. Our prioritization process is also often quick to rank career first, family second, and church a distant third.

For this reason, we often see Christians waning in fervor as they gain ground in their career. That opportunity to make an impression, to break through to the next level of achievement, is often too good to miss. Hence, striking the balance here often means that “God can wait” or that “We will make up to the family later.”

In the parable of the wedding feast, the king ordered his servants to call those invited to attend the feast, but the invitation was taken lightly as each went their way, to their farms or to their business. The king was furious and deemed those invited as unworthy (Mt 22:2-8).

On another occasion, Jesus called someone to follow Him. Although the response seemed positive on the surface, the person asked Jesus to wait as he had to first bid farewell to his family. Jesus deemed this man unfit for the kingdom of God (Lk 9:61, 62).

These two passages remind us that putting off the matters of God to a later date to focus on our career or our family may not be a wise choice.

The effective way of managing our time and energy starts with the realization that it is not about focusing on different aspects at different phases of our lives. A successful balance also does not pivot on an equal allocation of our time.

Actually, the only way a balance can be achieved is to make God the pivot and have everything else balance around it. This means that our one and only focus is God and nothing else!

This does not suggest that Christians, by default, are irresponsible workers in society and negligent spouses or parents at home. On the contrary, it is precisely because our only focus and pivot is God that Christians should display the most responsible behavior both at work and at home.

The motivation to do a good job at work is not our relentless and blind pursuit of material rewards, for career advancement, or the satisfaction of our ego, but rather the natural need for a

good Christian to do the right thing, be an example, and bring glory to the name of God.

This is summed up in Ephesians 6:5, 6:

Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice as menpleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord and not to men.

Likewise, it is precisely due to our love for God that we will naturally love and give to our family. A person who loves God and walks closely with Him will know how to care for his family and rely on Him to build a strong, loving family.

As we draw closer to God, He will give us the wisdom to naturally strike the balance in faith, career, and family. Therefore, the formula to manage conflicting demands for our time and energy really lies in just focusing on God.

This is very different from using our own human or worldly wisdom, as relying on our own abilities will inevitably lead us to focus on our career, followed by family, and leaving God and the church to fill whatever is left of our spare time.

GAINING SUCCESS IN THE SECULAR WORLD

Christians seeking to serve God may often face the dilemma of whether they should allow their fullest potential in their career be realized. The corporate world constantly pushes for better performance year after year and seeks to promote performers to achieve higher levels of responsibility.

The question is whether Christians should continue to attain or accept more and more senior positions in their careers, which often compromises the time for and the quality of service to the Lord. On the other hand, are Christians meant to be underachievers even if they may not necessarily be under-performers?

The Bible does not forbid Christians from being achievers. In fact, there are examples of God's people who attained very high levels of achievement. At only thirty years of age, Joseph became second only to the pharaoh of Egypt, a leading nation at that time (Gen 41:40-44, 46). Daniel became one of three governors under King Darius (Dan 6:1, 2).

However, one commonality in these cases is that the achievements were unequivocally the work of God to fulfill His own special purpose. Neither Joseph nor Daniel actively sought their high-ranking position. All they did was to simply continue in their faith and integrity towards God even in the face of adversity.

Joseph, when tempted, did not yield to his mistress and, when jailed, did not murmur against God (Gen 39:7-20). Daniel did not compromise his beliefs to enjoy the delicacies of Babylon and risked his life to continue to pray three times a day, as was his custom (Dan 6:1-10). They simply did the right thing. The rest of the road to achievement was paved by God.

As we advance in our careers, the examples above remind us to sincerely make the following considerations:

- Are these career opportunities engineered by us or by God? Are we over-working to be rich or to achieve advancement in our career?

The motivation to do a good job at work is not our relentless and blind pursuit of material rewards, for career advancement, or the satisfaction of our ego, but rather the natural need for a good Christian to do the right thing, be an example, and bring glory to the name of God.



- Is this promotion pandering to our ego or is there potentially a higher purpose of God?
- What is the state of our faith? That is, are we so close to God that we are truly focusing on Him and allowing our way forward to be charted by Him? Or have we drifted from God such that we are actually engineering our own moves but wishfully hoping that God will concur?
- If we were to rise to the highest levels in our career, would we be able to use our achievements to contribute to God? If so, are we willing?
- Are there any direct conflicts with our faith? Will we put ourselves in potentially difficult situations where we may need to compromise our beliefs?

As we search for answers, the Bible has also laid down the following familiar and related teachings:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Prov 3:5, 6)

Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? (Prov 23:4, 5)

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. (Mt 6:33)

While everyone's situation is unique, maintaining a close relationship with God, devoting ourselves to deep and long prayers, and consistently seeking wisdom from Scripture should certainly provide solutions to whatever circumstances we face.

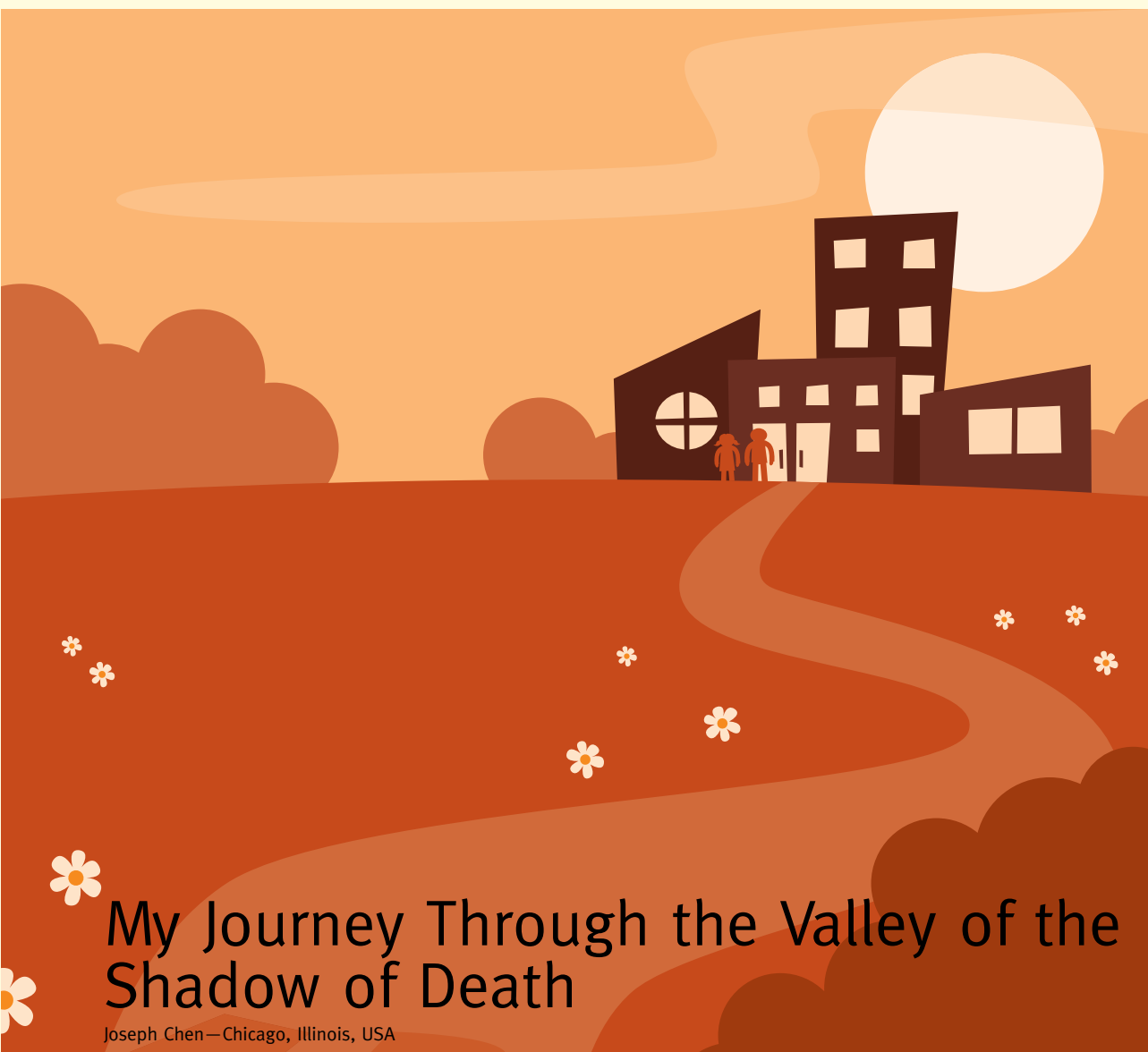
VERDICT AT THE END

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mt 16:26)

Let us picture the scene at our retirement party. On that day, we are surrounded by colleagues and business associates celebrating our illustrious career. What thoughts will be racing through our minds?

What will we rejoice over? What will be our regrets? Will our family still be there as well, rejoicing and celebrating together with us? Will we take comfort in knowing that we have been a light to the world and salt to the earth? Will we be thankful that God has walked with us and guided us through our entire career? Will God be pleased with us?

The list of questions can go on. But for now, there is still some time before that day. How we manage our time and efforts in maintaining a balanced life today will determine how we view our career. What thoughts do we want at our retirement party? ★



My Journey Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Joseph Chen—Chicago, Illinois, USA

God healed me from cancer when I was in high school. Now, twelve years later, I am pursuing a PhD at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, but the painful memories of my chemotherapy treatment are hard to forget. Through that experience, my values and priorities were changed, and I thank God for the opportunity to share His marvelous grace.

MY FIRST FIGHT AGAINST CANCER

In 1997, I had just entered an academically competitive high school in Taiwan and immediately felt great pressure. During the second semester of my freshman year, I started to get sick often with stomachaches and colds, but I didn't think anything of it. My homeroom teacher,

who genuinely cared about her students, took me to the hospital because I was so ill during class.

I was diagnosed with lymphoma, a type of cancer that originates in white blood cells, which are cells of the immune system that defend the body against infectious diseases. The doctors said it was very rare for someone so young to have this illness and recommended that I immediately put my studies on hold and begin chemotherapy.

However, my family wondered if I had been misdiagnosed and sought a second opinion. At the same time, we prayed sincerely to God for a miracle. After an examination using more sophisticated medical technology, the doctors confirmed that I had cancer, specifically lymphoma.

My mother later told me that, during this period, the doctor repeatedly told my family to prepare themselves for any outcome since my illness was in its most critical stage. My family prepared themselves by praying every day as they usually did, entrusting the matter to Jesus Christ, the Lord of life.

From the way my parents normally prayed and trusted God, I learned a very valuable life lesson: live actively by the principle, "Prepare yourself when you can, not when you need to." I have carried this lesson with me at home and abroad, as a student and as a person, and it has been like a faithful guide to me.

Since I was so young at the time, I did not react that strongly to the news. Actually, I thought it would be a good



opportunity to take a break from school! However, after my parents completed the necessary paperwork to suspend my studies, my life spiraled into a journey through the valley of the shadow of death.

I began a regimen of six treatment cycles. Every three weeks, I went to the hospital for three hours of chemotherapy and then suffered three days of very severe side effects including nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and loss of appetite. The anxiety that began soon after the medications were administered was so unbearable that time seemed to stand still as I lay on the hospital bed unable to sleep. Soft noises were amplified to the point that the sound of a pin dropping on the floor was deafening.

I began to lose my hair, which made me reluctant to go out in public. When I went to service or Student Spiritual Convocation, I felt very disrespectful because I had to wear a hat. As I became weaker and weaker during the course of the chemotherapy, diarrhea became the least of my concerns among the many other adverse effects.

The pain of the treatment helped me realize the importance of health and understand the following words recorded in the Bible: "A living dog is better than a dead lion" (Eccl 9:4).

After the chemotherapy sessions were over, I begged my parents not to let me suffer this torment again. Apart from not wanting to go through the physical pain, I was also eager to resume school in September. They agreed, even though the doctor said there was an 80% chance that the cancer would return in the next two years. As I left the hospital to recover at home, all we could do was entrust the matter to God in prayer.

THE LORD'S PROVIDENCE

Back in school, it was hard to handle all the schoolwork because I was physically weaker. Most of my friends were in another grade, and I had to make new

friends and catch up with fast-paced studies. Nevertheless, amazingly, I was able to successfully repeat my freshman year of high school and enter my sophomore year.

One day in November of my sophomore year, I felt a lump on my neck when showering. Very reluctantly, I told my parents. My father led us in prayer, saying, "As we focus on Joseph's health in our prayers, let us entrust it to the Lord. God's will must be within all of this."

The month before, the doctor had performed a bone marrow examination and said everything was fine. Now, however, the MRI showed that cancer cells were again active.

The homeroom teacher who had taken me to the hospital advised me to see a certain doctor at the National Taiwan University (NTU) Hospital in Taipei. My friend and I made the long trip there from Taichung and, at our arrival, were told that the doctor was not there and that the hours for making appointments were over. The lady scheduling appointments was about to draw the window blinds and shut down her computer when she saw us and asked if I was a cancer patient. I answered, "Yes," and she gave me an appointment.

Several years later, I learned that only preauthorized cancer patients could obtain an appointment. I believe that I got an appointment because God had planned to put me under the care of a certain doctor, Dr. Chen, Director of the Department of Hematology at the NTU Hospital.

Not everyone has the opportunity to be treated by such a good doctor as Dr. Chen, who dedicated himself to thoroughly

understanding my condition. It was clear that God had given him professionalism, knowledge, and a caring heart. To this day, I send him a card every year or two to thank him.

The next Sabbath, the hospital called us to say, "You are very fortunate. You can check into the hospital on Monday." It was a miracle that I secured a hospital bed this easily. One fellow cancer patient lived in the emergency room for about a month before he was given a bed in a regular ward.

After a comprehensive checkup at the hospital, Dr. Chen told my parents how serious my condition was. It was only after I was discharged from the hospital that my parents told me what he said.

The doctor had told them, "The cancer has spread to the bone marrow and to the brain. The situation in the brain looks particularly complicated. If he doesn't react positively to chemotherapy, his condition will worsen, and he will likely die. Please prepare yourselves for the worst."

My parents had heard this type of bad news many times before. Although the emotional pain they suffered was beyond what I could imagine, they never let me see their tears and chose instead to cry silently for me in their prayers.

All I knew at the time was that I had to undergo extremely high doses of chemotherapy at once. The treatment itself would put my life at risk.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

During the winter holiday, I began high-dose chemotherapy treatment at the NTU Hospital. Remembering this period of my life still sends a chill down my spine.

During those eight months in the NTU Hospital, I prayed earnestly each day... "Dear Lord Jesus Christ, I know that You might take me. If You want to take me with You, I am willing to accept it, but please comfort my family because they will be the ones to suffer most."

My father asked many of the churches in Taiwan to pray for me. Our local church was not open at night, so each day after work, my father would go to the Lileng Church at midnight and tearfully pray in the chapel.

According to a nurse, my chemo dosage was so strong that two patients who had received a similar dosage had died. Medications were given intravenously starting from the morning, and at night I received saline and rest. This treatment process was administered for three consecutive days, during which I alternated between lying in bed and vomiting.

By the second day, I gave up eating altogether, knowing that I wouldn't be able to keep anything down. Because the dosage was high, several side effects became many times worse. In addition to ulcers in my mouth, I had an ulcer in my esophagus. It took me twenty minutes to eat or drink anything and the process was very painful.

Apart from this, I had to take nystatin, a liquid antifungal medication with a very unpleasant flavor, before and after eating. For those eight months in the hospital, everything I ate tasted like nystatin.

I also went into cycles of constipation and diarrhea. I lost weight until I reached 101 pounds and became the proverbial skin and bones. My hair fell out so fast that the nurse had to use tape to remove all the remaining hair to keep things sanitary.

When the medications were in effect, my white blood cell count went down to almost zero, which put my life in danger, as normal white blood cell counts are between 6,000 and 10,000. Some of the other chemotherapy patients had their blood drawn every two days like me, so we started a competition to see who had the highest white blood cell count. Scoring more than sixty was a rare occurrence.

Undergoing this treatment in the sterile room was like going through hell on earth. All that was left to do was to pray with the little strength I had left and fight against time.

During those eight months in the NTU Hospital, I prayed earnestly each day, never changing the content of my prayers from the day I was admitted until the day I was discharged:

"Dear Lord Jesus Christ, I know that You might take me. If You want to take me with You, I am willing to accept it, but please comfort my family because they will be the ones to suffer most. However, if You think that I still can be of any use here in the world, maybe You could consider letting me stay, and I will certainly try my best to survive."

My father asked many of the churches in Taiwan to pray for me. Our local church was not open at night, so each day after work, my father would go to the Lileng Church at midnight and tearfully pray in the chapel.

Sometimes, while driving to work, my father would have to pull over because of sudden bursts of tears that would overwhelm him while praying for me in his heart. Although I did not know it at the time, the fervent intercessions of my family and brothers and sisters in church acted as a strong sustaining force for me.

GOD'S WONDERFUL WILL

While I was going through chemotherapy, the doctor asked my father to prepare about \$1,000,000 NTD (about \$30,000 USD) in cash. The doctor explained, "It is more likely to find fully compatible bone marrow in siblings. If not, we have to look nationwide. If we cannot find

it in the country, we'll need to search internationally, and that will cost at least \$1,000,000 NTD. The chance of finding a compatible person who is not a sibling is one in two million." To prepare for this expense, my father sold farmland that was worth exactly \$1,000,000 NTD.

I have three brothers and one sister. The doctor first analyzed the blood and bone marrow of my three brothers. When we found out that none of my brothers were compatible and our hopes were lost, I had an unforgettable dream.

In my dream, my brothers and I were out in the mountains. I was walking behind the rest of them and slipped off the mountainside because I was not careful. I managed to hold on to the edge, but I knew I couldn't hang on for long. I called to my second and third brother for help but they couldn't hear me.

As I was about to fall off the mountain, my eldest brother Shanchuan suddenly appeared and pulled me up. After that, we cleared that dangerous mountain road without further incident.

When I talked to my father the next day, he encouraged me with heartfelt words that revived my hope in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death. He said, "Don't be worried, Joseph! As always, let's pray to God and entrust it all to Him. We will see His wonderful will unfold."

At this critical stage, something miraculous happened. Dr. Chen told me, "Congratulations, Joseph! In the end, we found that your brother Shanchuan's bone marrow is fully compatible with yours, so we can do a bone marrow transplant."

God had planned this all even before I was born! My mother and I offered our prayers to God with tears of thankfulness. While praying, I remembered that God had revealed this to me in my dream.

After struggling for so long, I finally entered the intensive care unit for a bone marrow transplant, the last stage of my treatment. A bone marrow transplant is very risky because it consists of using chemicals or radiation to remove the

bone marrow that creates cancer cells and injecting healthy compatible bone marrow. Lastly, there is a session of radiotherapy. All of these steps are taken to ensure that the old bone marrow is completely eliminated.

During the month-long bone marrow transplant process, I had a fever of 108° F for several days. My mother was warned several times that my life was in danger. The last night of the fever, I completely lost consciousness.

When I awoke the next morning, it was the beginning of seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. I realized how fragile and insignificant humans were, yet God,

who rules life, raised us from the ashes of death.

As it says in Luke,

*"Through the tender mercy of our God,
With which the Dayspring from on high has
visited us;
To give light to those who sit in darkness
and the shadow of death,
To guide our feet into the way of peace."
(Lk 1:78, 79)*

Leaving the intensive care unit was the first step in escaping from the valley of death. I recovered for a month in a normal hospital room before being formally

discharged. I still needed to go to the NTU Hospital every week for follow-up blood tests, but as the days and months went by, I started to recover little by little and march toward life again.

A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

When I was discharged, Dr. Chen warned me, "You have to stay at home and rest for two years. Don't even think about going back to the high school you used to attend and subjecting yourself to that kind of pressure."

At home, I started thinking over and over about how I survived from hospitalization to discharge. I was able to get through that time thanks to the love and the prayers of my family as well as



**Taipei Church
Tatung Church
NTU Hospital**

**Lileng Church
Boai Church**

Nanshi Church

Life is precious, but the soul even more so. I now study and work hard with a clear goal—to live happily with God.

my local church. The mothers of Tatung Church came to visit me and to pray with me every week.

Members from the churches of Lileng, Boai, and Nanshi came from afar to show their concern and pray for me at the NTU Hospital. The board members of the Taipei Church sent me sterilized church publications so that I could read them in my hospital room. This moved me as well as the nurses caring for me. God heard the prayers of the many brothers and sisters from different churches, and He allowed me to have a second chance at life.

Because of this, I told my parents, “It was truly Jesus Christ who healed me. If we trust in His power, why do we fear what might happen if I go back to school? If the Lord healed me, how is it that He can’t protect me if I go back to school?” My parents were moved, so by faith they did the paperwork for me to return to school.

Nonetheless, the school had its doubts and considered my condition unsuitable for coping with the pressures of study. My father went to plead with the school officials and quoted a verse from Isaiah 42:3: “A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench.”

The school officials agreed to let me return to high school, and I took up the challenge. However, this time, my vision and attitude were different.

With a calm heart, I opened my spiritual eyes and carefully contemplated all aspects of life. People too often believe they will live to their seventies or even eighties, but the truth is that we never know! It is extremely important that we live to the utmost here and now.

Life is precious, but the soul even more so. I now study and work hard with a clear goal—to live happily with God.

I would like to conclude this chapter of walking out of the valley of death with David’s Psalm 23:

*The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name’s sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the
presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever. ★*

A Noble Task

Hain-Lee Hsueh—East Bay, California, USA

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. (1 Tim 3:1, NIV)

1 Timothy chapter 3 describes the criteria and qualifications of being an overseer, or “bishop,” and a deacon. As indicated by the first verse, the description that follows is not for those who are already an overseer or deacon (though I’m sure it serves as an excellent reminder), but for those who desire to become one. It is not a list of requirements by which we judge existing church workers, but a set of spiritual goals and standards we are to diligently pursue if we wish to dedicate ourselves to, and become worthy of, serving the church.

And to pursue diligently is by no means an overstatement. The standards are high, beginning with “above reproach,” or blameless (1 Tim 3:2). To desire to serve the Lord is no casual matter; it’s an ambition.

In our society, it is typical for people to have ambitious career goals. If we want to be accepted into a prestigious university, we have to study hard and take up a lot of extracurricular activities to develop our knowledge and be well rounded. If we want to become a technical expert, we must receive a lot of hands-on and theoretical training and constantly keep up with the latest tools and technologies. If we want to become a doctor, we need to score well on the MCAT and excel in medical school.

Bottom line: when we want to achieve something or become someone noteworthy in society, we take it seriously, and we’re prepared to do whatever it takes to fulfill any prerequisites and pass any test or assessment with flying colors. Only those who excel in the necessary qualities will make the cut, and, in this way, we egg ourselves on.

Again, to serve the Lord in His church is an ambition. We might think, “As long as I have the desire to serve, then God will accept me.” Maybe it seems more loving or politically correct to believe this. But in my opinion, this is a gross oversimplification.

If I have the desire to be a doctor, then can I just begin treating patients? If I have the desire to get a PhD, then can I just expect to get a diploma? Of course not.

Isn’t God higher than all of these? Isn’t His house more honorable than any worldly office? Thus, if I have the desire to serve God in His house, then can I just begin to lead, teach others, and make decisions? Of course not.

If we want to serve God, we must view this ambition with the highest regard. We must be ready to do whatever it takes to prepare and train ourselves, giving up whatever may hinder us from attaining the standard of God. Only then can we serve well and “obtain a good standing in the faith” (1 Tim 3:13).

At the end of Joshua's life, he told the Israelites, "[C]hoose for yourselves this day whom you will serve," (Josh 24:15) and the people emphatically said,

"Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods...We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God." (Josh 24:16, 18)

This is a good and touching response. But how did Joshua answer them?

"Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord God of Israel." (Josh 24:23)

Thus, in order to serve the holy God, we ourselves must be holy, set apart, above reproach, blameless. Others may commit adultery, but we are faithful to our spouse. Others may indulge, but we exercise self-control. Others may be given to drunkenness in wine or pleasure, but we remain sober-minded. Others may be inappropriate and despicable, but we are respectable and of good behavior.

The list in 1 Timothy chapter 3 goes on: not violent, not greedy for money, not quarrelsome, not covetous, able to manage his family. Whereas others' hearts are inclined towards themselves, our hearts are inclined towards God and His household. Only those who excel in these necessary qualifications are worthy to serve.

They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. (1 Tim 3:10, NIV)

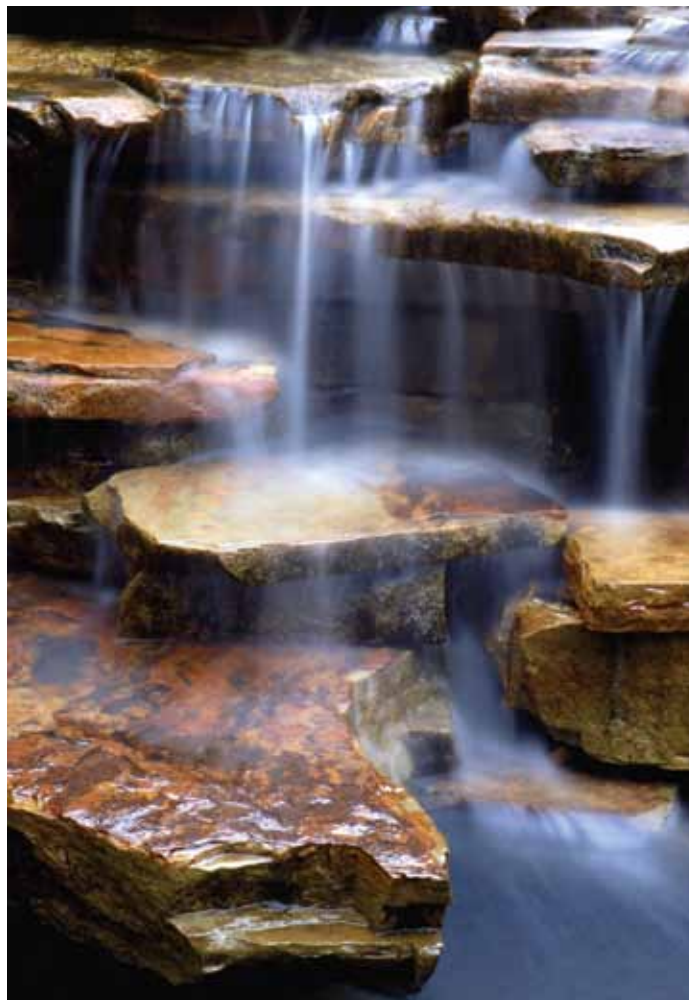
We may devote much time and effort in becoming someone of consequence in this world, but no matter how much we invest, the results are temporary. If, instead, we dedicate and offer ourselves to spiritual ambition, the results are eternal.

Wouldn't obtaining an eternal reward require a much greater investment than something temporary? Therefore, let us re-evaluate our perspective towards serving the holy God. If we are given an opportunity to serve the church in any capacity, let us not regard it casually but rather in reverence by keeping holiness with all diligence.

If anyone desires to serve the Lord, he desires a noble task. But the privilege and honor of serving is not simply given but earned.

Leaving Our Comfort Zone to Preach

Albert Chen—Garden Grove, California, USA



It all started when He said, “Give Me a drink.”

He was tired and thirsty.

He was a Jew, and she was a Samaritan.

But these issues did not stop Him, and He went on to preach.

She questioned His credibility and disagreed with Him, saying, “I have my views, and you have yours.” Yet, He patiently explained anyway.

Jesus not only had the courage to speak in an awkward situation, He also crossed social, religious, and cultural boundaries to proclaim the wonderful news of salvation, a “gift of God” that is above human constraints (Jn 4:10).

Once the Samaritan woman realized that He was the Christ who is to bring salvation, she also went out of her way to preach the good news.

From Jesus and the Samaritan woman, we can learn the magnitude of sacrifice and effort we should be willing to make for the sake of the gospel of salvation.

BEING WEARIED FROM HIS JOURNEY

Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. (Jn 4:5)

The sixth hour is equivalent to twelve o’clock noon, which is the heat of the day. Jesus had probably been journeying since daybreak. He was wearied. But even in His tired and thirsty state, He preached before He drank any water. Like Jesus, we should also be willing to offer our energy at all times for the sake of the gospel.

Paul reminds us of this mentality in 2 Timothy 4:2: “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” Perhaps the in-season times are during church seminars, spiritual convocations, or designated evangelical outreaches, when we can anticipate opportunities to preach.

However, even when these seasonal events are not going on, we should be ready. “Out of season” may be a typical day at school, a normal day at work, or a restful day of vacation.

A preacher from Taiwan was once on a plane, flying from one African country to another for missionary work. These flights are usually the chance for preachers to catch up on rest. On the plane, he sat next to an African businessman. Even

though he could have slept through the flight, he felt moved to preach to the businessman instead.

At first, the African businessman was surprised as to why this stranger was trying to preach to him. The preacher invited him to a spiritual convocation in the country they were flying to, but the businessman declined, saying he was on a business trip. However, because of the preacher's insistence, the businessman ended up going.

The businessman received the Holy Spirit at the event. Later, he was baptized and became a fervent worker for God. The preacher's eagerness to preach at all times resulted in much fruit for the Lord.

We never know whom God might want us to preach to. So we must be ready to preach the word at all times, like Jesus and this preacher. We must be willing to offer our energy for the gospel.

ME? A SAMARITAN WOMAN?

Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. (Jn 4:9)

Jews generally did not interact with Samaritans. Many believed that because Samaritans were part Gentile, whatever they lay on, sat on, or rode on was ceremonially unclean.

Furthermore, men generally did not discuss theological issues with women. These factors alone were cultural and social boundaries that Jesus had to cross when talking to someone who was both a Samaritan and a woman. However, there were more obstacles.

This woman was sinful—she had five husbands in the past and was currently in a relationship with a man who was not her husband (Jn 4:18). Yet, Jesus didn't perceive her as undeserving of the gospel.

She was also very persistent in her own beliefs. She unyieldingly pointed out differences between Samaritan worship and Jewish worship (Jn 4:20),

and responded to Jesus as if He couldn't give her any new information, saying, "I know that Messiah is coming...When He comes, He will tell us all things" (Jn 4:25).

Even though it seemed that she was sinful, unworthy, unwilling to change, and not accepting of the gospel, Jesus overlooked these issues and preached to her. Like Jesus, we must also be willing to leave our comfort zone and cross boundaries for the gospel, preaching to those we feel might not accept or deserve the gospel.

During my sophomore year in college, I found myself struggling with this idea. I once had the opportunity to preach to a classmate in the dining hall. She came in and started getting food as I was getting seconds. She hinted that she didn't have somewhere to sit and suggested that she might sit next to me.

It seemed like an opportunity to preach, but at the same time I felt that it would be awkward to talk about our church with her. I implied that because I was about to leave, she probably shouldn't sit next to me.

In reality, I didn't think that she would believe or be interested in the gospel, so I didn't want to risk having an awkward conversation. I had this prejudice and didn't try to overcome it.

In fact, I encountered similar situations many times that year. I justified my cowardice and fear of uncomfortable moments by thinking that the people didn't seem like they would believe or accept the gospel.

However, a brother reminded me that, in his experience, those who initially appeared unreceptive or unpromising often came to believe. Therefore, we must look beyond our prejudices and first impressions of people and preach to all.

Another example is of a non-believing college student who spent a lot of time with True Jesus Church youths who attended the same school. He noticed that these friends would go to church on Friday nights and Saturdays. Sometimes,

he could hear them praying when he passed by their rooms.

He was curious about their faith but also very firm on not believing in Christianity, even debating with them about their beliefs. Even though the youths felt he would probably remain a non-believer and reject their invitations to church and Bible studies, they still invited him. Because of their insistence, he actually started going to worship services.

He even began reading the Bible and praying every day, thinking that if nothing happened, he would at least have more proof that they were wrong. However, in one of his daily prayers, he received the Holy Spirit. He started going to church seminars, decided to get baptized, and is now a fervent member in church.

We may have our own prejudices toward people and impressions about whether they might believe or not. But as the testimony shows, overcoming such preconceived ideas may yield beautiful results. Like Jesus, we must be willing to leave our comfort zone and cross boundaries to preach.

THE WOMAN LEFT HER WATERPOT

The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (Jn 4:28, 29)

Jesus willingly and boldly went out of His way to preach to the Samaritan woman because He understood how wonderful salvation was. Similarly, once the Samaritan woman understood that Jesus was the wonderful Savior, she left her waterpot to preach the gospel in her city.

She abandoned her initial intention to get water and returned home without the water she needed. She didn't even bring back her waterpot. We must also be willing to sacrifice our personal objectives for the sake of the gospel.

Though it is up to us to leave our comfort zone to preach, in the end, people believe “not because of what [we] said,” but because they themselves have experienced Jesus’ abidance.

We are often touched by Jesus during church events, Sabbath services, prayers, or personal trials. At these times, we resolve to change for God. However, these experiences do not always lead to change, and we may remain unwilling to sacrifice our self-centered wants and goals to give priority to God. However, we must be like the Samaritan woman, who completely forsook her objective of getting water.

I know of a brother who was moved to preach in South America while attending a church event where he learned that there was a need for holy workers there. When the seminar concluded, he went home and began to fervently prepare himself to serve God in South America.

Instead of enjoying entertainment and video games like he used to, he devoted his free time and vacations to studying Spanish, attending Spanish Bible studies, translating church material into Spanish, and spiritually cultivating himself. After two years of preparation, he went to South America on a missionary trip and returned to the US to encourage and train other brothers and sisters to serve there.

This brother’s fervor and sacrifice for the sake of the gospel is an example to us. Once we experience the wonderful grace and salvation of Jesus, we must also be willing to let go of our personal objectives. We must leave our waterpot and preach.

WE OURSELVES HAVE HEARD HIM

Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for

we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” (Jn 4:42)

Once the Samaritan woman shared her testimony with the people of the city, they urged Jesus to stay with them, and Jesus stayed there for two days (Jn 4:40). The original word for “stayed” is the same word as “abide,” as when Jesus said, “Abide in Me, and I in you” (Jn 15:4).


The abidance of Jesus is what caused the people in the city to say, “We know this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.” Today, this abidance is also what fundamentally brings people to believe. Though it is up to us to leave our comfort zone to preach, in the end, people believe “not because of what [we] said,” but because they themselves have experienced Jesus’ abidance.


Therefore, after we have preached and shared our testimony with others, we must bring them to Jesus and encourage them to seek this abidance. Once they experience the abidance of the Savior, they can also cross boundaries, leave their comfort zone, and make sacrifices for the gospel because they, too, believe.

When others understand and experience His gift of salvation, they can also share their own testimonies and bring others to Jesus. ★

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 True Jesus Church


the true vine 

<http://www.tjc.org>


April 2010

His Hour, His Glory

John 2:11 clearly states the primary purpose of the miracle of changing water to wine: "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him." Jesus attended the wedding and fulfilled the need for wine, but in His time and in order to show His glory, so His disciples would put their faith in Him. [Read more...](#)



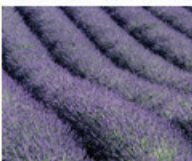
Christian Living



Finding Hope in Every Circumstance

When you first step into the chapel on Sabbath morning, what crosses your mind? For many of us, it is simply another Saturday at church. But what if you didn't have a local True Jesus Church to go to each week? [Read more..](#)


Our Stories



How I Found My Spiritual Family

I enjoyed going to church and learning about the Bible. I discovered that God is a great God, and His love is manifested in the brothers and sisters in church. Whenever I stepped into church, I felt peace in my heart that I had never known. [Read more...](#)

Q & A



On Keeping the Sabbath

Why do Christians need to keep the Sabbath? [Read more...](#)

If you think this newsletter is a valuable resource, PASS IT ON!

So log on to www.tjc.org and join our online community today!

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Issue #66:

Column: Family Focus

Articles due: December 1, 2010

Parents and children often disagree over many things, but one issue that can be particularly divisive is cultural differences. Children who grow up in a different culture from their parents face unique tensions and challenges in addition to the difficulty of maintaining their faith in a secular society. How can these clashes be prevented? What can parents and children do when they find themselves arguing over these issues?

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.

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 (Microsoft Word) to manna@tjc.org, or send hardcopy and CD to:

Manna

General Assembly of True Jesus Church
21217 Bloomfield Avenue
Lakewood, CA 90715 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.

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, resurrected on the third day and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and earth, and the only true God.

Holy Bible

The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by God, the only scriptural truth, and the standard for Christian living.

Church

The True Jesus Church, established by our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit during the time of the "latter rain," is the restored true church of the apostolic time.

Baptism

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as the river, sea, or spring. The Baptist, who already has had received baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, conducts the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the person receiving the baptism must be completely immersed in water with head bowed and face downward.

Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, is the guarantee of our inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

Footwashing

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 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 can have eternal life and be raised on the Last Day. This sacrament shall be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice shall 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 salvation and with the hope of eternal rest in the life to come.

Salvation

Salvation is given by the grace of God through faith. Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, to honor God, and to love humanity.

Last Day

The Lord's Second Coming will take place on the last day when He descends from heaven to judge the world: 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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